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**2025- 2028**

**WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS  
LOWER RIO (WFS)**

**LOCAL WORKFORCE  
DEVELOPMENT BOARD  
PLAN**

Board plans promote communication, coordination, and collaboration among grantees, employers, economic development organizations, community-based partners, and other service providers that support the economic growth of the local workforce development area while meeting the needs of employers and job seekers.



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# ACRONYMS PAGE



**AEL** - Adult Education & Literacy **BRR** - Business Relations Representative **BSU** - Business Service Unit **CTE** - Career & Technical Education **CBO** - Community Based Organization **CEOs** - Chief Elected Officials **CE** - Community Engagement **COVID-19** - Coronavirus-19 **CLF** - Civilian Labor Force **DFPS** - Department of Family & Protective Services **E&T** - Education & Training **EDC** - Economic Development Corporation **ES** - Employment Services **ETPS** - Eligible Training Provider System **HDJT** - High Demand Job Training **HEP** - High School Equivalent Program **HS** - High School **IEP** - Individual Employment Plan **ISD** - Independent School District **IT** - Information Technology **IHE** - Institution of Higher Education **ITA** - Individual Training Account **IW** - Incumbent Worker **KPI** - Key Performance Indicator **KSAs** - Knowledge, Skills & Abilities **LMCI** - Labor Market & Career Information **LNG** - Liquid Nitrogen Gas **LRGV** - Lower Rio Grande Valley **MET** - Migrant Education & Training **MOU** - Memorandum of Understanding **MPR** - Monthly Performance Report **MSA** - Metropolitan Statistical Area **MSFW** - Migrant Seasonal Farm Worker **NCP** - Non-Custodial Parent - **NAICS** - North American Industry Classification System **OJT** - On the Job Training **QCEW** - Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages

**Region One** - Region One Education Service Center **RFA** - Request for Application **RFP** - Request for Proposal **RGVP** - Rio Grande Valley Partnership **RGVLEAD** - RGV Linking Education & Academic Dev. **RSTEC** - Rio South Texas Economic Council **SCSEP** - Senior Community Service Employment Pro. **SDF** - Skill Development Fund **SEAL** - Summer Earn & Learn **SHN** - Student HireAbility Navigator **SNAP E&T** - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training **SOC** - Standard Occupations Classification **STC** - South Texas College **STEM** - Science, Technology, Engineering and Math **TAA** - Trade Adjustment Assistance **TANF** - Temporary Assistance for Needy Families **TIP** - Texas Industry Partnership **TMAC** - Texas Manufacturing Assistance Center **TRS** - Texas Rising Star **TSR** - Texas School Ready (TSR) Project **TX SPG** - Texas' Strategic Plan Goals **TVC** - Texas Veteran's Commission **TWC** - Texas Workforce Commission **TWC-VRS** - Texas Workforce Solutions - Vocational Rehabilitation Services **TVC** - Texas Veterans Commission **UI** - Unemployment Insurance **UTRGV** - University of Texas Rio Grande Valley **SBDC** - Small Business Development Center **WDA** - Workforce Development Area **WFS** - Workforce Solutions **WIOA** - Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act **WIT** - Work In Texas **WOS** - Workforce Outreach Specialist



# PART 1: BOARD VISION AND STRATEGIES

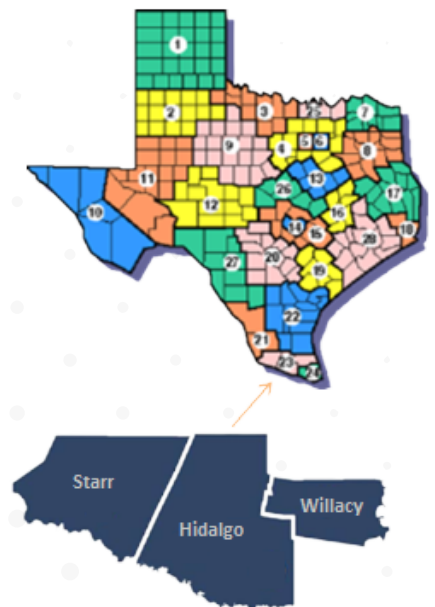


## 1.A. VISION AND GOALS

Workforce Solutions (WFS) Lower Rio meets its mission by collaborating with industry, education, economic development and regional partners to develop a trainable and available workforce to provide workforce-relevant education and training opportunities for youth and individuals with barriers to employment throughout the service delivery areas of Hidalgo, Willacy and Starr counties.

WFS, under the direction of the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), is one of 28 workforce development boards located throughout the state of Texas. WFS is governed by a group of Chief Elected Officials (CEOs): the Mayor of the most populated city (McAllen), County Judges from Hidalgo, Willacy, Starr counties, and a 29-member Board of Directors representing the private sector, education, community-based organizations, labor, vocational rehabilitation, public assistance, and employment services.

The WFS Workforce Development Board of Directors (WFS Board) serve as the governing body for the workforce development area and supports WFS in its goals. The primary goal of WFS is to respond to the needs of local employers and workers while supporting regional economic growth and economic self-sufficiency through locally designed, demand-driven workforce development initiatives. WFS strives to improve and further integrate the workforce system in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV).



It offers access to integrated services to all employers, workers, job seekers, and youth including individuals with disabilities and other barriers to employment. To assess the success of its services, WFS is guided by performance accountability measures established by TWC. These performance measures increase accountability and measure progress to assess if efforts are leading to desired results. In addition to performance measures, WFS is guided by three Key Strategic Imperatives (KSIs).

WFS three KSIs:

1. Understand the needs of the business community to ensure a demand-driven system.
2. Prepare a job-ready workforce and foster external partnerships that promote educational and skill attainment.
3. Build strategic partnerships to leverage resources for our customers.

The KSIs provide a clear sense of purpose and direction that help WFS focus its efforts on what matters most. Here is an outline of the organization's Mission, Purpose, and Core Values:

**Mission:** To provide the job seekers with resources and essential skills they need and businesses with the exceptional talent necessary for their success.

**Purpose Statement:** Leading Change, Connecting People, Improving Potential.

**Core Values:** Integrity, Ingenuity, Inclusion, and Inspirational.

## 1.B. BOARD STRATEGIES

WFS works closely with the core programs: Adult Education and Literacy Program (AEL) administered by Region One Education Service Center (Region One) and Texas Workforce Solutions Vocational Rehabilitation Services (TWS-VRS) partners to enhance customer experience and increase coordination between the agencies. AEL, TWS-VRS, and WFS share a common objective: to create a broader and more valuable range of services that effectively support their shared customers in achieving educational goals. These goals foster career development, facilitate the transition to higher education, and contribute to strengthening families and communities. The following are strategies in place that align the efforts of these programs:

- The WFS Workforce Development Board of Directors (WFS Board) serves as the governing body for the workforce development area and supports WFS in its goals. The primary goal of WFS is to respond to the needs of local employers and workers while supporting regional economic growth and economic self-sufficiency through locally designed, demand-driven workforce development initiatives. WFS strives to improve and further integrate the workforce system in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV).
- Maintain the WFS online referral system and adapt customized intake forms to ensure consistency across core programs. These standardized electronic forms support alignment of services across programs and reduce duplicate data collections allowing core program partners to streamline services.
- TWS-VRS is co-located at WFS Office locations to increase competitive integrated employment outcomes and work-based learning experiences, such as internships, volunteer positions, and summer year-round work experience programs.
- Collaborate amongst WFS Student HireAbility Navigators, TWS-VRS and vocational rehabilitation counselors to help connect individuals with disabilities to services that facilitate a successful transition to employment and/or post-secondary education.
- Leverage co-enrollment opportunities amongst programs whenever beneficial to customer.
- Support improved customer service and cross program staff training to increase staff knowledge and capacity that allows for seamless service delivery.
- Convening, when applicable, core, required and regional partners to align and expand services.

## **1.C. HIGH-PERFORMING BOARD**

To ensure continuous improvement in operations and sufficiently meet the needs of businesses, job seekers, workers, and childcare customers while meeting performance measures, WFS negotiates with sub-recipient(s) to establish measures and strategies that exceed the TWC contracted measures.

The following measures are conducted to ensure workforce system accountability:

- Performance measures within contracts are negotiated annually and include WFS Strategic Goals and Objectives.
- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that measure the quality and quantity of services are established annually.
- Annual occupational training completion and employment rates for eligible training providers delivering training to WIOA participants.

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### 2.A. REGIONAL ECONOMIC AND EMPLOYMENT NEEDS ANALYSIS

#### Economic Landscape of the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV)

The Rio Grande Valley (RGV), comprising the four counties of Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy in southern Texas, is home to a diverse and evolving economic landscape influenced by both historical factors and emerging trends. Workforce Solutions (WFS) Lower Rio Grande Valley serves Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy counties, while Workforce Solutions Cameron covers Cameron County in deep South Texas. Over recent years, the region has seen substantial economic growth and transformation, driven by demographic changes, infrastructure improvements, and the diversification of its industrial base. Below is an analysis of the current economic conditions, in-demand industries, and occupations within the region.

#### 1. Economic Overview

The LRGV has a population of over 1.4 million, characterized by a young demographic and a predominantly bilingual workforce, providing a competitive edge for industries requiring Spanish-language proficiency. The region maintains strong economic ties with Mexico, bolstered by trade and logistics hubs in border cities like McAllen, Brownsville, and Pharr. Historically reliant on agriculture, tourism, and trade, the region is now expanding into other sectors.

Key economic characteristics include:

- **Income levels:** The LRGV has lower per capita income compared to state and national averages, though these levels are improving as new industries emerge.
- **Unemployment:** Unemployment rates in the region fluctuate in line with national trends, typically higher than the national average. However, employment opportunities are on the rise due to growing industries.

- **Poverty rates:** Poverty remains a challenge in the LRGV, with a significant portion of the population in lower-income brackets. Policymakers are focused on enhancing economic mobility and skill development.

## 2. In-Demand Industries

### a. Healthcare and Social Assistance:

The healthcare sector is expanding rapidly due to the aging population and increased healthcare needs. The demand for clinical positions such as nurses, medical technicians, and physicians, as well as allied health professionals and support staff, continues to rise.

- **Key occupations:** Registered nurses, medical and health services managers, healthcare support staff, home health aides, medical assistants, and physical therapists.

### b. Retail Trade:

The retail sector is a major economic driver, fueled by local consumption and cross-border trade with Mexico. Growth is evident in big-box retail, grocery stores, and e-commerce fulfillment centers.

- **Key occupations:** Retail salespersons, cashiers, customer service representatives, and warehouse workers.

### c. Construction:

Construction, particularly in residential and commercial development, is essential to the region's growth. The demand for skilled labor has surged as cities expand.

- **Key occupations:** Construction laborers, electricians, carpenters, construction managers, and heavy equipment operators.

### d. Manufacturing and Logistics:

The region's proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border supports the growth of manufacturing (food processing, electronics, industrial equipment) and logistics. The area's infrastructure, including ports, highways and rail systems, facilitates the flow of goods.

- **Key occupations:** Warehouse workers, truck drivers, industrial engineers, logistics managers, and production workers.

#### **e. Education:**

Education plays a critical role in workforce development. Both public and private educational institutions, as well as vocational training programs, are essential for enhancing the region's skill set.

- **Key occupations:** Teachers (especially in STEM and special education), school administrators, and educational support roles.

#### **f. Tourism and Hospitality:**

Tourism is a vital industry for the LRGV, driven by its coastal location, proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border, cultural heritage, and favorable climate. Popular events such as the South Padre Island International Music Festival and the Rio Grande Valley Livestock Show draw both domestic and international visitors.

- **Key occupations:** Hospitality managers, hotel workers, restaurant staff, tour guides, and event coordinators.

### **3. Emerging Industries**

#### **a. Renewable Energy:**

The LRGV is witnessing a rise in renewable energy development, especially in solar power. The region is well-positioned for solar energy production, with several large-scale projects underway. Wind Energy is already present in the LRGV with steady expansion occurring across the region.

- **Key occupations:** Solar panel installers, renewable energy engineers, project managers, wind turbine technicians and electrical engineers.

#### **b. Technology and IT Services:**

The technology sector is developing in the LRGV, with increasing demand for IT services, software development, and technical support, spurred by a young, tech-savvy workforce.

- **Key occupations:** Software developers, IT support specialists, web developers, cybersecurity analysts, and systems administrators.

### **c. Financial Services:**

Financial services, including banking, insurance, and investment management, are growing, particularly in cities like McAllen and Brownsville. As the economy diversifies, demand for financial professionals rises.

- **Key occupations:** Financial analysts, insurance agents, loan officers, and accountants.

### **d. Agribusiness and Food Technology:**

Agriculture remains a cornerstone of the region's economy, with innovations in agribusiness, including precision farming and food processing, emerging. The region is home to some of the nation's largest citrus producers, with new agricultural technologies improving efficiency and sustainability.

- **Key occupations:** Agricultural technicians, food scientists, farm managers, and supply chain analysts.

## **4. Workforce Development Needs**

There is a pressing need for skilled workers in sectors such as healthcare, construction, manufacturing, and technology. Education and training programs that focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) skills, along with trade certifications, are critical to meeting the demands of these growing industries. Collaboration between local educational institutions, businesses, and workforce development organizations will be key to building a well-trained workforce.

## **5. Conclusion**

The LRGV's economy is evolving, with strong sectors such as healthcare, construction, logistics, and manufacturing, while emerging industries like renewable energy, technology, and financial services are gaining traction. Strategic investments in workforce development, skills training, and education will be essential to ensure that the labor force is equipped for future job demands. The region's unique location, young and bilingual workforce, and expanding infrastructure position it as a promising area for economic growth and employment opportunities in the years ahead.



## Chart: Growth of New Business Establishments in LRGV Counties

Timeframe	Data Element	Hidalgo County	Starr County	Willacy County
2019 2nd Quarter	Establishments	12,750	615	313
	Avg. Employment	266,223	15,452	3,769
	Avg. Weekly Wage	\$657	\$579	\$729
	Total Wages	\$2,274,801,548.00	\$116,325,582.00	\$35,715,974.00
2020 2nd Quarter	Establishments	12,992	620	329
	Avg. Employment	249,000	14,646	3,672
	Avg. Weekly Wage	\$703	\$650	\$777
	Total Wages	\$2,274,319,103.00	\$123,696,670.00	\$37,081,825.00
2021 2nd Quarter	Establishments	13,249	617	320
	Avg. Employment	266,755	14,220	4,033
	Avg. Weekly Wage	\$730	\$725	\$776
	Total Wages	\$2,530,118,343.00	\$133,952,091.00	\$40,665,370.00
2022 2nd Quarter	Establishments	13,677	621	323
	Avg. Employment	278,786	14,867	4,327
	Avg. Weekly Wage	\$765	\$723	\$844
	Total Wages	\$2,772,921,151.00	\$139,689,305.00	\$47,490,349.00
2023 2nd Quarter	Establishments	14,030	648	322
	Avg. Employment	287,608	15,307	4,260
	Avg. Weekly Wage	\$791	\$739	\$849
	Total Wages	\$2,958,707,443.00	\$147,000,151.00	\$46,993,911.00
2024 2nd Quarter	Establishments	14,018	664	317
	Avg. Employment	291,515	14,782	4,258
	Avg. Weekly Wage	\$820	\$767	\$864
	Total Wages	\$3,105,672,102.00	\$147,372,505.00	\$47,820,807.00

Source: TWC Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) 2022-2024

[Link to data source](#)

## Workforce Solutions Workforce Development Area (Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy counties) Employment Projections

- **Total Employment Growth:** From 325,666 jobs in 2022 to 363,142 jobs in 2032, an increase of 37,476 jobs (11.51% growth).
- **Strongest Growth:**
  - **Healthcare and social assistance:** +16,438 jobs (19.72% growth)
  - **Accommodation and food services:** +5,087 jobs (19.08% growth)
  - **Professional, scientific, and technical services:** +1,300 jobs (19.93% growth)
  - **Transportation and warehousing:** +1,637 jobs (16.93% growth)
  - **Management of companies and enterprises:** +500 jobs (36.28% growth)
- **Industries with Declining Employment:**
  - **Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting:** -522 jobs (-38.55% decline)
  - **Construction:** -231 jobs (-2.83% decline)
- **Other Notable Trends:**
  - **Retail trade:** +4,609 jobs (11.87% growth)
  - **Educational services:** +2,762 jobs (5.59% growth)
  - **Finance and insurance:** +271 jobs (4.06% growth)
  - **Wholesale trade:** +641 jobs (7.28% growth)
  - **Utilities:** +75 jobs (7.01% growth)

**Source: TWC LMI Employment Projections (2022-2032)**

[Link to data source](#)

In summary, the overall trend reflects significant growth in sectors like Healthcare, Accommodation/Food Services, Professional Services, and Transportation, while sectors like Agriculture and Construction are projected to see employment declines.

## **Emerging Industries in the Rio Grande Valley: A Spotlight on LNG, Aerospace, Biotech, AI, and Advanced Manufacturing**

The Rio Grande Valley (RGV) in Texas is rapidly becoming a powerhouse for diverse industries, driven by strategic investments, infrastructure developments, and its advantageous location near the U.S.-Mexico border. Emerging sectors like Liquid Natural Gas (LNG), Aerospace Manufacturing, Biotechnology, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Advanced Manufacturing are reshaping the region's economy, creating jobs and fueling growth. The RGVs expanding workforce, supported by institutions like the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV), is helping position it as a significant player on the global stage.

### **LNG Industry: A New Energy Hub**

The LNG sector is one of the fastest-growing industries in the RGV. With the U.S. Gulf Coast emerging as a critical export hub for LNG, the RGV is poised to take advantage of its proximity to international markets. Notable projects include the Brownsville LNG Export Terminal and the Rio Grande LNG Project, both of which aim to increase the U.S.'s LNG export capacity, particularly to Asia and Europe. As demand for cleaner energy grows globally, these projects are positioning the RGV as a key player in the energy sector.

In addition to export terminals, LNG transportation and storage facilities are expanding, with investments in specialized vessels and pipelines to ensure the efficient flow of LNG. The region is also becoming a center for LNG equipment manufacturing, with local businesses producing essential infrastructure components like cryogenic tanks and heat exchangers.

### **Aerospace Manufacturing: A Frontier for Space Exploration**

Aerospace Manufacturing is another burgeoning sector in the RGV. The region's vast open spaces, coupled with its proximity to both the U.S. and Mexico, make it an attractive location for aerospace companies. One of the most prominent players in the region is SpaceX, with its Boca Chica facility near Brownsville focused on developing the Starship rocket for missions to the Moon, Mars, and beyond. This facility contributes to significant local job creation and technological advancements.

The RGV is also witnessing a surge in Advanced Manufacturing for aerospace, with companies specializing in precision machining, 3D printing, and composite material production. This is complemented by workforce development initiatives aimed at preparing students and workers for the growing demand in aerospace engineering and related fields.

### **Biotech and Medtech: Innovation in Healthcare**

Biotechnology and Medical Technology are growing sectors within the RGV, fueled by strong partnerships between universities, healthcare systems, and startups. UTRGV is at the forefront, with its School of Medicine and innovation centers focused on advancing health sciences and medical device development. The Texas Research & Technology Foundation (TRTF) collaborates with UTRGV to commercialize biomedical research, while local hospitals like Doctors Hospital at Renaissance (DHR) are integrating cutting-edge technologies to improve patient care and drive medical innovation.

The RGV's growing healthcare ecosystem is fostering an environment ripe for breakthroughs in medical devices, health technologies, new medical company startups and biotechnology.

### **AI: Transforming Industries Across the Region**

Artificial intelligence is another transformative force in the RGV, with applications spanning agriculture, healthcare, education, and manufacturing. AI technologies such as machine learning and precision agriculture are improving productivity in farming, while AI-driven innovations in healthcare are enhancing diagnostics, treatment personalization, and telemedicine services. Educational institutions like UTRGV and South Texas College (STC) are preparing the next generation of workers with AI-related curricula, helping bridge the skills gap in this rapidly evolving field.

The region is also embracing AI in smart city technologies, optimizing traffic management, energy efficiency, and public safety. Local startups and tech companies are exploring AI-driven solutions, contributing to a thriving tech ecosystem and attracting venture capital investment.



## Advanced Manufacturing: A Diverse Industrial Base

The RGV is diversifying its manufacturing base with advanced processes that integrate technology and sustainability. Key areas include additive manufacturing (3D printing), aerospace manufacturing, semiconductor production, renewable energy manufacturing, and robotics. The region is seeing growth in 3D printing technologies, with applications in aerospace and healthcare, as well as in semiconductor manufacturing for electronics and telecommunications.

Renewable energy is also gaining traction, with solar panel production and wind turbine component manufacturing expanding. As Texas continues to lead in renewable energy, the RGV is becoming a hub for clean energy technologies and the skilled workforce required to support them.

Robotics and automation are transforming manufacturing in the region, with growing demand for robotics technicians and automation engineers. Logistics and supply chain optimization are also seeing a boost, driven by the proximity to Mexico and the Port of Brownsville, making the region an important logistics corridor.

## Demographics of the Rio Grande Valley

**The Rio Grande Valley comprises four counties:** Starr, Hidalgo, Willacy, and Cameron.

According to recent estimates, the population of these counties are as follows:

- **Starr County:** 66,214
- **Hidalgo County:** 908,656
- **Willacy County:** 19,820
- **Cameron County:** 428,509
- **RGV:** 1,423,199

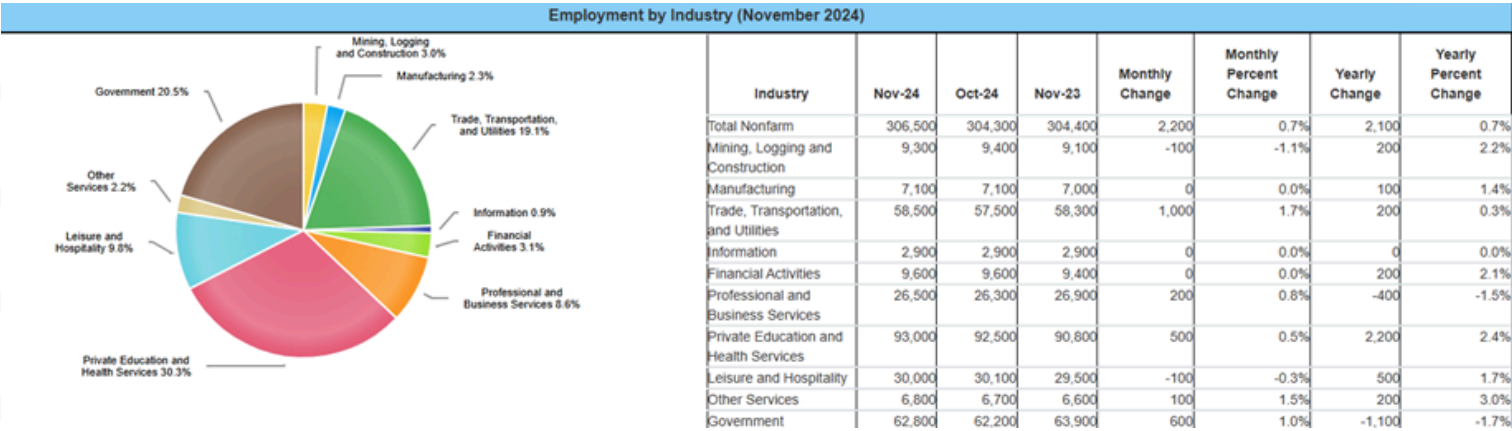
Together, these counties contribute to a vibrant and diverse workforce that supports the growth of these emerging industries.

\*Source: World Population Review 2024

# Conclusion

The RGV is on the cusp of a significant economic transformation, driven by the rapid growth of sectors like LNG, Aerospace Manufacturing, Biotech, AI, and Advanced Manufacturing. With its strategic location, investments in education and infrastructure, and an increasingly skilled workforce, the RGV is well-positioned to become a major player in these industries. As these sectors continue to develop, the RGV is poised for even greater economic diversification and global competitiveness in the coming years.

Chart: Growth of New Business Establishments in LRGV Counties



Source: TWC Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) Profiles - McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, November 2024 [Link to data source](#)

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The workforce composition of the Lower Rio Grande Valley Workforce Development Area (Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy counties)

in 2024 reflects a diversified economic base, with three key sectors contributing a significant portion of regional employment. Here's a deeper analysis of the top industries:

- 1. Private Education and Health Services (30.3% of employment):** This sector is the largest in terms of employment, indicating a strong reliance on healthcare and educational services in the region. The prominence of this industry suggests that the Lower Rio Grande Valley has a robust healthcare infrastructure and educational institutions. It may also reflect the area's growing demand for healthcare services, such as hospitals, outpatient clinics, and long-term care facilities, as well as educational programs ranging from K-12 to higher education.
- 2. Government (20.5% of employment):** The government sector's substantial share indicates that public administration, including federal, state, and local government jobs, plays a critical role in the region's economy. This includes positions in areas such as law enforcement, public policy, social services, and education. Given the relatively high percentage, it also suggests that the region may benefit from public investments in infrastructure, social services, and government-funded programs.
- 3. Trade, Transportation, and Utilities (19.1% of employment):** This sector, encompassing industries such as wholesale and retail trade, logistics, transportation, and utility services, highlights the Lower Rio Grande Valley's role as a key trade and transportation hub. Its proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border likely enhances its significance in cross-border commerce. Employment in this industry indicates a vibrant logistics and supply chain sector, with jobs related to retail operations, warehousing, transportation networks, and the distribution of goods.

### Implications and Insights:

- The dominance of education, healthcare, and government sectors suggests that the region's economy is heavily influenced by public sector spending and social services, which may provide stability but also poses potential challenges in terms of reliance on government funding.
- The importance of trade and transportation underscores the region's strategic location for commerce, possibly benefiting from international trade, particularly with Mexico, which is critical for regional economic growth.
- The diversification across sectors indicates that the region is not overly dependent on a single industry, which can help mitigate risks in case of sector-specific downturns.

In conclusion, the workforce composition of the Lower Rio Grande Valley reveals a balanced and diverse economy, with healthcare, government, and trade-related industries serving as the pillars of employment in the region.

## Target Occupations

Workforce Solutions (WFS) has identified 41 occupations across various high-demand industries as key focus areas for investment. These targeted occupations represent priority sectors for WFS's workforce development initiatives, including Individual Training Accounts (ITAs), On-the-Job Training (OJTs), and Work Experience programs.

## 2025 Target Occupations List

	SOC	Description	2024 Jobs	2034 Jobs	Annual Openings	Median Wage	Typical Entry Level Education
<b>Healthcare Practitioners &amp; Technical</b>							
1	29-1141	Registered Nurses	5791	7221	496	\$36.42	Bachelor's degree
2	29-2034	Radiologic Technologists and Technicians	438	507	32	\$27.40	Associate's degree
3	29-2042	Emergency Medical Technicians	575	515	38	\$14.10	Postsecondary nondegree award
4	29-2043	Paramedics	286	266	13	\$20.64	Postsecondary nondegree award
5	29-2052	Pharmacy Technicians	1138	1368	135	\$17.17	High school diploma or equivalent
6	29-2055	Surgical Technologists	209	243	17	\$25.32	Postsecondary nondegree award
7	29-2061	Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	2286	2791	245	\$22.93	Postsecondary nondegree award
8	29-2099	Health Technologist and Technicians, all other	362	410	30	17.6	Postsecondary nondegree award
9	31-1131	Nursing Assistants	2448	3157	470	13.76	Postsecondary nondegree award
10	31-2021	Physical Therapist Assistants	337	433	62	\$33.14	Associate's degree
11	31-9091	Dental Assistants	751	886	126	16.47	Postsecondary nondegree award
12	31-9092	Medical Assistants	2859	3449	461	\$13.82	Postsecondary nondegree award
<b>Education, Training &amp; Library</b>							
13	25-2021	Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	5415	5704	398	\$29.77	Bachelor's degree
14	25-2022	Middle School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	2896	3038	211	\$29.31	Bachelor's degree
15	25-2031	Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	5112	5370	347	\$29.69	Bachelor's degree



Business & Financial Operations							
16	13-1199	Business Operations Specialists, All Other	983	1149	108	\$30.83	Bachelor's degree
17	13-2011	Accountants and Auditors	1284	1462	123	\$30.52	Bachelor's degree
Office & Administrative Support							
18	13-1071	Human Resources Specialists	951	1116	102	\$22.71	Bachelor's degree
19	23-2011	Paralegals and Legal Assistants	783	870	92	\$17.91	Associate's degree
20	43-3031	Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks	2660	2689	317	\$18.29	Some college, no degree
21	43-4051	Customer Service Representatives	7778	8397	1151	\$17.54	High school diploma or equivalent
22	43-6013	Medical Secretaries and Administrative Assistants	1697	2011	225	\$14.94	High school diploma or equivalent
23	43-9061	Office Clerks, General	4886	4992	603	\$14.85	High school diploma or equivalent
Computer & Mathematical							
24	15-1212	Information Security Analysts	86	130	11	\$42.80	Bachelor's degree
25	15-1231	Computer Network Support Specialists	172	213	17	\$28.50	Associate's degree
26	15-1232	Computer User Support Specialists	1090	1198	87	\$20.79	Some college, no degree
27	15-1252	Software Developers	403	601	47	\$47.06	Bachelor's degree
28	15-1299	Computer Occupations, All Other	290	356	27	\$38.33	Bachelor's degree
Transportation & Material Moving							
29	49-3023	Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics <b>*Dealer-Authorized Programs Only</b>	1626	1908	178	\$18.19	Postsecondary nondegree award
30	49-3031	Bus and Truck Mechanics and Diesel Engine Specialists	561	602	52	\$22.37	High school diploma or equivalent
31	53-3032	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	4850	5246	568	\$21.60	Postsecondary nondegree award

Construction & Extraction							
32	17-2141	Mechanical Engineers	135	177	13	\$42.24	Bachelor's degree
33	17-3023	Electrical and Electronic Engineering Technologists and Technicians	48	62	7	\$30.05	Associate's degree
34	47-2111	Electricians	724	858	83	\$21.17	High school diploma or equivalent
35	47-2152	Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters	394	412	36	\$21.56	High school diploma or equivalent
Installation, Maintenance & Repair							
36	49-9021	Heating, Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration Mechanics and Installers	421	454	40	\$21.16	Postsecondary nondegree award
37	49-9071	Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	2398	2604	247	\$15.19	High school diploma or equivalent
Production							
38	51-4041	Machinists	128	145	15	\$16.93	High school diploma or equivalent
39	51-4121	Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers	409	431	43	\$18.38	High school diploma or equivalent
Protective Services							
40	33-3012	Correctional Officers and Jailers	1274	1324	118	\$22.21	High school diploma or equivalent
41	33-3051	Police and Sheriffs Patrol Officers	2055	2277	187	\$28.71	High school diploma or equivalent

Source: WFS Target Occupations List 2025. Lightcast Occupation Table

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## In-Demand Occupations List

WFS has identified 40 in-demand occupations across various industries, which are expected to see significant growth between 2024 and 2034, and currently offer a high number of job opportunities.

### 2025 In-Demand Occupations List

	SOC	Description	2024 Jobs	2034 Jobs	Annual Openings	Median Wage	Typical Entry Level Education
	<b>Business &amp; Financial Operations</b>						
1	13-1041	Compliance Officers	1,502	1,621	131	\$29.68	Bachelor's degree
2	13-1111	Management Analysts	296	402	39	\$32.77	Bachelor's degree
3	13-1151	Training and Development Specialists	517	616	57	\$22.31	Bachelor's degree
4	13-1082	Project Management Specialists	878	1,002	78	\$31.90	Bachelor's degree
5	13-2051	Financial and Investment Analysts	161	193	14	\$34.03	Bachelor's degree
6	43-3021	Billing and Posting Clerks	1,289	1,413	151	\$18.37	High school diploma or equivalent
7	43-6014	Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive	3,717	3,592	409	\$17.43	High school diploma or equivalent
	<b>Computer &amp; Mathematical</b>						
8	15-1211	Computer Systems Analysts	201	265	20	\$32.51	Bachelor's degree
9	15-1244	Network and Computer Systems Administrators	336	382	24	\$36.41	Bachelor's degree
10	15-1253	Software Quality Assurance Analysts and Testers	66	92	7	\$44.07	Bachelor's degree
	<b>Management</b>						
11	11-1021	General and Operations Managers	7,138	7,802	660	\$32.14	Bachelor's degree
12	11-3031	Financial Managers	629	784	63	\$56.34	Bachelor's degree
13	11-9032	Education Administrators, Kindergarten through Secondary	1,536	1,617	113	\$40.77	Master's degree
14	11-9111	Medical and Health Services Managers	1,314	1,795	155	\$41.79	Bachelor's degree

	<b>Legal</b>						
15	23-1011	Lawyers	497	611	32	\$48.93	Doctoral or professional degree
	<b>Sales &amp; Sales Related</b>						
16	41-3021	Insurance Sales Agents	798	901	79	\$21.44	High school diploma or equivalent
17	41-3031	Securities, Commodities, and Financial Services Sales Agents	458	477	36	\$29.35	Bachelor's degree
18	41-4011	Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Technical and Scientific Products	213	228	21	\$33.32	Bachelor's degree
19	41-4012	Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products	1,267	1,404	132	\$23.11	High school diploma or equivalent
	<b>Education, Training &amp; Library</b>						
20	25-1099	Postsecondary Teachers	2,765	3,099	270	\$36.88	Doctoral or professional degree
21	25-2012	Kindergarten Teachers, Except Special Education	541	569	61	\$29.16	Bachelor's degree
22	25-2052	Special Education Teachers, Kindergarten and Elementary School	769	804	57	\$29.23	Bachelor's degree
23	25-3031	Substitute Teachers, Short-Term	2,681	2,859	348	\$13.85	Bachelor's degree
24	25-4022	Librarians and Media Collections Specialists	360	387	38	\$32.43	Master's degree
25	25-9031	Instructional Coordinators	1,103	1,149	101	\$32.32	Master's degree
	<b>Healthcare Practitioners &amp; Technical</b>						
26	29-1051	Pharmacists	607	724	36	\$66.70	Doctoral or professional degree
27	29-1122	Occupational Therapists	394	456	29	\$46.24	Master's degree
28	29-1123	Physical Therapists	551	675	36	\$47.51	Doctoral or professional degree
29	29-1127	Speech-Language Pathologists	638	735	46	\$40.38	Master's degree
30	29-1229	Physicians, All Other	769	885	33	\$164.87	Doctoral or professional degree

Healthcare Support							
31	19-3033	Clinical and Counseling Psychologists	65	85	6	\$48.54	Doctoral or professional degree
Community & Social Service							
32	21-1012	Educational, Guidance, and Career Counselors and Advisors	1,019	1,090	81	\$34.68	Master's degree
33	21-1021	Child, Family, and School Social Workers	668	730	60	\$24.17	Bachelor's degree
Construction							
34	17-3011	Architectural and Civil Drafters	136	149	15	\$23.09	Associate's degree
Installation, Maintenance & Repair							
35	49-9041	Industrial Machinery Mechanics	318	373	32	\$22.02	High school diploma or equivalent
Transportation, Material Moving & Warehousing							
36	53-3033	Light Truck Drivers	1,608	1,877	209	\$17.19	High school diploma or equivalent
37	53-7065	Stockers and Order Fillers	5,875	6,766	1,104	\$16.29	High school diploma or equivalent
38	53-3052	Bus Drivers, Transit and Intercity	382	407	52	\$21.39	High school diploma or equivalent
Protective Services							
39	33-3021	Detectives and Criminal Investigators	1,703	1,809	139	\$47.71	High school diploma or equivalent
40	33-9032	Security Guards	3,956	6,260	920	\$14.01	High school diploma or equivalent

Source: WFS In-Demand Occupations List 2025. Lightcast Occupation Table

## In-Demand Industries

The data provided includes projections for various sectors under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) In-Demand Industry Sectors for WFS. The WIOA In-Demand Industry Sectors List table below outlines industry codes, titles, employment trends from 2022 to 2032, and whether the industry is connected to a governor's industry cluster. Here's a breakdown and analysis of the key findings:

## WIOA In-Demand Industry Sectors List

WIOA In-Demand Industry Sectors List							
2022 North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) Code (4-digit)	NAICS Industry Title	* Annual Average Employment 2022	* Annual Average Employment 2032	* Number Change 2022-2032	* Percent Growth 2022-2032	Does Industry Relate to a Governor's Industry Cluster? (yes or no)	Labor Market Information Data Source(s)
6216	Home Health Care Services	35186	41382	6196	17.6%	Yes	Texas Labor Market Portal - Projections Report
7225	Restaurants and Other Eating Places	24105	29057	4952	20.5%	No	Texas Labor Market Portal - Projections Report
6241	Individual and Family Services	15488	19305	3817	24.6%	No	Texas Labor Market Portal - Projections Report
6111	Elementary and Secondary Schools	42601	44843	2242	5.3%	No	Texas Labor Market Portal - Projections Report
6211	Offices of Physicians	8799	10999	2200	25.0%	Yes	Texas Labor Market Portal - Projections Report
6221	General Medical and Surgical Hospitals	9892	11585	1693	17.1%	Yes	Texas Labor Market Portal - Projections Report
4450A1	Food and beverage stores (4451 and 4452 only)	7886	9003	1117	14.2%	No	Texas Labor Market Portal - Projections Report
4552	Warehouse Clubs, Supercenters, and Other General Merchandise Retailers	5478	6558	1080	19.7%	No	Texas Labor Market Portal - Projections Report
5613	Employment Services	3901	4828	927	23.8%	No	Texas Labor Market Portal - Projections Report
4411	Automobile Dealers	3263	3851	588	18.0%	No	Texas Labor Market Portal - Projections Report



5511	Management of Companies and Enterprises	1378	1878	500	36.3%	No	Texas Labor Market Portal - Projections Report
6219	Other Ambulatory Health Care Services	1420	1910	490	34.5%	Yes	Texas Labor Market Portal - Projections Report
4561	Health and Personal Care Retailers	2351	2811	460	19.6%	Yes	Texas Labor Market Portal - Projections Report
6212	Offices of Dentists	1828	2247	419	22.9%	Yes	Texas Labor Market Portal - Projections Report
6213	Offices of Other Health Practitioners	2100	2503	403	19.2%	Yes	Texas Labor Market Portal - Projections Report
6216	Home Health Care Services	35186	41382	6196	17.6%	Yes	Texas Labor Market Portal - Projections Report
7225	Restaurants and Other Eating Places	24105	29057	4952	20.5%	No	Texas Labor Market Portal - Projections Report

**Source: Texas Labor Market Portal - Projections Report Industry Projections for Lower Rio Grande Workforce Development Area 2022-2032 (<https://texaslmi.com/>).**

## 1. High Employment Growth

- Several industries are expected to experience substantial growth in employment from 2022 to 2032. Notable sectors with the highest percentage growth include:
  - **Management of Companies and Enterprises** (36.3% growth): This indicates a significant increase in the number of companies needing to manage operations, potentially tied to expanding businesses or organizational restructuring in the state.
  - **Other Ambulatory Health Care Services** (34.5% growth): A sign that there is rising demand in outpatient care and specialized health services beyond traditional hospital settings.
  - **Offices of Physicians** (25.0% growth) and **Individual and Family Services** (24.6% growth): Reflect a continuing trend of expansion in healthcare and social services, both of which align with aging populations and rising healthcare demands.

## 2. Healthcare-Related Sectors

- **Home Health Care Services** (17.6% growth) and **General Medical and Surgical Hospitals** (17.1% growth) continue to show steady demand, consistent with national trends toward home-based care and the increasing need for medical services.
- **Offices of Dentists** (22.9% growth) and **Offices of Other Health Practitioners** (19.2% growth) also point to continued opportunities in health services, driven by both preventive care and specialized treatments.
- The healthcare industry is also highly connected to a **Governor's Industry Cluster**, which is expected to further prioritize and facilitate sector growth through initiatives and support.

## 3. Industries Unrelated to Governor's Cluster

- **Restaurants and Other Eating Places** (20.5% growth), while showing significant growth, are not related to a governor's cluster, indicating this sector may be driven more by consumer trends and lifestyle choices rather than targeted economic strategies.

Similarly, sectors such as **Warehouse Clubs, Supercenters, and Other General Merchandise Retailers** (19.7% growth) and **Food and Beverage Stores** (14.2% growth) reflect retail trends, driven by consumer purchasing patterns.

## 4. Sectors with Lower Growth

- Some sectors, such as Elementary and Secondary Schools (5.3% growth) and Automobile Dealers (18.0% growth), show more modest growth rates compared to others. The slow growth in education may reflect demographic stabilization or limited increases in enrollment, while the automotive industry is experiencing more steady but not explosive growth.

## 5. Labor Market Information and Data Source

- All the data sources are provided by the Texas Labor Market Portal - Projections Report, which adds credibility and ensures the analysis is based on state-specific labor market insights.

## 6. Clusters and Strategic Priorities

- Industries related to the governor's industry clusters, such as healthcare, are expected to receive additional attention in terms of funding, policy support, and workforce development. The growing demand for health services aligns with these strategic priorities, supporting targeted workforce investments.
- Sectors not part of the governor's clusters may still experience growth but may face less focused development efforts.

## Conclusion

The analysis highlights healthcare and social services as significant drivers of employment growth in Texas over the next decade, supported by state-level initiatives. However, other industries, especially in retail and management, are also seeing substantial increases. Understanding these trends can inform workforce development, policy, and investment strategies aimed at supporting the growth of key sectors.

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## 2.B. LABOR FORCE ANALYSIS AND TRENDS

In the WFS service area, the business community continuously emphasizes the demand for a highly skilled workforce, particularly through entry-level positions. WFS, in collaboration with the business community, works to identify skill gaps and develop training initiatives targeting individuals facing barriers to employment.

Increasing the labor force participation of individuals aged 25 and older with higher education remains a critical challenge for the region. As shown in the Educational Attainment and Employment Statistics tables, in 2023, the labor force participation rate with less than a high school diploma stands at 62.4% in Hidalgo County, 59.6% in Starr County, and 53.1% in Willacy County. This group faces a significant risk of unemployment, along with high school graduates.

In 2023, individuals with “Less than High School” education and “Some College or Associate’s Degree” reported the highest unemployment rates. According to the Educational Attainment and Employment Statistics tables by County below show, the educational segment with the highest unemployment rate in Hidalgo County was “High school graduate (includes equivalency)” at 6.2%, in Starr County it was “Some College or Associate’s Degree” at 9.7%, and in Willacy County it was “Less than High School Graduates” at 12.6%.

On the other hand, the lowest unemployment rates were observed in the “Bachelor’s Degree or Higher” category. In 2023, Hidalgo County reported an unemployment rate of 3.1%, Starr County had a 0% unemployment rate, and Willacy County recorded 6.1%.

### Hidalgo County Educational Attainment and Employment Statistics 2023

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	Total	Labor Force Participation Rate	Employment/Population Ratio	Unemployment Rate
Population 25 to 64 years	416,705	74.5%	70.8%	4.7%
Less than high school graduate	100,989	62.4%	59.2%	5.0%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	112,591	72.1%	67.6%	6.2%
Some college or Associate’s degree	112,207	79.2%	75.1%	4.6%
Bachelor’s degree or higher	90,918	85.1%	82.4%	3.1%

## Starr County Educational Attainment and Employment Statistics 2023

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	Total	Labor Force Participation Rate	Employment/Population Ratio	Unemployment Rate
Population 25 to 64 years	29,926	71.5%	67.5%	5.6%
Less than high school graduate	10,055	59.6%	56.1%	5.9%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	7,611	75.8%	71.8%	5.2%
Some college or Associate's degree	7,208	76.9%	69.5%	9.7%
Bachelor's degree or higher	5,052	81.1%	81.1%	0.0%

Source: Census, American Community Survey 2023, S2301.

## Willacy County Educational Attainment and Employment Statistics 2023

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	Total	Labor Force Participation Rate	Employment/Population Ratio	Unemployment Rate
Population 25 to 64 years	9,973	69.6%	64.0%	8.0%
Less than high school graduate	2,778	53.1%	46.4%	12.6%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	3,799	71.5%	65.9%	7.8%
Some college or Associate's degree	2,178	77.6%	73.4%	5.4%
Bachelor's degree or higher	1,218	86.9%	81.5%	6.1%

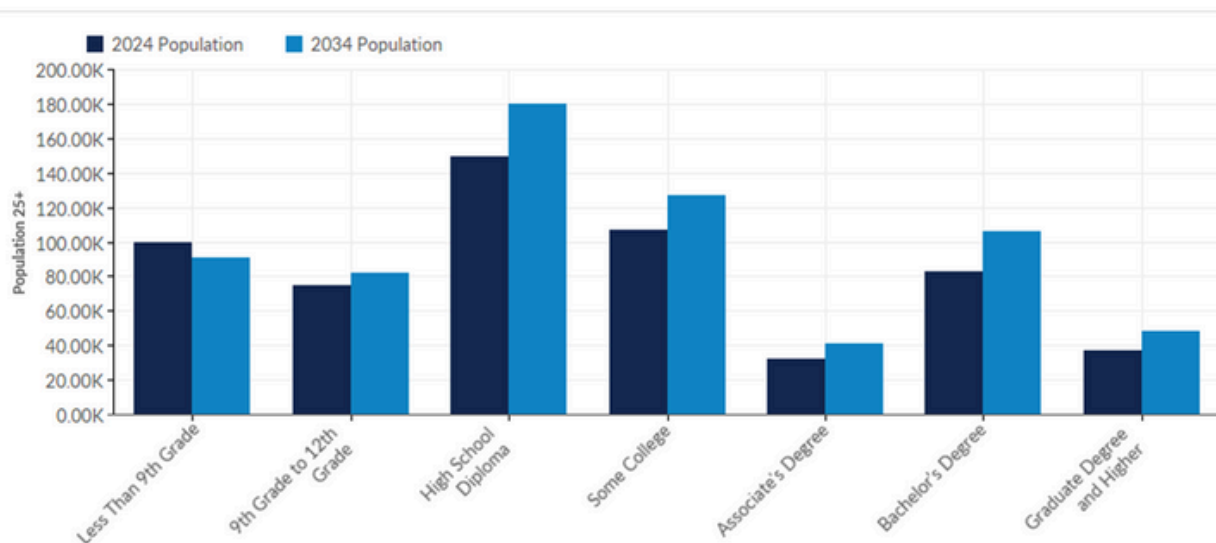
Source: Census, American Community Survey 2023, S2301.

Looking ahead, the population of individuals aged 25 and over in the WFS service area is projected to grow by 16% from 2024 to 2034. According to the Three County Educational Attainment Projections 2024-2034 table below, the educational groups that are expected to see the most significant growth in population include: High School Diploma (20% increase), and Some College (19% increase). The Less Than 9th Grade population is expected to decrease (9%).

Combining the populations of Less than 9th Grade, 9th – 12th Grade, and High School Diploma, the total projected percent of population in 2034 is 52% a 4% decrease from 2024 (56%). Efforts to elevate these segments of the population to attain Some College or higher educational levels are vital for the region's economic development in the next decade.

### Three County Educational Attainment Projections 2024-2034

Educational Attainment by Level



Education Level	2024 Population	2034 Population	2024 % of Population	2024 State % Population	2024 National % Population
Less Than 9th Grade	99,765	91,144	17%	7%	5%
9th Grade to 12th Grade	74,353	81,543	13%	7%	6%
High School Diploma	149,755	179,940	26%	24%	26%
Some College	107,082	127,139	18%	20%	19%
Associate's Degree	32,014	41,047	5%	8%	9%
Bachelor's Degree	82,725	105,685	14%	21%	21%
Graduate Degree and Higher	36,644	48,392	6%	12%	14%
	582,337	674,890	100%	100%	100%

Source: Lightcast Educational Attainment 2024-2034.



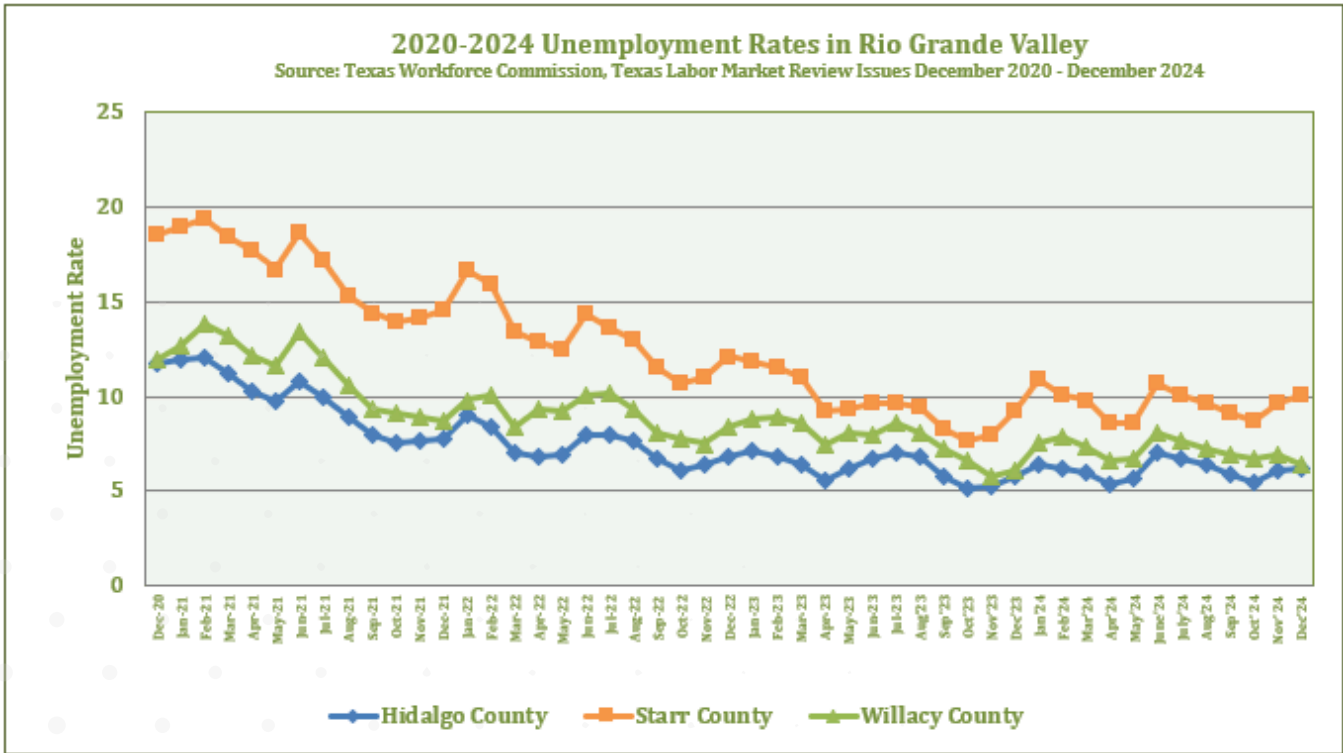
The Local Unemployment Statistics table presents the unemployment statistics for November 2024, showing an unemployment rate of 6.1% in Hidalgo County, 9.6% in Starr County, and 6.9% in Willacy County. In comparison, the unemployment rates at the state and national levels were 4.2% and 4.0%, respectively. The lowest unemployment rates were reported in the cities of McAllen (4.4%) and Edinburg (4.9%).

Since the COVID Pandemic our area has seen a steady decline in unemployment rates and is back to pre-pandemic levels or better.

### Local Unemployment Statistics 2024

	Nov-24			Oct-24	Nov-23
Geographic Area	Civilian Labor Force	Unemployed	Rate	Rate	Rate
USA	168,164,000	6,708,000	4.0%	3.9%	3.5%
Texas	15,621,025	655,510	4.2%	4.1%	3.5%
Workforce Solutions	422,806	26,766	6.3%	5.8%	5.5%
Hidalgo County	390,310	23,841	6.1%	5.5%	5.3%
McAllen	73,628	3,244	4.4%	4.2%	3.8%
Mission	38,197	2,196	5.7%	5.5%	5.1%
Edinburg	52,524	2,553	4.9%	4.6%	4.0%
Pharr	34,346	2,167	6.3%	5.7%	5.8%
San Juan	16,832	1,159	6.9%	5.8%	5.9%
Weslaco	18,745	1,326	7.1%	6.2%	6.0%
Starr County	25,409	2,436	9.6%	8.7%	8.1%
Willacy County	7,087	489	6.9%	6.7%	6.2%

Local Unemployment Statistics Trend 2020-2024



Specialized Skills for the Lower Rio Grande Valley Table below presents workforce profiles that offer an overview of the current skillsets within the region. These profiles detail the number of individuals with specific skills, their share of the overall workforce, and projected growth trends for these skills. For instance, marketing is the most common specialized skill, with 5,214 individuals (4% of the workforce) and a projected growth rate of 23%, categorizing it as a rapidly growing skill. Other notable skills include accounting (2,791 profiles, 2%), inventory management (2,023 profiles, 2%), and merchandising (2,000 profiles, 2%), each with unique growth patterns. Skills with rapid growth potential include auditing (21.8% growth), billing (20% growth), and customer relationship management (22.1% growth), while skills such as data entry and selling techniques show limited or negative growth. These workforce profiles offer insight into the region's current capabilities, while also identifying emerging trends that align with labor market demands and economic priorities.

## Specialized Skills for the Lower Rio Grande Valley

Specialized Skills	Profiles	% of Total Profiles	Projected Skill Growth	Skill Growth Relative to Market
Marketing	5,214	4%	23.00%	Rapidly Growing
Accounting	2,791	2%	24.00%	Rapidly Growing
Inventory Management	2,023	2%	12.60%	Growing
Merchandising	2,000	2%	15.00%	Growing
Data Entry	1,914	1%	2.60%	Lagging
Auditing	1,810	1%	21.80%	Rapidly Growing
Curriculum Development	1,628	1%	14.60%	Growing
Warehousing	1,266	1%	13.00%	Growing
Selling Techniques	1,170	1%	-1.20%	Lagging
Billing	1,152	1%	20.00%	Rapidly Growing
Invoicing	1,054	1%	16.20%	Growing
Lesson Planning	1,043	1%	12.60%	Growing
Customer Relationship Management	916	1%	22.10%	Rapidly Growing

## Barriers to Employment

In the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV), various educational, social, and economic factors combine to create significant barriers to employment. One of the most pressing challenges is the lack of formal education, affecting a large portion of the population. In 2023, 24% of Hidalgo County residents, 34% of Starr County residents, and 28% of Willacy County residents aged 25 and over had not completed high school. This educational gap is closely tied to high unemployment rates, particularly among individuals with lower educational attainment. For instance, in 2023, the unemployment rate for those without a high school diploma in Willacy County was 12.6%, while Hidalgo County reported a 6.2% rate for high school graduates. The limited availability of adult education and GED programs further complicates this issue, emphasizing the need for targeted efforts to increase educational attainment. Additionally, workforce profiles as illustrated in table above show that while specialized skills like marketing and accounting are growing, other critical skills, such as data entry and selling techniques, are underdeveloped, highlighting the importance of aligning skill development with market needs.

Other significant barriers to employment include immigration and legal status issues, which prevent a portion of the workforce from accessing stable jobs. Transportation challenges, particularly in rural areas with limited public transit options, restrict mobility for many job seekers. The lack of affordable child care is another major obstacle for working parents, particularly single mothers, who struggle to participate fully in the workforce. Criminal records also hinder employment opportunities, especially for higher-paying positions, while individuals with disabilities face difficulties due to insufficient workplace accommodations and training opportunities. Furthermore, generational poverty restricts access to education and professional networks, exacerbating the cycle of unemployment. Overcoming these barriers requires a comprehensive approach, including expanding workforce development programs for opportunity youth and expanding drop out recovery programs, introducing carpooling or local transportation initiatives, creating second-chance employment opportunities, and supporting mentorship and apprenticeship programs. These interventions are crucial to breaking the cycle of poverty and helping individuals access sustainable, long-term careers, ultimately fostering economic resilience and improving employment outcomes across the region.

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## 2.C. WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS (WFS) WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ANALYSIS

The Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV) region of Texas is facing a set of critical workforce development challenges that range from skills gaps to demographic shifts. Addressing these gaps is essential for sustaining regional economic growth and meeting employer demands for a skilled and adaptable workforce. WFS is actively addressing these challenges by focusing on several priority areas for workforce development, education, and training.

### 1. Youthful Population and Early Career Development

WFS has placed a significant emphasis on developing career pathways for younger populations. Through a TWC-funded initiative, the **Workforce Career and Education Outreach Specialist Pilot Program** targets middle and high school students (grades 6-12), guiding them toward high-demand and high-growth occupations. This strategic approach aims to bridge the knowledge gap by providing students with access to critical career data and education on potential career opportunities.

#### **Program Impact and Relevance:**

- This initiative aligns with regional economic growth trends and prepares future generations for high-demand careers in sectors like healthcare, technology, and advanced manufacturing.
- In-depth career counseling, labor market insights, and skill development in early education stages are essential to build a pipeline of skilled workers.

**Recent Developments:** WFS is working to expand the program's reach, expanding to provide services to more schools and expand its collaboration with Region One ESC.

### 2. Aging Workforce and Knowledge Transfer

The growing number of older workers nearing retirement is another significant challenge. Many industries face the risk of losing valuable knowledge and skills as experienced workers retire. In response, WFS and regional partners are working to address this issue by focusing on apprenticeship programs that facilitate knowledge transfer from seasoned workers to the younger workforce. In addition, WFS continues to work with businesses to find opportunities for upskilling and other industry specific training opportunities.

### **Program Impact and Relevance:**

- Apprenticeships not only help preserve institutional knowledge but also provide on-the-job training opportunities, making it easier for younger workers to acquire the specialized skills needed in industries such as construction, healthcare, and information technology.
- This initiative aims to ensure that businesses continue to thrive despite the retiring workforce and provides younger workers with the hands-on experience necessary to enter skilled trades and professions.

**Recent Developments:** WFS is seeking additional funding opportunities to expand apprenticeship programs, working closely with local employers and industry partners to promote this model. WFS works closely with South Texas College (STC) and other educational partners to expand apprenticeships in our region.

### **3. Educational Attainment and Employer Needs**

A persistent issue within the region is the mismatch between the educational attainment of the workforce and the evolving needs of employers. Many workers in the region may lack the credentials or advanced skills necessary for in-demand positions.

### **Program Impact and Relevance:**

- WFS is promoting **industry-recognized, portable, and stackable credentials** as key pathways for workers. These credentials provide workers with the flexibility to pursue careers in growing sectors like healthcare, technology, and skilled trades.
- Partnerships with educational institutions and industry leaders are vital in developing curricula that are aligned with the job market needs, allowing workers to build a career progression with certifications that are recognized nationally.

**Recent Developments:** WFS continues to collaborate with local educational institutions and industry leaders to identify skill gaps and create targeted training programs that align with current and future workforce demands, utilizing Texas Workforce Commission grants for example the Skills Development Fund and Skills for Small Business to help with the cost of training.



## 4. Soft Skills and Employability Training

A significant concern in the region is that many job seekers and entry-level workers lack critical soft skills such as communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, teamwork, and adaptability, which are essential for long-term employment success.

### Program Impact and Relevance:

- WFS is partnering with Independent School Districts (ISDs), post-secondary institutions, and community organizations to integrate **soft/employability skills training** into workforce development programs. This helps ensure that job seekers are better equipped for successful integration into the workforce.
- Employers often report that while technical skills can be trained, soft skills are harder to develop and are crucial for worker retention. By addressing these skills early, WFS is laying the foundation for a more resilient and capable workforce. WFS provides job seekers and students with soft-skills training covering relevant topics to better prepare them for the workforce.

**Recent Developments:** WFS is expanding collaborations with local education partners and Region One ESC to offer soft skills workshops as part of workforce training programs.

## 5. Upskilling for Technological Advancements

With rapid advancements in technology, WFS recognizes the need to **upskill the existing workforce** to ensure that workers are prepared to meet the demands of an evolving job market. This is especially important in sectors such as manufacturing, healthcare, and information technology, where technological change is accelerating.

### Program Impact and Relevance:

- WFS is actively encouraging employers to use state and federal workforce development programs designed to upskill current employees. The WFS Business Relations Team works closely with local stakeholders to identify businesses that need to upskill their workforce and create customized plans and apply for funding to train, certify and grow their businesses. This not only helps businesses retain talent but also ensures that workers are continuously improving their skills, leading to higher wages and job satisfaction.

- Upskilling programs can also support transitions for workers who are displaced by automation or technological advancements in their industries.

**Recent Developments:** WFS is continuing to work with industry associations and employers and other community stakeholders to offer tailored upskilling programs, ensuring that workers are equipped with the skills needed for tomorrow's jobs.

## **6. Addressing Barriers to Employment**

WFS realizes that the most significant barrier to employment is the need for quality childcare, therefore Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a key component to help develop a skilled workforce in the region. While this program is continuously evolving here are some key programs and initiatives.

- 1. Child Care Services (CCS):** Workforce Solutions provides financial assistance for childcare to eligible low-income families to ensure children have access to quality early education. This helps parents to work or pursue further education while their children receive care from licensed providers.
- 2. Workforce Development and Training for Early Childhood Educators:** There are programs aimed at improving the skills of the early childhood workforce. These may include financial support or partnerships with local colleges and education institutions to help early educators earn certifications, degrees, or credentials that elevate the quality of care and education they provide.
- 3. Texas Rising Star (TRS) Program:** This program helps improve the quality of child care by recognizing and promoting centers that meet high standards of care. Workforce Solutions often assists providers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley to qualify for Texas Rising Star certification, which involves training and resources to improve service quality.
- 4. Workforce and Economic Development Partnerships:** WFS collaborates with local community organizations, schools, and agencies to build stronger partnerships focused on the future workforce. This includes initiatives to strengthen the early childhood education pipeline, such as internships, job shadowing, or connecting educators with employment opportunities in early childhood settings.
- 5. Support for Parents:** Workshops or services are often available to help parents understand the importance of early childhood education and how to choose quality childcare providers. This also includes awareness programs on the availability of financial assistance for childcare and other resources to support families.

**6.Early Childhood Educator Recognition Programs:** Programs designed to acknowledge exceptional early childhood educators might be part of their offerings, emphasizing the importance of quality education in the formative years.

The strengths and weaknesses of Workforce Solutions Workforce Development Board's workforce development activities can be assessed based on its overall approach to workforce development, regional needs, and impact. Below are some strengths and weaknesses:

### **Strengths:**

- 1.Strong Focus on Regional Workforce Needs:** WFS tailors its workforce development efforts to meet the specific needs of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, a region with a unique demographic and economic landscape. This includes addressing industries like healthcare, education, manufacturing, agriculture, and logistics.
- 2.Collaboration with Local Employers and Educational Institutions:** WFS works closely with local employers, EDCs and educational institutions to create job training programs, internships, and apprenticeships. This collaboration ensures that workers are being trained for jobs that are in high demand within the region.
- 3.Support for Diverse Populations:** The organization provides resources for a variety of target groups, including veterans, youth, displaced workers, and individuals with disabilities. By offering specialized services for these populations, WFS promotes inclusivity in the workforce.
- 4.Comprehensive Career Services:** WFS offers a broad range of career services, including job search assistance, skills assessments, resume building, and interview preparation. These services help job seekers improve their employability and transition into the workforce more smoothly.
- 5.Youth Programs and Partnerships:** WFS focus on youth workforce development, such as internship programs, career exploration, sharing labor market information and mentorship opportunities, helps young people gain valuable work experience and exposure to various career paths. Innovative initiatives like Summer Earn and Learn (SEAL) and Externships for Teachers, these efforts contribute to building a future-ready workforce in the region.
- 6.Access to Funding and Support for Education and Training:** Workforce Solutions provides scholarships, tuition assistance, funding to upskill and training resources, helping individuals pursue certifications, degrees, or skills training that can increase their employment opportunities.

7. **Texas Rising Star and Child Care Services:** Through support for the Texas Rising Star program and child care subsidies, WFS helps to improve the quality of child care and ensures that parents can access affordable services while they work or study, contributing to a better work-life balance.

## **Weakness:**

1. **Limited Resources for High-Demand Industries:** Despite efforts to cater to high-demand sectors, there may be instances where certain industries or specialized job roles face insufficient training opportunities or program offerings. For example, fast-growing sectors like tech may not always be adequately supported in rural or underserved areas.
2. **Challenges in Addressing High Poverty Rates:** The Lower Rio Grande Valley has relatively high poverty rates and challenges related to economic mobility. While WFS offers a wide range of services, systemic issues such as low education attainment, limited access to higher-paying jobs, affordable housing, and transportation can make it harder for individuals to transition successfully into the workforce.
3. **Bureaucracy and Access to Services:** Some individuals may find it difficult to navigate the services due to bureaucracy, paperwork, or eligibility requirements. WFS continuously looks for opportunities to expand our services to reach more people through partnerships with other agencies and assist customers navigate the process and gain access to additional needed resources. Additionally, low digital literacy among certain segments of the population can pose a barrier to accessing online services and job search tools.
4. **Limited Funding and Staffing Capacity:** Workforce development programs often depend on funding from both state and federal sources, and budget constraints can limit the scope and reach of services. This can result in limited staffing or the inability to expand programs as rapidly as demand requires.
5. **Geographic and Infrastructure Challenges:** The Lower Rio Grande Valley is geographically large, and certain rural areas might face challenges with accessing training centers, career services, and job opportunities. Public transportation can also be a barrier to mobility, particularly in more isolated communities. WFS communicates and partners with local county officials, non-profits and other partners to find innovative solutions to reach customers in need throughout our service area.

**6.Retention of Trained Workers:** While WFS does a good job of providing training, there may be issues with worker retention, particularly if economic conditions in the region do not support sustainable job growth. This could be compounded by out-migration to other regions with more job opportunities or higher wages.

**7.Employer Engagement and Job Placement:** While WFS works to create partnerships with employers, the region's economy is often characterized by lower wages and limited career advancement opportunities. As a result, some workers may find it difficult to secure long-term, well-paying jobs, leading to challenges in job placement and satisfaction.

Workforce Solutions Lower Rio Grande Valley has made significant strides in addressing the region's workforce development challenges through strong programs designed to meet regional needs, with a focus on inclusivity, youth development, and skill-building. Targeted initiatives such as early career development, apprenticeship opportunities, upskilling for new technologies, and addressing skill mismatches are equipping workers with the skills and credentials needed for a rapidly evolving job market. However, challenges such as limited resources, systemic poverty, and barriers to access can hinder its effectiveness in some areas. Continued collaboration with educational institutions, employers, and community organizations will be crucial in sustaining these efforts and ensuring long-term success. By addressing these weaknesses, Workforce Solutions Lower Rio Grande Valley can further enhance its impact, mitigating skill gaps and fostering a more adaptable, skilled, and competitive workforce in the region.

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### 3.A. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

#### Required Partners and Programs

WFS is committed to maximizing the benefits for job seekers and businesses within the service delivery area. The organization is focused on ensuring that all individuals, particularly those facing employment barriers, can access WFS workforce system services to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

WFS proposes to align the administration of the following TWC programs with the WIOA Texas Combined State Plan:

- WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Programs
- Wagner-Peyser Employment Service (ES) Program
- Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) Program
- Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program
- Unemployment Insurance (UI) Program
- Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Program
- Choices, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Employment and Training (E&T) Program
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T)
- National Dislocated Worker Grant (NDWG) Program
- Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) Program
- Career and Technical Education Programs under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, amended by the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) (20 USC §2301, et seq.)
- Subsidized Child Care Programs
- Apprenticeship Programs (Texas Education Code, Chapter 133)
- Veteran Employment and Training Programs
- Senior Community Service Employment Program



## Collaborating with Core Partners

WFS is dedicated to delivering exceptional service to both job seekers and businesses, ensuring effective coordination across internal and external partners to meet employers' skill expectations. Strategies for collaboration include:

- **Enhancing partnerships** with core and required partners, such as AEL, TWS-VRS, and TVC, to maximize resource utilization and explore co-enrollment opportunities for customers.
- **Partnering with local organizations** to secure or leverage additional resources.
- **Identifying collaborative opportunities** with community partners where service goals align.
- **Convening with core and regional partners** when appropriate, to align and expand services.
- **Maintaining the WFS referral system** and adapting standardized intake forms to ensure consistency across core partner agencies. These electronic forms will help streamline services by reducing duplicate data collection and promoting alignment of services based on shared customer information.
- **Establishing local Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs)** with core and required partners to define each agency's roles and responsibilities in supporting an educated and skilled workforce (e.g., Senior Community Service Employment Programs (SCSEP), Adult Education and Literacy). Working with SCSEP to align services and outcomes, focusing on the identification of opportunities and strategies to enhance service delivery.
- **Leveraging co-enrollment opportunities** among programs to benefit customers whenever possible.
- **Supporting improved customer service** and staff training across programs to enhance staff knowledge and ensure seamless service delivery.
- **Developing, supporting, and collaborating** with core, required, and regional partners to design customized training for employers (e.g., Skill Development Fund (SDF), High Demand Job Training (HDJT) grants).
- **Responding to consultations from educational partners** regarding proposals for workforce training programs, such as Jobs Education and Training (JET) and Self Sufficiency Fund (SSF) grants.
- **Collaborating among WFS Student HireAbility Navigators, TWS-VRS, and vocational rehabilitation counselors** to connect individuals with disabilities to services that support successful transitions to employment and/or post-secondary education.

## Part 3: Core Programs



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

WFS is actively engaged in community planning with partners to improve access to workforce services. Local agencies, education and training partners, and employers have a proven track record of working together through collective impact models that maximize resources, integrate funding, and deliver better outcomes for the community. This enhanced access to WFS services, combined with co-enrollment in core programs, helps individuals gain industry-recognized post-secondary credentials, thereby boosting their employability.

In response to the rapidly evolving technological landscape, WFS has implemented innovative strategies to bridge gaps in service access and strengthen the One-Stop service delivery system. These strategies include utilizing online resources (e.g., orientations, job readiness materials), hosting online recruitment events for employers, conducting Rapid Response virtual meetings via Zoom or Microsoft Teams to address mass layoffs, and partnering with regional organizations to ensure both businesses and job seekers can access services.

A key strategy moving forward will be continued collaboration between WFS and core partners such as AEL and TWS-VRS, with an emphasis on aligning services and outcomes. The primary goal is to improve access for individuals facing barriers to service access, including those with disabilities, low educational attainment, English as a Second Language (ESL) customers, and rural populations.

The collaboration strategy will involve convening Executive Leadership meetings, structured around the following planning principles: (1) identifying opportunities and strategies, (2) determining what each partner can contribute, (3) building trust, (4) continuously improving service delivery, and (5) maintaining an outcomes-oriented approach. Shared outcomes will include, but are not limited to:

- Customers
- Leveraging Resources
- Expertise, Competencies, Skills, and Knowledge

- Increasing Access through Partnerships
- Programs & Services
- Online Service Listings
- Resources
- Connection to Job Opportunities
- Media Outreach
- Social Media Platforms

## **Adaptive Equipment and Services**

WFS and its sub-recipient conduct annual training on WIOA 188, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the proper use of accessibility software and hardware. WFS regularly monitors and performs annual accessibility reviews to identify and address barriers, ensuring individuals with disabilities have full access to services.

Workforce Services ensures all customers have equal opportunity to access facilities and programs, operating in full compliance with Equal Opportunity (EO) and ADA requirements.

### **Minimum Accessibility Standards**

To meet minimum accessibility standards and enhance accessibility to services, WFS provides a range of adaptive equipment at all Workforce Career Centers. The following adaptive strategies are available at each office location to assist customers requiring accommodations:

- ZOOM Screen Magnifier Software
- Microsoft Windows Magnifier
- Microsoft Windows Narrator
- Microsoft Windows On-Screen Keyboard
- Large Print Keyboards with Braille
- BigTrack Trackball Mouse(s)
- Volume Control CapTel Phones
- TTY Telephones
- Bi-Level Adjustable Height Workstations
- In-Person Sign Language Interpreting (procured)
- Large Print Materials (upon request)
- POCKETALKER Ultra Speech Amplification Device with disposable headsets
- Sorenson Video Relay Service

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

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

WFS ensures the efficient coordination of programs and services for target populations through a streamlined delivery system, guided by a structured process that includes (1) regional analysis, (2) service delivery design, and (3) accountability.

**Regional Analysis:** WFS conducts a comprehensive analysis of the regional economy and labor market, comparing it with demographic data and local insights to identify target populations, service gaps, and limitations. This analysis is done in collaboration with WFS's sub-recipients and partners to ensure it is fully contextualized and reflects the interests of all stakeholders.

The current target populations for the region include Public Assistance Recipients, Other Low-Income Adults, and Individuals with Basic Skills Deficiencies. Additional priority groups include Eligible Veterans and Spouses, Migrant Seasonal Farm Workers, Individuals without a Diploma/GED, Foster Youth, Individuals with Disabilities, Court-Involved/Offenders, English Language Learners, Unemployed Individuals and/or those receiving Unemployment Insurance, People earning below the Self-Sufficiency Wage, Individuals with Cultural Barriers (including legal immigrants and refugees), and those facing multiple barriers such as substance abuse, homelessness, mental health challenges, and domestic violence.

**Service Delivery Design:** The findings from the regional analysis inform the development of programs, strategies, and opportunities that best serve the needs of both job seekers and employers. The WFS workforce system is designed to enhance access to employment, education, training, and support services for individuals, especially those facing employment barriers, including the target populations.

WFS collaborates with sub-recipients and partners to ensure that all customers can access high-quality WFS Workforce Career Centers, which connect them to a wide range of services available in their communities, including referrals to partner organizations.

These services support individuals seeking employment, developing basic educational or occupational skills, earning a postsecondary certificate or degree, or receiving career guidance. All programs and services are coordinated, involving both internal and external partners, to address the unique needs of each customer. WFS Workforce Career Centers provide career services that inspire, support, and empower customers—including those with disabilities and other barriers—to make informed decisions based on local and regional economic demand, enabling them to successfully achieve their employment and educational goals.

**Accountability:** At the start of each contract year, WFS sets service level targets primarily based on (1) TWC contracted measures, (2) target populations identified for specific grants, and/or board/local priorities and service strategies. WFS ensures that these service level targets, which include specific enrollment and performance goals for target populations, are met through ongoing monitoring.

This is achieved through monthly data analysis and reporting on priority services and activity levels. The data helps assess whether the projected outreach and service levels for WFS priorities and target populations are meeting expectations. If there are overages or deficiencies, adjustments are made to ensure performance goals are met. One key data point tracked by WFS is the Migrant Indicators of Compliance, which monitors the level of services provided to specific target populations. This indicator alerts WFS to areas where services need improvement, where increased outreach is necessary, or where more activity is required. Additionally, each Workforce Career Center contributes to the accountability process by recording customer service requests, the type of services requested, and customer demographic characteristics to assess alignment with specific target populations.

Data trends are analyzed by WFS staff, sub-recipient leadership, and Workforce Career Center leadership. Based on these analyses, service strategies are adjusted as needed to meet service demand. These corrections are tailored to specific situations and developed collaboratively among the relevant parties.

**Strategies and Services in the Local Area:**

- a. To engage employers in workforce development programs, including small employers and those in high-demand industry sectors and occupations.
- b. To support a local workforce development system that aligns with the needs of businesses in the area.

c. To improve coordination between workforce development programs and economic development efforts.

d. To strengthen connections between the one-stop delivery system and unemployment insurance programs.

**Note:** These strategies may include initiatives such as incumbent worker training programs, on-the-job training, customized training programs, industry and sector-specific strategies, career pathway initiatives, use of effective business intermediaries, and other services designed to meet the needs of regional employers. All these initiatives will support the broader strategy outlined above.

**Continuous Improvement:** The WFS Board staff and its sub-recipients are responsible for the ongoing enhancement of all system operations, ensuring that the needs of businesses, job seekers, workers, and childcare customers are met effectively. To support continuous improvement, the following strategies are implemented:

1. Contract performance measures are negotiated annually.
2. Contracts include provisions requiring sub-recipients to adhere to the Strategic Goals and Objectives set by the WFS Board.
3. Contracts are structured to align the Statement of Work with the Board's Goals and Strategies, with adherence evaluated through multiple levels of oversight.

These strategies help ensure the continuous improvement of eligible providers and the overall system.

Additionally, WFS negotiates Local Board Contract Targets with sub-recipients. The current local targets are as follows:

- **Job Placement** – Continued enrollment in work-based activities (i.e., On-the-Job Training (OJT), Work Experience, Transitional Jobs);
- **Training** – Continued educational and training investments in healthcare;
- **Barriers to Employment** – Increased enrollment of individuals with barriers to employment (i.e., ex-offenders, foster youth, homeless, single parents, migrant seasonal farmworkers, etc.); and
- **Financial Management Strategy – Direct Services Budget**

Expenditure plans must meet 90 percent or more of the relative proportion of the program year, for each respective program.

The WFS leadership team, consisting of WFS Board staff and sub-recipient management, regularly meet to review contractual performance, monitor progress, and implement remedies for any deficiencies.



**Training Providers:** WFS oversees the Eligible Training Provider System (ETPS) and requires training providers to apply for certification through the local workforce board in order to receive WIOA training funds. Before training programs are added to the ETPS, an analysis of the area's target industries and occupations is conducted to ensure alignment with the required skill sets. WFS monitors the performance of each certified training provider, focusing on program completion rates and employment outcomes. Regular oversight and updates to the ETPS, along with ongoing collaboration with local employers, help maintain awareness of emerging employment trends and evolving labor market needs.

WFS has established policies and procedures for workforce system operations that ensure the efficient functioning and continuous improvement of both the ETPS and the eligible providers within the system.

### **Facilitating Access to Services:**

WFS leverages technology to make workforce services more accessible, allowing customers to receive support without the need for an in-person visit to the Workforce Career Center whenever possible. Key initiatives and technologies employed by WFS to enhance access to the workforce system include:

- **Online Booking and Appointment Scheduling:** WFS uses Office 365 Bookings to offer quicker and more efficient appointment scheduling. Job seekers can access the online booking system to save time for both themselves and WFS career center staff. Appointments can be scheduled at Workforce Solutions - [Schedule Appointment](#).
- **Libraries and Community Centers:** WFS partners with local municipalities and government entities to leverage public infrastructure, such as libraries and community centers, for hosting events and providing temporary office space. This helps expand access to services across a wider network of locations available to the public.
- **Social Media (Facebook):** WFS operates two active Facebook campaigns (WFS and RGV Operation Get Hired), reaching over 57,000 users. These campaigns help distribute event information, job opportunities, and outreach for workforce programs. They also offer real-time “help desk” services through Facebook Messenger/Chat, providing immediate assistance in a virtual space.
- **Affiliation with AEL Sites:** WFS collaborates with Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) providers to extend program services to their locations, promoting services to AEL students and expanding access to the workforce system.

- **Community Engagement/Partnership:** Beyond the initiatives listed above, WFS maintains relationships with numerous regional agencies, enhancing the workforce system's reach. Rural community partners and organizations serving special populations play a critical role in ensuring effective coordination within the community.

Additionally, WFS continuously collaborates with core and community partners offering social services, educational services, AEL, and TWC Vocational Rehabilitation Services to improve the referral process within the system. The online referral system directly connects representatives and core partner staff, capturing essential customer data at the point of entry. This system ensures efficient referrals between agencies and provides customers with an acknowledgment of receipt, ensuring their referral is being processed.

### **Compliance with WIOA §188 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990:**

WFS conducts a bi-annual review of all Workforce Career Centers to assess compliance with the nondiscrimination and equal opportunity provisions of WIOA §188. This review evaluates both programmatic and physical accessibility. Additionally, TWC monitors WFS on-site, including reviews by the DOL's Civil Rights Center (DOL-CRC).

WFS ensures access to services that comply with ADA §188. Websites and electronic resources are designed to be accessible, and content is user-friendly for individuals with disabilities or those with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). For example, WorkInTexas.com offers content in both English and Spanish, making it accessible to a wider range of job seekers. TWC's website is also available in Spanish, providing information on unemployment insurance, unemployment benefits, labor law, and housing discrimination. Furthermore, WFS collaborates with Student HireAbility Navigators and TWS-VRS to equip Workforce Career Centers with a variety of adaptive equipment, enhancing accessibility for individuals with disabilities. For further details, refer to Section B. Core Programs—Expand Access, Facilitate Development, and Improve Access for the list of adaptive equipment available at Workforce Solutions Career Centers.

WFS designates a staff member to coordinate and serve as the point of contact for all accessibility issues. This coordinator oversees compliance with accessibility policies across all WFS facilities and resources and facilitates the prompt correction of any compliance issues. The coordinator works with sub-recipient staff as an accessibility liaison, ensuring that staff development addresses the needs of individuals with disabilities.

The coordinator's responsibilities also include:

- **Scheduling TWC Training for One-Stop Staff:** TWC's Training and Development Department (T&D) offers WFS and sub-recipient staff a comprehensive course called "Access for All." This course is designed specifically for Workforce Career Center staff, providing instruction on serving individuals with disabilities, covering key elements of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act, and teaching how to apply these regulations in WFS Workforce Career Centers.
- **Scheduling additional regular classroom training** on a variety of accessibility topics.
- **Maintaining an inventory of adaptive equipment** to meet ADA requirements.
- **Consulting on accessibility purchases** and assisting with the exception request process.
- **Ensuring that contracted Workforce Career Center staff** are trained and kept up to date on ADA requirements.

### **Integration with TWS-VRS Roles and Responsibilities:**

WFS and TWS-VRS staff are co-located at Workforce Career Centers within the three-county WDA service area.

The success of an integrated workforce system depends on the contributions and roles of each partner, ensuring services are delivered according to their mission and expertise. Co-locating TWS-VRS staff allow for specialized reviews and assessments of the system, helping to enhance services for the disabled population. This integration ensures WFS resources are fully leveraged for the benefit of individuals with disabilities. On-site staff provide immediate services and enable consistent training for Workforce Career Center staff and partners, fostering a deeper understanding of how best to serve all customers.

### **Cooperative Agreements:**

WFS has established cooperative agreements that outline how local service providers collaborate to integrate and provide access to the full range of services available in the one-stop delivery system. These agreements include:

- **Adult Education and Literacy (AEL):** Region One ESC (Memorandum of Understanding - Region One Education Service Center)

WFS and its AEL partner have committed to assigning appropriate staff to (1) provide system-wide staff training and development, (2) implement policies and procedures, and (3) develop 'operational manuals' that support the integration and accessibility of partner services. This document addresses the WIOA requirement to ensure that the workforce system, its programs, and services are sufficiently integrated so that, regardless of the point of entry, customers receive information about all services, any program requirements, and the ability to capture service provision through an automated electronic system accessible by all partners.

In addition to the core partnerships, WFS maintains MOU relationships with several other partners who are co-located or coordinated to implement the region's workforce system service delivery model. These MOU partners include:

- The Senior Community Service Employment Program (AARP)
- Motivation, Education, & Training (MET)
- La Reina Apartments
- Oak Haven Apartments
- Abel B. Gonzalez Jr. Community Center
- Hidalgo Public Library
- Office of the Attorney General – Non-Custodial Parent
- City of San Juan Public Library
- Cesar Chavez Foundation
- Texas Veterans Commission
- AVANCE Inc.
- BCFS Health and Human Services
- Villa Vallarta Apartments
- Behavioral Health Solutions of South Texas
- Donna North HS T-STEM Academy – WBL
- Job Corps Center/Southeast Texas
- Job Corps Center Strategix Management, LLC – Laredo
- La Joya ISD
- Los Naranjos Apartments
- Raintree Apartments
- Region One Education Service Center
- Region One Education Service Center – Adult Education & Literacy
- Texas Health & Human Services (HHSC)

- University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston – UTHealth – Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS)
- Ysleta del Sur Pueblo – Native Pathways

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### 4.B. Employer Engagement, Economic Development, and Unemployment Insurance Program Coordination

Workforce Solutions (WFS) is committed to developing and integrating a dynamic workforce system aligned with our Key Strategic Imperative #1: “Understand the needs of the business community to ensure a demand-driven system.”

WFS achieves this by conducting Target Industry and Occupation research, fostering strategic partnerships with education, economic development, and community-based organizations. This approach ensures that resources are focused on addressing the workforce skill requirements of the region’s businesses. WFS works closely with employers to promote, develop, and implement employer-centered strategies, such as industry sector task forces, apprenticeships, grant initiatives for upskilling, and work-based learning opportunities, including On-the-Job Training (OJT) and internships. WFS seeks to establish and maintain relationships with local employers who need to fill positions offering family-sustaining wages and career advancement pathways.

WFS continues to explore new and innovative strategies to enhance employer engagement while collaborating with other entities that require employer input, participation, or partnership. These efforts enable WFS to gather comprehensive insights into employer needs and reduce the burden on employers responding to multiple requests.

One example is the WFS Healthcare Industry Sector Taskforce. The healthcare sector in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) is one of the fastest-growing industries. WFS convenes business leaders within the sector, works with educational partners, and collaborates with economic development and community organizations to address workforce needs. The Healthcare Industry Sector Taskforce is focused on:

- Identifying and addressing priority workforce needs and emerging skill gaps, both short- and long-term.
- Aligning training programs, curricula, and resources with employer requirements.
- Communicating industry priorities to policymakers and workforce development partners, enabling them to design responsive solutions.



In 2025 WFS is working closely with regional healthcare employers to support initiatives that will help grow their workforce with trained, certified workers, several projects are in place that will help expand increase the amount of Registered Nurses, Licensed Vocational Nurses, and other healthcare related positions to help close the gap of healthcare workers in the region.

#### Coordinating Workforce and Economic Development:

To enhance coordination between workforce services and economic development efforts, WFS partners with numerous economic development corporations (EDCs) and stakeholders across the service delivery area. These partnerships connect local employers and job seekers with new opportunities arising from regional economic development projects. Through these relationships, WFS identifies in-demand employment opportunities, gains access to labor market information, assists in talent acquisition and retention, and supports entrepreneurship.

WFS staff regularly meet with area economic development entities and collaborate on employer-focused services, such as city-specific job fairs, regional job fairs, business retention and expansion visits, and data-sharing initiatives that benefit area businesses.

The WFS Business Retention and Recruitment (BRR) and Business Services Unit (BSU) teams participate in economic development meetings and provide information about workforce programs available through WFS Workforce Career Centers, including WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs, TANF, Choices NCP, SNAP, and other program funding. These partnerships allow for the distribution of information regarding human resource assistance for businesses, as well as skills training through programs such as TWC's Skills for Small Business Program, Self-Sufficiency Fund, and Skills Development Grants.

Additionally, WFS staff, in collaboration with area EDCs, actively seek new funding opportunities and grants targeted at local priorities such as funding internship programs, entrepreneurship and training. Key partnerships, such as with the UTRGV Small Business Development Center, provide essential support for new entrepreneurs, offering business planning, financing, and technical guidance.

## Strengthening Linkages with Unemployment Insurance (UI) Programs:

WFS plays a vital role in strengthening the connection between the one-stop delivery system and unemployment insurance programs by:

- Utilizing a monthly dashboard to identify active UI job seekers and matching them with quality job opportunities.
- Leveraging networks and collaborative strategies, including labor exchange and career counseling services, to offer enhanced services to UI job seekers.
- Analyzing demographic, work history, and education/skill level data for individuals receiving UI benefits to align employer outreach with job postings, work experience opportunities, OJT, and other employment activities.
- Collaborating with employers to identify strategies for worker retention or rapid placement in the event of layoffs, tailoring services to match the occupational and skill profiles of affected workers.
- Promoting Workforce Career Center services and Rapid Response services to the general public, particularly targeting individuals engaged with the UI Program but not actively participating in Workforce Career Center services.
- Coordinating with TWC UI office representatives to notify them of local layoffs, schedule Rapid Response services, and ensure UI representatives can present at affected employee orientations.
- Working with the TWC statewide Rapid Response coordinator to share information on statewide layoffs and assist with the placement of affected workers within the WDA service delivery area.
- Providing cross-training for WFS staff to ensure they are up-to-date on TWC UI program guidelines and regulations.

Through these initiatives, WFS ensures a seamless connection between the unemployment insurance program and workforce development services, helping to support both job seekers and employers in navigating workforce challenges.

### 4.C. Coordination of Wagner-Peyser Services

WFS effectively administers the Wagner-Peyser program through a structured collaboration between its merit staff and sub-recipient staff. This coordination aligns with the Texas Model of operations, where merit staff are primarily responsible for providing the core services of the Wagner-Peyser Act, while sub-recipient staff supplement and enhance these services. Additionally, sub-recipient staff, in partnership with the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), offer guidance and support for merit staff, ensuring seamless integration of services.

Key components of WFS's strategy to support workforce development and enhance coordination among partner organizations include:

1. **Community Resource Listings and 2-1-1 Texas:** WFS Career Center and partner staff have access to an extensive list of community resources. These resources, which are provided through 2-1-1 Texas, enable staff to connect customers with appropriate agencies and services. 2-1-1 Texas is an online platform maintained by Texas Health and Human Services that offers a comprehensive database to connect individuals with local and statewide services. This resource is invaluable for providing job seekers and employers with access to the services they need.
2. **Inter-Agency Referral Process:** To ensure that customers receive appropriate and timely assistance, WFS utilizes an inter-agency referral process. This system helps direct customers to other agencies or service providers when their needs go beyond the scope or expertise of the current agency. This approach minimizes gaps in service and ensures that individuals are referred to the right resources quickly, fostering better overall customer service and coordination among partners.
3. **Webinars and Cross-Training Opportunities:** WFS facilitates webinars and cross training opportunities among agencies to foster information sharing and build a culture of collaboration. These sessions help staff understand the roles of various agencies, improve knowledge sharing, and encourage consistent service delivery. They also ensure that all partners are aligned in their approach to customer service and workforce development.

**4. Leadership Meetings:** WFS holds regular leadership meetings to discuss strategies for aligning and coordinating the services offered by all partnering agencies. These meetings - provide an opportunity to assess current practices, share updates, and ensure that efforts are aligned with the workforce development goals and the needs of local employers and job seekers.

**5. Annual Partner Assessment:** To keep services up-to-date and relevant to customer needs, WFS conducts an annual partner assessment. This process includes maintaining an updated listing of services available across core and required partners. The assessment helps identify areas where services can be improved or better coordinated, ensuring that workforce services are comprehensive, effective, and accessible to all.

These strategies work together to streamline service delivery, enhance coordination among agencies, and reduce duplication, ensuring that individuals receive the support they need to succeed in the workforce. The integrated approach ensures that WFS's services align with the needs of both job seekers and employers, creating a more efficient and responsive workforce system.

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### 4.D. Integrated, Technology-Enabled Intake and Case Management

#### D.Integrated, Technology-Enabled Intake and Case Management

WFS integrates several key systems and technologies to enhance the delivery of services and ensure efficient tracking and management of customer data for programs under WIOA. These systems play a crucial role in coordinating services between core partners, streamlining intake processes, and maintaining comprehensive case management. Key systems and practices used by WFS include:

1. **WorkInTexas.com (WIT):** WorkInTexas.com serves as the primary platform for job seekers to access services, search for employment opportunities, and connect with employers. It is also integrated into WFS's case management and service delivery systems, ensuring that customers can seamlessly interact with both online and in-person services.
2. **VOS Greeter:** VOS Greeter is an automated system used at Workforce Career Centers to capture customer information at the point of entry. This system helps track customer flow, manage traffic through the center, and direct individuals to the appropriate services. It ensures that all visitors are registered and that their interactions are efficiently tracked for future reference.
3. **Inter-Agency Referral System:** WFS uses an inter-agency referral system to facilitate coordination among different service providers, particularly core partners such as Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) and Texas Workforce Solutions Vocational Rehabilitation Services (TWS-VRS). This system enables partners to share client information and track the services provided to each individual, ensuring a smooth and comprehensive service experience for customers.
4. **Web-Based System for AEL Service Registration:** For individuals seeking Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) services, WFS utilizes a web-based system for service registration. This system is designed to collect and share customer information with the Region One Education Service Center (ESC) for further service provision. It facilitates the registration process and ensures that all partners are working with up-to-date customer data.

By leveraging these integrated systems, WFS ensures that the workforce development system operates efficiently, with accurate and up-to-date information available for all stakeholders involved in service delivery. These technologies enhance collaboration among core partners and improve overall service delivery for both job seekers and employers. As additional core partners, such as AEL and TWS-VRS, are incorporated into the service delivery model, WFS is committed to modifying practices as directed by TWC to further integrate systems and ensure seamless data sharing.

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### 4.E. Third Party Partnership in SNAP Employment and Training Programs

WFS is actively working on the implementation of the **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T)** Third-Party Partnership (TPP) through strategic planning and collaboration with various stakeholders. The goal is to enhance the employability and economic self-sufficiency of SNAP recipients by involving third-party partners who can provide services like job training, work experience, job placement, and support. The strategies being used for the planning and implementation of this program include:

#### 1. Identifying Potential Third-Party Partners

- **Researching and engaging potential partners:** WFS is conducting research to identify and reach out to community colleges, local governments, private-sector entities, and community-based organizations that could serve as third-party partners for the SNAP E&T program. These partnerships are crucial for expanding the variety of services available to SNAP recipients.

#### 2. Building Partnerships with Local Employers

- **Employer collaboration:** WFS aims to build partnerships with local employers who are willing to offer opportunities for work experience, job placement, or apprenticeships to SNAP participants. By engaging employers, WFS ensures that participants have access to practical work opportunities that can help them gain valuable skills and improve their employability.

#### 3. Ensuring Third-Party Partner Alignment with Program Goals

- **Partner familiarization:** WFS ensures that third-party partners are aware of the specific needs of SNAP participants and that their services align with the goals of the SNAP E&T program. This alignment ensures that the program meets the needs of the participants and enhances their ability to transition into sustainable employment.

#### **4. Establishing Clear Program Guidelines and Responsibilities**

- **Defining roles and service provisions:** WFS will establish clear program guidelines that outline the roles, responsibilities, and expectations for both WFS and third-party partners. Key service provisions, including eligibility verification, job readiness training, skills development, job placement, and follow-up support, will be defined to ensure consistency and compliance with program requirements.
  - Verifying and documenting eligibility: Third-party partners will be responsible for verifying the eligibility of SNAP recipients for participation in the program.
  - Defining service provisions: The services provided by third-party partners, such as training, job placement, and follow-up, will be documented and aligned with program standards.
  - Obtaining verification documentation: WFS will ensure that third-party partners provide necessary documentation for SNAP E&T activities to maintain program compliance.

#### **5. Formalizing Partnerships through Agreements and MOUs**

- **Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs):** WFS will develop formal agreements or MOUs that clearly outline the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of both WFS and the third-party partners. These documents will help ensure clarity and accountability in the collaboration.

#### **6. Creating a Collaborative Referral System**

- **Referral system development:** WFS will establish a collaborative referral system that connects eligible SNAP recipients with third-party partners. Additionally, WFS will incorporate a process for reverse referrals, ensuring continuous communication between WFS and its partners. This approach promotes strong collaboration and ensures that clients receive the full spectrum of services available to them.

These strategies aim to create a structured and well-coordinated approach to the SNAP E&T program that maximizes the impact of third-party partnerships, providing SNAP recipients with the skills and opportunities needed to become economically self-sufficient. By fostering collaboration, clear communication, and proper documentation, WFS is working toward the successful implementation of the program.

## Part 5: Workforce Investment Activities



### 5.A. Rapid Response Activity Coordination

The WFS Business Relations Representatives (BRR) team oversees services for employers, including the coordination of Rapid Response activities. Within the BRR team, a designated Rapid Response Coordinator serves as the single point of contact to ensure the timely delivery of services in the service delivery area. WFS provides Rapid Response services to employers and dislocated workers affected by permanent closures, mass layoffs, or natural disasters that cause significant job displacement.

Upon receiving a WARN Notice from TWC or an employer notice, the Rapid Response Coordinator takes the following actions:

1. **Initial Contact:** The Rapid Response Coordinator makes immediate contact with the employer, representatives of the affected workers, and the local community. Based on an assessment of the layoff plans and employer needs, the Coordinator collaborates with the sub-recipient BSU and TWC Unemployment Insurance (UI) staff to facilitate services. The BRR team works closely with TWC UI representatives to provide affected workers with information on how to file for unemployment benefits.
2. **Employer Consultation:** The Rapid Response Coordinator meets with the employer to:
  - Discuss potential layoff aversion strategies or shared work plans and schedule informational sessions in consultation with TWC.
  - Develop a plan using the list of affected workers to assess background needs and reemployment prospects in the local community.
  - Determine if a trade petition or employer/employee intervention is necessary.
  - Provide instructions on Mail Claim procedures, as required.

Throughout the process, the Rapid Response Coordinator ensures the effective delivery of services by working with the sub-recipient BSU and WFS Workforce Career Center staff.

### **3.Sub-recipient BSU:**

- Engages with employer and worker representatives to provide information on unemployment compensation benefits, including access to WFS Workforce Career Center services, training activities (including the Trade Adjustment Assistance program), crisis counseling, financial planning, debt management, interview techniques, resume and application assistance, stress management, and referrals to other partner agencies.
- Coordinates with WFS Career Center staff to match affected workers with immediate job referrals and resources to meet both short-term and long-term needs.

### **4.WFS Career Center Staff:**

- Works directly with affected workers to offer services related to job search, WIOA and TAA training opportunities, financial management, stress relief during layoffs, and more.

The Rapid Response Coordinator also works with other state agencies and partners to ensure affected workers have access to all necessary services.

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## Part 5: Workforce Investment Activities



### 5.B. Youth Activities and Services

Workforce Solutions strongly believes a skilled worker exists for every occupation required by an employer. We believe that the needs of employers should be met through market-driven analysis and must meet the needs of both the employer and workers. With the knowledge and access to Workforce services, it is the responsibility of individuals to make decisions that impact their lives and are accountable for those decisions. The following are strategies, activities, and services currently provided by Workforce Solutions, but WFS will continue to implement data-based, market-driven solutions that are adaptable to changing times and that will lead to more job creation and economic prosperity for workers and employers.

- WIOA provides a broad spectrum of youth employment programs focusing on eligible youth, ages 14-24, who are encountering barriers to education, training, and employment.

- WIOA is designed to assist local youth secure employment, education, training opportunities (e.g. work experience, on-the-job training, internships and apprenticeships) and support services crucial for success in the labor market. It is also intended to match employers with skilled workers needed to compete in the global economy.

Services provided to youth customers include a full range of employment and training activities (i.e., Work Experience, Individual Training Accounts (ITA's), Supervised Job Search and Job Readiness) offered at the Workforce Solutions (WFS) Career Centers

- WFS recognizes that effective training programs must be responsive to real-time labor market analysis. Training programs must effectively utilize direct and prior learning assessments to measure a customer's knowledge, skills, competencies, and experiences. Assessment outcomes are used to measure skills and competencies for adaptability, contributing to efficient placement of customers in employment and/or training.

An initial assessment is performed to identify academic levels, skill levels and services needed by a customer. Assessments include a review of basic skills, occupational skills, prior work experience, employability interest, aptitudes (including interest and aptitudes for nontraditional jobs), supportive service needs, and developmental needs. A determination of needs for individualized career services are identified by the initial assessment or the individual's inability to obtain employment through career services provided is documented. If initial assessment indicates a customer is job ready, WFS immediately connects customer to employment opportunities via the State of Texas Application for job seekers, WorkInTexas.com. If customer is identified as potentially benefiting from additional assistance such as training, upskilling, and career advancement opportunities, a more comprehensive objective assessment is performed.

A comprehensive objective assessment includes review of customer's employment and training service needs and goals, academic levels, prior work experience, occupational skill levels, abilities and aptitudes, support service needs, and barriers to employment and/or training. The WFS Workforce Career Centers offer a full range of assessment tools including Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), CAPS & COPS and Spanish Assessment for Spanish only speaking customers (SUPERA). The TABE is designed to effectively assess both the knowledge and skills of learners while CAPs & COPs Assessment measures a customer's aptitude and career interest and helps in creating a foundation to begin the career or educational planning process.

Assessment results, in addition to other relevant information, contribute to shaping individualized service strategies. Strategies may include the identification and enrollment in youth program elements/services as listed in table found below.

In efforts to promote and support a workforce system that creates value and offers employers, families, individuals, and communities the opportunity to achieve and sustain economic prosperity, WFS (1) leverages community partnerships to provide services to customers that are not available through the workforce system and (2) deploys technology to provide virtual services.



WIOA Youth Element	WFS Provided Services	Partner Services
Evidence-based dropout prevention and recovery strategies that lead to completion of the requirements for a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent (including a recognized certificate of attendance or similar document)	WFS utilizes the online referral portal to connect customers to dropout prevention and recovery services. The portal is accessible on WFS website <a href="https://wfsolutions.org/connect/referral.html?highlight=WyJyZWZlcnJhbCIzInJlZmVycmFscyJd">https://wfsolutions.org/connect/referral.html?highlight=WyJyZWZlcnJhbCIzInJlZmVycmFscyJd</a>	Region One and South Texas College provide dropout recovery services. Referral to services provided by either of these organizations is accessible through the WFS online referral portal.
Alternative secondary school services, such as basic education skills training, individualized academic instruction, and English as a Second Language (ESL) training.	Identification of individuals needs and barriers. Utilization of WFS online referral portal. <a href="https://wfsolutions.org/connect/referral.html?highlight=WyJyZWZlcnJhbCIzInJlZmVycmFscyJd">https://wfsolutions.org/connect/referral.html?highlight=WyJyZWZlcnJhbCIzInJlZmVycmFscyJd</a>	Region One and South Texas College provide dropout recovery services. Referral to services provided by either of these organizations is accessible through the WFS online referral portal.
Paid and unpaid work experience that provide youth with opportunities for career exploration and skills development.	Youth earn a prevailing wage, a wage comparable to other employees with similar job duties. Duration varies between 3 to 6 months. During which youth increase their skills and experience.	Local employers who have been outreached by contractor and have signed all required documentation.
Occupational skills training is an organized program of study that provides specific vocational skills that lead to proficiency in performing actual tasks and technical functions required by certain occupational fields at entry, intermediate, or advanced levels. Boards must give priority consideration to training programs that lead to recognized postsecondary credentials that align with in-demand industry sectors or occupations in the local area.	Eligible youth with or without post-secondary training may enroll TWC eligible training. Youth with a post-secondary training that seek to upgrade, may also enroll in a TWC eligible training. Eligibility is determined by counselors located at the WFS centers. Youth interested in occupations listed on the Target Occupation or Demand Occupation list are prioritized.	Eligible Training Providers or WFS designated contracted trainings

Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupation cluster.	Remediation via service providers	Region One ESC and STC
Supportive services enable youth to participate in WIOA activities.	Support services may include transportation assistance, work attire, work-related tools, testing fees, books, utility bills, childcare and more.	Reference Support Service Policy ( <a href="#">Supportive Services Policy No.002.11</a> ).
Follow-up services for not fewer than 12 months after the completion of participation.	Placement in follow-up services is determined by WIOA Youth Career Counselor to ensure youth continue on target in achieving long-term career goals. Services include continued regular contact with youth, leadership development, adult mentoring, financial literacy education and more.	
Comprehensive guidance and counseling provide individualized counseling to customers. This includes drug and alcohol abuse counseling, mental health counseling, and referral to partner programs, as appropriate.	For other types of guidance and counseling needed, referrals are made to partners as appropriate.	Utilizing the online referral portal, individuals relate to partners such as TWC-VR, Region One Adult Education and Literacy, Texas Veterans Commission, and AARP foundation. For other partners, individuals are directed to access 211 listing here: <a href="#">Texas 211 Directory Community Resources</a>
Financial Literacy	WFS Outreach Specialists provide Financial Wellness presentations to students, parents, and educators. Financial literacy education is also integrated into the Youth Workshop. Topics covered include bank accounts, budgeting and credit reports. Youth also participate in interactive activities such as Texas Reality Check.	Access Texas 211 Directory for Community Resources. Local Banks and Credit Unions.

Entrepreneurial skills training	Career advising, service planning and referral by Career Counselor	Small Business Development Center, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, and local banking institutions and credit unions
Services that provide labor market information	WFS Outreach Specialists are tasked with presenting labor market information to students, grades 6 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> . This information focuses on occupations listed on WDA23 Target List and High Demand List. Presentations are also provided to parents and educators.	Utilization of Texas Reality Check, Career Check, and local knowledge obtained from employers
Activities that help youth prepare for and transition to postsecondary education and training	WFS Outreach Specialists conduct trainings focused on Interview Skills, Resume Writing and Dress for Success. These along with LMI presentations assist students in preparing for post-secondary education and employment.	TWC LMI tools, South Texas College modules.

WFS, through its sub-recipient(s), administers WIOA funds to provide employment and training activities for WIOA Youth through a network of six WFS Workforce Career Centers located throughout the service delivery area. These centers are in each of the three counties that comprise WDA 23 and ensure maximum accessibility to services by locating facilities in high density population areas.

<b>WFS Workforce Career Center</b>	<b>County</b>
<b>Edinburg Office</b> 2719 W. University Dr., Edinburg, TX 78539 Tel: (956) 380-0008 / Fax: (956) 316-2626	<b>Hidalgo County</b>
<b>McAllen Office</b> 2101 S. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Street, McAllen, TX 78503 Tel: (956) 302-0800	<b>Hidalgo County</b>
<b>Mission Office</b> 901 Travis St., Ste. 7, Mission, TX 78572 Tel: (956) 519-4300 / Fax: (956) 519-4388	<b>Hidalgo County</b>
<b>Raymondville Office</b> 700 FM 3168, Ste.3, Raymondville, TX 78580 Tel: (956) 689-3412 / Fax: (956) 690-0285	<b>Willacy County</b>
<b>Rio Grande City Office</b> 5408 Brand St., Ste.1, Rio Grande City, TX 78582 Tel: (956) 487-9100 / Fax: (956) 487-9190	<b>Starr County</b>
<b>Weslaco Office</b> 2290 W. Pike Blvd., Weslaco, TX 78596 Tel: (956) 969-6100 / Fax: (956) 969-6190	<b>Hidalgo County</b>

## **Additional Youth Service Initiatives:**

Workforce Solutions thrives to support all individuals, including people with disabilities, veterans, foster youth, adult learners, and second chance populations, to prepare them to achieve career success and close gaps in the labor force.

**E3 Youth Program:** The E3 Youth Program (E3) is a year-round program and impacts in-school youth (ISY) and out-of-school youth (OSY). E3 offers an intensive selection of organized activities supporting the youths' short- and long-term career goals. The E3 model focuses on the in-demand industries of healthcare, education, public safety, and retail/hospitality. The success of the E3 model is in offering a combination of activities that could potentially lead youth to self-sufficiency through meaningful employment.

In addition to E3, WFS offers various youth special programs that focus on more specific populations. Some of these programs are:

- Summer Earn and Learn – providing job readiness workshops and work experience for youth with disabilities.
- TANF Subsidized Employment Initiative – offers the E3 workshop and work experience during the summer for youth ages 16 to 24.

Workforce Solutions works diligently on creating opportunities to leverage all resources to improve our workforce systems. One of these key partnerships is the Governor's Tri-Agency Initiative between TWC, the Texas Education Agency (TEA), and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). We continue to work to meet the state's higher education goal, 60x30TX, through initiatives like postsecondary educational efforts. WFS continues to work with technical colleges, universities and businesses to align and leverage resources available to support workforce development efforts through interagency partnerships and collaboration.

Workforce Outreach Specialists (WOS) coordinate activities with secondary and post-secondary programs to ensure that a skilled workforce is prepared and equipped to fill critical in-demand jobs, both now and in the future. WFS has four WOS assigned to school districts across the three-county service area. The WOS are tasked with strengthening partnerships with secondary campuses within their assigned school districts. WOS coordinate with campuses on dates and times of presentations and workshops for students, teachers, administrators, and parents of students in grades 6th – 12th.



These workshops and presentations focus on career exploration, career pathways, post-secondary programs, work-based-learning opportunities, and the development of job readiness skills. WOS work to ensure there is alignment between training programs and credentials associated with in-demand, high-wage occupations. WFS make concerted efforts to focus on providing LMCI on High Demand and Target Occupations as well as High Demand Middle Skilled STEM Occupations to students for the purpose of assisting them in making informed decisions on future careers.

TWC tools such as Texas Reality Check and Texas Career Check are utilized for career exploration. In addition, Career Coach, a board purchased platform, is used to enhance career exploration experience for youth to include information for post-secondary programs, resume writing, and access to employment opportunities. WOS conduct presentations and workshops informing students, educators, administrators and parents on how to use these tools. WOS utilize Virtual Reality Headsets for career exploration. There are currently 10 headsets with preloaded career simulations that are used at campuses by students for career exploration.

WOS utilize Google Suites, most notably G Drive and Google Classroom, as depositories of literature, videos, quizzes, activities, and the WFS Job Readiness Curriculum. In speaking with local school districts, it was discovered that close to 100% of local districts utilize Google Classroom and G Drive. WOS have created G Drives and Google Classrooms for their assigned districts allowing quick and seamless accessibility for educators.

A video library has been created and will continue to be developed to be accessible via the WFS website (WFSolutions.org). The video library contains "How To" and "Employer Interview" videos. Topics covered in the "How To" videos include step by step instructions on how to use Texas Reality Check and Texas Career Check. Each of these videos highlight specific features of each online tool. In addition, quizzes and activities are available allowing educators to check for retention of material and assign videos as part of student assignments and learning curriculum.

Employer Interview videos assist employers who find it difficult to take time from their busy schedules to participate in school exploration events. These videos are available to teachers upon request and assist with meeting the requirements for career exploration for students in 6th through 12th grade. Industries represented by Employer Interview videos range from Health Care, Law Enforcement, Education, Construction, and Engineering.

Virtual interviews for job applicants are quickly becoming the norm for business. This format of interview requires a unique set of preparedness that is not required during face-to-face interviews. WFS is utilizing Interview Stream Prep to assist students with mastering the skills needed for virtual interviews. The platform enables teachers to assign virtual interviews to students and then review the recorded session. Enabling teachers, the opportunity to provide students with feedback and recommendations and providing students the opportunity to view themselves and note areas for improvement. Students can also share the video with parents so as to allow parents to view the assignment and provide their feedback.

### **Youth with Disabilities:**

Student HireAbility Navigators (SHNs) across the state of Texas are tasked with promoting, developing, and strengthening the processes and resources needed to ensure successful transition of youth with disabilities to post-secondary education and employment. WOS and SHNs work cohesively to ensure all services, resources, and tools are accessible to youth with disabilities. WFS ensures the use of Closed Caption function, if available via the presentation platform. Reading material is available in large print or in some instances, Braille when needed or requested. WOS and SHNs routinely present together at presentations, workshops, and events targeting students, educators, and parents. This is part of WFS holistic approach that focuses on providing all students with the tools needed to be successful in the workforce. Tools such as Interview Stream Prep, Google Suites, Microsoft Teams, and many of the TWC resources are accessible to youth with disabilities. Similar to WOS, the SHNs are assigned school districts within the three-county service area. SHNs work with each district to provide information on student transition services to post-secondary and/or employment. Furthermore, SHNs help to connect TWS-VRS and school officials for Admission Review and Dismissal Committee reviews and to promote TWC-VRS services. SHNs assist in planning and hosting job fairs for school district Special Education departments and provide Job Readiness Curriculum (JRC) training to teachers for implementation of soft skills training for youth with disabilities. SHNs also work diligently with 18+ programs found in several districts in the service delivery area.



### Successful Models Identified:

Connecting with local school districts by partnering with Region One ESC. Region One ESC is a vital partner in connecting with local districts. Through Region One ESC, WOS and SHNs have presented and networked with Career and Technology Education (CTE) directors for districts in the WFS service delivery area during quarterly CTE director meetings. SHNs have connected with Special Education directors from districts in the service delivery area during Special Education Directors Meetings. Attending these director meetings has enabled WFS to share new resources, tool, and projects with all the districts in the WFS service delivery area in one meeting. Additionally, WOS and SHNs have been asked to present at Region One ESC events such as the CTE Summer Conference, GEAR UP Kick Off, and STEM conference.

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



### **5.C. Coordination with Secondary and Postsecondary Education Programs**

WFS staff including WOS and SHNs coordinate with several educational partners to enhance services and avoid duplication. Emphasis is placed on aligning and leveraging resources available to support workforce development efforts through interagency partnerships and collaboration.

Workforce Outreach Specialist (WOS) provide career services to students at public middle and high schools, grades 6th – 12th, to provide youth with career exploration information focused on High Growth, High Demand Occupations. Students receive in-depth education and direction on career choices as well as access to up-to-date labor market and career data.

SHNs are tasked with promoting, developing, and strengthening the processes and resources needed to ensure successful transition of students with disabilities to post-secondary education and employment, providing persons with disabilities quality service that lead to employment and living independently. This is done by raising awareness and connecting disability stakeholders to services provided by workforce development boards and TWS-VRS services. SHNs are committed to collaborating with schools, employers, and community partners to create systemic solutions that advance inclusion.

WOS and SHNs fulfill their roles through presentations, utilization of TWC tools and resources, and leveraging of partnerships with community-based organizations and employers. WOS and SHNs work closely with their assigned districts. Presentations and workshops are scheduled and coordinated directly through each schools' administrators, counselors, or instructors. Assignment of districts avoids duplication of services and ensures a single point of contact for local school districts to connect with WFS.

Partners include RGV LEAD (Linking Economic & Academic Development), RGV Focus, Educate Texas, South Texas Career And Technical Association (STCTAT), Region One ESC, Career and Technology Education (CTE) Directors Network, RGV Academy Leaders Coalition, P-16 Council, Counselors Network, South Texas College (STC), University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV), University of Texas Youth Engagement Center, and GEAR UP grant recipients and Vanguard Academy.

WFS works with each of these organizations in providing services regarding career exploration, soft skills, and TWC resources and tools to students, educators, parents, and businesses. Working diligently to convene partners and schedule opportunities for strengthening partnership among these entities, leveraging resources, and seeking opportunities to impact the community and avoid duplication of services.

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## Part 5: Workforce Investment Activities



### 5.D. Child Care and Early Learning

Childcare services are managed through regulated providers or eligible relatives whom parents or caretakers have chosen to care for their children in accordance with 40 Texas Administrative Code (TAC) Chapter 809, as amended. Local pledge contributions/match for Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) federal funds are utilized in a timely manner in accordance with the Agency rules (40 TAC Chapter 809), federal regulations (45 CFR Part 98) and with all applicable state, federal guidelines, rules, and regulations. Childcare services are also made available for children determined eligible and authorized by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (TDFPS) local Child Protective Services staff.

The LRGV economy is comprised of a diverse array of employers. WFS mission is to provide the job seekers with resources and essential skills they need and businesses with the exceptional talent necessary for their success. Parents depend on reliable childcare so they can work. By extension, childcare is also essential for their employers, who depend on them to be at work and support business operations. Ensuring businesses have the labor force available, WFS provides employers with information on workforce services, to include services that aide the removal of job candidate barriers such as adequate childcare. Information is disseminated via business webinars, recruitment fairs, partner meetings (e.g., Economic Development Corporations, Chamber of Commerce). Partnerships with economic development corporations, chambers of commerce and non-profit organizations across the Rio Grande Valley have collectively brought local businesses important information and services that supports a thriving economy.

Support services such as affordable high-quality childcare is provided through subsidized Child Care Services Program which aids with retention strategies that provide eligible working families the assurance that their children are in a safe and stimulating environment that support learning and healthy development. WFS' efforts to increase visibility in the region utilizing social media strategies has helped expand the vision and mission to a vast number of businesses and job seekers in the service delivery area. As such, WFS continues to use these platforms to bring about the awareness that a high-quality early learning and development program for a child gives parents the stability to be productive employees.

Support improved school readiness through higher quality childcare, including Texas Rising Star, and through partnership opportunities such as prekindergarten partnerships. Support the needs of the childcare industry, which could include assistance with business development or shared services, as well as opportunities to support professional growth and career pathways for early education.

Knowledge of child development and learning enables providers to create curriculum and environment that aligns to state standards/guidelines for early childhood programs. WFS supports the needs of the childcare industry by providing early educational materials, curriculum, and an array of professional training opportunities geared towards promoting higher quality care that leads to improved school readiness. These professional development activities help improve quality and address the critical needs of young children and families which include but are not limited to:

- handling temperaments and developmental milestones of Infants and Toddlers
- promoting reasoning, language, and social-emotional development
- learning about the impact of nutrition and movement on early brain development
- Implementing low-cost ideas for gathering and creating rich explorations in learning centers
- incorporating Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics activities
- leading effectively and maintaining a positive attitude
- generating revenue through customer service
- implementing organizational systems to focus on problem solving productivity, effectiveness, and efficiency.

In addition, professional development initiatives include:

- Effective partnering with families and the community: Strengthening collaboration with families and community organizations to create a unified support system for children.
- Improving staffing and retention in early child care education: Addressing workforce challenges by promoting strategies for hiring, retaining, and supporting qualified educators to ensure consistent, high-quality care for children.

To further support the advancement of childcare professionals' early childhood career pathway, WFS implemented the Child Care Staff Retention Initiative to enhance the use and familiarity of Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS). Texas Rising Star (TRS) staff provides ongoing assistance and guidance to childcare professionals with their professional development planning through proper tracking and maintenance of qualifications and trainings in TECPDS. Effectively, training opportunities offered by our region have training certificates generated through TECPDS. Centralizing all training hours and certifications provide a holistic data analysis that support the growth and expansion of a high-quality childcare industry in our region.

Additionally, credentialing childcare professionals in the region with a Child Development Associate (CDA), the most widely recognized credential in early childhood education (ECE), is a key steppingstone on the path of career advancement. Credentialed staff become equipped with the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to effectively support the learning and development of young children. While earning a CDA credential enhances their qualifications it also contributes to elevating the overall quality of early child education programs. Effectively, it ensures the proper use and implementation of curricula in classroom activities to positively affect early learning domains.

WFS continuously focuses on connecting with childcare providers and public-school administrators on adequate research-based curricula that will close achievement gaps and address instructional needs in the age groups served by Texas Rising Star (TRS) providers. The TWC TRS program is a quality rating and improvement system for Texas early childhood programs. These efforts help sustain TRS Category 3 Curriculum and promote a child's school readiness when transitioning from a childcare provider facility setting into a school setting.

Professional development opportunities are specifically designed and made accessible to Spanish-speaking early educators. These opportunities may include workshops, training sessions, webinars, and certification programs conducted in Spanish, focusing on topics such as early childhood education best practices, classroom management, curriculum development, and cultural responsiveness. Additional resources, such as bilingual training materials and access to mentors fluent in Spanish, are also provided to support their ongoing professional growth and enhance the quality of education for diverse learning communities.



While a vast array of professional development opportunities is offered to childcare professionals, WFS recognizes the childcare industry faces staffing challenges and competition from public programs as professionals gain recognized credentials. Effectively, we continuously support the childcare industry through a Child Care Staff Retention Initiative to help increase staff retention.

Supporting the Texas Infant and Toddler Specialist Network is a priority for WFS. Currently, WFS employs a certified Texas Infant-Toddler Specialist who is widely recognized for delivering high-quality training in Circle Infant and Toddler Foundations. These trainings empower educators with research-based practices to effectively integrate into their classrooms, enhancing the quality of early childhood education. Additionally, WFS plans to certify a second Texas Infant-Toddler Specialist by the end of 2025, further expanding its capacity to support early childhood educators. Additional resources to support capacity building for infant/toddler expansion within childcare programs include but are not limited to: Early Literacy Center for infant, toddler, preschool and school age children, Social-Emotional Learning Kits, technological age-appropriate material, and other additional incentives that help create a nurturing, safe, and early learning environment.

Along with promoting higher quality childcare through the attainment of the TRS certification, WFS also support providers that have attained a Texas School Ready (TSR) designation. The TSR program is a comprehensive preschool teacher training program which combines research-based, state-adopted curriculum with ongoing professional development and progress tools. The goal of the TSR program is to support school readiness. WFS is equipped with knowledgeable, skilled, and credentialed sub-recipient staff to mentor and coach professional caregivers to intensify support models that help ensure the continuum of high-quality providers throughout our region. Both mentors and coaches conduct onsite visits, observe classroom settings, evaluate instructional curricula, and provide critical resources to increase professional development that nurtures a child's progress in their early learning development while responding to their needs.

Childcare back-office solutions such as software licenses or subscription fees support sound business practices and promote management efficiencies for TRS-certified childcare providers. These solutions allow childcare providers to operationalize and deliver services more effectively and efficiently. WFS' has contracted with a vendor for an all-in-one software platform for Texas Rising Star certified programs. The software helps teachers manage their day and communicate with parents, giving parents deeper insights into what their children are learning, and automates the process of managing operations for childcare administrators such as billing & tuition management, enrollment management, record retention, financial reporting and payroll. Proper usage and implementation of these systems in the childcare industry will foster overall parent engagement and satisfaction.

WFS supports the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Plan for Texas FFY 2025-2027 in which child care providers may enter the Texas Rising Star (TRS) program at the Entry Level Designation to ensure that programs receiving subsidies in Texas meet a base level of quality as determined by their licensing history while also ensuring they are on a path to increase their level of quality over time.

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## Part 5: Workforce Investment Activities



### 5.E. Transportation and Other Support Services

Transportation: WFS offers transportation-related support services to eligible customers, including gas cards and assistance with vehicle repairs. In addition to these support services, WFS actively collaborates to enhance system capacity through its role as a member of the Regional Transportation Advisory Panel (RTAP).

The RTAP is managed by the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC) and consists of 14 advisory members representing transportation entities, workforce development boards, and community-based organizations. Together, these members bring a diverse range of perspectives and expertise to better address the public transportation needs of the region. The RTAP meets quarterly to share updates on the availability of transit services and to discuss regional transportation needs.

WFS's participation in RTAP helps leverage resources for its customers by ensuring ongoing coordination and communication about available transportation services. The group also works together to address regional transportation challenges. WFS contributes by providing current workforce system information and offering recommendations on bus route updates, as well as coordinating transportation for special events, such as job fairs and health-related events.

Other regional transportation resources in the Lower Rio Grande Valley service area include: local cities and county governments, LRGVDC, the Federal Highway Administration, the Texas Department of Transportation, Regional Mobility Authorities, private sector partners, Valley Metro, McAllen Metro, Brownsville Metro, Island Metro, and Workforce Solutions Cameron.

Other Support Services: In addition to transportation, WFS offers a variety of support services, including emergency assistance, work-related clothing, tools, supplies, training-related books, and other allowable support services based on the program. However, WFS recognizes that the resources available through the traditional workforce system are often insufficient to meet the full range of community needs. To address this gap, WFS works to leverage additional resources by forming partnerships with agencies that can supplement workforce system services and better meet the needs of customers.

The WFS Community Engagement Department maintains strong connections with the local community by serving in an advisory capacity to Community-Based Organizations, Non-Profit Organizations, Educational Institutions, as well as private foundations and public entities. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or Agreement is developed with each partner to outline the entity's role and the services provided.

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## Part 5: Workforce Investment Activities



### 5.F. Coordination of Adult Education and Literacy

WFS has a history of active coordination with Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) providers in the service delivery area. Partners and WFS collaborate to develop adult education and literacy programs that support increases in employment, postsecondary education and training transition, skill gains, and secondary completion through demonstrated approaches that integrate system services and leverage community partnerships. Region One ESC and South Texas College are the TWC funded AEL providers for the region. As a result, stakeholders have engaged in cross-partnership, cross-functional workgroups to infuse traditional AEL services with work-based literacy and contextualized learning components that are aligned to WFS Career Pathways and Target and Demand Occupations. WFS intends to continue this work and to engage with Industry Task Forces to identify the ways adult education and literacy can better align to work-based skill requirements, skills gaps, and emerging industry skill needs; this continuous effort will better position AEL providers to meet educational benchmarks, gainful employment requirements, and employer skills demands.

Strategies that strengthen collaboration with core partners such as AEL partners are as follows:

1. Adult education and literacy remain a priority for WFS.
2. WFS convenes adult education and literacy leadership and stakeholders in regular discussions to address adult education and literacy needs in the RGV and strategize solutions to leveraging resources and partnerships.
3. Reviews application(s) submitted by adult education and literacy under Title II Adult Education and Literacy for services provided.
4. WFS has executed cooperative agreements that explain how local service providers carry out the requirements for integration and access to the set of services available in the local one-stop delivery system. Cooperative agreements include:
  - a. Adult Education and Literacy: Region One ESC
  - b. Rehabilitative Services: TWS-VRS
  - c. Adult Education and Literacy: South Texas College

5. Develops Memorandum of Understandings with agencies to outline partnership roles and responsibilities.
6. Utilizes WFS On-Line Referral system to connect customers in need of agency services. WFS meets regularly with agency leadership that provide adult education and literacy program and services in service delivery area. A few are noted below:

**Region One ESC Adult Education and Literacy Program** is the adult education and literacy provider for the LRGV and offers English as a Second Language (ESL), Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE) and English Literacy and Civics (EL Civics) classes. WFS collaborates with Region One ESC with all literacy programs via a.) regular meetings with leadership to discuss program progress/performance issues and solutions b.) an on-line service registration link, c.) supporting outreach and recruitment, d.) connecting with business and /or community-based organizations.

Review of Local Applications: WFS, as a coordinator and convener for the region, shall review applications to provide adult education and literacy activities under Title II Adult Education and Literacy for the service delivery area to ensure (1) consistency with the local plan and (2) advises applicants on alignment of resources with additional adult education and workforce services. WFS staff may offer technical assistance, training, and relevant information sharing to assist applicants.



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



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

- WFS, through its sub-recipient(s), manages WIOA funds to offer employment and training services for WIOA Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Youth via a network of six Workforce Career Centers across the service delivery area. The services provided to Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth customers include a full range of employment and training activities, such as Work Experience, Individual Training Accounts (ITAs), Supervised Job Search, and Job Readiness.
- Workforce Career Centers are strategically located in high-density population areas within each of the three counties in the WFS service delivery area, ensuring maximum accessibility to services.

Workforce Career Center	County
<b>Edinburg Office</b> 2719 W. University Dr. Edinburg, TX 78539 Tel: (956) 380-0008 / Fax: (956) 316-2626	<b>Hidalgo County</b>
<b>Mission Office</b> 901 Travis St., Ste. 7 Mission, TX 78572 Tel: (956) 519-4300 / Fax: (956) 519-4388	<b>Hidalgo County</b>
<b>Willacy County</b> Office 700 FM 3168, Ste.3 Raymondville, TX 78580	<b>Willacy County</b>

<b>Starr County</b> <b>Office 5408</b> <b>Brand St., Ste.1</b> <b>Rio Grande City, TX 78582</b> <b>Tel: (956) 487-9100 / Fax: (956) 487-9190</b>	<b>Starr County</b>
<b>Weslaco Office</b> <b>2290 W. Pike Blvd. Weslaco, TX</b> <b>78596 Tel: (956) 969-6100 / Fax: (956)</b> <b>969-6190</b>	<b>Hidalgo County</b>
<b>South McAllen Office</b> <b>2101 S. 2<sup>nd</sup> St., McAllen, TX 78503</b> <b>Tel: (956) 302-0800 / Fax: (956) 627-5239</b>	<b>Hidalgo</b>

In addition to the physical Workforce Career Center locations, WFS utilizes partner sites in rural areas to provide services to customers who may have difficulty accessing the Workforce System. As an alternative to in-person services, WFS also offers online virtual service options to ensure customers can still access support.

The Workforce Career Centers provide a wide range of assessment tools, including the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS), CAPS & COPS, and the Spanish Assessment (SUPERA) for Spanish-speaking customers. The TABE and CASAS assessments are designed to assess the knowledge and skills of learners across various areas, such as reading, listening, math, writing, and speaking. CASAS serves a broad range of learners, including English language learners, Adult Basic Education (ABE) students, high school diploma candidates, and both potential and current employees, with accommodations available for individuals with intellectual or learning disabilities. The CAPS & COPS assessment is a computerized tool that measures both career aptitude and interests, helping individuals begin the process of career or educational planning.

Assessment results, along with other relevant information, are used to create personalized service strategies. These individual service strategies include:

- Customized career pathway plans
- Identifying and addressing barriers
- Setting goals and related activities
- Documenting achievements and credentials

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



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

WFS ensures priority of service for the designated groups outlined in WIOA §134(c)(3)(E), 20 CFR §680.600, and WIOA guidelines through effective coordination of programs and services aimed at target populations. These populations are identified through a thorough regional analysis process. WFS evaluates the regional economy and labor market, comparing it with demographic data and local insights to identify target groups and service gaps. This analysis is carried out in collaboration with WFS' sub-recipients and partners to ensure that it accurately represents the interests of all stakeholders.

The current target populations for the region include Public Assistance Recipients, Low-Income Adults, and Basic Skills Deficient Individuals. Additional priority groups include Eligible Veterans and Spouses, Migrant Seasonal Farm Workers, Individuals without a Diploma or GED, Foster Youth, Individuals with Disabilities, Court-Involved Individuals/Offenders, English Language Learners, Unemployed Individuals and those receiving Unemployment Insurance, Individuals earning less than the Self-Sufficiency Wage, Individuals facing Cultural Barriers (such as legal immigrants and refugees), and Individuals facing multiple barriers (such as substance abuse, homelessness, mental health challenges, and domestic violence).

WFS has established policies to address and prioritize these target populations, and these policies are shared with WFS sub-recipients and partners.

In accordance with WIOA and its final regulations §680.600, WFS has adopted board policies to designate priority target populations, ensuring compliance with the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Guidelines for Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Youth. TWC guidelines specify that individualized career services and training services must be prioritized, regardless of funding levels, for:

- Public assistance recipients
- Low-income adults
- Individuals who are basic skills deficient

Additionally, WFS policy states that Veterans and eligible spouses are given priority for all Department of Labor (DOL)-funded job training programs, including WIOA programs. The priority for individualized career services and training services is provided in the following order:

1. Eligible veterans and eligible spouses who are also recipients of public assistance, low-income, or basic skills deficient.
2. Non-veteran, non-spouse individuals who are recipients of public assistance, low-income, or basic skills deficient, in the following order:
  - Foster youth and former foster youth, as required by Texas Family Code 264.121.
  - Non-foster youth.
3. All other eligible veterans and eligible spouses.
4. Priority populations designated by the governor and/or Board, in the following order:
  - All other foster youth and former foster youth, as required by Texas Labor Code 264.121.
  - Local Board priority groups, including Adults who meet one or more of the following criteria:
    - Migrant and Seasonal Farm Workers
    - Individuals with disabilities
    - Court-involved individuals/offenders
    - Unemployed individuals and/or those receiving Unemployment Insurance
    - Individuals earning less than the Board-defined self-sufficiency wage
    - Individuals with cultural barriers (including legal immigrants and refugees)
    - Individuals facing multiple barriers, such as substance abuse, mental health issues, and domestic violence

WIOA funding for training services is available to participants who:

- Are unable to secure funding from other sources, including state-funded training programs, Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), or Federal Pell Grants, or
- Require WIOA assistance in addition to other grant sources, including Federal Pell Grants.

Individual Training Account (ITA) services must be directly linked to:

- Occupations listed on the WFS Board's targeted occupations list, or
- Occupations on the targeted occupations list for another local workforce development area, if the customer is willing to commute or relocate, or
- A Registered Apprenticeship (RA) program.

## Part 7: Fiscal Agent, Grants, and Contracts



### 7.A. Fiscal Agent

WFS is a non-profit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization serving Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy counties, in Texas with its corporate office located at 3101 West Business 83, McAllen, TX 78501. WFS was certified by the Governor of Texas in 1999 and incorporated in 2000. The WFS Board is a volunteer Board appointed by the CEOs of the WD area and is composed of a majority of representatives of private sector employers, labor, education, childcare, social services, community-based organizations, rehabilitation agencies and other local interests.

WFS is responsible for the workforce development (WD) planning, contracting, oversight and evaluation of the local workforce system and the services it provides. WFS is the administrator of grants received and is responsible for disbursing the state and federal grant funds provided under this plan. WFS has not seen any significant changes in financial availability to support WIOA Title I service, and partner provided WIOA services that have an effect on the implementation of WFS' board plan. WFS continues to operate its workforce career centers by providing career and training services. Partner contributions have allowed the board to expand services through expansion of workforce career center offices.

## Part 7: Fiscal Agent, Grants, and Contracts



### 7.B. Subgrants and Contracts

Procurement is the process and procedures utilized to obtain goods and services from the marketplace. WFS ensures that the procurement of all goods and services is conducted, to the maximum extent practical, in a manner providing full and open competition consistent with applicable administrative requirements. The estimated amount of award or contract determines the procedures used to competitively procure goods and services. This process includes standards of conduct and detailed procedures for both small and large procurements as outlined below.

WFS maintains written standards of conduct, which govern the performance of individuals engaged in the award and administration of contracts and contain disciplinary action if such standards are violated. The definition of immediate family and substantial interest is included in the standards of conduct (WFS Procurement available by accessing the following link: [Procurement Procedures](#)). No employee, officer, or agent of WFS may participate in the selection, award, or administration of a contract that is supported by federal or state funds if a conflict of interest or apparent conflict of interest would be involved. In general, a conflict of interest exists when any of the following have a financial or other interest in a firm that is selected to receive an award:

- an employee, officer or agent;
- any member of the employee's immediate family;
- the employee's partner; or
- any organization that employs or is about to employ any of these groups.

WFS standards of conduct prohibit the solicitation and/or acceptance of gratuities, favors or anything of monetary value by an officer, employee, or agent of WFS from a bidder or sub-recipient. Every reasonable course of action shall be taken to maintain the integrity of the expenditure of public funds and to avoid any favoritism or questionable conduct. Any situation is avoided which suggests a decision was influenced by prejudice, bias, special interest, or personal gain.



WFS Board, WFS staff, or agents involved in the procurement process are prohibited from accepting gifts, favors, or anything of monetary value from the existing or potential sub-recipients or contractors.

The small purchase method of procurement is used when purchasing goods or services for which the aggregate cost does not exceed the simplified acquisition threshold per 41 U.S.C. §403(11) of \$150,000. When using the small purchase method, WFS staff obtains price or rate quotations from an adequate number (usually two or more) of qualified sources.

Competitive proposal methods of procurement are appropriate when purchasing goods or services for which the aggregate cost exceeds the simplified acquisition threshold of \$150,000. The competitive proposal method is used when two or more responsible bidders are willing and able to compete effectively for the business and the procurement lends itself to a fixed-price or cost-reimbursement contract. The competitive proposal method is generally used when conditions are not appropriate for the small purchase method.

Competitive proposal methods of procurement meet the following federal requirements:

- Requests for proposals (RFP) are advertised in the newspaper with the highest circulation, Texas Register, and WFS website and identify all evaluation factors and their relative importance. Any response to the advertised RFP is honored to the maximum extent practical.
- RFP is solicited from an adequate number (usually two or more) of qualified sources.
- The method for conducting technical evaluations of the proposals received and for selecting awardees is contained in the RFP.
- Awards are made to the responsible firm whose proposal is most advantageous to the program, with price and other factors considered; and
- Competitive proposal procedures for the qualifications-based procurement of architectural/engineering professional services are utilized whereby competitors' qualifications are evaluated and the most qualified competitor is selected, subject to negotiation of fair and reasonable compensation. The method, where price is not used as a selection factor, can only be used in procurement of "professional services." It cannot be used to purchase other types of services.

All non-competitive or sole source procurements that will be conducted by WFS will have adequate documentation in the procurement file for auditor and monitor review.

## Part 8: Performance



### 8.A. Board Performance Targets

WFS negotiates performance measures with the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) to ensure standards are reflective of conditions/activity in the LRGV service delivery area; data is compiled by WFS and sub-recipient to support deviations from TWC proposed performance and to serve as the basis for negotiated measures.

All negotiated TWC measures are contracted to the sub-recipient for the Operation and Management of Workforce Career Centers. The sub-recipient is required to meet minimum standards and higher stretch goals are negotiated with the sub-recipient during the contract negotiation process. Performance is measured at monthly intervals utilizing Work in Texas (WIT) reports as well as ad hoc data analysis. Failure to meet acceptable measures of performance requires WFS to implement Technical Assistance Plans, Corrective Action Plans and or up to including sanctions for continued low performance.

Eligible Training Providers (ETPS) must also meet the minimum performance standards established by WFS for inclusion in the Eligible Training Provider System. The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) issues ETPs performance outcomes on all providers annually. ETPS providers not meeting minimum performance two consecutive years are not eligible to participate in the delivery of training services.

## Part 9: Training and Services



### 9.A. Individual Training Accounts

WFS approves training providers through the TWC Eligible Training Provider System (ETPS). All training programs listed on the ETPS are based on the WFS Board-adopted Target Occupations List. WFS staff analyze regional economic conditions, evaluate industry and occupational growth projections, assess economic development trends, and consider other regional factors to identify occupations that represent the best targets for workforce development investment.

Additionally, WFS staff collaborate with regional education providers to (1) encourage them to apply for inclusion in the ETPS for programs aligned with the Target and Demand Occupations List, and (2) assist them in developing programs that align with regional economic needs and trainee demands.

WIOA customers, including Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Out of School Youth, are provided access to training through Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) on the ETPS. To access training services, customers must complete a comprehensive assessment to determine their needs, interests, and eligibility. They are then given a full orientation on how to select an appropriate training provider and use the ETPS. Customers are provided with information on provider and program performance, training costs, accessibility, relevant labor market data, and Career Pathway options. Customers are advised to review all information carefully before making their selection. ITAs must comply with the WFS Board's approved allowable limits.

## Part 9: Training and Services



### 9.B. ITA Limitations

Under Title I of WIOA, training services must be provided in a way that promotes informed consumer choice when selecting an eligible provider. WFS Career Center staff are required to make the Eligible Training Provider Listing (ETPL) available to customers. Eligible individuals can choose training services from the ETPL in consultation with a case manager to ensure informed choice. Customer choice is a fundamental principle of WIOA. The amount of funds authorized for an Individual Training Account (ITA) will be based on the cost of the training provider (tuition and fees) and other necessary program-related expenses (such as books, supplies, equipment, tools, and uniforms) for the current program year. However, the Board will set limits on both the duration and total amount of an ITA as follows:

- **Maximum duration for use of an ITA:** Two (2) program years.
- **Maximum amount of an ITA:** \$9,000 (\$4,500 per program year).

Exceptions to ITA Limits: Due to the significant projected growth and high entry-level wages for registered nurse and licensed vocational nurse training programs, the ITA maximum amount for these two occupations will be increased to:

- **Maximum amount of an ITA:** \$18,000 (\$9,000 per program year).

The ITA limits will be reviewed annually to determine if adjustments are needed.

Customers may select a training program that exceeds the maximum ITA amount if other funding sources, such as Pell Grants, scholarships, or severance pay, are available to cover the difference.

### 10.A. Registered Apprenticeship Programs

Workforce Solutions (WFS) promotes Registered Apprenticeship programs by fostering collaboration between area educational institutions and employers. The goal is to (1) identify existing apprenticeship programs that can be registered with the Eligible Training Provider System (ETPS) and (2) catalog current pre-apprenticeship programs or related initiatives that could be scaled into full Registered Apprenticeship programs.

WFS works closely with its Community Engagement and Contract Administration departments and local higher education partners to reach out to employers and highlight the advantages of apprenticeship programs, including:

- **ETPS Eligibility:** Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), all Registered Apprenticeship program sponsors are automatically eligible to be placed on the ETPS. WFS actively encourages sponsors to request inclusion of their programs on the ETPS.
- **Apprenticeship Benefits:** Registered apprenticeships offer numerous benefits, such as "earn while you learn" opportunities, nationally recognized credentials for apprentices, and state tax credits for participating businesses.

WFS engages in outreach to both traditional apprenticeship industries (e.g., skilled trades, construction, manufacturing) and non-traditional sectors, such as healthcare, to encourage employer participation in apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs.

## Part 10: Apprenticeship



### 10.B. Apprenticeship Texas

Recognizing the importance of a skilled workforce to meet industry demands, WFS has established regional partnerships with employers, educational institutions, and stakeholders. These collaborations focus on developing a talent pipeline and aligning education with business needs. WFS is dedicated to closing skills gaps by utilizing apprenticeships as a key workforce development strategy.

Through initiatives like the WFS Healthcare and IT Taskforces and regular business retention and expansion visits, WFS serves as a liaison between industry and education. By providing business intelligence, labor market information, and insights into target occupations, WFS helps identify training needs and fosters the expansion of apprenticeship models across various industries.

As an active participant in the TWC Apprenticeship Texas program, WFS supports apprenticeship efforts by:

- Publicly recognizing the program's support through branding on printed materials and the website.
- Assisting local entities, including industry leaders and economic development organizations, in developing Registered Apprenticeship training programs that target new occupations and underrepresented populations.
- Developing outreach strategies for both traditional and non-traditional industries.
- Engaging underrepresented populations, such as youth and individuals with disabilities, to promote entry into Registered Apprenticeship programs.
- Ensuring the successful participation of underrepresented populations in apprenticeship programs.



In addition to these efforts, WFS has collaborated with South Texas College (STC) on two Apprenticeship Grants aimed at increasing the number of new Registered Apprenticeship Programs and apprentices, thereby supporting the statewide apprenticeship expansion. WFS has also partnered with local industries to submit proposals for TWC Healthcare Apprenticeship Expansion Grants and a Department of Labor (DOL) Nursing Expansion Grant. These efforts aim to expand apprenticeship opportunities within healthcare, creating high-quality career pathways. WFS is collaborating with South Texas College to host a regional stakeholder forum and invite key partners for example local Boy's and Girls Clubs, Housing Authority leaders, EDC leadership, Chamber leadership and others who can help promote current apprenticeship programs to increase participation and help businesses grow and expand their workforce.

Furthermore, WFS hosts quarterly employer information sessions to inform regional businesses—ranging from small to large companies—about available employer services, grants, and apprenticeship opportunities. These sessions provide valuable resources for businesses seeking to enhance their workforce talent pool.

WFS will continue to pursue new opportunities, actively engaging regional stakeholders to support and participate in apprenticeship initiatives.

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## Part 11: Public Comment



Consistent with The Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC) is charged under Texas Government Code §2308.101(5), 2308.302(a), and 2308.304(a)(b)(4), and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) (Public Law 113–128) with recommending the plans of Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) to the governor for consideration for approval, WFS Lower Workforce Development Board Plan Program Years 2025-2028 was published and made available for review and commentary to the Chief Elected Officials, WFS Board of Directors, members, business representatives, labor organizations, educational entities, and the public.

Workforce Solutions (WFS) made available to stakeholders the WFS Lower Rio Workforce Development Board Plan Program Years 2025-2028 as follows:

- The Board Plan was accessible for review and public comments at the administration office in both electronic and hard copy formats during the review period from February 4, 2025, to February 21, 2025.
- The Board Plan was made available for viewing and public comments during the review period via the Corporate Website: [www.wfsolutions.org](http://www.wfsolutions.org).
- As required, WFS forwards all comments that express disagreement with the Plan to TWC.
- The Board Plan was provided for review to the Board of Directors and Board Committees, three County Judges representing Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy counties, and the Mayor of McAllen.
- General publication date of Public Notice: February 4, 2025.
- No public comments were received by the deadline of February 21, 2025.
- Board Action of Approval February 25, 2025.

## System Goals and Objectives

### 1. Employer Goal – Delivering Relevant Education and Training Programs *(Board response and corresponding Board Plan page number(s): 56-58 and 72-75)*

Workforce Solutions actively implements initiatives, strategies, and processes to accelerate the availability of education and training programs that align with employer needs. These efforts focus on:

- Expanding upskilling and reskilling programs to develop a pipeline of middle-skill workers,
- Supporting adult learners in transitioning to employment through integrated education and training programs, and
- Enhancing access to short-term credential programs aligned with high-demand occupations.

#### **Key Strategies and Actions:**

- **Upskilling and Reskilling Expansion:** The board is committed to expanding and refining workforce development programs to address employers' growing demand for middle-skill workers. This includes enhancing partnerships with training providers, employers, and industry organizations to deliver targeted skill development programs.
- **Targeted Program Identification and Delivery:** Collaborating with adult education and literacy providers, the board identifies and facilitates training programs that lead to short-term credentials, industry-recognized certifications, and licenses. These programs are designed to equip individuals with the technical skills and qualifications required in high-demand industries.
- **Support for Populations with Barriers to Employment:** Recognizing the need for supportive services, the board ensures that individuals facing barriers to education and employment—such as displaced workers, individuals with disabilities, and low-income adults—receive tailored assistance. This includes financial aid, career counseling, and wraparound services to improve program completion rates, credential attainment, and successful employment transitions.
- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** To monitor program effectiveness, the board employs robust data tracking systems that measure reskilling and upskilling enrollments, program completions, attainment of industry-recognized credentials, certifications, and licenses, and employment outcomes directly linked to acquired qualifications. These insights guide program improvements and ensure alignment with employer workforce needs.

Through these strategic initiatives, the local board ensures that education and training programs remain responsive to industry demands, fostering a skilled workforce that meets employer expectations and strengthens the regional economy.

## **2. Learners Goal - Expansion of Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship** *(Board response and corresponding Board Plan page number(s): 63, 67-75, 85-90, 97-99)*

Workforce Solutions is actively driving work-based learning opportunities to accelerate skills development and improve outcomes for learners, including youth and adults, by creating a range of initiatives and processes that engage system stakeholders in pre-employment strategies. Workforce Solutions is committed to expanding access to work-based learning experiences for all participants, particularly those who require supportive services and resources.

- **Youth Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeships:** Workforce Solutions is developing and expanding programs like the TANF Summer Youth Program, which provides hands-on work experience for low-income youth aged 16-24. These programs not only focus on job readiness training but also on career exploration and subsidized employment opportunities. By partnering with local employers, youth gain valuable skills, enhance employability, and create connections to potential employers. These initiatives are particularly beneficial for youth who need supportive services, including financial assistance or mentorship, to succeed in the workplace.
- **Adult Apprenticeships and Training:** For adults, Workforce Solutions is collaborating with industry partners to increase apprenticeship opportunities in high-demand sectors such as renewable energy, transportation, and broadband infrastructure. Through partnerships with training providers like JATC Pipefitters and VIDA, eligible individuals can access apprenticeships that lead to industry-recognized certifications. These programs not only help participants acquire the technical skills needed for in-demand occupations but also provide financial support through DOL grants, addressing any barriers participants may face during training.
- **Inclusive Work-Based Learning for Individuals with Disabilities:** Workforce Solutions is also dedicated to providing inclusive work-based learning opportunities through programs like SEAL (Summer Employment and Learning), which offers students with disabilities the chance to build skills and succeed in various roles. SEAL participants receive work readiness training and are placed in summer work experiences, gaining hands-on experience while receiving accommodations and support. This initiative prepares participants for long-term employment and promotes inclusive work environments, ultimately increasing participants' chances of securing permanent positions.
- **Collaboration with Employers and Stakeholders:** Workforce Solutions is committed to collaborating with employers across various industries to expand work-based learning opportunities. By creating these partnerships, Workforce Solutions ensures that learners not only develop relevant skills but also engage in real-world experiences that directly align with market needs. Workforce Solutions also engages community partners to provide additional support services, such as childcare, transportation, and mentorship, to ensure that learners, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, can successfully participate in these opportunities.

These efforts collectively improve system outcomes by helping youth and adults acquire the necessary skills to succeed in the workforce while reducing barriers to employment. Workforce Solutions' focus on work-based learning as a pre-employment strategy ensures that both youth and adults are better prepared for the labor market and that they develop the skills required by employers in the region's growing industries.

Region One Education Service Center gathered a group of advisory members that include post-secondary institutions, business leaders, local government agencies, and Workforce Solutions, to assist with the Tri-Agency Regional Conveners Grant. The grant is designed to create a seamless system to prepare students for advancement and success in target industries. The group is tasked with overseeing the development, implementation, and monitoring of regional strategies for high quality career and education pathways into targeted industries across the entire workforce development areas. Partners will meet quarterly over the next two years to draft a Regional Strategic plan, create work-based learning opportunities and establish data infrastructure and communication.

### **3. Partners Goal - Alignment to Support Career Pathways** *(Board response and corresponding Board Plan page number(s): 37-41, 76-77, 85-86*

#### **Alignment to Support Career Pathways**

Workforce Solutions is committed to enhancing the alignment between secondary and postsecondary technical programs, facilitating smooth transitions for students into successful careers. This involves supporting the identification of credentials of value and streamlining career pathways to meet labor market demands effectively.

#### **A. Stakeholder Input for Alignment and Articulation of Programs**

- **Stakeholder Advisory Committee:** Participate in multiple advisory committees that include representatives from secondary and post-secondary educational institutions, local employers, and industry experts. These committees meet quarterly to review and discuss the alignment of technical programs.
- **Conduct Needs Assessments:** Gather feedback from both employers and educational institutions to understand skills gaps and industry trends. Utilizes surveys and employer roundtables to identify which credentials are in demand and assess how current programs align with local labor market needs.
- **Data Collection and Analysis:** Analyze labor market data and trends. This data is shared with stakeholders to identify in-demand credentials and areas for program improvements.
- **Feedback Loops:** Gather ongoing feedback from students, instructors, employers, and other stakeholders on the effectiveness of career pathways and technical programs. This feedback guides improvements in curriculum design, course delivery, and alignment with market needs.

## **B. Collaboration to Identify Credentials of Value**

- **Employer Engagement:** Regularly engage with local employers through job fairs, networking events, and industry partnerships to understand the specific certifications, industry-based credentials, and skills they prioritize. These engagements ensure that the identified credentials reflect actual workforce needs.
- **Partnerships with Industry Certification Bodies:** Work with credentialing organizations to identify and validate which industry-based certifications, apprenticeships, and licenses are recognized and valued by employers in the region. This collaboration ensures that credentials provided through educational programs are relevant and high-quality.
- **Collaborative Curriculum Design:** Collaborate with secondary and postsecondary institutions to align curriculums based on the identified credentials of value. This ensures that secondary programs prepare students for postsecondary programs and that postsecondary programs are aligned with industry standards and certification requirements.
- **Explore Apprenticeships and Work-Based Learning:** Build or enhance apprenticeship programs, internships, and other work-based learning opportunities in partnership with local employers. These experiences may lead directly to industry-recognized credentials and provide students with practical, hands-on learning that aligns with labor market needs.

## **C. Streamlining and Clarifying Career Pathways**

- **Mapping Career Pathways:** Develop clear, accessible pathways that show how students can progress from secondary education to postsecondary technical programs. These pathways should include specific credentials and certifications that are required at each stage, offering students a roadmap from high school through to industry employment.
- **Credit Articulation Agreements:** Strengthen or create articulation agreements between secondary and postsecondary institutions that allow students to earn college credit for technical education received in high school. This will streamline transitions and avoid duplicative coursework, making career pathways more efficient and affordable.
- **Clear Program Communication:** Create user-friendly resources (e.g., brochures, websites, and orientation sessions) for students, parents, and educators to clarify career pathways, credential options, and the benefits of industry-recognized certifications. This will help ensure that stakeholders at all levels understand the value of these credentials and the opportunities available through them.

## **D. Processes for Continuous Improvement**

- **Ongoing Program Evaluation:** Implement a continuous program evaluation process to assess the effectiveness of technical programs. Use both qualitative and quantitative data from stakeholders to assess how well these programs align with labor market needs and provide value to students.



- **Cross-Sector Collaboration:** Foster ongoing collaboration among secondary and post-secondary institutions, employers, and workforce development boards. These groups will meet regularly to review local labor market data, update credential requirements, and adjust technical programs as needed to maintain alignment with industry needs.
- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** Utilize data from student outcomes (graduation rates, employment rates, wage levels, etc.) to track the success of career pathways and make necessary adjustments. Establish a feedback mechanism that involves employers in reviewing the outcomes of program participants.

#### **4. Policy and Planning Goal- Relevant Data Sets** *(Board response and corresponding Board Plan page number(s): 78-82, 30-40)*

##### **Expanding High-Quality Childcare Availability**

- Workforce Solutions (Board) works closely with childcare providers and employers to establish on-site or near-site, high-quality childcare facilities to support working families.
- The Board actively promotes and facilitates Texas Rising Star (TRS) certification among childcare providers, increasing the number of high-quality childcare options in the region.
- Through strategic partnerships with early childhood education stakeholders, the Board collects and analyzes data on childcare demand, availability, and quality to guide policy recommendations and funding allocations.
- The Board collaborates with local economic development organizations to identify childcare deserts and implement solutions that enhance childcare accessibility for workforce participation.

##### **Identifying and Quantifying Quality Outcomes, Including Industry-Based Certification Data**

- The Board partners with employers and training providers to identify in-demand industry-based certifications and ensure alignment with workforce development programs.
- The Board collects and analyzes certification attainment data to evaluate the impact of training programs on employment and earnings outcomes.
- To enhance data accuracy, the Board works with educational institutions and credentialing bodies to streamline data collection processes and improve reporting of certification outcomes.
- Through real-time labor market analytics, the Board tracks the correlation between industry certifications and job placement rates, helping policymakers understand the value of workforce training investments.

##### **Enhancing Wage Records and Employment Outcomes**

- The Board collaborates with employers to identify enhanced employment and earnings data, providing deeper insights into program effectiveness and long-term workforce outcomes.
- By leveraging wage record data, we assess job retention, wage progression, and career advancement trends to inform workforce policies and funding priorities.

- The Board works with state agencies and workforce system partners to improve the timeliness and completeness of data matching, ensuring that employment and earnings data are effectively integrated into performance evaluations.
- The Board actively advocates data-sharing agreements that support a more comprehensive analysis of workforce outcomes while maintaining compliance with privacy and security regulations.

Through these efforts, our board ensures that policymakers and planners have access to accurate and relevant data to make informed decisions that drive workforce development, economic growth, and community prosperity.

## Strategic Opportunities

**Strategic Opportunity 1- Employer Engagement** *(Board response and corresponding Board Plan page number(s): 56-58)*

In alignment with the "**Accelerating Alignment: Texas Workforce System Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2024-2031**", Workforce Solutions is committed to meaningful employer engagement and strategic coordination with stakeholders to gain insights into employer needs while minimizing redundant requests. This approach ensures that our workforce strategies are employer-driven and efficient.

### Coordination Efforts to Gain Employer Insights

#### 1. Industry and Sector Partnerships:

- Workforce Solutions participates in multiple industry-led roundtables and advisory groups to gather real-time insights on skills gaps, hiring trends, and training needs. These engagements foster employer-driven solutions, ensuring workforce programs align with current and emerging industry demands.

#### 2. Participation in the Tri-Agency Texas Regional Pathways Network:

- Workforce Solutions actively participates in the Tri-Agency Texas Regional Pathways Network, collaborating with the Texas Education Agency (TEA), Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), and Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) to align education and workforce pathways. Through this partnership, we engage employers in shaping regional career pathway initiatives that build a skilled talent pipeline for high-demand industries.

#### 3. Employer Surveys:

- Workforce Solutions conducts employer surveys in partnership with regional stakeholders to assess workforce needs, identify training gaps, and shape responsive workforce strategies. Data from these efforts inform curriculum development, job training programs, and policy recommendations.

#### 4. Public-Private Partnerships:

- By working closely with chambers of commerce, economic development organizations, and industry associations, we gain valuable employer insights and foster workforce-aligned business development initiatives.

#### Reducing Redundant Employer Requests and Streamlining Engagement

##### 1. **Centralized Employer Engagement Framework:**

- Workforce Solutions facilitates regional employer engagement through a single point of contact model, reducing the need for multiple stakeholders to request similar information from employers. By leveraging existing employer networks and data-sharing agreements, we consolidate employer feedback into actionable workforce strategies.

##### 2. **Collaboration with Education and Training Providers:**

- Workforce Solutions aligns workforce initiatives with community colleges, universities, and career training providers, reducing duplicative employer outreach related to curriculum development, internships, and apprenticeships.

##### 3. **Integrated Workforce & Economic Development Efforts:**

- Workforce Solutions collaborates with local economic development organizations (EDOs) and chambers of commerce to align employer engagement strategies, ensuring a seamless business support ecosystem. Through shared business retention and expansion efforts, we proactively address workforce challenges while minimizing redundant outreach to employers.

By implementing a coordinated, employer-driven approach, Workforce Solutions ensures businesses receive targeted workforce support while minimizing engagement fatigue. This collaborative strategy fosters strong industry partnerships, enhances workforce alignment, and strengthens regional economic growth.

This approach aligns with the strategic opportunity outlined in the "**Accelerating Alignment: Texas Workforce System Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2024–2031**", which emphasizes the need to "Engage Employers Meaningfully" by coordinating across agencies to gain insight into the needs of employers.

#### **Strategic Opportunity 2- Improving Outcomes for Texans with Barriers to Employment**

*(Board response and corresponding Board Plan page number(s): 46-53, 72-75)*

Workforce Solutions is committed to ensuring all Texans, including those with diverse needs, have equitable access to workforce opportunities. Our approach focuses on targeted engagement and inclusive program design that remove barriers to employment, maximize outcomes, and improve career opportunities.

## Engagement Models, Initiatives, and Programs

Workforce Solutions employs various models, initiatives, programs, and processes to reach and support individuals with barriers to workforce employment:

### 1. Individuals with Disabilities

- **Customized Employment Programs:** Partnering with TWS-VRS and employers to provide work experience opportunities through customized employment strategies.
- **Work-Based Learning & Internships:** Collaborating with businesses to create inclusive work experience and internships for individuals with disabilities.
- **Assistive Technology & Accessibility Enhancements:** Ensuring physical and digital access to services, including adaptive technology, ASL interpreters, and accessible online platforms.

### 2. Foster Youth

- **Workforce Readiness Training:** Providing career exploration, financial literacy, and soft skills training tailored to aging-out foster youth.
- **Foster Youth Conference:** Partnering with Department of Family and Protective Services and BCFS Health and Human Services to host an annual conference targeted to serve Foster Youth specific needs.
- **Education and Training Support:** Leveraging WIOA Youth funds to support tuition assistance, certifications, and career counseling.

### 3. Victims of Sex Trafficking

- **Trauma-Informed Workforce Services:** Training workforce staff to offer trauma-sensitive employment and training services.

### 4. Incarcerated & Justice-Involved Youth & Adults

- **Pre-Release Workforce Development:** Collaborating with correctional facilities to deliver job training, certifications, and career counseling before release.
- **Second Chance Employment Programs:** Partnering with employers to promote fair chance hiring and providing wage subsidies for businesses hiring returning citizens.

### 5. Opportunity Youth (Young Adults Not in Education or Employment)

- **Re-Engagement Centers:** Establishing centralized hubs to provide educational re-entry support, career training, and case management.
- **Paid Work Experience & On-the-Job Training (OJT):** Partnering with employers to provide subsidized employment opportunities for skill development.
- **Credential & Industry-Recognized Certifications:** Offering flexible learning options, including short-term credentialing programs aligned with high-demand occupations.

By leveraging innovative engagement strategies, targeted interventions, and strong partnerships, Workforce Solutions ensures Texans with diverse needs have access to meaningful employment opportunities. Our data-driven, equity-focused approach creates pathways to success while fostering economic mobility and community inclusion.

**Strategic Opportunity 3- Use of Data to Support Investment Decisions** *(Board response and corresponding Board Plan page number(s): 30-36, 48-50, 56-58, 72-75)*

**Strategic Use of Data to Support Investment Decisions**

Workforce Solutions (Board) leverages data-driven decision-making to ensure workforce investments align with regional labor market needs, employer demands, and workforce outcomes. By utilizing evidence-based practices and comprehensive performance analytics, the board strategically funds initiatives that yield measurable improvements in system performance.

**Evidence-Based Practices and Data-Driven Funding Initiatives**

To optimize the effectiveness of workforce programs, the Board employs multiple data sources and research methodologies:

- **Labor Market Information (LMI):** We analyze state and regional labor market data to identify high-growth industries, in-demand occupations, and emerging workforce trends. This guides investment decisions to align with employer needs.
- **Performance Metrics and Evaluation:** We assess program outcomes using key performance indicators such as participant completion rates, job placement success, and wage growth to ensure funding is directed toward high-impact initiatives.
- **Equity and Accessibility Analytics:** We utilize demographic and geographic data to identify underserved populations and ensure equitable access to workforce programs.
- **Sector-Based Strategies:** Data informs the prioritization of sector partnerships in industries such as healthcare, advanced manufacturing, IT, and construction to drive economic mobility and employer engagement.
- **Return on Investment (ROI) Analysis:** The board evaluates cost-effectiveness and workforce impact to optimize funding for programs that generate sustainable employment outcomes.

**Programs Demonstrating Success in Credential Attainment & Employment**

The Board strategically invests in programs with proven success in credential attainment and employment placement, including:

- **Industry-Recognized Credential Programs:** Training programs aligned with industry certifications (e.g., healthcare, IT, skilled trades) that equip participants with credentials leading to high-wage careers.
- **Registered Apprenticeships & Pre-Apprenticeships:** Proven models that blend classroom instruction with hands-on experience, yielding high completion and employment rates.
- **Work-Based Learning Initiatives:** Programs such as On-the-Job Training (OJT) and Paid Internships that provide participants with direct employment opportunities upon completion.
- **Integrated Education & Training (IET) Models:** Programs combining literacy, technical skills training, and employer engagement to improve workforce readiness.

- **Reemployment & Upskilling Initiatives:** Targeted training programs for dislocated workers and underemployed individuals to support rapid career transitions into in-demand fields.

Through continuous data analysis and performance evaluation, Workforce Solutions ensures that workforce investments drive system-wide improvements, foster economic growth, and create sustainable career pathways for job seekers.