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SOLUTIONS

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## **Workforce Solutions – Lower Rio**

### **TWIC Response**

## **Part 1—Demonstrating Alignment with Texas’ Strategic Plan for the Workforce System**

*The four sections below list and describe the four system goals from The Texas Workforce System Strategic Plan FY 2016–FY 2023 that identify critical, high-priority system issues. For each goal, provide a detailed description of one significant board strategy or initiative that both fulfills the intent of the goal and that could be considered a best or promising practice. Also, include the anticipated quantitative outcomes to be achieved as a result of implementation.*

### **System Goal and Rationale: Focus on Employers:**

*By accessing critical education and labor data sets, employers can better find and plan for skilled workers to meet their needs in both the immediate timeframe and the future. Through greater engagement with employers, education and training providers can better design career and technical education content and delivery options that are more aligned with industry needs. Providers can make adjustments in program content to benefit employers and students, as well as address both state and regional economic needs.*

### **Board Response:**

Workforce Solutions Lower Rio (WFS) understands the importance of the ability for individuals to access education and training opportunities for the purpose of supporting regional economic and employer needs. As such, WFS Corporate goal(s) provide a means by which WFS achieves and sustains success.

### **Board Initiative:**

WFS collaborates with Rio Grande Valley Linking Economic and Academic Development (RGV LEAD), a local non-profit organization that is a partnership between education and business. RGV LEAD prepares young people for today’s skilled workforce by partnering with high schools, colleges, universities, businesses, and governmental agencies.

WFS has partnered and collaborated with RGV Lead in 2015 and 2016 to convene two Regional Education and Workforce Summits. The Regional Education and Workforce Summit brings together economic development leaders, business leaders and education professionals to discuss how to collectively prepare students to meet the demands of current and future workforce labor needs.

WFS and RGV LEAD work in collaboration to create an event that creates greater engagement amongst key partners (i.e. business, education leaders, students, and WFS) and provides an opportunity for networking, sharing, learning and leveraging partnerships. Examples of the benefits to attendees are noted on the following page.

Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share with education partners’ employer needs (knowledge, skills abilities (KSA), soft and technical skills) in order to sustain and /or expand workforce.</li> <li>• Learn about TWC resources available to train new and/or existing workforce.</li> <li>• Labor Market Information (wages, target and demand occupations, unemployment rates).</li> <li>• Learn strategies implemented by local school districts to develop a young and vibrant workforce.</li> </ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen and learn first-hand what employers are saying they need from students to be work-ready.</li> <li>• Engage and network with employer partners.</li> <li>• Partner with workforce board and access up-to-date information on target and demand occupations within the region.</li> <li>• Accessed a Train-the-Trainer Job Readiness curriculum.</li> <li>• Share best practices amongst various school districts that support persistence to completion.</li> </ul>
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunity to network with business community</li> <li>• Listen and learn first-hand what employers are saying they need from students to be work-ready.</li> <li>• Learn about LMI, target and demand occupations to support career decisions.</li> <li>• RGV LEAD student ambassadors participate and engage in leadership activities.</li> </ul>
Workforce Solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage with education and business partners.</li> <li>• LMI shared is communicated to education and training providers so they can develop proper curriculum for students interested in target and demand occupations.</li> <li>• LMI is shared with students to build awareness on target and demand occupations and assist students in making informed decisions on career pathways, training and education.</li> </ul>

***Anticipated quantitative outcomes to be achieved as a result of implementation:***

- Continue to grow the RGV LEAD attendee participation by 10% on an annual basis. This event will enable employers to express their workforce needs and education /training providers will be able to better design career and technical education content and delivery options that are more aligned with industry needs.

***System Goal and Rationale: Engage in Partnerships***

*Through collaborative and transparent processes, workforce system partners focus on outcomes*

*that improve the employability of all program participants—from across a wide spectrum of capabilities and experiences—to meet employer needs. The leveraging of partnerships to enhance system alignment and outcomes depends on trust, a culture of collaboration both within and external to the workforce system, deep working relationships, and technical capacity to communicate to share needs, data, and information. Partnerships can provide for common planning, intake, and reporting on outcomes, as well as ensuring a “no wrong door” approach to the provision of workforce programs and services.*

**Board Response:**

WFS understand the importance of fostering partnerships that promote educational and skill attainment within our communities. As such, WFS in partnership with Region One Education Service Center (ESC) and other community adult education and literacy stakeholders work in collaboration to serve customers. Region One ESC serves as the adult education and literacy program funded by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) to provide English language, math, reading, and writing instruction to help students acquire the skills needed to succeed in the workforce, earn a high school equivalency, or enter college or career training in the service area.

**Board Initiative:**

Region One ESC and WFS have developed a strong working relationship in efforts to increase access and services for eligible participants throughout the service area. The partnership between Region One ESC AEL and WFS has been strengthened by the ability of staff to work together toward common goals and meet both community and business needs. Standing monthly Executive Leadership meetings have enabled staff to identify needs and develop solutions to common barriers and obstacles faced by the targeted population.

Through open lines of communication and an understanding of the needs of the adult learner population of the region, WFS has provided new opportunities for collaboration and expanded partnerships with local businesses, economic development corporation and community based organizations.

In addition, through an innovative online service list application developed by Region One ESC and made accessible at WFS offices and webpage ([www.wfsolutions.org/ael](http://www.wfsolutions.org/ael)), job seekers are connected directly to AEL services throughout the three county service areas. The website also features AEL content to include the banner added to the front page for visibility and easy access, and a link to the Region One ESC online service link so job seekers can register and facilitate the connection between AEL staff and job seekers. Furthermore, Region One ESC staff have worked in collaboration with WFS to coordinate center orientations. Orientations are geared to both WFS job seekers (accessing a new pool of potential eligible students) and to WFS staff in

efforts to build professional capacity and understanding of AEL services to help guide and connect job seekers.

***Anticipated quantitative outcomes to be achieved as a result of implementation:***

Through a common service registration link on the WFS webpage, increase access to Adult Education and literacy program information by 10%.

***System Goal and Rationale: Align System Elements:***

*By improving transitions, aligning programs, and ensuring portability and transferability, Texas improves access and the ability of all participants to complete programs of study, earn credentials, transition to further education, and gain critical employability skills. Texas employers are better positioned to find and hire the employees they need through an enhanced education and training pipeline.*

**Board Response:**

In efforts to have greater impact, WFS is leveraging strategic partnerships with independent school districts, specifically K-12, to share information and help guide individuals to appropriate career pathways.

**Board Initiative:**

In efforts to steer students towards target careers from an early age (middle –high school), WFS has partnered with K-12 school districts in a multi-pronged approach and at various levels to identify educational and career pathways for students in the region’s target and demand occupations. These efforts include ensuring critical employability skills identified by local employers in the service area are addressed.

Approaches include:

- ) Provide Labor Market Information presentations which include building in local employer job skill requirement awareness.
- Encouraging school districts to access and use TWC’s Labor Market and Career Information data base that provide resources and tools that align with House Bill 5 initiatives.
- WFS Job Readiness Curriculum is updated to reflect critical employability skills identified by local employers in the service area. The curriculum supports feedback received from employers via surveys, industry task forces, and company visits. The most common employer responses included critical thinking, active listening, time management, customer service and multi-tasking. Job Readiness curriculum topics include, but are not limited to:
  - Critical Thinking
  - Problem Solving

- Financial Literacy

***Anticipated quantitative outcomes to be achieved as a result of implementation:***

- Increase the number of participants completing employability skills training by 10%.
- Increase the placement of workforce system customers within the service area by 10%.

***System Goal and Rationale: Improve and Integrate Programs:***

*Accelerate employment and improve efficiencies through shared resources that can be leveraged to create new, relevant, and innovative opportunities that serve the needs of all stakeholders. By addressing high-priority programmatic needs through an integrated strategy, decision-making at the system, partner, and participant levels is improved and system service delivery is enhanced. The changing economic and educational landscapes provide opportunities to share relevant data through appropriate “push” mechanisms in an organized manner to key stakeholders who rely on information generated by system partners.*

**Board Response:**

WFS commits to strengthening data sharing and utilizing data to support data driven decisions. The use of relevant data will allow and support continuous improvement of programs and services.

**Board Initiative:**

WFS has planned and convened core partners due to the anticipation of the WIOA final rules and regulations. WFS core partners will establish a Workforce System Workgroup which will share a commitment to identifying strategies that support system alignment. Strategies may include; the creation of a cross agency reference guide, customized initial intake form, standardized electronic forms and partnership agreements with core agencies/ programs.

***Anticipated quantitative outcomes to be achieved as a result of implementation:***

- Jointly develop and implement one (1) comprehensive Workforce System Guide incorporating the services of core partners that identify each partner’s services.
- Jointly develop and implement an electronic data gathering system to capture relevant customer/agency information for use by core partners and area services providers to measure performance outcomes and identify areas for improvement or identify shared opportunities.

## ***Part 2—Identifying Industries of Significance to the Regional Economy***

*Texas has continued to exhibit economic success over the past decade, and local Workforce Boards have contributed to regional economic success through the establishment of industry sector or cluster strategies in partnership with employers. These strategies help to drive job creation and stimulate economic growth by providing job candidates with the skills and knowledge that employers require to be competitive. Texas' targeted industry cluster initiative supported this work. WIOA continues that support by encouraging sector partnerships and strategies to ensure that the skills of the workforce meet the needs of local industries. The questions below focus on industry clusters and sectors within the region.*

***Describe the top three industry clusters/sectors and occupations.***

*1. Identify the three key industry clusters or sectors within your local workforce development area and provide an explanation as to why those clusters or sectors are important to your region and the regional economy. Please indicate for each whether it is an industry cluster or sector.*

### **Board Response:**

WFS has identified the three most important key industry clusters and/or sectors within our local workforce board area and have explained the work that supports regional strategies that stimulate economic growth in our service area.

### **Healthcare Sector**

Because of the region's demographics, most notably the large share of low-income residents and the persistence of chronic health conditions such as diabetes, much of the employment growth is expected for direct care positions such as physicians, registered nurses, and licensed vocational nurses. Demand is also expected to continue for technician-level workers — those that provide diagnostic and therapeutic services including the need for more operating room surgical technician positions. The push for electronic medical records is also expected to create demand for health information technology workers.

Physicians- The growing population in the WFS service area has been plagued with an overwhelming number of diabetes and other health issues which have led to a physician shortage. The physician shortage means fewer than six primary care physicians for every 10,000 residents, compared to a state average of more than nine. This does not include the regular influx of foreign nationals because of Texas-Mexico border location or the seasonal increase when Winter Texans call the Rio Grande Valley a temporary home from cold northern states for about four months a year. The lack of a Medical Program locally has further led to the shortage until recently with the addition of the UTRGV Medical School. The new UTRGV regional Medical School will create significant growth in the high skilled professional medical occupations going forward, along with an emerging Research & Development component.

Registered Nurses – Hospitals have remained the biggest employer in the Healthcare Industry; however, there are some challenges they face when trying to fill nursing positions. In discussions with many hospital HR Managers, one of the major concerns is the lack of candidates to fill the vacancies, which is due to the lack of instructor capacity at the local colleges and universities. On average, most of the hospitals in the area, carry an estimated 30-40 nursing vacancies monthly. According to South Texas College, they were unable to enroll nearly 70 qualified nursing students this year because they could not accommodate that amount of growth in the program. Of these qualified students most of them had a 4.0 GPA and about 15 to 20 hours of prerequisite courses. In addition, the aging workforce of RN's retiring and an influx of newly graduated RN's lacking experience also pose a challenge for the industry. Most hospitals have started a Graduate Nurse program (similar to on-the-job training) to address these concerns but lack of faculty poses a critical problem.

**Education Industry Sector:** WFS service area projected population growth and its relatively young population will create continued demand for educators at all levels. Ensuring a sufficient number of teachers in the pipeline will require a continuous effort. A sufficient supply of quality teachers is doubly important to the region's economy because of the role teachers' play in preparing students for entry in the workforce. Recent changes to the Texas K-12 education system require connections between business and education, and WFS has taken a leadership role in this arena.

**Advanced Manufacturing Sector:** Manufacturing is showing a projected 19.6% increase or 1,250 new manufacturing jobs by 2024. WFS has been working with local economic development corporations to target manufacturing employers in Mexico that are experiencing a increase and have created opportunities for the WFS service area. Over the past 15 years there has been a dramatic increase in new manufacturing investment in Mexico. Because of our proximity to Mexico, we have a unique opportunity to recruit component manufacturers who are capital- intensive, and who need to be close to their customers in Mexico. For companies who are not labor intensive, the lower energy costs and more competitive building lease rates can represent an attractive alternative to setting up a plant in Mexico. Manufacturing provides one of the best opportunities for high wage jobs and career development. As the industry becomes more advanced, there has been a need for skills that use high-tech processes, such as robotics, Computer Numeric Controlled (CNC) machines, and other "intelligent" systems, in the production process.

*2. For each cluster or sector identified in Question 1, identify the **top five** occupations for which employer-demand exceeds the number of available workforce or education-program graduates or skilled applicants. Provide labor-market-information data, including the number of jobs, wages, the education required, and projected growth.*



**Board Response:**

WFS regularly conducts analysis of labor market information and trends the essential information for the service area. By utilizing information about the population, labor force, industry mix and employment outlook, WFS can adjust its existing sector strategies and ensure they align with the current and expected labor market demands.

<u>Healthcare Practitioners &amp; Technical Occupations</u>						
SOC Code	Target Occupation Job Title	Total Current Positions	Total Projected Positions in Ten Years - Jobs	Starting Wage	Experience Wage	Required Education or Training Component
29-1141	Registered Nurses	8,570	11,911	\$25.94	\$36.83	Bachelor or Assoc.
29-2061	Licensed Vocational Nurses	4,010	5,326	\$17.93	\$25.48	Associate degree +Certif

<u>Education, Training, &amp; Library Occupations</u>						
SOC Code	Target Occupation Job Title	Total Current Positions	Total Projected Positions in Ten Years - Jobs	Starting Wage	Experience Wage	Required Education or Training Component
25-2021	Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	9,379	11,574	n/a	\$25.08*	Bachelor degree
25-2031	Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	6,459	8,008	n/a	\$25.66	Bachelor degree

<u>Manufacturing/Production/Transportation Occupations</u>						
SOC Code	Target Occupation Job Title	Total Current Positions	Total Projected Positions in Ten Years - Jobs	Starting Wage	Experience Wage	Required Education or Training Component
51-4041	Machinists	645	745	\$15.36	\$23.54	High school + 1 yr Certificate
53-3032	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	7,732	8,500	\$11.87	\$17.99	High school + 1 yr Certificate

3. Identify the planned strategies to address the worker shortages in the occupations identified in Statement 2.

**Board Response:**

WFS employs multiple strategies to address worker shortages in high-demand industries, including (1) targeted strategies that address shortages within a specific occupational group and (2) broad impact strategies that address talent gaps at a macro-level.

**Healthcare worker shortages:** WFS actively coordinates with regional stakeholders to address worker shortages for registered nurses, licensed vocational nurses and other healthcare industry

occupations through the Board's Healthcare Industry Taskforce. The Taskforce brings together the area's largest healthcare employers (hospitals) with area educational institutions (dual-enrollment), including early college high schools and post-secondary institutions, to address worker shortages. WFS provides both staff resources and tailors service delivery design to operationalize strategies identified by the Taskforce, including:

- Applying for grants and other available funding that will build capacity in schools and open up more slots for RN and LVN students.
- Working with healthcare employers to expand internships and On-the-Job training opportunities to allow more students the opportunity to gain experience in a range of healthcare fields.
- Reviewing with the industry and educational institutions opportunities to begin registered apprenticeships that will benefit both job seekers ('earn while they learn') and employers. Internships provide an opportunity to provide business specific customized training that will lead to long-term high performing workers.
- Presenting to elementary, middle and high school students on WFS identified high demand occupations, Career Pathways and training available to them to efficiently reach their career goals. This strategy will be led by WFS staff that will serve as liaisons between workforce, employers, and area schools.

**Teacher worker (education) shortages:** WFS is actively marketing teaching careers through (1) social media, (2) targeted websites, and (3) presentations for K-12 students about high-demand careers. Through these channels, WFS will continue to share information on career pathways leading to becoming a certified teacher and market the benefits of a career in education. WFS will also provide students interested in this field information on programs and alternative teaching certification options through the Region One Education Service Center PACE program. The program is a low cost alternative for students with bachelor degrees to obtain an accelerated teaching certificate.

**Manufacturing worker shortages:** WFS will continue to work in close collaboration with area manufacturers through our partnership with the South Texas Manufacturers Association (STMA) and established advisory committees at area post-secondary institutions. These engagements allow WFS to address worker shortages and emerging new technologies used by this industry. In addition, these partnerships enable effective deployment of new initiatives to address manufacturing worker shortages.

WFS is also a member of the North American Advanced Manufacturing Research & Education Initiative (NAAMREI) which includes all higher educational institutions from Brownsville, Texas to Laredo, Texas and was established to increase the amount of skilled manufacturing workers. This committee meets regularly to discuss manufacturing workforce shortages and actively collaborates to align educational trainings to meet the needs of our manufacturing workforce throughout the border region.

**Strategies to address all occupational shortages:** The WFS Community Engagement Department (Department) actively collaborates with areas economic development agencies, educational institutions and community partners to keep a abreast of the local workforce

landscape. The Department also takes the lead on many initiatives and activities designed to impact occupational shortages including:

- Every two years, WFS conducts a target/in-demand industry and occupational assessment to validate regional industry/occupational demand projections, labor market trends, and identified gaps.
- WFS and contractor staff meet regularly to discuss new employment trends, training opportunities and employer workforce concerns. The Department facilitates these interactions.
- The Department leads cross-department projects and collaboration to ensure system delivery alignment and that employer needs are being addressed by the regional workforce system in an efficiently and effectively.
- WFS staff will increase outreach to students and promote career exploration, increase awareness of regional in-demand jobs, and provide area youth with relative, meaningful tools and resources to help them reach their career goals more efficiently.
- Participation and membership in college advisory committees, and other organizations/boards/committees focused on increasing educational attainment, career development and awareness allows WFS staff to identify and address employer workforce shortages.
- The Department leverages partnerships to increase awareness of workforce shortages and employer issues in the community. Examples of partnerships include: RGV LEAD, RGV FOCUS, SHRM, STMA, RTAP, LRGVDC, NAAMREI, P-16 Council, parental involvement groups with independent school districts, area TV, radio and newspaper outlets.