



Program Years '2026-2027

Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA)

Combined State Plan

(Two-year Modification)

Submitted by



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I. WIOA STATE PLAN TYPE AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. WIOA STATE PLAN TYPE

This is a combined plan

COMBINED PLAN PARTNER PROGRAM(S)

1. WIOA Title I-B: Youth, Adult, Dislocated Worker Programs
2. WIOA Title II: Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program
3. WIOA Title III: Wagner Peyser Act program
4. WIOA Title IV: Vocational Rehabilitation Program (*Including Services for the Blind*)
5. Employment and Training programs under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (programs authorized under section 6(d)(4) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2015(d)(4)))
6. Trade Adjustment Assistance for Workers programs (activities authorized under chapter 2 of title II of the Trade Act of 1974 (19 U.S.C. 2271 et seq.))
7. Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program (programs authorized under 38, U.S.C. 4100 et. seq.)
8. Unemployment Insurance programs (programs authorized under State unemployment compensation laws in accordance with applicable Federal law)
9. Career and technical education programs at the postsecondary level authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 ([20 U.S.C. 2301 et seq.](#));

B. PLAN INTRODUCTION OR EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive Summary

The 2026–2027 State Plan outlines a transformative vision for a more unified, efficient, and demand-driven workforce development system that reduces administrative complexity, maximizes public investment in direct services, and strengthens alignment with employers and career seekers alike. Grounded in the principles of the Governor’s Workforce Strategy, America’s Talent Strategy: Building the Workforce for the Golden Age and its five pillars, and new flexibilities provided through USDOL TEGL 05-25, this plan advances a bold restructuring of governance, service delivery, education alignment, and business engagement to ensure a more responsive and integrated workforce ecosystem.

1. System Transformation: Toward a “No Wrong Door” Model

The State is undertaking a significant restructuring of its workforce governance model by transitioning from ten independent local workforce development boards to a streamlined approach in which the State Board assumes local board functions. This shift eliminates fragmentation, enhances accountability, and enables a cohesive statewide strategy. By integrating efforts across key partners including the Departments of Commerce, Education, Human Services, Corrections, Labor and Licensing, Health, Veterans Affairs, and the National Guard, Arkansas is advancing a “no wrong door” system. Individuals will experience seamless access to workforce, education, and supportive services regardless of their point of entry, improving outcomes for jobseekers and employers while reducing duplication and inefficiencies. Additionally, this transformation will provide a more efficient statewide implementation of policy and strategy with unified performance expectations and

accountability while reducing administrative and operational costs. By leveraging USDOL TEGL 05-25: Flexibilities of a Modern System, Arkansas is planning to utilize this flexibility to:

- Streamline governance and reduce administrative burden
- Strengthen statewide oversight and accountability
- Expand virtual and remote service delivery utilizing AI
- Modernize performance reporting and data integration
- Support innovative service models and employer partnerships

These flexibilities accelerate Arkansas's transition to a unified, modern workforce system.

2. Education and Workforce Alignment: A Unified Career Pathway System

- a. For the first time, Arkansas is combining its WIOA and Perkins State Plans to better align education and workforce development systems. This integrated approach supports a comprehensive career pathway framework spanning K–12 education, postsecondary education, and employment. Key strategies include:
 - i. Aligning programs with in-demand occupations using updated labor market methodologies
 - ii. Leveraging Workforce Pell, Workforce Challenge, WIOA Title 1 Youth and WIOA Title 4 Pre-ETS, SNAP, OSD, and other federal and state funded initiatives to expand access to high-quality training
 - iii. Embedding Career and Technical Education (CTE) coordinators and career coaches into business services teams
 - iv. Strengthening collaboration between education providers and industry to ensure training leads directly to employment opportunities
 - v. Enhancing collaboration between CTE, adult education, and WIOA Title I youth programs
 - vi. Increasing dual credit, work-based learning, and youth apprenticeships
- b. This alignment ensures that learners are supported throughout their career journey and that employers benefit from a more prepared and skilled workforce.

3. Business Engagement: A Unified Industry-Facing Approach

- a. To better serve employers and reduce duplication, the State has established a centralized business engagement division with a new name and home called Arkansas Industry Connect. This division serves as the single point of contact for businesses, replacing multiple disconnected outreach efforts across agency divisions. This model reduces employer fatigue caused by fragmented engagement, provides consistent, coordinated messaging and service, enhances responsiveness to industry needs, and positions the workforce system as a true business partner. Arkansas Industry Connect strengthens Arkansas' ability to align talent development efforts with local input while supporting economic and workforce development.

4. Service Integration: Improving Outcomes Through Organizational Alignment

- a. The State is also planning to consolidate its Division of Services for the Blind and Rehabilitation Services Division into a unified structure. This integration improves operational efficiency, reduces administrative overhead, and enhances

service delivery by centering efforts on the needs of individuals with disabilities. By streamlining administration and aligning staff roles, Arkansas is ensuring that a greater share of resources is directed toward client services and outcomes rather than internal operations.

5. Fiscal Stewardship: Investing in People and Employers

- a. A central theme of this plan is the intentional reduction of administrative and operational costs across the workforce system. Through governance restructuring, program integration, and organizational alignment, the State is redirecting resources to where they have the greatest impact in serving individuals and supporting businesses. These efforts reflect a commitment to maximize the return on public investment, expand access to high-quality training and supportive services, and strengthen employer engagement and satisfaction.

6. Alignment with America's Talent Strategy & Governor's WF Strategy

- a. Collectively, these strategies advance the five pillars of America's Talent Strategy in alignment with the Governor's WF Strategy by building skilled talent pipelines aligned with industry demand, expanding access to education, training, and career opportunities, improving job quality through better alignment of skills and employment, enhancing data and accountability through unified governance, and strengthening system integration across the Departments of Commerce, Education, Human Services, and other state level departments.

Through these reforms, the State is creating a modern, integrated workforce system that is simpler to navigate, more responsive to employers, and more effective in helping individuals achieve sustainable employment. This plan represents a strategic shift toward a coordinated, outcomes-driven model that prioritizes private sector needs, supports people and economic development, and ensures long-term economic success for the state built on innovation, technology, and efficiency.

Conclusion: A Unified, Modern, and Employer Driven Workforce System

The 2026–2027 WIOA State Plan Modification positions Arkansas to:

- Deliver consistent, high-quality services statewide
- Reduce administrative and operational costs
- Strengthen employer partnerships
- Expand access through virtual and mobile services
- Integrate Perkins V and strengthen CTE and youth career pathways
- Leverage AI and data to drive smarter decisions
- Align education, workforce, and economic development
- Build a talent pipeline that meets the needs of today's and tomorrow's economy

Arkansas is not simply updating its plan it is transforming its workforce system to meet the demands of a rapidly changing economy and ensure every Arkansan has the opportunity to thrive.

II. STRATEGIC ELEMENTS

The Unified or Combined State Plan must include a Strategic Planning Elements section that analyzes the State's current economic environment and identifies the State's overall vision for its workforce development system.

A. ECONOMIC, WORKFORCE, AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES ANALYSIS

The Unified or Combined State Plan must include an analysis of the economic conditions, economic development strategies, and labor market in which the State's workforce system and programs will operate.

1. ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE ANALYSIS

(A) *Economic Analysis.* The Unified or Combined State Plan must include an analysis of the economic conditions and trends in the State, including sub-State regions and any specific economic areas identified by the State. This must include—

Title I/BLS/LMI/UI Response:

Arkansas' economic analysis provides a robust foundation for understanding the existing demand in industry sectors and occupations, offering insights into the anticipated trends and dynamics of the labor market and the changing needs of the employers. The reliance on authoritative data sources and advanced software contributes to the reliability and accuracy of the projections, providing valuable information for policymakers, businesses, and individuals alike.

The state of Arkansas is in many ways a reflection of the changes facing the nation as a whole. Despite a population size of only one percent of the nation, seven of the Fortune 500 companies are headquartered here. This list includes the largest retailer in the world (Walmart), one of the largest food producers in the world (Tyson) and a national chain of gas stations (Murphy USA).

The other four companies making that list (Murphy Oil, Dillard's, Windstream and J.B. Hunt) further demonstrate the diverse economic base of the state. Arkansas is also fortunate to be home to major operations with companies headquartered in other states such as Baxter International, Lockheed Martin, Hewlett-Packard, FedEx, Post Foods, Kimberly-Clark and Nucor to name a few. Arkansas has been fortunate to host the creation of unique information and service provider companies, such as Acxiom, Southwest Power Pool and the aforementioned Windstream. The Arkansas workforce is cosmopolitan, with workers from all corners of the globe that come for the opportunities available in the Natural State.

Arkansas has 75 counties and 10 Local Workforce Development Areas. There are also six Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs). The MSAs are Little Rock/North Little Rock/Conway, Fayetteville/Springdale/Rogers (which includes McDonald County in Missouri), Pine Bluff, Hot Springs, Jonesboro and Fort Smith (which includes Leflore and Sequoyah Counties in Oklahoma). Parts of two other MSAs are in the state but are based in other states. Crittenden County is part of the Memphis/West Memphis MSA, which is based in Tennessee, and Miller County is part of the Texarkana AR/TX MSA, which is based in Texas.

Local Workforce Development Areas



Central Arkansas Workforce Development Area

Faulkner, Lonoke, Monroe, Prairie, Pulaski outside the city limits of Little Rock, and Saline counties

City of Little Rock Workforce Development Area

Inside the city limits of Little Rock

Eastern Arkansas Workforce Development Area

Crittenden, Cross, Lee, Phillips, and St. Francis counties

Northwest Arkansas Workforce Development Area

Baxter, Benton, Boone, Carroll, Madison, Marion, Newton, Searcy, and Washington counties

North Central Arkansas Workforce Development Area

Cleburne, Fulton, Independence, Izard, Jackson, Sharp, Stone, Van Buren, White, and Woodruff counties

Northeast Arkansas Workforce Development Area

Clay, Craighead, Greene, Lawrence, Mississippi, Poinsett, and Randolph counties

Western Arkansas Workforce Development Area

Crawford, Franklin, Logan, Polk, Scott, and Sebastian counties

West Central Arkansas Workforce Development Area

Clark, Conway, Garland, Hot Spring, Johnson, Montgomery, Perry, Pike, Pope, and Yell counties

Southwest Arkansas Workforce Development Area

Calhoun, Columbia, Dallas, Hempstead, Howard, Lafayette, Little River, Miller, Nevada, Ouachita, Sevier, and Union counties

Southeast Arkansas Workforce Development Area

Arkansas, Ashley, Bradley, Chicot, Cleveland, Desha, Drew, Grant, Jefferson, and Lincoln counties

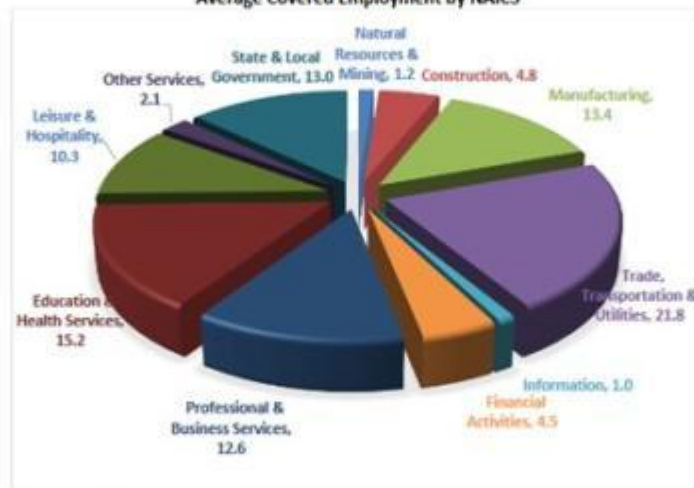
Arkansas' population, based on State Census Data Center estimates, was 3,045,637 as of July 1, 2022, an increase of 17,515 residents from the July 1, 2021, estimate of 3,028,122. The not-seasonally adjusted average unemployment rate for first quarter 2022 was 3.6 percent, while the seasonally adjusted number was 3.2 percent.

SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS DURING THIRD QUARTER 2022

AVERAGE EMPLOYMENT CHANGES

Covered employment averaged 1,220,444 during the Third Quarter 2022 (refer to Table 1), a loss of 1,865 (-0.2%) from the previous quarter and a gain of 47,343 (4.0%) from the average recorded one year ago. The over-the-year comparison is more significant when used as an economic indicator and allows for seasonal factors that appear when comparing over-the-quarter data to be disregarded.

Average Covered Employment by NAICS



EMPLOYMENT CHANGES FROM SECOND QUARTER 2022

Gains were recorded in nine major industry groups. (refer to Table 1). Large increases occurred in Trade, Transportation & Utilities (3,543), Education & Health Services (2,685), Construction (2,279), Manufacturing (2,018), Leisure & Hospitality (1,455), Professional & Business Services (1,376), and Financial Activities (1,271). Losses occurred in two major industries, with State & Local Government being the only significant loss (-16,647).

Source: https://www.discover.arkansas.gov/_docs/Publications/QCEW/Current/CEE.pdf

Arkansas

In-Demand Occupations



High Skill			Moderate Skill		
SOC Title	Total Annual Openings	May 2022 Mean Wage	SOC Title	Total Annual Openings	May 2022 Mean Wage
General and Operations Managers	3,281	\$84,460	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	4,917	\$47,090
Registered Nurses	1,717	\$66,530	Nursing Assistants	2,531	\$29,970
Clergy	1,435	\$46,910	Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks	1,687	\$41,160
Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	1,066	\$50,610	Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary	1,398	\$28,840
Accountants and Auditors	1,048	\$70,660	Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	863	\$45,990
Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	957	\$53,080	Medical Assistants	684	\$33,940
Management Analysts	836	\$78,380	Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education	650	\$31,680
Financial Managers	762	\$115,200	Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics	544	\$43,280
Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	690	\$75,990	Heating, Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration Mechanics and Installers	544	\$45,560
Medical and Health Services Managers	657	\$94,840	Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Workers, All Other	498	\$36,570
Project Management Specialists	541	\$82,180	Dental Assistants	478	\$28,510
Human Resources Specialists	519	\$58,750	Hairdressers, Hairstylists, and Cosmetologists	414	N/A
Fundraisers	506	\$56,510	Paralegals and Legal Assistants	399	\$50,080
Middle School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	483	\$52,890	Computer User Support Specialists	318	\$64,210
Buyers and Purchasing Agents	465	\$63,870	Physical Therapist Assistants	283	\$51,470
			Basic Skill		
			SOC Title	Total Annual Openings	May 2022 Mean Wage
			Fast Food and Counter Workers	8,649	\$25,580
			Cashiers	6,063	\$25,760
			Retail Salespersons	5,610	\$31,130
			Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	4,655	\$32,880
			Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers	4,638	\$53,020
			Stockers and Order Fillers	4,202	\$32,090
			Waiters and Waitresses	3,751	\$28,270
			Office Clerks, General	3,632	\$36,190
			Customer Service Representatives	3,012	\$37,110
			Home Health and Personal Care Aides	2,953	\$26,680
			Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	2,566	\$28,130
			Cooks, Restaurant	2,256	\$28,530
			First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	2,150	\$42,820
			Receptionists and Information Clerks	2,034	\$30,610
			First-Line Supervisors of Food Preparation and Serving Workers	1,939	\$32,350

Source: Division of Workforce Services
 "High Skill" occupations include occupations requiring at least a bachelor's degree. This also includes occupations requiring a master's degree or a doctoral or professional degree.
 "Moderate Skill" occupations include occupations requiring an associate degree, postsecondary non-degree award or some college with no degree.
 "Basic Skill" occupations include occupations requiring either a high school diploma or equivalent or no formal education.

Source: https://www.discover.arkansas.gov/_docs/Publications/Economic-Report-OCI/Economic-Report.pdf

- i. **Existing Demand Industry Sectors and Occupations.** Provide an analysis of the industries and occupations for which there is existing demand.

Title I/LMI/Office of State Technology Response:

Existing Demand Industry Sectors and Occupations. Arkansas (“The Natural State”), nestled in the heart of the United States, boasts an economic landscape characterized by diversity and resilience. The state’s current economic outlook reflects a dynamic interchange of various industry sectors and occupations, showcasing an extensive and multifaceted demand that highlights its economic vitality. As the Natural State embraces the challenges of the contemporary business environment, it stands out as a demonstration to adaptability and innovation, fostering a rich tapestry of opportunities for both businesses and workers.

In exploring Arkansas’ economic dynamics, one cannot overlook the mosaic of industry sectors that form the foundation of its economic prowess. From agriculture and manufacturing to healthcare, technology and services, the state’s economic canvas is painted with a broad spectrum of activities.

This diversity not only contributes to the state’s resilience in the face of economic variations but also positions Arkansas as a key player in the national economic landscape.

Occupationally, Arkansas presents a vibrant and evolving employment scenario. Skilled professionals find themselves in high demand across various sectors, fueling a continuous cycle of innovation and productivity. The state’s commitment to education and workforce development further enhances the skills pool, ensuring a steady supply of talent equipped to meet the evolving needs of an ever-changing economy.

The current economic landscape highlights a diverse range of existing demand in various industry sectors and occupations, showcasing opportunities for growth and development. Key sectors include

- Merchant Wholesalers of Durable Goods with 26,433 openings,
- Local Government (excluding Education and Hospitals) with 42,913 positions,
- Building Equipment Contractors offering 19,790 opportunities,
- Offices of Physicians featuring 27,189 openings,
- Religious Organizations with 34,943 positions,
- Services to Buildings and Dwellings providing 15,527 opportunities,
- Business Support Services offering 10,060 positions,
- Credit Intermediation and Related Activities with 20,553 openings,
- Animal Slaughtering and Processing featuring 34,724 opportunities, and
- Social Advocacy Organizations presenting 6,056 positions.

These numbers underscore the demand for skilled professionals and labor across a spectrum of industries, reflecting the dynamic nature of the current job market. As individuals navigate their career paths, these sectors stand out as key areas where talents and expertise are in high demand, creating pathways for meaningful employment and contribution to the broader economic landscape.

Top 10 Fastest Growth

NAICS Code	NAICS Title	2022 Estimated Employment	2024 Projected Employment	Numeric Change	Percent Change
454100	Electronic Shopping and Mail Order Houses	469	651	182	38.81%
813200	Grantmaking and Giving Services	7,144	9,602	2,458	34.41%
511200	Software Publishers	544	642	98	18.01%
331200	Steel Product Manufacturing from Purchased Steel	1,507	1,739	232	15.39%
524100	Insurance Carriers	23,041	26,509	3,468	15.05%
611400	Business Schools & Computer & Management Training	156	177	21	13.46%
813300	Social Advocacy Organizations	5,739	6,412	673	11.73%
236100	Residential Building Construction	4,295	4,769	474	11.04%
812900	Other Personal Services	1,375	1,526	151	10.98%
711500	Independent Artists, Writers, and Performers	79	87	8	10.13%

Top 10 Decline

999300	Local Government, Excluding Education & Hospitals	39,522	38,581	-941	-2.38%
814000	Private Households	6,370	5,740	-630	-9.89%
623100	Nursing Care Facilities (Skilled Nursing Facilities)	17,866	17,296	-570	-3.19%
112000	Animal Production	7,347	6,966	-381	-5.19%
999200	State Government, Excluding Education and Hospitals	31,276	30,929	-347	-1.11%
322100	Pulp, Paper, and Paperboard Mills	2,519	2,234	-285	-11.31%
425000	Wholesale Electronic Markets and Agents and Brokers	4,074	3,790	-284	-6.97%
511100	Newspaper, Periodical, Book, & Directory Publishers	1,559	1,340	-219	-14.05%
316200	Footwear Manufacturing	635	435	-200	-31.50%
115000	Support Activities for Agriculture and Forestry	5,122	4,930	-192	-3.75%

Top 10 Fastest Decline

237200	Land Subdivision	80	43	-37	-46.25%
483000	Water Transportation	26	15	-11	-42.31%
316200	Footwear Manufacturing	635	435	-200	-31.50%
533000	Lessors of Nonfinancial Intangible Assets (except Copyrighted Works)	64	55	-9	-14.06%
511100	Newspaper, Periodical, Book, & Directory Publishers	1,559	1,340	-219	-14.05%
322100	Pulp, Paper, and Paperboard Mills	2,519	2,234	-285	-11.31%
814000	Private Households	6,370	5,740	-630	-9.89%
425000	Wholesale Electronic Markets and Agents and Brokers	4,074	3,790	-284	-6.97%
488300	Support Activities for Water Transportation	444	419	-25	-5.63%
812300	Drycleaning and Laundry Services	1,726	1,629	-97	-5.62%

Source: Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, Projections Suite Software

Source: https://www.discover.arkansas.gov/_docs/Publications/Economic-Report-OCI/Economic-Report.pdf

(ii) Emerging Demand Industry Sectors and Occupations. Provide an analysis of the industries and occupations for which demand is emerging.

Title I/BLS/LMI/UI Response:

Emerging Demand Industry Sectors and Occupations. In a world characterized by rapid change and technological advancement, it is imperative for us to not only adapt but also anticipate the evolving needs of Arkansas' workforce and industries.

Arkansas has long been recognized for its resilience and ability to innovate, and today we find ourselves at the forefront of identifying new opportunities and addressing emerging demands. As we explore the dynamic landscape of industry sectors and occupations, we'll uncover the trends, innovations and strategies that will shape the future of our state.

From cutting-edge technologies to sustainable practices, the opportunities before us are diverse and promising. We continue to explore these emerging demands, but also to initiate a dialogue that fosters collaboration, innovation, and strategic planning. Together, we can ensure that Arkansas remains a leader in economic development, creating a prosperous and sustainable future for all.

As we stand at the intersection of tradition and progress, our state is witnessing the evolution of industry sectors and the emergence of new occupations that promise to redefine the economic fabric of Arkansas. We embark on a journey of discovery, shedding light on the transformative forces shaping our economic future and the pathways that will lead us toward innovation, prosperity, and sustainable growth.

From the forefront of technology to inventive strategies in agriculture, healthcare, manufacturing and beyond, we are committed to progressing amidst the opportunities and challenges that arise in these evolving domains.

Together, we have the power to propel Arkansas into a new era of economic vitality, ensuring our workforce is equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in an ever-evolving landscape.

The dining industry, specifically Restaurants and Other Eating Places, is expected to be the leading sector for job growth in Arkansas, with a projected addition of 3,714 new positions between 2022 and 2024. This surge will elevate the overall workforce in the state's foodservice sector to 93,472. Meanwhile, Electronic Shopping and Mail Order Houses are poised to experience remarkable growth, anticipating a 38.81% increase in jobs and emerging as the fastest-growing industry in Arkansas.

Contrastingly, the outlook for Local Government, Excluding Education and Hospitals appears challenging, with an estimated loss of 941 jobs or 2.38% of the workforce, reducing total employment to 38,581 by 2024. The Land Subdivision industry is expected to undergo the most significant decline, with a workforce reduction of 46.25%, resulting in a workforce level of 43.

On the broader scale, the Trade, Transportation, and Utilities super sector are forecasted to be the top-performing category, with an expected addition of 7,186 new jobs, reflecting a growth rate of 2.71% during the specified projection period.

Source: https://www.discover.arkansas.gov/_docs/Publications/Economic-Report-OCI/Economic-Report.pdf

Top 5 Industry Supersectors

NAICS Code	NAICS Title	2022 Estimated Employment	2024 Projected Employment	Numeric Change	Percent Change
102100	Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	265,150	272,336	7,186	2.71%
102500	Education and Health Services	307,625	314,043	6,418	2.09%
102400	Professional and Business Services	149,500	154,928	5,428	3.63%
102600	Leisure and Hospitality	117,500	122,830	5,330	4.54%
102300	Financial Activities	69,604	74,754	5,150	7.40%

Top Industries - Top 10 Growth

NAICS Code	NAICS Title	2022 Estimated Employment	2024 Projected Employment	Numeric Change	Percent Change
722500	Restaurants and Other Eating Places	89,758	93,472	3,714	4.14%
524100	Insurance Carriers	23,041	26,509	3,468	15.05%
813200	Grantmaking and Giving Services	7,144	9,602	2,458	34.41%
551000	Management of Companies and Enterprises	35,456	37,684	2,228	6.28%
424000	Merchant Wholesalers, Nondurable Goods	19,333	21,006	1,673	8.65%
238200	Building Equipment Contractors	20,175	21,741	1,566	7.76%
611100	Elementary and Secondary Schools	77,255	78,651	1,396	1.81%
452000	General Merchandise Stores	39,209	40,229	1,020	2.60%
621100	Offices of Physicians	27,151	27,963	812	2.99%
622100	General Medical and Surgical Hospitals	51,855	52,636	781	1.51%

Top 5 Major Occupational Groups

SOC Code	SOC Title	Employment		Change		Annual Openings			
		2022 Est.	2024 Proj.	Numeric	Percent	Exits	Transfers	Change	Total
13-0000	Business and Financial Operations Occupations	75,003	79,716	4,713	6.28%	2,396	4,397	2,356	9,149
53-0000	Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	149,288	153,805	4,517	3.03%	7,768	12,505	2,258	22,531
35-0000	Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	105,351	109,799	4,448	4.22%	9,280	10,850	2,224	22,354
41-0000	Sales and Related Occupations	136,496	140,732	4,236	3.10%	8,166	10,428	2,118	20,712
11-0000	Management Occupations	137,192	141,220	4,028	2.94%	5,599	6,885	2,014	14,498

Top Occupations - Top 10 Growth

SOC Code	SOC Title	Employment		Change		Annual Openings			
		2022 Est.	2024 Proj.	Numeric	Percent	Exits	Transfers	Change	Total
35-3023	Fast Food and Counter Workers	36,015	37,436	1,421	3.95%	3,982	3,957	710	8,649
11-1021	General and Operations Managers	29,660	30,969	1,309	4.41%	696	1,931	654	3,281
41-2031	Retail Salespersons	34,308	35,401	1,093	3.19%	2,240	2,824	546	5,610
41-3021	Insurance Sales Agents	9,272	10,343	1,071	11.55%	390	508	536	1,434
53-7062	Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	29,103	30,114	1,011	3.47%	1,435	2,714	506	4,655
35-2044	Cooks, Restaurant	11,013	11,994	981	8.91%	794	972	490	2,256
53-3032	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	37,527	38,453	926	2.47%	1,766	2,688	463	4,917
43-9041	Insurance Claims and Policy Processing Clerks	7,655	8,552	897	11.72%	333	501	448	1,282
13-1031	Claims Adjusters, Examiners, and Investigators	7,744	8,622	878	11.34%	224	424	439	1,087
53-7065	Stockers and Order Fillers	21,735	22,589	854	3.93%	1,420	2,355	427	4,202

Top 10 Fastest Growth

SOC Code	SOC Title	Employment		Change		Annual Openings			
		2022 Est.	2024 Proj.	Numeric	Percent	Exits	Transfers	Change	Total
13-113	Fundraisers	1,929	2,534	605	31.36%	80	124	302	506
11-2033	Fundraising Managers	129	166	37	28.68%	4	8	18	30
13-2033	Insurance Underwriters	1,534	1,737	203	13.23%	44	78	102	224
51-994	Etchers and Engravers	70	79	9	12.86%	4	4	4	12
43-9041	Insurance Claims & Policy Processing Clerks	7,655	8,552	897	11.72%	333	501	448	1,282
41-3021	Insurance Sales Agents	9,272	10,343	1,071	11.55%	390	508	536	1,434
13-1031	Claims Adjusters, Examiners, & Investigators	7,744	8,622	878	11.34%	224	424	439	1,087
29-1171	Nurse Practitioners	2,649	2,926	277	10.46%	64	80	138	282
15-2051	Data Scientists	275	303	28	10.18%	7	14	14	35
13-1081	Logisticians	1,375	1,514	139	10.11%	39	87	70	196

Top 10 Decline

45-2093	Farmworkers, Farm, Ranch, and Aquacultural Animals	4,785	4,574	-211	-4.41%	244	506	-106	644
37-2012	Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	10,474	10,275	-199	-1.90%	781	675	-100	1,356
33-3012	Correctional Officers and Jailers	6,122	5,925	-197	-3.22%	214	345	-98	461
31-1131	Nursing Assistants	17,342	17,217	-125	-0.72%	1,131	1,462	-62	2,531
43-6014	Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive	13,076	12,962	-114	-0.87%	756	776	-57	1,475
45-2092	Farmworkers and Laborers, Crop, Nursery, and Greenhouse	6,006	5,904	-102	-1.70%	310	644	-51	903
51-9196	Paper Goods Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders	2,661	2,563	-98	-3.68%	138	182	-49	271
33-3051	Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers	5,631	5,534	-97	-1.72%	167	286	-48	405
39-9011	Childcare Workers	10,250	10,188	-62	-0.60%	748	961	-31	1,678
51-8031	Water and Wastewater Treatment Plant and System Operators	2,003	1,960	-43	-2.15%	73	118	-22	169

Top 10 Fastest Decline

53-5011	Sailors and Marine Oilers	38	32	-6	-15.79%	1	3	-3	1
51-9031	Cutters and Trimmers, Hand	81	73	-8	-9.88%	4	6	-4	6
27-3023	News Analysts, Reporters, & Journalists	213	195	-18	-8.45%	8	16	-9	15
43-9022	Word Processors and Typists	60	55	-5	-8.33%	4	3	-2	5
51-6062	Textile Cutting Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders	100	93	-7	-7.00%	6	7	-4	9
47-4064	Rail-Track Laying and Maintenance Equipment Operators	316	296	-20	-6.33%	6	16	-10	12
51-6021	Pressers, Textile, Garment, and Related Materials	193	181	-12	-6.22%	12	10	-6	16
27-3041	Editors	493	464	-29	-5.88%	20	28	-14	34
51-8092	Gas Plant Operators	157	148	-9	-5.73%	4	12	-4	12
41-9041	Telemarketers	736	698	-38	-5.16%	38	68	-19	87

Source: Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, Projections Suite Software

Source: https://www.discover.arkansas.gov/_docs/Publications/Economic-Report-OCI/Economic-Report.pdf

(iii) **Employers' Employment Needs.** With regard to the industry sectors and occupations identified in (A)(i) and (ii), provide an assessment of the employment needs of employers, including a description of the knowledge, skills, and abilities required, including credentials and licenses.

Title I/BLS/LMI/UI Response:

Employers' Employment Needs

Arkansas supports a diverse and resilient economy with a strong presence of Fortune 500 companies and major operations serving regional, national, and global markets. The state is a leader in manufacturing, transportation, energy and critical minerals, timber, agriculture, and construction. These industries provide sustained employment, support skilled trades careers, and produce value-added goods.

Arkansas maintains a robust network of manufacturers, construction firms, and specialized producers that generate consistent demand for skilled trades, technical, and production talent. Registered Apprenticeship plays a central role in meeting these needs by providing employers with a proven, industry-driven model for developing a highly skilled workforce. Recent investments by the U.S. Department of Labor to expand manufacturing Registered Apprenticeship programs in Arkansas further strengthen the state's capacity to align training with employer demand and support long-term workforce sustainability.

To ensure alignment, AWC has identified targeted industries to guide investment, training, and program alignment. These industries include food manufacturing, aerospace and defense, data centers, transportation and logistics, firearms and ammunitions, paper and timber products, smart grid technologies, healthcare, software and data services, steel production, sustainable building products, transportation equipment manufacturing, construction-related trades, and suppliers to Walmart.

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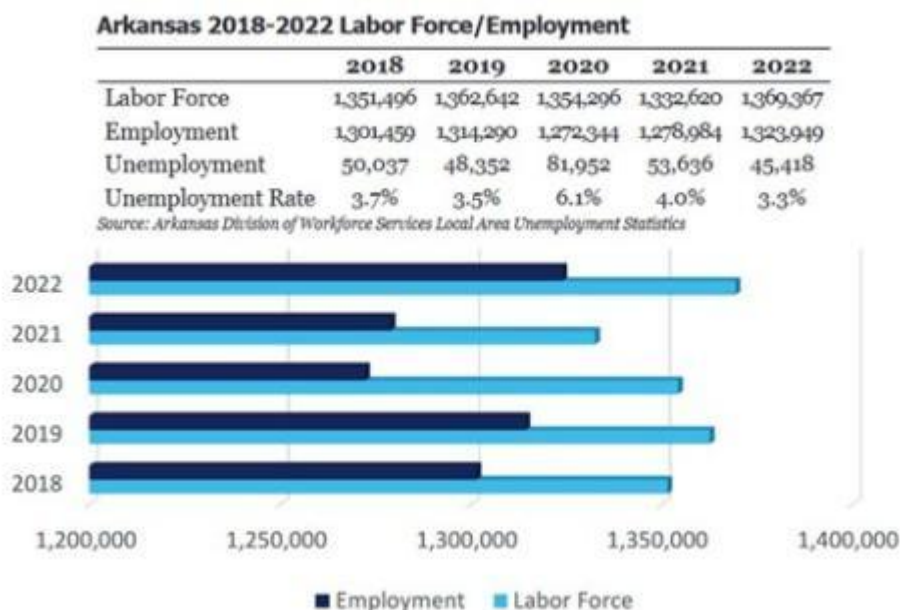
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Workforce boards and stakeholders can access interactive visualizations from the Discover Arkansas Labor Market Information (LMI) website, available for download in image or PDF formats. These tools provide detailed insights into industry growth, occupational trends, employment projections, wage data, and regional workforce patterns. By leveraging these resources, state and local stakeholders can make informed decisions for workforce development planning, identify high-demand occupations, anticipate skill gaps, and align training initiatives with the evolving needs of Arkansas employers. Arkansas' economic outlook, while sharing similarities with the nation, reveals distinctive facets that underscore its unique position in the evolving economic landscape. WIOA serves as a comprehensive framework in the United States for addressing employer needs through the public workforce system. WIOA emphasizes the development of a skilled and adaptable workforce to meet the dynamic demands of the labor market. Employers can engage with the public workforce system to fulfill their workforce requirements in several ways. WIOA is designed to enhance the competitiveness of the nation's workforce by aligning education and training programs with the current and future needs of employers. Through the public workforce system, WIOA aims to meet the following employer needs:

- **Skilled Workforce Development:** WIOA supports the development of a highly skilled and adaptable workforce by facilitating training and education programs that align with the specific skills demanded by employers in various industries. This includes both technical skills and essential soft skills necessary for success in the modern workplace.

- **Talent Recruitment and Placement:** The public workforce system, under WIOA, assists employers in identifying and recruiting qualified candidates for job openings. This involves the creation of a talent pool that matches the skills and qualifications sought by employers, streamlining the hiring process and reducing recruitment challenges.
- **Customized Training Programs:** WIOA encourages the customization of training programs to meet the unique needs of employers. This can involve collaborations between training providers, educational institutions and employers to design curricula that directly address the specific skill gaps within particular industries or companies.
- **Apprenticeship Opportunities:** WIOA promotes apprenticeship programs as a valuable pathway for individuals to acquire industry-specific skills while meeting the workforce needs of employers. These programs facilitate a hands-on learning experience, ensuring that workers are well-prepared for the demands of their chosen professions.
- **Labor Market Information:** WIOA facilitates the provision of up-to-date labor market information to employers. This includes data on current and projected skill demands, industry trends and emerging occupations, enabling employers to make informed decisions about their workforce needs and strategies. By addressing these key aspects, WIOA and the public workforce system play a pivotal role in connecting job seekers with employment opportunities.

The labor force increased by 36,747 between 2021 and 2022 and employment increased by 44,965 over the same period. Unemployment decreased by 8,218 from 2021 to 2022 and has seen a decrease of 4,619 since 2018. The state's unemployment rate declined by 0.7% from 2021 to 2022. Over the 2018-2022 period, the unemployment rate declined 0.4 percentage points to 3.3 percent for 2022. The state's unemployment rate was 2.6% in July 2023.



Source: https://www.discover.arkansas.gov/_docs/Publications/Economic-Report-OCI/Economic-Report.pdf

(B) Workforce Analysis.

The Unified or Combined State Plan must include an analysis of the current workforce in the State and within various state regions, including for populations with barriers to employment described in the first paragraph of Section II. Analysis must include--

- (i) Employment and Unemployment. Provide an analysis of current employment and unemployment data, including labor force participation rates, and trends in the State.**

BLS/LMI/UI Response:

Labor Force and Unemployment Rate

This section describes the state labor force and unemployment rate estimates for the period between January 2018 and January 2022 published by the U.S. Census Bureau. Table S2301 Employment Status is included below. Stated simply, the labor force includes all non-institutionalized civilians 16 years and older who are employed or actively looking for work.

Arkansas Employment Status, 2022	Total	Labor Force Participation Rate	Employment/ Population Ratio	Unemployment Rate
Populations 16 years and over	2,402,462	58.20%	54.90%	5.10%
Arkansas Employment Status, 2022	Total	Labor Force Participation Rate	Employment/ Population Ratio	Unemployment Rate
AGE				
16 to 19	165,397	35.20%	29.30%	16.50%
20 to 24	205,218	72.40%	65.00%	9.40%
25 to 29	195,578	80.30%	74.90%	6.00%
30 to 34	194,001	79.40%	74.90%	5.10%
35 to 44	378,345	79.20%	75.20%	4.50%
45 to 54	360,316	75.70%	73.20%	3.20%
55 to 59	193,645	66.20%	64.00%	3.10%
60 to 64	190,528	50.10%	48.80%	2.70%
65 to 74	304,000	22.70%	22.00%	2.80%
75 years and older	215,434	6.70%	6.50%	2.60%

Race and Hispanic or Latino Origin				
White alone	1,793,739	57.20%	54.20%	4.30%
Black or African American alone	349,801	57.70%	52.10%	9.40%
American Indian or Alaska Native alone	13,335	58.60%	55.40%	4.70%
Asian alone	38,130	69.40%	67.20%	2.90%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	7,443	63.00%	58.00%	7.80%
Some other race alone	63,335	70.70%	66.80%	0.10%
Two or more races	136,679	62.60%	58.70%	5.80%
Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race)	163,574	70.80%	67.40%	4.50%
Arkansas Employment Status, 2022	Total	Labor Force Participation Rate	Employment/Population Ratio	Unemployment Rate
White alone, nor Hispanic or Latino	1,735,795	56.80%	54.10%	4.40%
Population 20 to 64 years	1,717,631	73.10%	0.693	4.80%
SEX				
Male	858,902	77.00%	72.70%	4.90%
Female	858,729	69.20%	65.90%	4.70%
With own children under 18 years	315,450	74.00%	70.50%	4.50%
With own children under 6 years only	69,080	72.00%	68.20%	5.10%

With own children under 6 years and 6 to 17 years	68,858	67.30%	63.40%	5.70%
With own children under 6+ to 17 years only	177,512	77.30%	74.20%	3.90%
Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months				
Below Poverty Level	254,974	42.20%	33.80%	19.70%
At or above the poverty level	142,205	80.50%	77.40%	3.40%
Disability Status				
With any disability	267,316	37.00%	33.20%	10.20%
Educational Attainment				
Population 25 to 64 years	1,512,413	73.20%	69.90%	4.20%
Arkansas Employment Status, 2022	Total	Labor Force Participation Rate	Employment/Population Ratio	Unemployment Rate
Less than high school graduate	162,017	54.40%	50.10%	8.00%

Table S2301 above takes a detailed look at the labor force data for the year 2022 calculated by the U.S. Census Bureau (based on the 2018-2022 American Community Survey). The table includes labor force participation rates, employment-to-population ratios and unemployment rates for various demographics. The highest unemployment rates are found among the younger population, Blacks or African Americans, persons with disabilities and those with less than a high school diploma all at 8.0% or above.

Since 2014, the number of employed has increased at a faster rate than the labor force. In fact, the number of employed in September 2019 has surpassed the pre-recession level, while the labor force is just approaching its pre-recession level. As a result, the unemployment rate has been steadily decreasing from its highest in May 2011 (8.5%) to its lowest at 3.4% in August 2019.

Arkansas' historical data for 2015–2019 was reviewed for table S2301 Employment Status. While the unemployment rate for the entire population remained stagnant at 5.1% when comparing 2019 to 2022 although there were dramatic changes within the individual

populations. The unemployment rate from 2019 to 2022 estimates for the 16-19 years of age population reduced drastically from 19.3% to 16.5%, while the estimated population increased from 160,796 to 165,397 representing a 2.7% increase. This has been attributed to the increase of service sector positions, and replacing the aging population dealing directly with the public that likely chose retirement if it was available during the Pandemic period for safety.

Populations with more than two races dramatically increased from 46,194 to 136,679 representing an 196% increase while the unemployment rate for the same population decreased dramatically from 9.1% to 5.8%.

(ii) Labor Market Trends. Provide an analysis of key labor market trends, including across existing industries and occupations.

BLS/LMI/UI Response:

Labor Market Trends

The reports referenced were produced by the Labor Market Information section of the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services. These reports may be accessed at:
<https://www.discover.arkansas.gov/Publications/index>

Population:

Arkansas grew in population in 2024 by 20,622 from 2023 and added a total of 76,812 new residents from 2020 to 2024. Of Arkansas's 10 Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDAs), Northwest Arkansas saw the largest increase in population, adding 15,761 in 2024. The Eastern, Southeast, and Southwest Arkansas LWDAs saw decreasing populations in 2024.

Age Distribution:

An analysis of Arkansas' population distribution by gender and age group for 2010 and 2024 revealed that the number of people 65+ grew substantially while the younger population (under 15) reduced. In fact, the 65+ group increased its share of the total population from 14.4% in 2010 to 18.2% in 2024, a growth of about 141,300 people. During the same period, the under 15 age group went down from 20.3% to 18.5%, a net decrease of about 19,500. Based on the population projections, by 2030, 20.5% of the state population will be age 65 or older resulting in the older population continuing to increase its share of the total population.

Racial and Ethnic Composition:

Employment status by race data for 2024 show that whites made up 71.7% of the labor force while the total of all minority groups made up 28.3%. The unemployment rate for all races, including Hispanics, was 3.5%. The unemployment rate for all minority groups combined was 4.8%. Hispanics of all races made up 9.1% of the labor force, with an unemployment rate of 3.1%.

Industry:

This section describes projected employment trends by industry for the state of Arkansas for

2022-2032. The analysis is based on the long-term industry projections published by the Arkansas Department of Commerce, Office of Workforce Policy and Innovation. The industries analyzed include all the 2-digit industry sectors defined by the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), except for two – the self-employed and government sectors.

According to our data, the job market in Arkansas is projected to add 89,718 jobs between 2022 and 2032, a 6.18% gain. Goods-Producing industries are expected to add 6,798 new jobs, while the Services-Providing industries should see most of the growth, with 81,542 new jobs being added.

The **Natural Resources and Mining** supersector lost just 392 jobs between 2019 and 2020. Between 2022 and 2032, the industry supersector is slated to experience a net loss of 30 jobs. The Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting sector is expected to add 56 jobs during the projection period. Animal Production and Aquaculture is forecast to gain 326 jobs, while Crop Production is slated to increase by 108. However, Logging could see a loss of 190 jobs. The Mining sector is slated to experience a net loss of 86 jobs. While Mining (except Oil and Gas) could see a gain of 31 jobs, Support Activities for Mining is predicted to lose 92.

Construction gained 696 jobs between 2019 and 2020, weathering the pandemic storm of second quarter 2020. It is estimated to grow by 2,896 jobs between 2022 and 2032. More than 65% of the growth could come in the Specialty Trade Contractors subsector, with a growth of 1,897 new jobs over the 10-year period. Driving this growth is Building Equipment Contractors, which is forecast to add 1,320 new jobs. On the negative side of the economy, Land Subdivision could see an 8.64% reduction.

The **Manufacturing** supersector lost 7,422 jobs between 2019 and 2020. As of 2022, the supersector has recovered all but 160 jobs. An increase of 3,932 jobs is expected in Manufacturing, raising employment levels by 2.42%.

Non-Durable Goods Manufacturing lost 2,236 jobs between 2019 and 2020. The industry group is estimated to increase employment by 838 jobs but is not predicted to exceed pre-pandemic levels. The Food Manufacturing subsector is the driving force behind the growth, with a projected gain of 1,292. Textile Mills is forecast to gain 66.67%, becoming the fastest growing subsector in Arkansas. Within this subsector, Fabric Mills is slated to increase its workforce by 79.56% between 2022 and 2032, becoming the fastest growing industry in the state. However, on the negative side of the job market, Paper Manufacturing is projected to cut 992 jobs over the 10-year projection period. Within that subsector, Converted Paper Product Manufacturing is estimated to be the third highest declining industry in the state, losing 677 jobs, while Pulp, Paper, and Paperboard Mills is slated to cut 315 jobs. In all, five Non-Durable Goods Manufacturing industries made the Top 25 Declining Industries list. Apparel Manufacturing is anticipated to lose 40.06% of its workforce. Apparel Knitting Mills could be the fastest declining industry in the state, losing an estimated 209 jobs. In all, seven Non-Durable Goods Manufacturing industries made the Top 25 Fastest Declining Industries list.

Durable Goods Manufacturing lost 5,186 jobs between 2019 and 2020. The industry group surpassed pre-pandemic levels and is forecast to increase employment by 3,094 jobs between 2022 and 2032. The largest increase in jobs should be seen in the Transportation Equipment Manufacturing subsector, with 1,643 jobs anticipated overall. Iron and Steel Mills and Ferroalloy Manufacturing is predicted to increase its workforce by 23.71%, placing among the ten fastest growing industries. On the negative side of the economy, Furniture and Related Product Manufacturing is slated to be the fifth highest declining industry, cutting 526 jobs or 15.42% of its workforce. Household Appliance Manufacturing could see a 35% reduction in its

employment, placing it as the second fastest declining industry in the state. In all, eight Durable Goods Manufacturing industries place on the Top 25 Fastest Declining Industries list.

The **Trade, Transportation, and Utilities** supersector lost 3,824 jobs between 2019 and 2020. The supersector has since exceeded pre-pandemic levels. The supersector is slated to add 13,337 jobs during the 10-year projection period.

The **Wholesale Trade** sector lost 842 jobs between 2019 and 2020. The sector is expected to grow by 2,361 new jobs. Merchant Wholesalers, Durable Goods is anticipated to add 1,590 jobs, while Merchant Wholesalers, Nondurable Goods is predicted to raise staffing by 1,084 jobs. On the other side, Wholesale Electronic Markets and Agents and Brokers could lose 313 jobs between 2022 and 2032.

The **Retail Trade** sector lost 1,189 jobs between 2019 and 2020. The industry sector has since fully recovered and is estimated to grow by 6,667 jobs by 2032. Sporting Goods, Hobby, Musical Instrument, Book, and Miscellaneous Retailers is predicted to increase employment by 2,174 jobs, a gain of 17.43% becoming the top and fastest growing subsector in Retail Trade. Other Miscellaneous Retailers is slated to drive this growth, increasing its workforce by 21.57%. General Merchandise Retailers is predicted to be the top growing industry among Retail Trade industries, gaining 1,939 jobs. On the negative side of the labor market, Clothing, Clothing Accessories, Shoe, and Jewelry Retailers is estimated to lose 424 jobs, while Furniture, Home Furnishings, Electronics, and Appliance Retailers could cut 393 jobs. Electronics and Appliance Retailers leads declining industries, losing an estimated 333 jobs, placing among the ten highest declining industries in the state. Shoe Retailers is slated to decline by 16.40%, becoming the fastest declining industry in Retail Trade.

The **Transportation and Warehousing** sector lost 1,854 jobs between 2019 and 2020. The industry sector has fully recovered the loss and is forecast to add 3,753 jobs between 2022 and 2032. Warehousing and Storage is predicted to be the top growing industry in Transportation and Warehousing, adding 1,986 jobs between 2022 and 2032. Couriers and Express Delivery Services is slated to be the fastest growing industry, increasing its workforce by 17.48%. On the reverse side of the economy, Pipeline Transportation of Natural Gas is slated to lose 63 jobs, while Urban Transit Systems could cut 21.95% placing among the ten fastest declining industries in the state.

The **Information** supersector lost 834 jobs between 2019 and 2020. The industry group is projected to remain relatively flat in terms of job growth, adding just 33 jobs between 2022 and 2032. Computing Infrastructure Providers, Data Processing, Web Hosting, and Related Services is predicted to be the biggest highlight of this supersector, adding an estimated 718 jobs. The Telecommunications subsector, on the other hand, is slated to experience a decline of 379 jobs, placing the industry among the ten highest declining industries in the state. Publishing Industries is projected to cut 12.62% of its workforce. Newspaper, Periodical, Book, and Directory Publishers is anticipated to be the fastest declining industry in the Information supersector, declining by 16.76%.

The **Financial Activities** supersector stayed relatively stable during the pandemic, losing only 10 jobs between 2019 and 2020. The supersector is estimated to gain 5,816 jobs from 2022 to 2032. The Finance and Insurance sector gained jobs between 2019 and 2020, increasing its workforce by 331 jobs. The industry sector is expected to gain 5,003 jobs, more than 86% of the total growth in Financial Activities. The Insurance Carriers and Related Activities subsector is projected to add 4,558 jobs to its workforce. Driving this growth is Insurance Carriers, expected to increase the workforce by 3,755 jobs, placing among the ten highest growing industries in the state. The Real Estate and Rental and Leasing sector lost 342 jobs between 2019 and 2020. The

sector is expected to add 813 jobs between 2022 and 2032. The outlook is mixed as the Real Estate subsector is estimated to add 940 jobs to its workforce, while the Rental and Leasing Services subsector could decline by 113 jobs. Lessors of Nonfinancial Intangible Assets (except Copyrighted Works) is forecast to be among the ten fastest declining industries, cutting 21.54% from its workforce during the 10-year projection period.

The **Professional and Business Services** supersector lost 4,531 jobs between 2019 and 2020. The supersector has fully recovered from the loss of jobs and is projected to increase its workforce by 17,839 additional jobs between 2022 and 2032. The Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services sector lost 362 jobs between 2019 and 2020. The industry sector is slated to raise staffing by 6,863 new jobs during the projection period. Management, Scientific, and Technical Consulting Services leads the sector with an estimated 2,034 new jobs, placing among the ten fastest growing industries and ranking on the Top 25 Growing Industries list. Computer Systems Design and Related Services is forecast to increase its workforce by 1,806 jobs, also making the Top 25 Growing Industries list. Scientific Research and Development Services is also slated to experience strong growth, increasing its workforce by 24.93%, placing seventh on the Top 25 Fastest Growing Industries list.

Education and Health Services lost 9,079 jobs between 2019 and 2020. The industry group has not fully recovered to levels seen in 2019 but is expected to gain 27,292 jobs between 2022 and 2032, becoming the top growing supersector. Educational Services lost 3,191 jobs between 2019 and 2020 as many educational institutions at all levels were forced to go virtual or hybrid for much of 2020. The industry sector has not fully recovered but is estimated to gain 1,277 jobs during the projection period. Elementary and Secondary Schools should see most of this growth with 911 new jobs anticipated to be added, while Business Schools and Computer and Management Training is slated to increase its workforce by 8.15%.

Health Care and Social Assistance lost 5,887 jobs between 2019 and 2020. The industry sector has not fully recovered to 2019 employment levels but is forecast to grow by 26,015 jobs and becoming the top growing sector in Arkansas. Of those jobs, 10,958 could be found in the Ambulatory Health Care Services subsector. Offices of Physicians is slated to be the fourth highest growing industry, growing by 4,928 jobs between 2022 and 2032. Three other industries within this subsector are slated to be on the Top 25 Growing Industries list. Overall, eight industries in Healthcare and Social Assistance are predicted to be on the Top 25 Growing Industries list. Individual and Family Services is anticipated to be the second highest growing industry in the state, raising employment levels by 5,583 jobs and among the ten fastest at a rate of 24.39%. Child Day Care Services is also among the top ten fastest growing as well as the top ten highest growing industries, growing by 2,758 jobs, an increase of 25.51%. There are, however, some downsides to the Healthcare and Social Assistance sector. Nursing Care Facilities (Skilled Nursing Facilities) is predicted to cut 470 jobs placing sixth on the Top 25 Declining Industries list. Vocational Rehabilitation Services could also face a difficult outlook, cutting 185 jobs.

Leisure and Hospitality lost the most jobs of any supersector between 2019 and 2020, cutting 14,504 jobs. The industry supersector has fully recovered and is forecast to increase by 7,672 jobs between 2022 and 2032. The Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation sector lost 1,729 jobs between 2019 and 2020. The industry sector has fully recovered and is estimated to add 1,399 jobs. The Amusement, Gambling, and Recreation Industries subsector drives the growth with an estimated increase of 1,045 jobs. Promoters of Performing Arts, Sports, and Similar Events is slated to be the fifth fastest growing industry in the state, adding 27.59% to its workforce. Museums, Historical Sites, and Similar Institutions also makes the Top 25 Fastest Growing Industries list, raising employment levels by 19%.

The **Accommodation and Food Services** sector lost 12,775 jobs between 2019 and 2020. The industry group has fully recovered and is projected to add 6,273 jobs between 2022 and 2032. Restaurants and Other Eating Places drives the growth in the sector with an estimated gain of 5,131 jobs, making it the third highest growing industry in the state. Special Food Services and RV (Recreational Vehicle) Parks and Recreational Camps are each slated to grow by more than 14% during the 2022-2032 projection period.

The **Other Services (Except Government)** supersector lost 1,451 jobs between 2019 and 2020. The supersector has fully recovered and is predicted to add 9,319 jobs between 2022 and 2032. Most of the growth is expected in the Religious, Grantmaking, Civic, Professional, and Similar Organizations subsector, gaining an estimated 8,948 jobs. Social Advocacy Organizations is slated to add 3,032 jobs, an increase of 52.38%, placing it among the ten highest growing industries in the state and the second fastest. Three of the top five fastest growing industries are in this subsector. Religious Organizations is also among the ten highest growing industries, estimated to gain 2,511 new jobs. On the negative side of the labor market, Drycleaning and Laundry Services is projected to lose 308 jobs, 17.17% of its workforce, placing the industry on both the Top 25 Declining Industries list and the Top 25 Fastest Declining Industries list.

Occupation:

This section describes projected employment trends by occupation group for the state of Arkansas for 2022-2032. The analysis is based on the long-term occupational projections published by the Arkansas Department of Commerce, Office of Workforce Policy and Innovation. The occupations analyzed include the major occupation groups within the Standard Occupational Classifications (SOC) structure.

Arkansas occupations are projected to gain 89,718 jobs by 2032. A total of 172,258 annual openings are expected each year of the projection period. Of these, 72,991 would be due to employees leaving the workforce, while 90,295 would be due to those changing jobs. Growth and expansion account for 8,972 annual job openings. All major groups except two should see positive net growth over the 10-year projection period.

The **Management Occupations** major group is expected to gain 10,211 jobs during the projection period, with 13,433 total annual job openings. Of these, 5,870 are expected to come from employees leaving the workforce, 6,542 from those changing jobs, and 1,021 from growth and expansion. The Top Executives occupational family is expected to lead the major group in growth, adding 3,565 jobs. General and Operations Managers is forecast to be the top growing occupation in the major group and third statewide, adding 3,621 new jobs. The Other Management Occupations occupational family is estimated to account for 3,062 new jobs. Medical and Health Services Managers is slated to increase employment by 31.14%, or 2,081 new jobs, placing the occupation among the ten highest growing occupations in the state as well as among the ten fastest growing on the Top 25 Fastest Growing Occupations list. On the negative side of the labor market, Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers is expected to lose 1,751 jobs during the projection period, becoming the top declining occupation in the state.

The **Business and Financial Operations Occupations** major group is projected to gain 8,669 jobs by 2032. The group should see 7,037 annual job openings with 2,452 due to those exiting the workforce, 3,718 from those changing jobs, and 867 due to growth and expansion. The Business Operations Specialists occupational family is slated to add 6,238 jobs to its workforce. Management Analysts leads all occupations in the major group with 1,206 new jobs. In all, three occupations within Business and Financial Operations Occupations are predicted to be on the

Top 25 Growing Occupations list. Labor Relations Specialists is forecast to be among the ten fastest growing occupations in the state, increasing its workforce by 30.21%. Logisticians and Fundraisers are both included on the Top 25 Fastest Growing Occupations list, each increasing by more than 27%. On the negative side of the economy, Buyers and Purchasing Agents is slated to lose 57 jobs.

The **Computer and Mathematical Occupations** major group is expected to add 4,434 jobs during the projection period. Total Annual Openings could amount to 2,095 jobs with 627 annual openings due to exiting the workforce and 1,025 due to changing jobs. Another 443 openings are estimated for growth and expansion. The Computer Occupations minor group should see most of this growth, with 4,048 jobs expected over the 10-year period. Software Developers is anticipating the highest gain with 1,714 new jobs on the horizon, an increase of 31.97%, placing it as the fifth fastest growing occupation in the state and making the Top 25 Growing Occupations list. Information Security Analysts is anticipating a growth of 32.35%, placing it as the fourth fastest growing occupation statewide. In all, five occupations in Computer and Mathematical Occupations are included on the Top 25 Fastest Growing Occupations list. Despite the great outlook in computer and information technology related jobs, not every occupation is expected to see the same positive outcome. Computer Programmers could experience a loss of 161 jobs placing the occupation on the Top 25 Declining Occupations list.

The **Architecture and Engineering Occupations** major group could add 1,302 jobs by 2032. The group is expected to have 1,075 total annual openings with 402 annual openings due to employees leaving the workforce, 543 from employees changing jobs, and 130 from growth and expansion. The Engineers minor group leads the group in numeric change, expecting to add 980 jobs during the projection period, more than 75% of the major group's overall growth. In this minor group, Industrial Engineers could add 386 jobs, becoming the top growing occupation in the major group. Aerospace Engineers is slated to be the fastest growing occupation in the major group and on the Top 25 Fastest Growing Occupations list with a gain of 26.13%.

The **Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations** major group is predicted to gain 686 new jobs through the 2022-2032 projection period. Annual openings due to those leaving the workforce would amount to 175, while those changing jobs are estimated to account for 553 openings. Growth and expansion could account for an additional 69 openings, bringing total annual openings to 797. The Life, Physical, and Social Science Technicians minor group is expected to gain 207 jobs. Occupational Health and Safety Specialists is expected to lead the major group in numeric change, adding 100 new jobs to its workforce, while Social Science Research Assistants could be the fastest growing occupation in the major group, raising employment by 29.31%, placing it among the ten fastest growing occupations statewide.

The **Community and Social Services Occupations** major group is estimated to gain 4,011 new jobs during the projection period. The group could see 3,539 total annual openings with 1,463 due to exiting the workforce and 1,675 due to employees changing jobs. Another 401 annual openings would be due to growth and expansion. Clergy is slated to add 1,210 jobs to its workforce. It is also estimated that the occupation could experience 1,223 annual job openings. Social and Human Service Assistants is predicted to add 1,053 jobs, an increase of 24.27%, making the Top 25 Growing Occupations and Top 25 Fastest Growing Occupations lists.

The **Legal Occupations** major group is projected to add 558 jobs by 2032. Of the 552 annual openings, 236 should be due to employees exiting the workforce, while 260 would be for employees changing jobs. Growth and expansion could lead to 56 annual job openings. The Lawyers, Judges, and Related Workers minor group leads the group with 417 new jobs

anticipated, with Lawyers accounting for 398 of those new jobs. The Legal Support Workers minor group also expects robust growth with 141 jobs projected to be added. Paralegals and Legal Assistants leads this minor group with 119 jobs expected.

The **Educational Instruction and Library Occupations** major group is expected to gain 3,771 jobs during the projection period. The group could see 7,151 total annual openings with annual openings due to occupational exits and occupational transfers accounting for 3,441 and 3,333 jobs respectively. Growth and expansion are expected to account for 377 annual job openings. Postsecondary Teachers is expected to add 680 jobs, while the Preschool, Primary, Secondary, and Special Education School Teachers minor group is predicted to increase by 2,128 jobs. Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education is projected to add 1,083 new jobs, a 24.95% increase, placing on the Top 25 Growing Occupations list as well as the Top 25 Fastest Growing Occupations list. On the negative side of the labor market, Adult Basic Education, Adult Secondary Education, and English as a Second Language Instructors is predicted to lose 36 jobs, or 11.54% of its workforce, placing the occupation on the Top 25 Fastest Declining Occupations list.

The **Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations** major group is projected to add 1,347 jobs by 2032. Of the 1,811 total annual openings, 716 of them could come from employees leaving the workforce, 960 from those changing jobs, and 135 from growth and expansion. The Art and Design Workers occupational family is forecast to add 578 jobs to its workforce. Public Relations Specialists is estimated to be the top and fastest growing occupation in Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations with an anticipated gain of 310 jobs, an increase of 19.94%. On the negative side of the labor market, Editors is slated to lose 37 jobs while Broadcast Announcers and Radio Disc Jockeys is predicted to lose 10.38% of its workforce, becoming the fastest declining occupation in the major group.

The **Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations** major group is estimated to add 10,828 jobs by the end of the projection period. This group could see 6,594 annual job openings with 3,109 due to employees leaving the workforce, 2,402 due to employees changing jobs, and 1,083 due to growth and expansion. The Health Diagnosing and Treating Practitioners occupational family anticipates adding 7,284 jobs. Driving growth is Registered Nurses, which is predicted to see continued growth with 2,162 jobs, placing it among the ten highest growing occupations in the state. Nurse Practitioners is slated to be the fastest growing occupation statewide, increasing by 61.11% and placing ninth on the Top 25 Growing Occupations list. Physician Assistants is anticipated to be the second fastest, growing by 33.83%. The Health Technologists and Technicians family is predicted to experience a growth of 2,779.

Healthcare Support Occupations is projected to add 8,314 jobs by 2032 and is projected to be the second fastest growing major group, increasing the workforce by 14.64%. The group could see 9,500 total annual openings with 4,028 of the jobs due to employees leaving the workforce, 4,641 from employees changing jobs, and 831 from growth and expansion. The Home Health and Personal Care Aides occupational family is the biggest driver of growth, predicted to add 5,156 jobs. Home Health and Personal Care Aides is forecast to be the top growing occupation in the state, growing by 4,354. Occupational Therapy Assistants is forecast to increase its workforce by 32.41%, becoming the third fastest growing occupation in the state. In all, seven occupations in the major group are estimated to grow by more than 20% between 2022 and 2032.

The **Protective Service Occupations** major group is expected to add 576 jobs over the projection period with 2,721 total annual openings. Of these, 1,184 would be from employees leaving the workforce and 1,479 coming from those changing jobs. Another 58 annual openings

are forecasted to be from growth and expansion. The Other Protective Service Workers minor group leads the major group with 475 new jobs anticipated. Within this group, Security Guards is estimated to be the top growing occupation, adding 258 new jobs. Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers, of the Law Enforcement Workers occupational family, is slated to add 223 new jobs. However, Correctional Officers and Jailers could see a reduction of 365 jobs, or 7.45% of its workforce, becoming one of the ten highest declining industries statewide as well as the fastest declining occupation in the major group.

The **Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations** major group is estimated to add 6,617 jobs during the projection period. Of the 21,647 annual job openings, 9,590 should be due to employees leaving the workforce, while 11,395 could come from employees changing jobs. Another 662 are related to growth and expansion. The Cooks and Food Preparation Workers minor group leads the group with 3,088 jobs expected. Restaurant Cooks is estimated to experience a gain of 2,984 jobs, fourth highest statewide. It is projected to be the fastest growing occupation in the Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations major group with a growth of 23.79%. Fast Food and Counter Workers is also expected to see strong growth, adding 1,916 jobs to the workforce. On the negative side of the labor market, Waiters and Waitresses is predicted to lose 163 jobs. Fast Food Cooks is forecast to cut 453 jobs, placing the occupation sixth on the Top 25 Declining Occupations list.

The **Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations** major group is projected to add 3,165 jobs by 2032. The group should have 6,552 total annual openings with 2,947 jobs due to employees exiting the workforce, 3,289 due to employees changing jobs, and 316 due to growth and expansion. The Building Cleaning and Pest Control Workers minor group is expected to add 1,726 jobs with Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners estimated to add 1,607 of those jobs, placing it on the Top 25 Growing Occupations list. Pest Control Workers is projected to be the fastest growing occupation in the major group, increasing its workforce by 17.58%. On the negative side of the economy, Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners is anticipated to experience a decline of 150 jobs.

The **Personal Care and Service Occupations** major group is expected to gain 3,029 jobs over the projection period. Of the 5,257 total annual openings, 1,978 would be due to employees leaving the workforce, while 2,976 would be due to those changing jobs. Another 303 jobs could come from growth and expansion. The Other Personal Care and Service Workers minor group leads the major group with 1,288 new jobs expected. Childcare Workers is anticipated to add 909 new jobs. Animal Caretakers is slated to increase its workforce by 21.36%. On the reverse side of the economy, the Funeral Service Workers occupational family could lose 20 jobs during the projection period.

The **Sales and Related Occupations** major group is projected to gain 4,718 jobs by the end of 2032. The group is estimated to make available 17,635 jobs annually with 7,764 due to employees leaving the workforce, 9,399 related to job change, and 472 from growth and expansion. The Sales Representatives, Services occupational family is slated to grow by 2,266 jobs. Driving this growth is Insurance Sales Agents, with an anticipated increase of 1,567 jobs. Retail Salespersons is forecast to be the top growing occupation in the major group, adding 1,762 jobs, placing the occupation among the ten highest growing occupations. A few downsides in the Sales and Related Occupations major group include Cashiers, slated to lose 679 jobs during the projection period, becoming the fourth highest declining occupation in the state, and Advertising Sales Agents, which is estimated to cut 62 jobs between 2022 and 2032.

The **Office and Administrative Support Occupations** major group could face a challenging outlook between 2022 and 2032, estimated to experience a decline of 2,730 jobs. Despite this

decline, 18,107 job openings are projected in this major group annually. Of these, 8,636 are projected to be connected to employees exiting the workforce, while 9,744 are related to employees transferring jobs. Around 273 annual job openings could be eliminated by the reduction of jobs. Customer Service Representatives is slated to lose 1,047 jobs between 2022 and 2032 while Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive is predicted to lose 1,040 jobs. In all, thirteen occupations within Office and Administrative Support Occupations made the Top 25 Declining Occupations list. At a 36.84% decline, Word Processors and Typists is projected to be the fastest declining occupation in the state. In all, twelve occupations within the major group made the Top 25 Fastest Declining Occupations list. There are, however, some positive outlooks in the major group. Receptionists and Information Clerks is estimated to gain 976 jobs, an increase of 7.34 percent, making the Top 25 Growing Occupations list. Cargo and Freight Agents is predicted to increase its workforce by 13.20%.

The **Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations** major group is estimated to lose 89 jobs between 2022 and 2032. The major group is predicting 2,325 total annual openings with 884 due to employees leaving the workforce and 1,450 due to employees changing jobs. Growth and expansion are estimated to account for nine fewer openings annually. The Forest, Conservation, and Logging Workers family is slated to lose 68 jobs, while the Agricultural Workers minor group is estimated to cut 63 jobs. Farmworkers and Laborers, Crop, Nursery, and Greenhouse leads the major group with a decline of 145 jobs, placing it on the Top 25 Declining Occupations list, while Graders and Sorters, Agricultural Products is anticipated to lose 134. One positive outcome in the major group is Farmworkers, Farm, Ranch, and Aquacultural Animals, which is estimated to gain 110 jobs.

The **Construction and Extraction Occupations** major group is projected to gain 3,501 jobs over the projection period, with 5,375 total annual openings expected. The group is expected to have 2,032 annual openings due to employees leaving the workforce, 2,993 due to employees changing jobs, and 350 due to growth and expansion. The Construction Trades Workers minor group is expected to see a large gain with 2,816 jobs expected, more than 80% of the major group's overall growth. Construction Laborers is slated to add 955 to its workforce, placing the occupation on the Top 25 Growing Occupations list, while Electricians is projected to gain 875 new jobs. On the negative side of the labor market, Service Unit Operators, Oil and Gas is expected to cut 26 jobs while Rail-Track Laying and Maintenance Equipment Operators could see a 14.18% reduction in employment.

The **Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations** major group is expected to gain 4,520 jobs by 2032. The major group is estimated to have 5,954 total annual openings with 2,430 due to employees leaving the workforce, 3,072 due to employees changing jobs, and 452 due to growth and expansion. The Other Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations minor group could lead the group with 3,278 jobs projected, with Industrial Machinery Mechanics leading the major group with 1,389 new jobs anticipated, placing it on the Top 25 Growing Occupations list. Recreational Vehicle Service Technicians is slated to increase its workforce by 28%, placing it on the Top 25 Fastest Growing Occupations list. On the reverse side of the economy, Telecommunications Equipment Installers and Repairers, Except Line Installers is estimated to lose 40 jobs while Computer, Automated Teller, and Office Machine Repairers is set to lose 27 jobs.

The **Production Occupations** major group is projected to add 1,055 jobs between 2022 and 2032. The group is expected to experience 12,752 total annual openings with 5,120 due to occupational exits and 7,526 due to occupational transfers. Another 106 could come from growth and expansion. The Metal Workers and Plastic Workers minor group leads the major group with 609 new jobs expected. Driving this growth is Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and

Brazers, which is slated to add 525 jobs to the workforce, becoming the top growing occupation in Production Occupations. Computer Numerically Controlled Tool Programmers is forecast to increase its workforce by 22.29%. On the negative side of the economy, Production Worker Helpers is predicted to lose 415 jobs, placing among the ten highest declining occupations statewide. Hand Cutters and Trimmers is slated to be the second fastest declining occupation in the state, losing 30.23% of its workforce between 2022 and 2032. In all, eight occupations in Production Occupations are included on the Top 25 Declining Occupations list.

Transportation and Material Moving Occupations is estimated to gain 11,225 jobs during the projection period, becoming the top growing major group in the state. With 20,350 total annual openings expected, 7,909 could come from employees leaving the workforce, while 11,319 would come from those changing jobs. Growth and expansion are estimated to account for 1,122 annual job openings. The Material Moving Workers occupational family is estimated to grow by 6,892 jobs, while the Motor Vehicle Operators family is estimated to add 3,998 jobs. Stockers and Order Fillers is forecast to increase its workforce by 3,672 jobs, second highest in the state, while Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand, could add 1,880, placing it among the ten highest growing occupations. Taxi Drivers is projected to raise employment levels by 26.26%, becoming the fastest growing occupation in the major group and included on the Top 25 Fastest Growing Occupations list.

Labor Force and Unemployment Rate:

The labor force increased by 31,335 between 2023 and 2024, and employment increased by 27,373 over the same period. Unemployment increased by 3,962 from 2023 to 2024 but has seen a decrease of 33,865 since 2020. The state's unemployment rate increased by 0.2% from 2023 to 2024. Over the 2020-2024 period, the unemployment rate declined 2.7 percent to 3.5% for 2024. The state's unemployment rate was 3.7% in July 2025. The State's monthly unemployment rate remained lower than the U.S. unemployment rate during the first six months of calendar 2025.

Median Household/Per Capita Personal Income:

Arkansas' median household income was \$58,700 in 2024 which increased by \$3,268 from 2023 to 2024 but is below the national median household income of \$77,719 for 2024. Arkansas' per capita personal income in 2024 was \$59,663, an increase of \$5,316 from 2023. Over the 2020-2024 period, the per capita personal income increased by \$12,554. The state's per capita personal income is below the United States per capita personal income of \$72,425.

Wages:

Material Moving Workers was estimated to have the most employees across the state with 73,180 employed in 2024 with an average wage of \$36,687. Food and Beverage Serving Workers was the second largest occupation with 59,590 employed, earning an average wage of \$27,927.

Dermatologists topped the Occupations Paying the Most list with an annual salary of \$390,732. Pathologist Physicians, with an average annual salary of \$250,093, ranked second on the Occupations Paying the Most list.

The entry wage estimate for employers of all sizes was \$28,481 for 2024. The median wage estimate for employers with 250-499 employees was \$43,861, while wages for experienced workers averaged \$65,371 for employers in all size categories.

Of the 1,288,810 estimated employees with hourly wage data, 85,118 made less than \$12 an hour while 380,887 made more than \$27 an hour. Employees making between \$17 and \$21.99 totaled 281,243.

LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AREAS

Arkansas is divided into ten local Workforce Development Areas. We analyzed these ten areas along with their projected percent and numeric change in total employment for all sectors between 2022-2032. The Northwest LWDA is expected to grow at the fastest rate (9.62%) and add the greatest number of jobs (33,243). The Central LWDA is next with growth of 7.87% (adding 15,012 jobs) closely followed by the City of Little Rock LWDA with 7.14% expected growth (15,066 jobs). The Northeast LWDA (5.71%), North Central LWDA (5.63%) and West Central LWDA (5.20%) are all expected to grow at greater than 5%, while the Western LWDA (4.66%) will grow slower than 5%. These are all higher than 2%, which is an economic standard for strong growth. The Southwest LWDA (-.092%), Eastern LWDA (-1.22%) and Southeast LWDA (-2.34%) are all projected to decline.

Most of the job growth are in three Local Workforce Development Areas – Northwest, Little Rock and Central. The three areas together account for about 70.5% of all projected job growth with the Northwest WDA taking the largest share.

1. Central Arkansas WDA:

According to industry projections, the area is expected to experience a gain of 15,012 jobs. Goods-Producing industries are projected to experience a net gain of 1,115 new jobs, while the Services-Providing industries are predicted to gain 13,569 jobs.

Education and Health Services is predicted to be the top growing supersector, adding 3,784 jobs to the local economy. Other Services (except Government) is estimated to be the fastest growing major group, increasing its workforce by 27.48%. Grantmaking and Giving Services is slated to be the top growing industry in Central Arkansas, adding 2,418 new jobs to its workforce. Religious Organizations is projected to be the second highest growing industry and the fastest growing, anticipated to grow by 2,363 jobs, a 44.45% rise in employment. On the negative side of the economy, Paper Manufacturing is predicted to be the top declining industry, cutting 245 jobs from its workforce, while Textile Product Mills is forecast to be the fastest declining industry, cutting 29.17% from its already small workforce.

According to occupational projections, the Central Arkansas LWDA is expected to have 23,629 annual job openings during the projection period, with 9,218 being created due to employees exiting the workforce, 12,910 created due to employees changing jobs, and 1,501 due to growth and expansion. Transportation and Material Moving Occupations leads all major groups in numeric change, increasing its overall workforce by 2,266 jobs. Community and Social Service Occupations is predicted to be the fastest growing major group, adding an estimated 32.94% to its workforce. Driving this growth is Clergy, which is expected to add 974 jobs to its ranks. Nurse Practitioners could be the fastest growing occupation, raising employment levels by 55.60% between 2022 and 2032. On the negative side of the local economy, Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers could see a job reduction of 129, while Adult Basic Education, Adult Secondary Education, and English as a Second Language Instructors is slated to experience a 27.27% loss of its small local workforce. The Office and Administrative Support Occupations major group could see a drop of 63 jobs from its workforce between 2022 and 2032.

The LWDA saw an increase in the labor force of 9,147 to 269,411 from 2023 to 2024, and the labor force increased by 18,033 over the 2020 to 2024 period. Employment increased by 8,352 between 2023 and 2024 and increased by 24,803 over the five-year period. The LWDA has seen a fluctuation in unemployment over the same time periods. From 2023 to 2024, unemployment increased by 795, but from 2020 to 2024, unemployment decreased by 6,770. The LWDA's unemployment rate dropped by 3.0% over the five-year period. In 2025, the unemployment rate fluctuated, settling at 3.9% in July 2025.

2. City of Little Rock WDA:

According to industry projections, the City of Little Rock LWDA is expected to gain 15,066 jobs between 2022 and 2032. Goods-Producing industries are projected to experience a net gain of 1,430 jobs, while the Services-Providing industries are predicted to gain 13,292.

Education and Health Services is estimated to be the top growing supersector, adding 4,619 new jobs. Manufacturing is projected to see a gain of 17.55%, becoming the fastest growing supersector. Driving this growth is Wood Product Manufacturing, which is anticipated to be the fastest growing industry in the City of Little Rock LWDA, experiencing a 1,626.67% growth between 2022 and 2032. Insurance Carriers is predicted to be the top growing industry, increasing its workforce by 2,166 jobs. On the negative side of the labor market, Private Households is slated to decline by 197 jobs, while Support Activities for Agriculture and Forestry could see a 30.77% reduction in its workforce. Overall, Information is predicted to be the top and fastest declining supersector, cutting an estimated 366 jobs, or 15.92% of its workforce.

According to occupational projections, City of Little Rock LWDA employers are expected to have 23,795 annual openings during the projection period. Of these, 9,924 would be created due to employees leaving the workforce, while 12,364 would be created due to employees changing jobs. Around 1,507 job openings could be available annually due to growth and expansion of the workforce. Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations is estimated to be the top growing major group, increasing its workforce by 2,183 jobs. Computer and Mathematical Occupations is slated to be the fastest growing major group, raising employment levels by 14.90%. Home Health and Personal Care Aides is predicted to be the top growing occupation, increasing by 835 jobs. Tour and Travel Guides is estimated to more than double in employment during the projection period, becoming the fastest growing occupation. On the negative side of the local job market, Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive is forecast to lose 122 jobs during the projection period, while Word Processors and Typists is predicted to cut a third of its workforce during the projection period, becoming the fastest declining occupation in the area.

The labor force increased in the LWDA by 5,077 from 2023 to 2024 and saw an increase of 7,087 between 2020 and 2024. Employment increased by 4,563 from 2023 to 2024 and increased by 10,737 from 2020 to 2024. Unemployment and the unemployment rate increased between 2023 to 2024, with unemployment increasing by 511 and the unemployment rate increasing by 0.3% to 3.5% in 2024. The unemployment rate fluctuated from 2020 to 2024, but ultimately settled at 3.5% in 2024, 4.1% lower than 2020. The area's unemployment rate fluctuated from January 2025 through July 2025, settling to 4.3% in July 2025.

3. Eastern Arkansas WDA:

With a net loss of 474 jobs this LWDA is one of three areas in the state to experience a decline of

jobs. Goods-Producing industries are projected to experience a net loss of 337 jobs, while the Services-Providing industries are predicted to experience a small net gain of eight jobs.

Leisure and Hospitality is estimated to be one of only three supersectors in the Eastern Arkansas LWDA expected to see growth, adding 183 jobs. Professional and Business Services is slated to be the fastest growing supersector, increasing its workforce by 5.72%. Warehousing and Storage is forecast to be the top and fastest growing industry, increasing its workforce by 58.87%, or 282 new jobs between 2022 and 2032. On the negative side of the job market, Manufacturing is predicted to be the top declining supersector, losing 174 jobs, while Financial Activities is forecast to be the fastest declining supersector, cutting 6.91% from its workforce. Elementary and Secondary Schools is slated to be the top declining industry, with a drop of 299 jobs, while Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing is set to lose 53.68% of its workforce, becoming the fastest declining industry.

According to occupational projections, the Eastern Arkansas LWDA is expected to have 4,397 annual job openings during the projection period, with 2,004 being created due to employees leaving the workforce and 2,440 related to those changing jobs. Job opportunities related to growth and expansion could be reduced by 47 jobs annually. Transportation and Material Moving Occupations is estimated to be the top growing major group, adding 212 jobs to its workforce, while Healthcare Support Occupations is expected to be the fastest growing major group, increasing its workforce by 12.53%. Driving this growth is Home Health and Personal Care Aides, which is slated to add 181 new jobs during the projection period. Nurse Practitioners is projected to be the fastest growing occupation, gaining 40% more workers between 2022 and 2032. On the negative side of the labor market, Cashiers is forecast to cut 184 jobs from its workforce, becoming the top declining occupation, while Structural Metal Fabricators and Fitters could reduce its already small local workforce by 41.18%, becoming the fastest declining occupation in the area. Eight major groups are predicted to see job loss. Office and Administrative Support Occupations are estimated to lose 326 jobs, while Sales and Related Occupations could cut 9.21% from its workforce.

The labor force in the Eastern Arkansas LWDA increased by 570 to 42,987 in 2024 from 2023 but decreased by 2,747 from 2020 to 2024. Employment increased from 2023 to 2024, gaining 505 workers to 40,988. Unemployment saw a slight increase from 2023 to 2024, having 65 more unemployed, bringing the unemployment rate from 4.6% to 4.7%. Since the beginning of 2025, the unemployment rate fluctuated from 5.6% in January, ending July 2025 at 6.0%.

4. North Central Arkansas WDA:

According to industry projections, the North Central Arkansas LWDA is projected to add 4,804 jobs from 2022 through 2032. Goods-Producing industries are expected to have a net gain of 1,400 jobs, while the Services-Providing industries could add 3,318.

Education and Health Services is projected to be the top growing supersector in the North Central Arkansas LWDA with a gain of 1,409 jobs. Ambulatory Health Care Services leads all industries in numeric change, anticipating 876 new jobs to the local economy. Professional and Business Services is predicted to be the fastest growing supersector, increasing its workforce by 16.84%. Business, Professional, Labor, Political, and Similar Organizations is slated to be the fastest growing industry, increasing its workforce by 57.64% by 2032. On the negative side of the labor market, Truck Transportation is slated to lose 214 jobs between 2022 and 2032. Federal Government, Excluding Post Office could lose 27.71% of its local workforce, becoming

the fastest declining industry. Overall, the Government supersector could cut 217 jobs, or 4.07% of its workforce.

According to occupational projections, the area is expected to have 10,278 total job openings annually between 2022 and 2032. Of these, 4,523 would be from those exiting the workforce, while 5,275 would be from those changing jobs. Another 480 would be related to growth and expansion. Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations is predicted to be the top growing major group, adding 711 new jobs, while Healthcare Support Occupations is slated to be the fastest growing major group, increasing its workforce by 16.16%. Home Health and Personal Care Aides is projected to raise staffing levels by 326 jobs, becoming the top growing occupation. Nurse Practitioners is estimated to increase its workforce by 60.74% during the projection period. On the negative side of the labor market, Cashiers is projected to lose 114 jobs by 2032, becoming the top declining occupation, while Forest and Conservation Technicians is forecast to cut over a quarter of its workforce, becoming the fastest declining occupation.

The North Central Arkansas LWDA labor force increased by 2,484 from 2023 to 2024 and increased by 1,635 between 2020 and 2024. Employment increased by 2,369 and unemployment increased by 115 from 2023 to 2024. The unemployment rate stayed at 3.8% from 2023 to 2024. The unemployment rate fluctuated in 2025 but ended at 4.6% in July.

5. Northeast Arkansas WDA:

The Northeast Arkansas WDA is expected to gain 6,791 jobs, an increase of 5.71 percent between 2022 and 2032. Goods-Producing industries are predicted to experience a net gain of 1,326 jobs, while ServicesProviding industries could see an increase of 5,434.

Education and Health Services is expected to be the top growing supersector, adding 3,101 new jobs. Natural Resources and Mining is anticipated to be the fastest growing supersector, increasing its workforce by 15.43%. Social Assistance is estimated to add 1,249 jobs to the labor market, becoming the top growing industry in the Northeast Arkansas LWDA. Animal Production and Aquaculture is forecast to more than double in size between 2022 and 2032, becoming the fastest growing industry. On the negative side of the economy, Transportation Equipment Manufacturing is slated to be the top declining industry, cutting 297 jobs, while Private Households is projected to be the fastest declining industry in the area, losing 40.35% of its workforce between 2022 and 2032. Overall, the Information supersector could lose 128 jobs, or 19.08% of its workforce.

According to occupational projections, the Northeast Arkansas LWDA is expected to have 14,232 annual openings during the projection period with 6,069 created due to employees leaving the workforce, 7,484 from those changing jobs, and 679 related to growth and expansion. Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations is estimated to be the top growing major group, adding 1,303 jobs to the labor market. Nurse Practitioners is predicted to be the fastest growing occupation, raising employment levels by 56.39%. Healthcare Support Occupations is forecast to be the fastest growing major group, increasing its workforce by 23.29%. Driving this growth is Home Health and Personal Care Aides, which is slated to grow by 725 employees. On the declining side of the local labor market, Miscellaneous Assemblers and Fabricators is projected to lose 231 jobs during the projection period. Broadcast Announcers and Radio Disc Jockeys could lose a third of its workforce, becoming the fastest declining occupation in Northeast Arkansas. Overall, the Office and Administrative Support Occupations is predicted to lose 272 jobs, or 2.30% of its workforce.

The Northeast Arkansas LWDA labor force increased to 127,666 in 2024, or by 4,670 since 2023, and increased over the 2020-2024 period by 15,509. Employment increased by 4,307 and unemployment increased by 363 from 2023 to 2024. The unemployment rate rose to 3.5%, an increase of 0.2% from 2023 to 2024. The area's unemployment rate ended at 4.5% by July 2025.

6. Northwest Arkansas WDA:

According to industry projections, this area is projected to add an estimated 33,243 jobs from 2022 and 2032. Goods-Producing industries are estimated to gain 2,526 jobs, while Services-Providing industries are forecast to add 29,609 jobs.

Education and Health Services is expected to be the top growing supersector, increasing employment by 9,064 jobs. Other Services (except Government) could be the fastest growing supersector, raising employment levels by 16.12%. The top three fastest growing industries are in this supersector with Business, Professional, Labor, Political, and Similar Organizations leading with a growth of 67.44%. Management of Companies and Enterprises is slated to be the top growing industry with an increase of 5,012 jobs. On the negative side of the labor market, Animal Production is predicted to lose 415 jobs, or 17.97% of its workforce, while Mining (except Oil and Gas) is forecast to cut 41.56% of its workforce, becoming the fastest declining industry in the area. In all, the Natural Resources and Mining supersector could lose 12.06% of its local workforce.

According to occupational projections, the Northwest Arkansas LWDA is projected to have 42,924 annual job openings, of which 17,612 would be created from employees leaving the workforce, 21,988 from those changing jobs, and 3,324 from growth and expansion. Management Occupations is predicted to be the top growing major group, adding 3,778 new jobs, while the Computer and Mathematical Occupations major group is slated to increase its workforce by 25.97%, becoming the fastest growing major group. Home Health and Personal Care Aides is projected to increase its workforce by 1,408 jobs, becoming the top growing occupation, while Nurse Practitioners could be the fastest growing occupation, increasing its ranks by 60.50%. On the negative side of the labor market, the Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations major group is estimated to lose 255 jobs, or 9.55% of its workforce. Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers is predicted to cut 235 jobs, becoming the top declining occupation, while Data Entry Keyers is expected to lose 21.78% of its workforce, becoming the fastest declining occupation.

The Northwest Arkansas LWDA labor force and employment increased from 2023 to 2024, with the labor force gaining 6,150 to 362,870 and employment increasing by 4,838 to 352,497. Unemployment increased by 1,312 to 10,373 in 2023 but has seen a decrease of 5,221 since 2020. The unemployment rate rose by 0.4% from 2023 to 2024 to 2.9%. The area's unemployment rate fluctuated from 2020 but ultimately settled at 2.9 in 2024. The unemployment rate ended July 2025 at 3.6% percent.

7. Southeast Arkansas WDA:

According to industry projections, the Southeast Arkansas LWDA is expected to lose the most jobs of any workforce area, cutting 1,817 jobs between 2022 and 2032. Goods-Producing industries are projected to experience a net loss of 973 jobs, while the Services-Providing industries are predicted to experience a net loss of 547 jobs.

Leisure and Hospitality is predicted to be the top growing supersector, with a gain of 307 employees between 2022 and 2032. Professional and Business Services is forecast to raise employment levels by 6.63%, becoming the fastest growing supersector. Social Assistance is

projected to be the top growing industry, increasing employment by 258 jobs, or 10.71%. Waste Management and Remediation Services is slated to be the fastest growing industry, increasing its workforce by 38.64%. On the negative side of the labor market, Paper Manufacturing is set to lose 568 jobs, becoming the top declining industry, while Newspaper, Periodical, Book, and Directory Publishers is forecast to cut 62.32% of its workforce between 2022 and 2032. Overall, the Information supersector could cut 35.25% of its workforce by 2032.

Southeast Arkansas LWDA employers are expected to have 8,294 job openings annually during the 2022-2032 projection period. Of these, 3,805 would be from employees leaving the workforce, while 4,671 could be created from those changing jobs. Growth and expansion could be reduced by 182 job openings each year. Healthcare Support Occupations is projected to be the top and fastest growing major group, adding 271 jobs to its workforce, an increase of 8.88%. Driving this growth is Home Health and Personal Care Aides, which is slated to add 271 jobs to the labor market. Personal Financial Advisors is projected to be the fastest growing industry, adding 56.63% to its workforce. On the negative side of the local economy, Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers is anticipated to cut 277 jobs, while Advertising Sales Agents is slated to have a 37.50% reduction in its small local workforce. Office and Administrative Support Occupations is expected to be the top and fastest declining major group, losing an estimated 708 jobs, or 8.68% of its workforce. Overall, 13 of the 22 major groups are set to experience a net loss of jobs between 2022 and 2032.

Southeast Arkansas saw a decrease in the labor force of 2,815 to 72,562 from 2023 to 2024, and employment decreased by 3,020 to 69,204 for the same time period. Both the labor force and employment have decreased since 2020 by 7,389 and 5,148 respectively. Unemployment increased by 205 to 3,358 from 2023 to 2024 and the unemployment rate increased to 4.6% in 2024. After starting at 5.4% in January 2025, the unemployment rate fluctuated, ultimately settling to 5.8% in July 2025.

8. Southwest Arkansas WDA:

According to industry projections, employment is projected to see a reduction of 800 jobs. Goods-Producing industries are predicted to experience a net loss of 772 jobs, while Services-Providing industries are estimated to see a net gain of 236 jobs.

Professional and Business Services is predicted to be the top and fastest growing supersector, with a gain of 236 employees between 2022 and 2032, an increase of 5.22%. Social Assistance is projected to be the top growing industry, increasing employment by 290 jobs, or 14.27%. Grantmaking and Giving Services could be the fastest growing industry, increasing its workforce by 31.58 percent. On the other side of the labor market, Machinery Manufacturing is anticipated to lose 716 jobs, or more the 80 percent of its workforce by 2032, becoming the top and fastest declining industry in Southwest Arkansas.

According to occupational projections, Southwest Arkansas LWDA employers are estimated to have 9,450 job openings annually. Of these, 4,275 annual openings are due to employees leaving the workforce and 5,255 from those changing jobs. However, the overall decline in employment could reduce annual job openings by 80. Transportation and Material Moving Occupations is predicted to grow by 316 jobs, becoming the top growing major group. Healthcare Support Occupations is slated to be the fastest growing major group, raising employment levels by 9.45%. Driving this growth is Home Health and Personal Care Aides, which is predicted to increase its workforce by 251 jobs, becoming the top growing occupation in the area. Nurse Practitioners is estimated to grow by 39.16 percent, becoming the fastest growing industry. On

the negative side of the local economy, Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers is set to be the top declining occupation, losing an estimated 306 jobs, while Broadcast Announcers and Radio Disc Jockeys is projected to cut 34.78% of its already small local workforce, becoming the fastest declining occupation in Southwest Arkansas. Overall, Office and Administrative Support Occupations could be the top declining major group with 726 jobs being cut, while Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations could be the fastest declining major group, cutting 14.63% from its workforce.

The Southwest Arkansas LWDA labor force decreased from 2023 to 2024 by 1,257 to 86,068, while employment decreased by 1,447 to 82,490. Over the five-year period from 2020 to 2024, the area has seen a decrease of 5,072 in the labor force and decrease of 2,694 in employment. Unemployment increased by 190 from 2023 to 2024 but decreased by 2,378 over the five-year period. The unemployment rate rose by 0.3% from 2023 to 2024 to 4.2%. After various fluctuations in the unemployment rate during 2025, the rate settled at 5.2% in July 2025.

9. West Central WDA:

According to industry projections, the West Central Arkansas LWDA is estimated to experience a gain of 6,427 jobs. GoodsProducing industries are projected to see a net gain of 1,224 jobs, while the Services-Providing industries are predicted to add 5,072.

Education and Health Services is predicted to be the top growing supersector, adding 1,906 new jobs to the local labor market. Ambulatory Health Care Services is slated to add 1,099 new jobs by 2032. Grantmaking and Giving Services is predicted to be the fastest growing industry, increasing by 37.72% between 2022 and 2032. Construction is estimated to be the fastest growing supersector, increasing its workforce by 12.46%. On the negative side of the labor market, Federal Government, Excluding Post Office could cut 194 jobs, or more than a quarter of its workforce, becoming the top and fastest declining industry in West Central Arkansas. Overall, Government jobs could be cut by 238, or 3.16% of its local workforce.

According to occupational projections, the West Central Arkansas LWDA is estimated to have 15,133 annual job openings during the projection period. Of these, 6,552 openings could be due to those exiting the workforce, 7,938 from those changing jobs, and 643 due to growth and expansion. Transportation and Material Moving Occupations is estimated to be the top growing major group, adding 1,168 jobs to the labor market, an 8.99% increase. Healthcare Support Occupations is predicted to be the fastest growing supersector, increasing its workforce by 19.21%. Driving this growth is Home Health and Personal Care Aides, which is predicted to add 601 jobs to its ranks, an almost 32% growth. Nurse Practitioners is forecast to be the fastest growing occupation, estimated to raise its workforce by 58% over the next ten years. On the negative side of the economy, Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers is projected to lose 170 jobs, becoming the top declining occupation, or 3.06% of its workforce, while Sewing Machine Operators could cut 54.55% from its workforce, becoming the fastest declining occupation in the area.

In 2024, the labor force and employment increased in the West Central Arkansas LWDA. The labor force increased by 5,091 to a total of 134,894, while employment increased 4,869 to a total of 129,672. The labor force increased by 4,409 from 2020 to 2024 and employment increased by 7,716. Unemployment increased from 2023 to 2024 by 222 to 5,222. The unemployment rate stayed at 3.9%. The unemployment rate fluctuated through 2025 but ended at 4.9% in July.

10. Western Arkansas WDA:

According to industry projections, the area is expected to add 5,484 jobs. Goods-Producing industries are projected to have a net loss of 407 jobs, a 1.50 percent decline, while the Services-Providing industries are estimated to experience a net gain of 5,988 jobs, a 7.34% increase.

Education and Health Services is expected to be the top and fastest growing supersector in Western Arkansas with a gain of 2,409 jobs during the projection period, an increase of 10.08%. Driving this growth is Ambulatory Health Care Services, which is slated to add 1,020 jobs during the 2022-2032 projection period. Motion Picture and Sound Recording Industries could be the fastest growing industry, increasing its workforce by 56%. The Manufacturing supersector is expected to experience a decline of 427 jobs, or 1.99% of its workforce. Leading this decline is Food Manufacturing, which is forecast to cut 463 jobs, or 4.99% of its workforce. Half of the Top 10 Declining Industries list are in Manufacturing. Animal Production and Aquaculture is predicted to be the fastest declining industry, cutting 24.37% of its local workforce.

According to occupational projections, Western Arkansas employers are projected to have 13,968 annual job openings. Of these, 6,028 are estimated to come from occupational exits, 7,392 from occupational transfers, and 548 due to growth and expansion of jobs. Healthcare Support Occupations is predicted to be the top and fastest growing major group, increasing by 881 jobs, or 18.03%. Driving this growth is Home Health and Personal Care Aides, which is forecast to increase staffing by 561 jobs, a 32.98% rise in staffing. Nurse Practitioners is estimated to be the fastest growing occupation in the area with a gain of 59.65%. On the negative side of the economy, Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers could cut 241 jobs, from its ranks, while Broadcast Announcers and Radio Disc Jockeys is slated to lose 30.77% of its already small local workforce.

The Western Arkansas LWDA labor force increased 112,410 to 112,410 and employment increased by 2,036 to 108,454 from 2023 to 2024. Over the 2020-2024 period, the labor force increased by 1,316 while employment increased by 3,873. Unemployment and the unemployment rate both fluctuated from 2020 to 2024. Unemployment ultimately increased by 184 to 3,956 unemployed, while the unemployment rate rose by 0.1% to 3.5%. The area's unemployment rate fluctuated through 20205, ending at 4.2% in July.

(iii) Education and Skill Levels of the Workforce. Provide an analysis of the educational and skill levels of the workforce.

Title I Response:

Education and Skill Levels of the Workforce.

Education:

When considering the number of annual openings an occupation is projected to have, the following occupations are as follows:

Skills

The skills of critical thinking, active listening, speaking, monitoring, and reading comprehension are as follows.

A knowledge represents the acquisition of facts and principles about a domain of information.

Occupations requiring a bachelor's degree are expected to add 32,165 jobs during the projection period. Occupations requiring a high school diploma or equivalent could add 25,421 jobs but could also have 71,092 annual job openings between 2022 and 2032. Job seekers with at least an associate degree could see 41,987 new jobs and 33,625 annual job openings when they are ready to enter the workforce. Jobs requiring a master's degree could see the largest percent change, with a 17.61 percent gain in employment over the 10-year period. Every educational category is forecast to see net gains in jobs.

When considering the number of annual openings an occupation is projected to have, the following occupations in the following tables stand out:

Top Occupations Requiring High School Diploma or Less

SOC Code	SOC Title	2022 Emp.	2032 Emp.	Annual Open-Exits	Annual Open-Transfers	Annual Open-Change	Annual Open-Total
35-3023	Fast Food and Counter Workers	37,015	38,931	4,193	4,476	192	8,861
41-2011	Cashiers	33,006	32,327	3,142	3,166	-68	6,240
53-7065	Stockers and Order Fillers	28,693	32,365	1,899	2,989	367	5,255
41-2031	Retail Salespersons	32,183	33,945	2,170	2,618	176	4,964
11-9013	Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers	42,062	40,311	2,878	1,372	-175	4,075
53-7062	Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	29,069	30,949	1,433	2,438	188	4,059
31-1120	Home Health and Personal Care Aides	20,311	24,665	1,799	1,500	435	3,734
43-9061	Office Clerks, General	29,080	28,727	1,747	1,699	-35	3,411
35-3031	Waiters and Waitresses	15,113	14,950	1,293	1,816	-16	3,093

37-2011	Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	18,627	20,234	1,353	1,351	161	2,865

Top Occupations Requiring Associate Degree/Postsecondary Training

SOC Code	SOC Title	2022 Emp.	2032 Emp.	Annual Open-Exits	Annual Open-Transfers	Annual Open-Change	Annual Open-Total
53-3032	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	36,392	37,992	1,684	2,179	160	4,023
31-1131	Nursing Assistants	16,804	17,518	1,086	1,343	71	2,500
43-3031	Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks	12,237	12,089	788	620	-15	1,393
25-9045	Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary	10,119	10,791	596	618	67	1,281
29-2061	Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	10,933	11,656	458	397	72	927
31-9092	Medical Assistants	4,267	5,125	220	377	86	683
25-2011	Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education	4,340	5,423	223	288	108	619
49-3023	Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics	6,776	7,024	240	341	25	606
31-9091	Dental Assistants	3,014	3,619	184	270	60	514
49-9021	Heating, Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration Mechanics and Installers	4,018	4,396	132	217	38	387

Top Occupations Requiring Bachelor Degree or Higher

SOC Code	SOC Title	2022 Emp.	2032 Emp.	Annual Open-Exits	Annual Open-Transfers	Annual Open-Change	Annual Open-Total
11-1021	General and Operations Managers	34,518	38,139	905	1,951	362	3,218
29-1141	Registered Nurses	28,753	30,915	990	614	216	1,820
21-2011	Clergy	12,964	14,174	542	560	121	1,223
25-2021	Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	11,871	12,198	404	396	33	833
13-2011	Accountants and Auditors	8,618	9,688	283	414	107	804
25-2031	Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	11,524	11,866	339	377	34	750
11-9111	Medical and Health Services Managers	6,683	8,764	215	319	208	742
13-1111	Management Analysts	6,683	7,889	251	335	121	707
11-3031	Financial Managers	7,096	8,612	202	320	152	674
13-1161	Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	5,341	6,474	185	344	113	642

Skills

Employment projections for 2022-2032 were combined with skills data from the Occupational Information Network (O*NET) to estimate worker skills that are more in-demand. The content skills listed are developed capacities that facilitate learning or more rapid acquisition of knowledge.

Skill	2022 Employment	2032 Employment	Numeric Change

Active Learning	303,110	327,717	24,607
Active Listening	1,074,736	1,135,375	60,639
Complex Problem Solving	156,923	172,703	15,780
Coordination	775,518	812,428	36,910
Critical Thinking	1,121,078	1,183,697	62,619
Equipment Maintenance	75,789	80,851	5,062
Equipment Selection	714	702	-12
Installation	13,748	15,106	1,358
Instructing	80,937	85,834	4,897
Judgment and Decision Making	446,425	475,230	28,805
Learning Strategies	94,817	102,024	7,207
Management of Financial Resources	10,031	11,689	1,658
Management of Personnel Resources	105,221	109,875	4,654
Mathematics	100,172	102,697	2,525
Monitoring	895,736	939,715	43,979
Negotiation	89,800	96,042	6,242
Operation and Control	231,816	243,738	11,922
Operation Monitoring	252,823	265,323	12,500
Operations Analysis	12,121	13,841	1,720
Persuasion	190,778	199,835	9,057
Quality Control Analysis	135,403	142,410	7,007
Reading Comprehension	951,860	1,005,085	53,225
Repairing	74,389	79,740	5,351
Science	11,314	13,978	2,664
Service Orientation	502,369	528,494	26,125
Social Perceptiveness	687,077	721,407	34,330
Speaking	1,030,088	1,088,877	58,789
Systems Analysis	22,434	25,595	3,161
Systems Evaluation	12,666	14,836	2,170

Time Management	532,807	557,002	24,195
Troubleshooting	93,379	99,639	6,260
Writing	480,002	511,282	31,280

A knowledge represents the acquisition of facts and principles about a domain of information.

Knowledge	2022 Employment	2032 Employment	Numeric Change
Administration and Management	680,098	722,501	42,403
Biology	130,103	138,844	8,741
Building and Construction	108,943	116,690	7,747
Chemistry	116,731	124,961	8,230
Administrative	504,983	533,175	28,192
Communications and Media	29,630	31,806	2,176
Computers and Electronics	613,647	645,838	32,191
Customer and Personal Service	1,041,750	1,106,079	64,329
Design	107,742	114,655	6,913
Economics and Accounting	113,002	121,631	8,629
Education and Training	762,949	808,303	45,354
Engineering and Technology	151,883	161,280	9,397
English Language	1,058,252	1,124,350	66,098
Fine Arts	5,460	5,943	483
Food Production	97,936	102,987	5,051
Foreign Language	2,208	2,081	-127
Geography	59,625	62,083	2,458
History and Archeology	26,679	28,250	1,571
Law and Government	121,777	132,705	10,928
Mathematics	816,726	855,081	38,355
Mechanical	389,712	407,403	17,691
Medicine and Dentistry	92,187	104,357	12,170
Personnel and Human Resources	202,569	219,633	17,064

Philosophy and Theology	49,644	54,143	4,499
Physics	49,086	53,865	4,779
Production and Processing	327,866	342,602	14,736
Psychology	281,146	304,466	23,320
Public Safety and Security	383,582	404,877	21,295
Sales and Marketing	276,396	291,837	15,441
Sociology and Anthropology	112,139	124,023	11,884
Telecommunications	11,743	11,548	-195
Therapy and Counseling	106,405	118,996	12,591
Transportation	159,578	167,744	8,166

Title II Response:

According to the US Census, Arkansas has a population of 3,011,524 individuals. The highest level of education among people aged 25 years and older includes: no high school diploma 6.6%, high school diploma 33.1%, Associate's 8.8%, Bachelor's 17.1%, Master's or higher, including a professional degree, is 10%. The Office of Adult Education (AOE) program served 19,021 individuals in the 2024-2025 fiscal year, which is an increase of 5% over the previous fiscal year. Adult learners enroll in adult education to attain their Arkansas High School Diploma, participate in English learning activities, workforce preparation activities, and job training programs to meet the demands outlined in Pillar IV of America's Talent Strategy goals. Arkansas adult education enrollment in the 2024-2025 program year was 11,447 individuals. Of those 11,447 participants, only 317 entered at the 9th-grade level or higher, while 11,130 entered below the 9th-grade level. 3,006 of the total enrolled entered as English as a second language learners, with Hispanic/Latinos seeing a decrease in enrollment of -.8% from the 2023-2024 program year.

The 25-44 year-old age group saw the highest increase in enrollment as a total, and also as a percentage of the overall enrollment, with 4916 in that age group comprising 43% of the total enrollment. For the 2024-2025 program year, 10,683 Educational Functioning Level Gains were made. Of the other measurable skill gain indicators that were identified, 2,060 secondary credentials were attained; 13 transcripts were identified in postsecondary education; 578 milestones were met for on-the-job or apprentice training; and 974 occupational skills exams were passed that were required for benchmarks to be met and skill gains to be recorded that helped meet each of the performance accountability requirements under WIOA.

<https://data.census.gov/table?q=arkansas+educational+attainment>

<https://nrs.ed.gov/rt/reports/longitudinal>

(iv) Comparison of Economic and Workforce Analytical Conclusion. Describe areas of opportunity for meeting hiring, education, and skills needs identified in the economy compared to the assets available in the labor force in the state.

Title I Response:

Arkansas is a diverse state in both available workforce and industries. Arkansas employers face an opportunity with helping their staff develop the critical skills needed for the modern workforce. The diversity of post-secondary colleges and universities work collaboratively with industry to provide the training and education needed. Arkansas' labor market continues to be strong with a lower unemployment rate than the national average. In recent years, the ratio of unemployed persons per job opening in the state has been near historic lows. Rural areas are experiencing population and labor force declines while central and northwest Arkansas are experiencing nearly all the population, labor force, and job growth in the state.

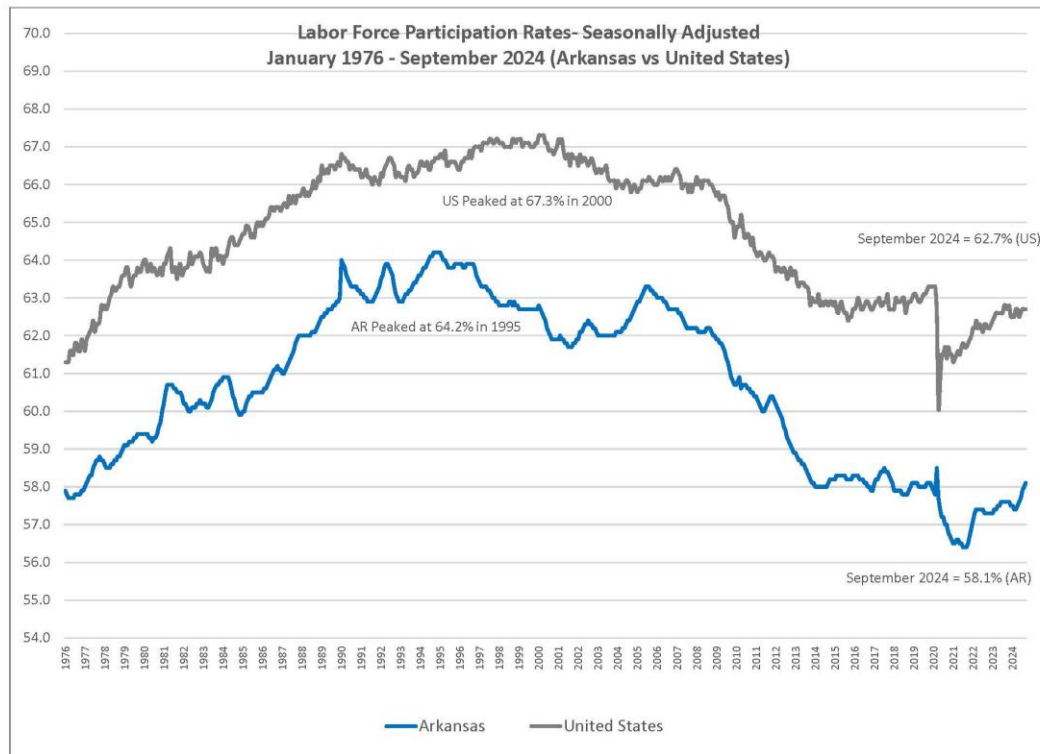
Retail, food production, manufacturing, transportation, and related industries are the backbone of Arkansas' economy. Arkansas' aging population is driving the increased need for healthcare services, health practitioners, and healthcare support workers. Arkansas currently is projected to need healthcare providers on many fronts, largely impacting the following occupations: nurse practitioners, nursing assistants, home & personal care aides, childcare workers, medical assistants, specific practitioners, and multiple human services occupations.

Many in the workforce face difficulties in working that WIOA partners can help address. The positive correlation between education and economic growth continues to track beyond high school and into postsecondary outcomes. First, a college degree is crucial to increasing a person's earning potential. Second, the economic gains of postsecondary education aren't limited to individuals.

There is a direct correlation between increased educational attainment and lower levels of unemployment. People with higher education levels also earn more on average than those with lower education levels. According to the Current Population Survey, educational attainment also has an impact on Labor Force Participation Rates. In this study, Labor Force Participation in Arkansas: A Comprehensive Study May 2023, those with higher educational attainment are also more likely to be active in the Labor Force. In 2022, Arkansans (Age 25+) with less than a High School Diploma participated in the Labor Force at a rate of 38.8%. Arkansans with a bachelor's degree or higher (Age 25+) had a LFPR of 66.8%.

The Arkansas LFPR has risen steadily through the Covid-19 pandemic recovery, tracking the nationwide trend. Overall, the Arkansas economy shows a strong positive trend in this period. Bolstering this assertion are recent announcements of major corporate expansion and investment projects in Arkansas. Further, as also referenced elsewhere in this plan, in the pandemic recovery years, Atlas Van Lines has rated Arkansas #1 nationally more than once in its annual rankings based on the ratio of state in-bound to out-bound movers ('net in-bound movers').

On the other hand, the following chart illustrates the persistence of the Arkansas LFPR relative to the U.S. average over decades. Although there is a recent positive trend, the gap is still significant, not least because of its persistence through up and down economic turns.



Another symptom of labor force health is that roughly one in four Arkansans are enrolled in Medicaid, which reports indicate includes on the order of 220,000 able-bodied, working age adults, approximately 130,000 of those working and the remaining 90,000 not working.

Further, during the economic expansion associated with the pandemic recovery, Arkansas has generally had an unemployment rate below the U.S. average and a corresponding job openings to unemployed ratio almost double the national average. Thus, despite a relatively high quantity of job openings, the high percentage of those not participating in the labor force is persistent. This highlights gaps and presents opportunities for the state.

The map and tables on the following of the Arkansas office of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicate estimated numbers of working age individuals (18 to 64) that are out of the labor force (OOLF) and estimated numbers of unemployed. These indicators are shown at both the county level and within nine U.S. Department of Labor, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) workforce development areas. Note that the City of Little Rock and Central Arkansas workforce development areas operate separately yet are combined for purposes of this content.

Out of the Labor Force (OOLF) and Unemployed by County (2024)



Definitions:

OOLF = civilian non-institutionalized residents Aged 18-64 that are not employed or unemployed

Unemployed = civilian non-institutionalized residents Aged 16+ that are not employed but have actively looked for work in the last 4 weeks



Data calculated and provided by the
Arkansas Department of Commerce,
Workforce Policy and Innovation,
Labor Market Information

County by LWDA	Number of Unemployed (2024)	Aged 18-64 Out of the Labor Force (2023)
Faulkner	1,984	17,160
Lonoke	1,053	9,284
Monroe	115	1,028
Prairie	135	1,148
Saline	1,849	11,407
Central LWDA (minus Pulaski County)	5,136	40,027
City of Little Rock LWDA (Pulaski County)	7,041	50,213
Crittenden	911	7,755
Cross	272	2,621
Lee	126	1,603
Phillips	287	3,928
St. Francis	404	4,149
Eastern LWDA	2,000	20,056

County by LWDA	Number of Unemployed (2024)	Aged 18-64 Out of the Labor Force (2023)
Gleburne	384	4,489
Fulton	171	3,000
Independence	551	5,513
Izard	239	3,416
Jackson	243	3,212
Sharp	255	3,633
Stone	195	2,918
Van Buren	251	3,361
White	1,258	14,856
Woodruff	106	601
North Central LWDA	3,653	45,009
Clay	231	2,625
Craighead	1,745	14,758
Greene	741	8,274
Lawrence	246	3,213
Mississippi	834	5,103
Poinsett	368	3,783
Randolph	284	3,657
Northeast LWDA	4,449	41,414
Baxter	670	6,972
Benton	4,331	25,664
Boone	558	5,696
Carroll	431	4,513
Madison	241	2,177
Marion	270	4,091
Newton	112	1,494
Searcy	121	1,279
Washington	3,639	32,187
Northwest LWDA	10,773	84,933
Arkansas	262	1,995
Ashley	375	4,514
Bradley	182	2,328
Chicot	181	2,085
Cleveland	111	1,561
Desho	275	2,180
Draw	121	2,958
Grant	252	2,781
Jefferson	1,216	12,755
Lincoln	178	1,688
Southeast LWDA	3,857	34,825
Calhoun	76	941
Columbia	356	5,373
Dallas	101	941
Hempstead	312	3,021
Howard	169	2,293
Lafayette	110	1,495
Little River	201	2,066
Miller	731	8,758
Nevada	129	2,204
Ouachita	393	3,948
Sevier	325	2,281
Union	796	6,859
Southwest LWDA	3,581	40,178
Crawford	935	10,944
Franklin	248	3,140
Logan	336	3,979
Polk	320	3,767
Scott	136	1,563
Sebastian	1,981	19,865
Western LWDA	3,956	43,257
Clay	231	2,625
Craighead	1,745	14,758
Greene	741	8,274
Lawrence	246	3,213
Mississippi	834	5,103
Poinsett	368	3,783
Randolph	284	3,657
North Central LWDA	3,653	45,009

These estimated populations of unemployed and OOLF total more than 500,000 Arkansans. It is important to note that these numbers include individuals unable to work and gainfully choosing not to work, such as those with disabilities and spouses choosing not to work. However, considering the persistently low LFPR in Arkansas and historical lack of specific consideration of these populations in

developing workforce goals and strategies, these populations represent substantial opportunity to reach and serve more individuals, directly impacting workforce and economic outcomes. As a comparison reference, all WIOA programs combined (Titles I, II, III, and IV) reported serving on the order of 81,000 individuals statewide in program year 2023 (roughly 70% under Title III).

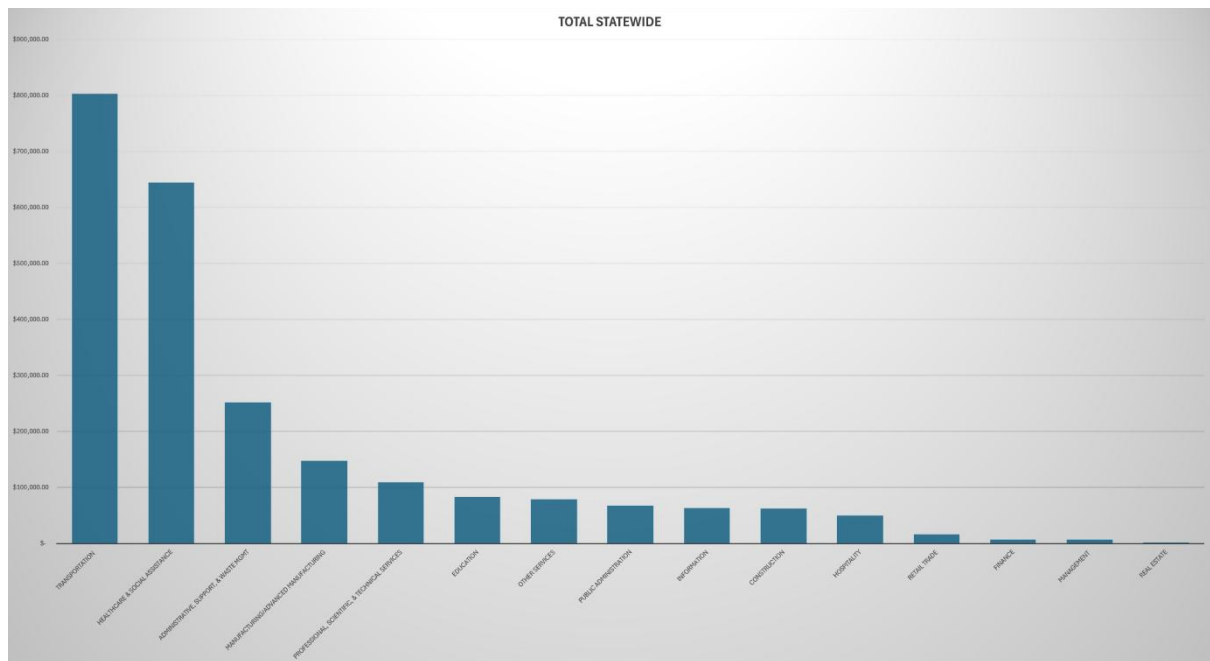
The following Employment by Industry table illustrates the top industries in Arkansas according to number employed. Data includes employment counts, 2024-25 growth estimates, and sources from BLS, CES, Arkansas Labor Market summaries, and official data tools. Source URLs are text only (not active links).

Employment by Industry	Est. Jobs (2025)	Employer Activity Examples	2024-25 Growth	Sources (Text URLs)
Education & Health Services	200,000+	Teaching, hospitals, outpatient care, social services	+8,700 jobs	bls.gov/regions/southwest/arkansas.htm; discover.arkansas.gov/Industry-Employment-by-Sector
Government	200,000	Public administration, public education, safety services	+2,000 jobs est.	bls.gov/regions/southwest/arkansas.htm; discover.arkansas.gov
Trade, Transportation & Utilities	190,000	Retail, warehousing, trucking, power/water utilities	+4,100 jobs	bls.gov/regions/southwest/arkansas.htm; discover.arkansas.gov
Leisure & Hospitality	130,000	Restaurants, lodging, tourism, arts and recreation	+5,200 jobs	bls.gov/regions/southwest/arkansas.htm
Manufacturing	150,000	Food processing, metal/machinery, plastics, chemicals	+2,700 jobs	bls.gov/regions/southwest/arkansas.htm; discover.arkansas.gov/Data-Search-Tool/QCEW
Professional & Business Services	140,000	IT, consulting, legal/accounting, admin support	Private sector growth implied	discover.arkansas.gov/Industry-Employment-by-Sector
Construction	60,000	Residential, commercial, infrastructure, trades	-1,900 jobs	bls.gov/regions/southwest/arkansas.htm
Other Services	40,000	Repair, personal care, laundry, civic/religious orgs	Private sector growth implied	discover.arkansas.gov

The above table of estimated industry employment data provides a 2024-25 snapshot of the overall consistent growth that has occurred since the Covid-19 pandemic, as referenced above. As the data relates to labor market demand, the top two industry categories are government/government-adjacent (such as education) and healthcare. Also in the top five are retail, supply chain/transportation, and

manufacturing. The indicated employment growth in these core industries further highlights the recent overall population and economic expansion in Arkansas.

The following chart illustrates calendar year 2024 Arkansas Workforce Connections program investments in workforce training by industry.



In descending order, the top fourteen industries in the chart by investment in workforce training are:

Transportation

Healthcare and Social Assistance

Administrative, Support, and Waste Management

Manufacturing

Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services

Education

Other Services

Public Administration

Information

Construction

Hospitality

Retail Trade

Finance

Management

The industries receiving training expenditures in significant part match the industries employing the most Arkansans. However, there is significant mismatch in the emphasis between the amount of training expenditures in each industry and number of employed in each industry, where training expenditures in transportation and healthcare/social assistance combined are greater than the sum of the training expenditures for the next thirteen industries. Additionally, it is known that a significant proportion of the transportation industry training expenditures were on truck driver training. Though truck driver training is in demand, this proportion of spending on truck driver training, and in only two industries in transportation and healthcare/social assistance, does not match the overall needs or priorities of Arkansas employers or the labor force.

The above information in this section highlights at least two high level gaps in the current workforce system: there is (1) an unfulfilled, high demand for workers (an asset) co-existing with a relatively large population that is not participating in the labor force (a potential asset), and (2) a mismatch between the proportion of training dollars invested by industry (an asset) and the distribution of leading industries in the state. These gaps are also opportunities.

The gap between high labor demand and relatively low labor force participation puts a spotlight on barriers to labor force participation and opportunities to activate the out of labor force (OOLF) population. Arkansas has many new resources and initiatives that present opportunities to reach more of the OOLF and provide services to the existing labor force more efficiently.

LAUNCH is a new platform developed by the Arkansas Office of State Technology (OST) that can increase services to both employers and the labor force.

Civiform is a tool offered by Google that OST has provided to improve visibility with consumers across service programs, including social services administered by the Department of Human Services and workforce services administered by the Department of Commerce, among others. Civiform enables a consumer to respond to several questions and then get presented with various programs for which the consumer is most likely to be eligible. Maximizing use of Civiform across programs has the potential to reach many more consumers and improve referrals, collaboration, visibility, and use of resources across agencies and programs.

The Arkansas Data Hub and longitudinal data system (LDS), administered by OST, presents the opportunity to assimilate administrative data across state government agencies and create data sets for visibility, efficiency, and collaboration across programs and services, identification of barriers within populations, and related opportunities for engagement and activation of groups of individuals not already gainfully in the labor force. For example, men in Arkansas drop out of the labor force at almost twice the U.S. average dropout rate from age 35 to age 64. The data hub could be used to study men in this age group, and identify trends and possible causes that can be used to develop strategies for increasing labor force participation.

Other examples of opportunities for characterization of specific populations with barriers and developing better solutions include: (1) investigating the effects of benefits cliffs and challenges preventing the OOLF and underemployed from moving forward in a career path, and (2) identifying individuals that are receiving benefits from any combination of Medicaid, SNAP, TANF, and workforce services programs, and better collaborating across agencies and programs to maximize benefits and success.

Very broadly and futuristically, there is the opportunity to view the Arkansas workforce and citizen-support system comprehensively and systematically, statewide, across agencies and programs, such as Corrections, Commerce, Education, Human Services, and Health. Likewise, there is the opportunity to view the population(s) relevant to receiving services from these agencies and programs comprehensively and systematically. Current considerations of a ‘no wrong door’ (or ‘one door’ or ‘Utah model’) are in this vein of thinking. A mature version of such a system would (or will) take years to design, build, and implement. However, there are initial, critical, concrete steps that have not been taken and can be taken utilizing existing resources. For example, engaging in system-level (inter-agency/program) population research, strategy development, and goal setting that contemplate the total prospective target population of hundreds of thousands highlighted above. The Arkansas Data Hub and OST already provide the capability and vision to do this internally to Arkansas state government.

2. Workforce Development, Education and Training Activities Analysis. The Combined State Plan must include an analysis of the workforce development activities, including education and training in the State, to address the education and skill needs of the workforce, as identified in (a)(1)(B)(iii) above, and the employment needs of employers, as identified in (a)(1)(A)(iii) above.

This must include an analysis of—

- (A) *The State’s Workforce Development Activities.* Provide an analysis of the State’s workforce development activities, including education and training activities of the core programs, Combined State Plan partner programs included in this plan, and required¹ and optional one-stop delivery system partners.²**

Title I Response:

Historically, local workforce boards have been tasked with procuring a one-stop operator for the daily operation of their perspective American Job Center(s) in accordance with WIOA 121(d). These boards carry out workforce activities by partnering locally through Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) to implement core, non-core, and other partner programs. Through the modification planning cycle, Arkansas is proposing that workforce development activities be carried out through a single statewide planning area model where the state workforce board acts as the local boards. Arkansas Workforce Connections will become service provider for WIOA Titles I-IV, governed by statewide policies and strategies developed by the Arkansas Workforce Development Board. Arkansas Workforce Centers, the state’s common identifier for AJCs, are fully integrated with WIOA, Wagner-Peyser, Jobs for Veterans

¹ Required one-stop partners: In addition to the core programs, the following partner programs are required to provide access through the one-stops: Career and

Technical Education (Perkins), Community Services Block Grant, Indian and Native American programs, HUD Employment and Training programs, Job Corps, Local Veterans’ Employment Representatives and Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program, National Farmworker Jobs program, Senior Community Service Employment program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) (unless the Governor determines TANF will not be a required partner), Trade Adjustment Assistance programs, Unemployment Compensation programs, and YouthBuild.

² Workforce development activities may include a wide variety of programs and partners, including educational institutions, faith- and community-based organizations, and human services.

State Grant (JVSG), Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), Unemployment Insurance (UI), Adult Education and Family Literacy, and Vocational Rehabilitation. Local partnerships and integration also exist in many areas with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training Programs and others.

WIOA Title I provide youth, adults, and dislocated workers with access to career and training services delivered through a network of programs and partner organizations. Career services focus on assessing individual needs and barriers, then provide more targeted services to improve employability. Training services, on the other hand, provide the academic and technical instruction necessary for individuals to gain skills that lead to in-demand employment and economic self-sufficiency. Other training activities such as work-based learning further strengthen this system by engaging employers directly. These opportunities offer participants hands-on, “learn-by-doing” experience that meets employer workforce needs while increasing participants’ job readiness, earning potential, and long-term employment outcomes.

WIOA Title I training providers play a critical role in this process. They deliver approved training programs listed on the state’s Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL), provide referrals to WIOA Title I, tutoring, skill development, support participants in earning industry-recognized credentials, contribute to the measurable skill gains, and successful WIOA performance measures outcome. Arkansas’s robust work-based learning approach is inherently employer-driven, aligning perfectly with America’s Talent Strategy Pillar 1: Industry-Driven Strategies. In this model, employers define skill requirements, co-design training, provide real work environments, and hire successful participants. Work-based learning ensures that training reflects real-time labor market needs and operationalizes demand-driven strategies by placing employers at the center of training design and talent development.

Arkansas’s model also supports America’s Talent Strategy Pillar 2: Worker Mobility by providing paid pathways into employment, enabling career exploration without financial risk, supporting skill progression and wage growth, and reducing reliance on debt-financed education. For populations with barriers, work-based learning strategies can provide immediate income and experience, improving retention and advancement.

Arkansas Pathways to Self Sufficiency Coalition

Arkansas Workforce Connections will also align its efforts with the AR Pathways to Self Sufficiency initiative led by Arkansas Community Action Agencies Association. As Arkansas advances workforce development in all 75 counties, a statewide, cross-sector effort designed to address poverty through a coordinated, holistic, and community-driven approach is important. Rooted in the understanding that poverty is complex and multifaceted, this initiative brings together leaders from across Arkansas—practitioners, policymakers, community advocates, business partners, educators, faith-based organizations, and philanthropy—to create meaningful pathways for families to achieve long-term stability and economic mobility. AR Pathways is a coalition of more than 100 organizations, united by a shared commitment to improving quality of life for individuals and families in all 75 counties. A unique coalition of 100+ nonprofits, faith-based organizations, and community-centric organizations focused on Workforce Development, Education, Healthcare, Digital Opportunity & Economic Mobility, Food & Nutrition, Policies Impacting Children & Families, ALICE, and Self-Sufficiency.

AR Pathways is grounded in core values of industry-driven solutions, worker mobility and growth, integrated systems for impact, and flexibility and innovative solutions ensuring all in the community have a voice for positive change. Accountability and integrity are at the core of our partnership to ensure transparency and ways to work collaboratively.

Title II Response:

The Office of Adult Education (OAE) supports adult basic and literacy education programs for adults who lack basic skills, a high school diploma, or proficiency in English. Adult education and literacy activities include English language acquisition activities, workforce preparation activities, and integrated education and training (IET) that provides adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with both workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster, and is for the purpose of educational and career advancement. Adult education and literacy activities may also include workplace education and literacy, family literacy, and integrated English literacy and civics education.

All adult education providers are required to integrate the Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy (WAGE™) program. WAGE™, trademarked by the Office of Adult Education since 1990, is a job readiness program for unemployed and underemployed adults. WAGE™ is unique among other career readiness programs in that it focuses on improving the basic academic skills of participants while providing workforce preparation and training activities. With the needs of business and industry at its core, WAGE™ addresses the requirement for a competent workforce among entry-level jobs sectors such as Manufacturing, Transportation, Information Technology, Health Science, and Construction and Energy to name a few. Participants can earn a WAGE™ Level I and II certificate by completing the requirements of each module. Additionally, through the Integrated Education and Training program, participants earn job industry-recognized certifications and credentials. Participants have earned credentials in CDL, welding, Phlebotomy, Certified Nursing Assistant, NCCER, Pharmacy Tech, CNC Machine Operator, and much more. WAGE Level I is aligned to Pillar II; Worker Mobility in that it prepares Arkansans for the workforce; whereas, WAGE Level II is aligned to Pillar I in that it helps adults gain the necessary job skills and credentials that will help them become employed.

In addition, the Office of Adult Education (OAE) operates the SNAP Employment & Training (E&T) program through adult education centers across the state. OAE is the largest provider of SNAP E&T services, serving 74 of the 75 counties and having had over 5,700 participants dually participate in SNAP E&T and adult education. The Office of Adult Education also works closely with Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Program, along with local workforce development boards. In addition, adult education is co-located in most of the comprehensive workforce centers and utilizes the mobile one-stop services for job fairs, job training events, and Open House activities throughout the year.

Title III Response:

The Arkansas Workforce Centers are at the forefront of the workforce activities and represent Arkansas's version of the American Jobs Center. There are 23 workforce centers spread across the state providing access to many Arkansans. In addition to these locations, Arkansas has six

mobile workforce center units that travel the state and provide service locations in rural parts of the State. In recent years, the state created a virtual hotline called "CONNECT" that links jobseekers and employers with services without physically visiting a workforce center. The hotline operates in concert with the unemployment insurance call center and UI clients are referred to ES staff for assistance with labor exchange and a range of additional services. Wagner-Peyser staff provides work readiness assessments and training courses focused on assisting individuals with resume creation, job search assistance, interviewing, and soft skills to improve hireability. Our Training Unit provides a 45 course curriculum to both jobseeker customers and staff with the goal of empowering attendees with practical instruction that encourages professional growth and assists with workforce development by reskilling/upskilling workplace habits. Courses are delivered both virtually as well as in a classroom environment.

Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) staff work hard to identify veterans with Significant Barriers to Employment in order to provide support services and activities for individuals and families with low incomes that alleviate the causes and conditions of poverty in communities in accordance with the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG). In Arkansas, The CSBG is federally funded and administered by the state through the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS). The CSBG funds are distributed to a network of local organizations known as Eligible Entities or Community Action Agencies. There are 15 Community Action Agencies in Arkansas that assist low to moderate-income individuals in all 75 counties. As required partners, JVSG staff have developed long-standing relationships with these entities.

Title IV ARS Response:

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) is the general vocational rehabilitation agency and has 19 field offices. Little Rock, Harrison, Fayetteville, Jonesboro, Searcy, West Memphis, Russellville, Hot Springs, and El Dorado offices are co-located with Arkansas Workforce Centers. ARS maintains counselor itinerary points at all other Workforce Centers. ARS provides targeted services to eligible Arkansans with disabilities to help clients obtain, maintain, or advance in competitive integrated employment. According to the 2025 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium, 41.4% of individuals aged 18 to 64 with disabilities are employed in Arkansas compared to 77.4% without disabilities (<https://disabilitycompendium.org/>).

Title IV DSB Response:

The Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) has 14 Field Office locations co-located within Arkansas Workforce Centers and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) offices (Fayetteville, Fort Smith, Harrison, Russellville, West Memphis, Jonesboro, Pine Bluff, Hot Springs, Benton, Little Rock, Monticello, El Dorado, Texarkana, and Magnolia). DSB is the vocational rehabilitation agency for Blind and Visually Impaired individuals in Arkansas. Significant barriers to employment exist for individuals who are blind and visually impaired. DSB works with participants to obtain, maintain, or advance in competitive integrated employment. According to the Annual Disability Statistics Compendium: 2023, approximately 3.6% of Arkansans report having a visual disability. [1] Reference: Annual Disability Statistics Compendium: <https://disabilitycompendium.org/>

Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Demographics and Statistics (StatsRRTC), (2008); Report on Disability Demographics for Arkansas; Retrieved 12/29/2023.

Arkansas currently administers Vocational Rehabilitation services through two separate agencies: Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) and the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB). Through the state planning process, Arkansas is establishing a coordinated plan to merge these two divisions into a single Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency operating as the Designated State Unit (DSU), with Arkansas Workforce Connections serving as the Designated State Agency (DSA).

This structural alignment is intended to strengthen program coordination, improve service delivery, enhance administrative efficiency while maintaining specialized services for individuals with disabilities and increase the availability of funds for client services. The transition will be implemented in a manner that ensures continuity of services for participants and incorporates ongoing engagement with stakeholders, including consumers, providers, employers, and partner agencies. The merger is planned for implementation during the next phase of the WIOA State Plan, covering Program Years PY24–PY27, and will support a more integrated and employer-responsive workforce development system.

2. The Strengths and Weaknesses of Workforce Development Activities.

Provide an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the workforce development activities identified in (A), directly above.

Title I Response:

Initial analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of Arkansas's workforce development activities suggests that our talent development system has the right expertise and pockets of excellence.

Successfully serving common customers in our system will require continued collaboration, coordination and re-assessment. During a strategic planning session of the Arkansas Workforce Development Board, the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges were identified for the workforce development system in Arkansas.

STRENGTHS

- The State has strong workforce development programs in place; The State's key industries are at the table as champions of the programs through input into program design, identification of skills development, and commitment to continuous improvement of the talent development system.
- Economic development is involved in planning activities at the state and local level and has identified targeted industries.
- Partnerships at state level are strongenable the state to successfully and fully implement WIOA, thereby enhancing services to the public through the State's talent development system.
- Despite reductions in funding, diverse service delivery strategies, including virtual connections, have been implemented to provide services in all 75 counties.

- Centralized business engagement under Arkansas Industry Connect has provided single points of contact for all program areas and the broader workforce development ecosystem to include private sector employers, local workforce boards, and education.
- Registered Apprenticeship presents tremendous opportunities for opening workforce development strategies with an emphasis on expanding registered apprenticeship in non-traditional while continuing strong support for traditional construction trade registered apprenticeship programs.
- State funding non-credit workforce Pell has provided additional funding to support this critical area of workforce development and education at institutions of higher education and private training providers.
- There are best practices and subject matter experts scattered at all levels throughout the state.
- There is a strong common spirit among direct service providers and key stakeholders regarding the underlying socioeconomic dynamics and related basic needs targeted by workforce programs.
- The Office of State Technology (OST) is innovative, open, has deep knowledge of workforce programs, and has recently introduced meaningful technological advancements targeting greater efficiency and quality management in workforce development programs.
- As a low population state, leadership can be accessed and convened relatively easily, enabling communication and imitation of action on new initiatives quickly.
- There is voluminous relevant data available, enabling analyses and conversion of data to insights and then action for continuous improvement.

WEAKNESSES

- Arkansas has a shrinking labor force and low labor force participation rate. To address this, the state is working to reduce its recidivism rate, increase youth apprenticeship opportunities, reform our state workforce system to increase the number of Arkansans served while increasing the number of occupations and sectors we support via Title 1B of WIOA, and continue ramping up our talent attraction campaign which has yielded Arkansas being the number 1 state for inbound movers two consecutive years in a row.
- While there are strong partnerships in some areas of the state with community colleges and workforce development, involvement from all community colleges statewide could be stronger. To address this, AWC has forged stronger collaboration efforts with Arkansas Community colleges, including involvement in planning meetings with local workforce development boards and co-locations of Arkansas Workforce Centers on college campuses.
- Marketing and outreach of the State's talent development system has not been properly targeted to produce an increase in program enrollments. Many employers and jobseekers are unaware of the services and opportunities available, which has led to a strategic marketing partnership to ensure we are connecting with the people and businesses we serve and effectively communicating the services that are available.

- Staff training programs for serving the customers across agencies were not in place, especially recognizing the special needs of serving persons with disabilities. To address this, local workforce development boards have designated one-stop operators to lead efforts in cross-training staff and creating service menus
- Budgets for federally funded workforce development programs are stagnant or declining. In PY '25, Arkansas Workforce Connections staff were impacted by a reduction in force, resulting in a layoff of approximately 25 employees.
- Since 2019 many major steps have been taken across state government to reduce the number of, and integrate across, 'silos'. However, silos and lack of integration and systemization across agencies and programs that have common goals and customers remain a primary weakness. In federally funded workforce programs such as WIOA, the original creation of silos was driven by the design of the federal programs. State work on such integration and systemization remains a priority and progress is ongoing. New technology tools introduced in the last couple of years by the Office of State Technology (OST, formerly DIS) are primary examples of significant ongoing work that will continue to reduce the 'silo' effect.
- Further to the preceding 'silo' topic, across agencies, programs, and program regions there remain many disparate technological and operational systems that overlap in purpose and do not permit or facilitate coordination, either operationally or in analytics. These overlapping and duplicative systems are inefficient. From the citizen perspective, across WIOA programs and support services such as TANF and SNAP, an individual wanting to apply to these programs must separately seek out, apply, and submit personal documentation to each program. The state is currently evaluating opportunities and working towards increasing efficiency (integration and systemization) in these areas.
- In the current situation, lack of coordination, duplication across agencies and programs, and lack of outreach is not conducive to citizens or employers understanding what services are available or how to use them. A great need is for better outreach to, and education of, citizen-users and employers, in addition to the above-highlighted integration.
- Lack of deeper technical assistance and innovation support from national/federal level experts versus federal resources focusing on compliance in engagement with states. This is also an opportunity for better engagement with the such experts on strategic projects.
- The resources necessary to adhere to uncoordinated and intensive federal program requirements tend to cause compliance to be equated with performance; this hinders a mindset of, and allocation of resources to, continuous improvement that goes beyond compliance.
- Further to the immediately foregoing point, currently available data can be better leveraged, beyond compliance, to gain insights and drive new strategies and initiatives, for continuous improvement across, and at all levels of (region, program, agency), the greater Arkansas workforce and economic development system.
- Lack of minimum standardization across state regions and programs, such as could be implemented in policies, procedures, protocols, and for better data tracking. Lack of

standardization blocks the ability to, as two examples: (i) review performance across programs and regions, and (ii) scale best practices. Where a strength in the state is having pockets of excellence (i.e. best practices), it is a weakness that such excellence and best practices are not standardized and 'scaled' statewide.

- Too few resources allocated to or available for implementing and scaling available technological tools and solutions, such as those provided via OST and the state LMI/BLS office, that would enable greater efficiencies and penetration of populations needing services. Such activities would require, among other things, investment in staff and user training,
- While Arkansas's workforce system demonstrates significant strength through the advanced technological integration of the **LAUNCH** platform, a critical weakness remains in the fragmented delivery of supportive services for the **ALICE** (asset limited income constrained employed) population, or Arkansas' working poor.

Title II Response:

The strength and weaknesses of the Office of Adult Education (OAE) workforce development activities are closely tied to the delivery operations at the local level across 34 adult education center providers. Each center is evaluated for workforce service delivery in four areas: connection to required local advisory boards with participation from local business and industry; connection to community resources; knowledgeable and well-versed teachers; and intentional enrollment, course offerings, and awarding of stackable credentials and certifications that focus on improving an individual's academic and workplace skills holistically.

STRENGTHS

Together, the following strengths demonstrate how OAE supports workforce development across the state:

- Comprehensive adult education and literacy activities, including English language acquisition, workforce preparation, Integrated Education and Training (IET), workplace adult education and literacy, family literacy, and Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education.
- Required integration of the WAGE™ job-readiness program throughout all coursework, taught through contextualized instruction.
- Strong alignment with business and industry needs for entry-level jobs in sectors such as manufacturing, transportation, information technology, health science, construction, energy, hospitality, and tourism.
- Availability of WAGE™ Level I and Level II Certificates and a range of industry-recognized credentials, including CDL, welding, phlebotomy, CNA, NCCER, pharmacy technician, National Career Readiness Certificate, CNC machine operator, and more.
- Excellent partnership with the Arkansas Literacy Alliance that supports Arkansans with below literacy levels, including coordinated support where literacy councils are co-

located with adult education, promoting life-long learning and employment readiness at the lowest academic levels.

- An individualized workforce development component within adult education that considers an individual's knowledge, skills, and abilities when developing academic and career pathways, supported by the WAGE™ program, Career Coaches, and Adult Education staff using interest inventories and individual learning plans.
- A holistic approach that addresses barriers to learning, including assistance with identifying disabilities and needed social services, with comprehensive services coordinated more effectively, all core partner programs are located under the Arkansas Department of Commerce.
- OAE's role as the largest provider of SNAP Employment & Training (E&T) services, serving 74 of 75 counties and supporting dually enrolled participants in SNAP E&T and adult education.
- Strong integration with the broader workforce system through co-location in most comprehensive workforce centers, use of mobile one-stop services, and collaboration with Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Programs, and local workforce development boards.

WEAKNESSES

At the same time, weakness affect the consistency and responsiveness of the workforce development activities across the state:

- Variation in workforce development quality and outcomes across the state that depends heavily on local participation, resources, and the availability of technology, including access to high-speed broadband internet, which also impacts distance education.
- Uneven access in some areas that still lack direct access to certain services despite broad coverage, which can limit participation in programs such as SNAP E&T and IET.
- Difficulty finding available teachers who can teach sector-specific content for Integrated Education and Training course materials, as well as limited access to qualified college instructors or subject matter experts, which reduces OAE's ability to respond quickly to workforce needs.
- Capacity challenges in maintaining consistent quality of WAGE™ and IET instruction across multiple providers while supporting a wide range of industry-recognized credentials and sectors.
- Persistent participant barriers such as transportation, childcare, and housing that limit consistent engagement in workforce preparation and training.

Moving forward, the Office of Adult Education will continue to build on these strengths—particularly its comprehensive services, proven models like WAGE™ and IET, and strong

partnerships—while addressing gaps in access, capacity, technology, and navigation so that all Arkansans can connect to education, training, and in-demand employment opportunities.

Title III Response:

Wagner Peyser staff are located across the state as well as through a virtual service center allowing clients to receive services either through in-person or virtual means. Assessment of needs and barriers of clients, referrals of clients to partner services, job referrals and assisting employers with posting job orders continue to be strengths of the program. Weaknesses are:

- Difficulties in maintaining staff across the state for in-person service delivery due to funding issues.
- Balancing implementation of technology allowing for more virtual services while maintaining staffing levels for in-person services.

Outreach opportunities are limited in areas with transportation deficiencies and low employment opportunities.

Title IV ARS Response:

ARS' expertise is in working with individuals with disabilities who are seeking to obtain, maintain, or advance in competitive integrated employment, and in assisting employers in maintaining employees who experience illness and injury that results in disability. ARS utilizes co-location opportunities for increased effectiveness and efficiency in serving consumers. ARS has co-located offices within Arkansas Workforce Centers in ten locations. ARS clients face challenges with transportation and access to technology.

Title IV DSB Response:

Strengths: Colocation of partner agencies has allowed for increased effectiveness and efficiency for individuals who need services from multiple partners. Coordination of shared participants is enhanced by staff being closer together and having a stronger working relationship. As an independent consumer-controlled commission, DSB has a strong connection to state and national consumer agencies that provide the agency with information on consumer's needs and challenges. DSB also conducts consumer satisfaction surveys to stay knowledgeable about the impact and needs of agency consumers. DSB has developed relationships with partners to improve the service delivery and opportunities available to consumers. DSB staff participate in local events, business outreach, rapid response activities, local workforce board meetings, and other activities with partners to share knowledge and resources. DSB has strong partnerships with assistive technology vendors to ensure DSB's Technology staff are aware of new technology and training options available to assist consumers.

Weaknesses: The rural nature of the state creates barriers for consumers to access services independently. DSB continues to work to develop vendors and service providers to reduce these barriers. However, as noted in the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, transportation remains a barrier for individuals who are Blind or Visually Impaired.

3. State Workforce Development Capacity.

Provide an analysis of the capacity of State entities to provide the workforce development activities identified in (A), above.

Title I Response:

Arkansas will be well-poised to provide workforce and talent development activities efficiently once waiver requests are approved and services are streamlined. Partners at both state and local levels strive to exceed these standards and pursue further integration of staff, resources, resource management, customer enrollment and service delivery. The standards are based on the premise that partners will continually work together to improve the system, engage new partners, and better serve Arkansas job seekers, workers, and businesses. Core activities are provided to determine where customers are on their journey to employment and/or training and where they want to be in the future.

Due to nationally recognized system components, such as a career pathway system with many bridges and stackable credentials; a robust Registered Apprenticeship program; and training programs that meet industry demands, our pursuit becomes one of continuous improvement. Arkansas has implemented a workforce system designed to increase capacity to serve more customers. Led by the strategic vision set by Governor Sarah Sanders and the Arkansas Workforce Development Board, the functional design of the Arkansas workforce system starts with coordination at the highest level through the Governor's Workforce Cabinet, which provides a common direction at the state agency level for driving workforce development. This partnership at the highest level will increase capacity and extend the alignment of the system to a broader and more diverse population of jobseekers across the state.

The agencies represented in this plan, will develop a streamlined customer experience through referrals from and to core, non-core, and program partners to coordinate workforce activities and increase the capacity of each partner by allowing specialized services to function optimally and assist in the elimination of the duplication of services. Each customer completes a one-on-one "Welcome Session" (in-person or virtually) with staff to assess individual need, determine program eligibility, and develop an individual service plan which may include referral to services and training programs as relevant and appropriate. The intent is to listen to customers' needs and guide them toward their next steps based on individual needs rather than a one-size-fits-all approach of requiring formal assessments and processes for all customers coming into the center.

Staff provide LMI and referral to appropriate resources and partner services. Career Services are those services that assess a person's readiness to work and provide employment statistics information to inform career goals and opportunities for advancement in occupations. Key values provided to job seekers through provision of Career Services are to ensure they know their skills, know how their skills match the labor market, and know which tools are available for them to acquire the skills needed to be competitive. Career services include eligibility determination; orientation; job search; placement assistance; career counseling; the provision of information on in-demand industry sectors and occupations, non-traditional employment, and local labor market information.

Effective Career Services rely on assessment, development of a focused Individual Employment Plan (IEP), career planning and skills validation. Referrals to and coordination of activities with

other programs and services are provided as they relate to the career service needs of customers. Individuals determined to be in need of training to obtain or retain employment that leads to economic self-sufficiency or wages comparable to or higher than wages from previous employment may be eligible to receive Training Services. Local boards also prioritize training connected to sectors and target populations as part of the local plan and priorities of the Governor of Arkansas and will create opportunities for remediation. The local boards engage in a network of service providers such as community colleges, Goodwill, Chambers of Commerce, and other community action agencies.

The outreach goal is to engage customers with program services that provide equitable technology access to minorities and underserved populations, economically and technically disadvantaged communities, and those in rural areas living in technology deserts to engage them with the education and skills needed to enter Arkansas' workforce. To assist customers as soon as possible following a separation, each training plan is evaluated to meet program training criteria below

- Criterion 1. There is no suitable employment available for the customers.
- Criterion 2. The customer would benefit from appropriate training.
- Criterion 3. There is a reasonable expectation of employment in the customer's commuting area (or in the area where the customer intends to relocate) upon completion of the training, based on projections of job market conditions expected to exist at the time of completion.
- Criterion 4. Training is reasonably available to the customer.
- Criterion 5. The customer is qualified to undertake and complete such training.
- Criterion 6. Training is suitable for the customer and available at a reasonable cost.

In Arkansas, individuals with barriers to employment include those defined under WIOA as well as veterans, unemployed workers, and youth. An IEP is required for all customers accessing Training Services. The IEP is used to inform training needs, as well as to verify if customers have the skills to be successful in training prior to enrollment into the training program. The IEP must include: clear employment goals, demonstration that selected training is directly linked to employment opportunities in the local area or in an area to which a participant is willing to relocate, timelines attached to the set goals, and a budget that has accurate and clear costs and funding sources for the planned training activities and related costs that support successful completion of training. Furthermore, through direction by the Arkansas Workforce Development Board and one of the objectives of this plan, the State will explore ways to increase capacity, especially in rural areas across the state beyond bricks-and-mortar, through virtual services.

Concern continues for many of the programs of this plan that have experienced stagnant or declining funding over the last several years. The lack of new funding in many programs means the State must continue to find more efficient ways to provide services to Arkansans. Increased integration by function across programs will not only provide enhanced efficiency, but will also reduce program silos, increase co-enrollment rates, and streamline case management. This model aligns with America's Talent Strategy Pillar 3: Integrated Systems and will result in an improved customer experience through the "no wrong door" approach. Arkansas's evolving model of staff integration across programs will leverage existing flexibilities to transform the

workforce system into a more agile and responsive ecosystem in alignment with America's Talent Strategy Pillar 5: Flexibility and Innovation.

Title II Response:

The Office of Adult Education provides workforce development activities in all 75 counties within the state through an extensive provider system. Adult education has 34 providers that can respond to the demands within their local communities to service all eligible adult learners and special populations. The local providers can hire additional teachers, paraprofessionals, and trainers as needed. Furthermore, providers are connected to 26 community colleges and universities, seven school districts, and one literacy council, with a host of satellite facilities. Every adult education program must offer Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy (WAGE™), a job readiness program for unemployed and underemployed adults, trademarked by the Office of Adult Education.

Adult education programs are organized into five economic regions that align with Arkansas's economic development and local workforce development boards, as outlined in America's Talent Strategy: Building the Workforce for the Golden Age, Pillar III: Integrated Systems. Each region is supported by an Office of Adult Education (OAE) regional program advisor who monitors performance, provides technical assistance, and coordinates professional development. More than 400 licensed adult education teachers—with degrees in adult education, math, science, and related fields—deliver instruction. Every program is required to maintain at least one Certified Career Services Provider (career coach) trained in assessment for career planning; developing helping relationships; ethics; serving multicultural and special populations, including individuals with disabilities and justice-involved learners; job search and employability skills; and business services. WAGE™ Coordinators are teachers and instructors who specialize in contextualized workforce preparation; many bring prior experience in industry, economic development, or community development. Programs also contract with subject-matter experts such as nursing, welding, and pharmacy technician instructors to deliver occupationally focused training.

The adult education network is supported by strong infrastructure and systems. Programs maintain partnerships with employers, nonprofits, and other training providers focused on adult and youth education and training. Many centers are housed on college campuses, giving learners access to advanced equipment and facilities needed for industry-recognized credentials and technical training. Statewide, programs use nationally recognized educational software platforms to support English language acquisition, reading, math, keyboarding, and financial planning, ensuring instruction is current, accessible, and aligned with varied learning styles.

Within this infrastructure, Integrated Education and Training (IET) and the Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy (WAGE™) program form core components of Arkansas's workforce development capacity. WAGE™ is administered at adult education centers across the state and is unique in that it simultaneously strengthens basic academic skills and provides workforce preparation and training activities. It serves as the primary workforce preparation and training component of adult education, built around four main strands: employability skills, digital literacy, financial literacy, and career development. Local adult education programs work with business and industry partners through community "workforce alliances" to identify critical skills, integrate additional local competencies, and design workforce preparation certificates that improve productivity, reduce turnover, and support higher wages.

WAGE™ and IET are closely linked. The WAGE™ framework is a focal point for developing IET activities cooperatively with local employers and adult education programs. Together, local programs and businesses identify workforce needs, then establish curricula, certificates, and credentials to meet those needs. Each local provider develops an IET implementation plan in consultation with OAE, which reviews IET requirements, employer demand, and available funding opportunities. WAGE™ participants may earn Level I and Level II WAGE™ Certificates: Level I focuses on essential employability and foundational skills, integrated with digital and financial literacy, to support job attainment and retention as deemed necessary within Pillar I; Level II helps learners explore and enter career pathways in high-demand industries such as business, education, health care, hospitality and tourism, information technology, and manufacturing, with opportunities to earn industry-recognized credentials (e.g., CPR/First Aid, Guest Service Gold®, IC3 Digital Literacy, NCRC, OSHA-10, ServSafe, and forklift certification).

This statewide network has demonstrated capacity to meet demand and serve priority populations. Adult education services are standardized across the state so learners can co-enroll and transfer among programs while maintaining continuity of services. The system serves approximately 22,000 students per year and reports measurable skill gains for roughly 14,000 learners annually. Arkansas's Office of Adult Education consistently ranks in the top quartile nationally on key performance indicators, including measurable skill gains, GED and credential attainment, median earnings, and employment in the second and fourth quarters after exit. Priority populations—including English language learners and justice-involved individuals—can access WAGE™ Level I and Level II and other industry-recognized credentials, and many employers are willing to hire these individuals when they possess the foundational and occupational skills provided through adult education. Together, this network, staffing, infrastructure, and WAGE™/IET framework demonstrates the State's capacity to deliver the adult education, literacy, English language acquisition, workforce preparation, and integrated education and training activities.

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Title III Response: Wagner Peyser is co-located with many of our partners across the state. In instances where co-location is not currently available, procedures are in place to refer clients to partner services to address needs and barriers as they are determined.

Title IV ARS Response: ARS serves individuals statewide through 19 local offices and the Arkansas Career Development Center. ARS counselors work with a variety of vendors and service providers to assist consumers.

Title IV DSB Response: DSB serves individuals who are Blind and Visually Impaired across the state through 14 local offices that cover all 75 counties. DSB counselors work with a variety of vendors and service providers as well as partner agencies to ensure access to services for consumers. DSB continues to work to develop additional vendors and increase staff capacity.

Summary:

Despite the challenges presented in this section, Arkansas is resilient and will be successful in its endeavors to provide and strengthen workforce activities in our state. Arkansas' strategy to better utilize its resources and leverage its strengths is the way we WILL be effective. Doing it right includes coordinating, integrating, and optimizing services, funding, and resources to maximize desired outcomes and improve operational efficiencies.

Integrated service delivery is a holistic approach to providing public services that focuses on efficiently and effectively meeting the needs of individuals through coordinated and streamlined processes. It is characterized by the integration of services across different agencies and sectors to provide a comprehensive support system for individuals seeking employment, training, or other related services.

Integrated service delivery reflects the commitment to a more coordinated, efficient, and customer-centric approach to workforce development. This initiative is crucial for ensuring that all Arkansans can easily access the support and opportunities they need to succeed in today's dynamic job market.

A customer-centric approach underpins the Arkansas Workforce Strategy, highlighting the commitment to design and deliver workforce services that are attuned to the needs, preferences, and experiences of both job seekers, incumbent workers, and employers. By focusing on the needs and feedback of the customer, workforce services become more accessible, intuitive, and effective, leading to higher satisfaction and better outcomes. This theme is about more than just providing services; it's about creating positive, impactful experiences for every individual and employer who interacts with the Arkansas workforce system. Through this approach, the strategy seeks to build a more inclusive, responsive, and user-friendly workforce environment in Arkansas.

B. STATE STRATEGIC VISION AND GOALS

The Unified or Combined State Plan must include the State's strategic vision and goals for developing its workforce and meeting employer needs in order to support economic growth and economic self-sufficiency. This must include—

1. Vision.

Describe the State's strategic vision for its workforce development system.

State Board/Title I Response:

Arkansas will have a world-class workforce that is well educated, skilled, and working in order to keep Arkansas's economy competitive in the global marketplace.

To promote and support a talent development system in Arkansas that offers employers, individuals, and communities the opportunity to achieve and sustain economic prosperity.

Arkansas's Talent Development System Philosophy

- We believe that there must be a pipeline of skilled workers for employers and a job for every Arkansan that wants one.
- We believe that the talent development system of Arkansas must be relevant to the labor market in order to meet the needs of employers and jobseekers, and for Arkansas to compete globally.
- We believe that every Arkansan should have opportunity and access to training and education that leads to a career with gainful employment.
- We believe innovation and partnerships centered on local economic priorities maximizes effectiveness and puts the State in the best position to address local and regional workforce needs.
- We believe Arkansas's workforce system should be a viable resource for business and industry.
- We believe that in order for the talent development system to be the preferred system, the system must be accountable, flexible, and align education and training with business and industry needs.

- We believe that in order for the talent development system to be effective, we must eliminate overlap and duplication of resources and services and streamline investment of funds.

The publicly funded workforce system envisioned by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is quality focused, employer-driven, customer-centered, and tailored to meet the needs of regional economies. It is designed to increase access to, and opportunities for, the employment, education, training, and support services that individuals need to succeed in the labor market, particularly those with barriers to employment. It aligns workforce development, education, and economic development programs with regional economic development strategies to meet the needs of local and regional employers, and provides a comprehensive, accessible and high-quality workforce development system. This is accomplished by providing all customers access to high-quality workforce development centers that connect them with the full range of services available in their communities, whether they are looking to find jobs; build basic educational or occupational skills; earn a postsecondary certificate or degree; obtain guidance on how to make career choices; or are businesses and employers seeking skilled workers.

The Arkansas Workforce Development Board vision provides standards for a high-quality workforce center including customer service, innovation and service design, and systems integration and high-quality staffing.

Under WIOA, partner programs and entities that are jointly responsible for workforce and economic development, educational, and other human resource programs collaborate to create a seamless customer-focused workforce delivery system that integrates service delivery across all programs and enhances access to the programs' services. The workforce delivery system includes six core programs (Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs; Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act; Title III Wagner-Peyser program; and Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation program), as well as other required and optional partners identified in WIOA. In Arkansas, these programs are administered by the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (Titles I, III), Adult Education (Title II), and the Rehabilitation Services portion of Title IV. The Division of Services for the Blind administers the remaining portion of Title IV. Through the Arkansas Workforce Center network, these partner programs and their service providers ensure that businesses and job seekers—a shared client base across the multiple programs identified above— have access to information and services that lead to positive employment outcomes. Under WIOA, workforce centers and their partners:

- Provide job seekers with the skills and credentials necessary to secure and advance in employment with family-sustaining wages.
- Provide access and opportunities to all job seekers, including individuals with barriers to employment, such as individuals with disabilities, to prepare for, obtain, retain, and advance in high-quality jobs and high-demand careers.
- Enable businesses and employers to easily identify and hire skilled workers and access other supports, including education and training for their current workforce.

- Participate in rigorous evaluations that support continuous improvement of workforce centers by identifying which strategies work better for different populations.
- Ensure that high-quality integrated data inform decisions made by policy makers, employers, and job seekers.

The management of the Arkansas workforce delivery system is the shared responsibility of the State and the core WIOA partners, other required partners, and workforce center operators. The Divisions encourage all of these entities to integrate the characteristics below into their work, including developing state, regional, and local strategic plans; establishing workforce center certification criteria; examining the state, regional, and local footprint of workforce centers; conducting competitions for selecting workforce center operators; developing local Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs); updating other workforce center policies and procedures; and operating and delivering services through the Arkansas Workforce Centers.

The characteristics identified below, consistent with the purpose and authorized scope of each of the programs, are designed to reflect elements that contribute to a high-quality workforce delivery system. They demonstrate the spirit and intent of the WIOA, and they will strengthen the successful integration and implementation of partner programs in Arkansas Workforce Centers. For clarity and readability, the characteristics have been grouped into three functional categories: (a) Customer Service; (b) Innovation and Service Design; and (c) Systems Integration and High-Quality Staffing.

Arkansas Workforce Centers provide excellent customer service to job seekers, workers and businesses. Meeting the needs of job seekers, workers and businesses is important in developing thriving communities where all citizens succeed, and businesses prosper. High-quality workforce centers:

- **Deliver Quality Employer Services:** Develop, offer, and deliver quality business services that assist specific businesses and industry sectors in overcoming the challenges of recruiting, retaining, and developing talent for the regional economy. To support area employers and industry sectors most effectively, workforce center staff identifies and has a clear understanding of industry skill needs, identify appropriate strategies for assisting employers, and coordinate business services activities across workforce center partner programs, as appropriate. This includes the incorporation of an integrated and aligned business services strategy among workforce center partners to present a unified voice for the workforce center in its communications with employers.
- Additionally, Arkansas Workforce Centers will leverage the updated WIOA Effectiveness in Serving Employers (ESE) performance measure, which focuses on Retention with the Same Employer, to drive continuous improvement across business services statewide. By concentrating on how well Arkansas job seekers remain employed with the same employer after placement, local areas can more effectively evaluate the long-term impact of their services, strengthen follow-up and communication with employers, and refine retention-focused strategies that support a stable and skilled Arkansas workforce. This measure reinforces Arkansas Workforce Connections' commitment to delivering

responsive, high-quality business solutions that help employers maintain a reliable talent pipeline and reduce turnover.

As part of this commitment, Arkansas Workforce Connections is introducing Arkansas Industry Connect (AIC), a modernized business service model designed to elevate service delivery through a streamlined single point of contact. AIC is supported by Regional Business Managers and Regional Outreach Coordinators, who work together as Champions, Connectors, Consultants, and Service Providers for Arkansas employers. Regional Business Managers lead strategic employer engagement, assess workforce needs, and direct businesses to high-impact workforce and training solutions. Regional Outreach Coordinators strengthen this model by maintaining consistent communication, supporting service delivery, and connecting employers with training providers, workforce programs, and sector partnerships.

Through this unified AIC approach, employers experience simplified access to workforce services, real-time workforce intelligence, and customized recruitment, retention, and upskilling strategies. By aligning business needs with educational and workforce resources, AIC ensures efficient, consistent, and comprehensive business services that enhance industry competitiveness and support a resilient and future-ready Arkansas workforce.

Reflect a Welcoming Environment: Reflect a welcoming environment to all customer groups who are served by the workforce centers. All workforce center staff are courteous, polite, responsive, and helpful to job seekers, businesses, and others who visit the workforce centers, either in person or by telephone or e-mail. Moreover, workforce center staff are sensitive to the unique needs of individuals with disabilities and are prepared to provide necessary accommodations.

- **Provide Career Services that Empower:** Provide career services that motivate, support and empower customers, including individuals with disabilities, to make informed decisions based on local and regional economic demand and effectively attain their personal employment and education goals.
- **Value Skill Development:** Value skill development by assessing and improving each individual's basic, occupational, and employability skills. **Create Opportunities:** Create opportunities for individuals at all skill levels and levels of experience by providing customers, including those with disabilities, as much timely, labor market, job-driven information and choice as possible related to education and training, careers, and service delivery options, while offering customers the opportunity to receive both skill-development and job placement services.
- **Improve Job Seeker Skills:** Improve the skills of job seeker and worker customers. Workforce centers offer access to education and training leading to industry-recognized credentials through the use of career pathways, apprenticeships, and other strategies that enable customers, including those with disabilities, to compete successfully in today's global economy. They provide businesses with access to the quantity and quality of talent they need and support upskill/backfill strategies that expand job opportunities in the community.

Innovation and Service Design

Arkansas Workforce Centers reflect innovative and effective service design.

- **Integrate Intake Process:** Use an integrated and expert intake process for all customers entering the workforce centers. Frontline staff is highly familiar with the functions and basic eligibility requirements of each program and can appropriately assist customers and make knowledgeable referrals to partner programs, as needed and as appropriate given the authorized scope of the program. Modernization of the workforce system to integrate staff by function across programs and utilize innovative technology such as the CiviForm and LAUNCH platforms provides a streamlined customer experience in alignment with America's Talent Strategy Pillar III: Integrated Systems. This modernization strategy will be accomplished through leveraging the flexibility afforded by waivers under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act in support of America's Talent Strategy Pillar 5: Flexibility and Innovation.
- **Actively Engage Industry Sectors:** Design and implement practices that actively engage industry sectors and use economic and labor market information, sector strategies, career pathways, Registered Apprenticeships, and competency models to help drive skill-based initiatives. By engaging employers to define skill requirements, co-design training, and provide real work environments, Arkansas is operationalizing demand-driven strategies by placing employers at the center of training design and talent development. This model directly supports America's Talent Strategy Pillar 1: Industry-Driven Strategies.
- **Use Market Driven Principles:** Balance traditional labor exchange services with strategic talent development within a regional economy. This includes use of market-driven principles and labor market information that help to define a regional economy, its demographics, its workforce and its assets and gaps in skills and resources. This approach also supports America's Talent Strategy Pillar 1: Industry-Driven Strategies by ensuring that training and work-based learning opportunities reflect real-time labor market needs.
- **Use Innovative Delivery Models:** Incorporate innovative and evidence-based delivery models that improve the integration of education and training, create career pathways that lead to industry-recognized credentials, encourage work-based learning, and use state-of-the-art technology to accelerate learning and promote college and career success.
- **Offer Virtual and Center-Based Services:** Include both virtual and center-based service delivery for job seekers, workers, and employers. Both methods of delivery support the talent needs of the regional economy, although each may better serve different customers with different levels of service needs at any given time. The workforce delivery system can expand its reach by delivering robust virtual services; and increasing the accessibility of those services through community partners, such as libraries, community and faith-based organizations, and other partners.
- **Ensure Access to All Customers:** Ensure meaningful access to all customers. Workforce centers must be physically and programmatically accessible to all customers,

including individuals with disabilities. In so doing, workforce centers use principles of universal design and human-centered design, such as flexibility in space usage; the use of pictorial, written, verbal and tactile modes to present information for customers with disabilities or limited English proficiency; providing clear lines of sight to information for seated or standing users; providing necessary accommodations; and providing adequate space for the use of assistive devices or personal assistants. Workforce centers use assistive technology and flexible business hours to meet the range of customer needs.

Arkansas Workforce Centers operate with integrated management systems and high-quality staffing. High-quality workforce centers:

- **Reflect Robust Partnerships:** Reflect the establishment of robust partnerships among partners. The workforce center operator facilitates an integrated, co-located partnership that seamlessly incorporates services of the core partners and other workforce center partners.
- **Organize Services by Function:** Organize and integrate services by function (rather than by program); when permitted by a program's authorizing statute and as appropriate, and by coordinating staff communication, capacity building, and training efforts. Functional alignment includes having workforce center staff who perform similar tasks serve on relevant functional teams, e.g. Skills Development Team, Business Services Team. Service integration focuses on serving all customers seamlessly (including targeted populations) by providing a full range of services staffed by cross-functional teams, consistent with the purpose, scope, and requirements of each program.
- **Use Common Performance Indicators** Use common performance indicators to ensure that federal investments in employment and training programs are evidence-based, labor market driven, and accountable to participants and taxpayers. Center performance is transparent and accountable to the communities and regions served; data entry staff are trained and understand the importance of data validation, data collection processes, and the importance of accurate reporting.
- **Offer Highly Trained Career Counselors:** Staff the center with highly trained career counselors, skilled in advising job seekers of their options, knowledgeable about local labor market dynamics, aware of available services inside and outside the workforce center, and skilled in developing customers' skills for employment success.
- **Implement Integrated Policies:** Develop and implement operational policies that reflect an integrated system of performance, communication, and case management, and use technology to achieve integration and expanded service offerings.
- **Cross Train and Equip Center Staff:** Train and equip workforce center staff in an ongoing learning process with the knowledge, skills, and motivation to provide superior service to job seekers, including those with disabilities, and businesses in an integrated, regionally focused framework of service delivery. Center staff are cross trained, as appropriate, to increase staff capacity, expertise, and efficiency. Cross-training allows staff from differing programs to understand every program and to share their expertise

about the needs of specific populations so that all staff can better serve all customers. Center staff is routinely trained and are keenly aware as to how their particular function supports and contributes to the overall vision of the local board.

- **Maintain Integrated Case Management:** Develop and maintain integrated case management systems that inform customer service throughout the customer's interaction with the integrated system and allow information collected from customers at intake to be captured once. Customer information is properly secured in accordance with personally identifiable information guidelines, and facilitated as appropriate, with the necessary memoranda of understanding or other forms of confidentiality and data sharing agreements, consistent with federal and state privacy laws and regulations. Data, however, would be shared with other programs, for those programs' purposes, within the workforce system only after the informed written consent of the individual has been obtained, where required.

WIOA has a focus on helping those with barriers to employment, which includes, but not limited to low-income and disadvantaged populations. Workforce development professionals operate within a highly integrated one-stop career system, complete with co-located partners, procured service providers, and shared resource leveraging. However, funding and available public resources are still finite and limited, so populations with significant or multiple barriers to employment should receive priority for services. Sometimes these populations will be referred to as "hard- to-serve" or "hard-to-employ" clients.

Some special populations the workforce system serves include, but are not limited to:

- Veterans and eligible spouses
- Individuals with disabilities, both youth and adults
- English language learners (Limited English Proficiency)
- Migrant and seasonal farmworkers
- Out-of-school youth
- Adult and youth ex-offenders (justice-involved)
- Public assistance recipients (TANF, SNAP, SSI, Medicaid, etc.)
- Youth in, or previously in, foster care
- Homeless individuals, both youth and adults
- Runaway youth
- Pregnant and parenting youth
- The long-term unemployed
- Low-income workers earning wages below self-sufficiency
- Basic skills deficient individuals

- The over 55 age group

(2) The vision of the one-stop system is that service providers leverage all available assets, ensure universal access, and allocate funding for low income and special populations. Many local areas have established more inclusive priority of service policies to ensure that their hard-to-serve and disadvantaged populations receive a focus in their service delivery.

Describe the goals for achieving this vision based on the analysis in (a) above of the State's economic conditions, workforce, and workforce development activities. This must include—

(A) Goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce, including preparing youth and individuals with barriers to employment³ and other populations.⁴

(B) Goals for meeting the skilled workforce needs of employers.

State Board/Title I Response:

Each of the four major goals of this plan will be implemented with the above listed special populations in mind to increase the services and enrollment of these populations. The ultimate goal is to find and help disadvantaged individuals, which in turn leads to greater overall economic prosperity for the State. Persistent, incremental accommodations or assistance can often result in a safety net that can eventually lead to huge gains for the individuals seeking help raising the overall level of economic prosperity for the community, when they achieve positive labor market outcomes. Thus, proactive intake of special populations helps the State attain a larger return on investment for the funding, assets and staff resources employed. This requires leadership and vision in labor market-relevant planning, including evaluation, assessments, data-driven decision-making, and collaboration to best meet the needs of special populations, jobseekers, workers and businesses alike.

The four major goals listed below, when implemented, will achieve this outcome.

Strategic Goal 1: Develop an efficient partnership with employers, the educational system, workforce development partners, and community-based organizations to deliver a platform that will prepare a skilled workforce for existing and new employers.

Goal 1 Objectives:

1. Expand employer partnerships through the support of industry engagement.
2. Identify and promote best practices (private and public) for developing and sustaining partnerships.
3. Expand partnership with economic development to refine sector strategies.

³ Individuals with barriers to employment include displaced homemakers; low-income individuals; Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians; individuals with disabilities, including youth who are individuals with disabilities; older individuals; ex-offenders; homeless individuals, or homeless children and youths; youth who are in or have aged out of the foster care system; individuals who are English language learners, individuals who have low levels of literacy, and individuals facing substantial cultural barriers; eligible migrant and seasonal farmworkers (as defined at section 167(i) of WIOA and Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 3514); individuals within 2 years of exhausting lifetime eligibility under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program; single parents (including single pregnant women); and long-term unemployed individuals.

⁴ Veterans, unemployed workers, and youth and any other populations identified by the State.

4. Improve communication/participation between education entities, local and state boards, government agencies, community-based organizations, and employers.
5. Increase accountability and clarity of action between all workforce related boards.
6. Increase the utilization of Registered Apprenticeship programs as viable talent development opportunities.
7. Increase connections with employers and Vocational Rehabilitation agencies to provide support and employment for youth and adults with disabilities.
8. Partner with K-12 education, higher education, career and technical education, and adult education to provide consistent rules and eliminate barriers to implementing training programs around the State.
9. Expand small business participation.

Strategic Goal 2: Enhance service delivery to employers and jobseekers.

Goal 2 Objectives:

1. Develop a common intake process for jobseekers and businesses that will efficiently connect them with services available from all workforce development partner programs and identify any barriers to employment that need to be addressed.
2. Develop an integrated data system that will enable the sharing of information between partner agencies to more efficiently service both employers and jobseekers.
3. Promote training that leads to industry recognized credentials and certification.
4. Support transportable skill sets for transportable careers.
5. Support career pathways development and sector strategy initiatives as a way to meet business and industry needs.
6. Expand service delivery access points by the use of virtual services.
7. Develop a common business outreach strategy with a common message that will be utilized by all workforce system partners.
8. Develop a menu of services available at each service delivery access point that provides a list of the services and training opportunities available through Arkansas's talent development system.
9. Utilize customer satisfaction surveys to ensure continuous improvement of the State's talent development system.
10. Explore data sharing opportunities with non-governmental organizations that are committed partners to the state's workforce center system that will lead to improved intake, referral, and case management for customers served by multiple agencies (both public and private).

Strategic Goal 3: Increase awareness of the State's Talent Development System.

Goal 3 Objectives:

1. Increase access to the workforce development system through a no wrong door approach to services.
2. Develop an image-building outreach campaign that educates Arkansans about the services and the career development opportunities available in the State.
3. Utilize technology, including social media and search engine optimization, to better connect jobseekers and employers with the talent development system in Arkansas.
4. Develop a user-friendly website that provides a common repository of information about career development opportunities that are relevant to K-12 education, parents, educators, adults, employers, government agencies, and the general public.

Strategic Goal 4: Address Skills Gaps

Goal 4 Objectives:

1. Conduct a statewide skills and asset analysis to determine the skills gaps present and resources available to solve the skills issue.
2. Develop and implement an action plan to close the basic core, technical, and soft skills gaps in Arkansas.
3. Develop and maintain a system for the continuous assessment and alignment of programs with current and future skills demand.

Performance Goals.

Using the table provided in Appendix 1, include the State's expected levels of performance relating to the performance accountability measures based on primary indicators of performance described in section 116(b)(2)(A) of WIOA. (This Strategic Planning element only applies to core programs.)

Title I Response:

WIOA ensures that federal investments in employment and training programs are accountable to jobseekers, employers, customers, and taxpayers. WIOA establishes common performance measures across the four core programs and also requires other programs authorized by the Act to report on the same indicators. In addition, WIOA requires the establishment of primary indicators on credential attainment and skills gain and on the effectiveness of services to employers. The tables with the performance goals in Title I, II, III and IV are included within the Core Program Section in the Performance Indicators Appendix.

4. Assessment.

Describe how the State will assess the overall effectiveness of the workforce development system in the State in relation to the strategic vision and goals stated above in sections (b)(1), (2), and (3) and how it will use the results of this assessment, which may include evaluation findings, and other feedback to make continuous or quality improvements.

Title I & III Response:

Arkansas' State Workforce Development Board is engaged in a review of performance outcomes through its Performance and Program Evaluation Committee. The first priority of the committee is performance data. This includes having an accessible dashboard, with information and data that is easily able to be understood by any stakeholder. dashboards have been created by the state's Workforce Policy and Innovation department, to show quarterly and annual performance outcomes, investment vs. return on investment (participant and expenditure data) and unemployment rate by local workforce development area.

Arkansas has historically contracted with a state institution or other firm to evaluate the effectiveness of programs. Areas of opportunity in regard to assessment include evaluating the effectiveness of alignment of core programs into Arkansas workforce development. Additional emphasis will be placed on improvement of co-enrollment and increased data collection in this area.

Title II Response: N/A

Title IV ARS Response: N/A

Title IV DSB Response: N/A

C. STATE STRATEGY

The Unified or Combined State Plan must include the State's strategies to achieve its strategic vision and goals. These strategies must take into account the State's economic, workforce, and workforce development, education and training activities and analysis provided in Section (a) above. Include discussion of specific strategies to address the needs of populations provided in Section (a).

1. Strategies Related to In-Demand Industry Sectors and Occupations and Career Pathways.

Describe the strategies the State will implement, including industry or sector partnerships related to in-demand industry sectors and occupations and career pathways, as required by WIOA section 101(d)(3)(B), (D). "Career pathway" is defined at WIOA section 3(7) and includes registered apprenticeship. "In-demand industry sector or occupation" is defined at WIOA section 3(23).

Title I & III Response:

The State has convened key partners to align initiatives and strategies in our state plan to include the America's Talent Strategy: Building the Workforce for the Golden Age with Pillar I: Industry-Driven Strategies. With the status of our current economy, it is imperative that we integrate education and industry with credentials. We are transforming our workforce system by evaluating and restructuring statewide education and training systems, resources and infrastructure to better serve workers such as developing or identifying portable, stackable credentials to ease individuals' transition from education to industry. We do this by publishing credential information through the Arkansas Department of Shared Administrative Services (ADSAS) by partnering with Credential Engine.

Credential Engine's mission is to map the credentials, qualifications, and skills landscape with clear information, fueling the creation of resources that empower people to discover and pursue the learning and career pathways that are best for them. It hosts detailed information about credentials and skills and makes it accessible to anyone from anywhere. It allows providers to upload information, such as learning outcomes, cost, and market value, and fuels the development of tools and services that use this information to help people make better decisions. Credential Engine provides a suite of web-based services that creates for the first time a centralized Credential Registry to house up-to-date information about all credentials, the Credential Transparency Description Language (CTDL) a common description language to enable credential comparability, and a platform to support customized applications to search and retrieve information about credentials. This helps learners, credential providers, employers, and policy-makers understand the value of credentials.

The approved training programs with the approved Eligible Training Providers (ETPs) are published as follows:

- Bulk upload of credentials and related information;
- Manual entry of credentials and related information; and
- Publishing assigned to third party.

The ETPs are ensuring that their programs include recognized credentials. The State ensures that the industry-recognized credentials are linked to in-demand occupation with their training programs. The ETP list includes a description of each eligible programs, designation of industry-recognized certificate, and program performance.

Industry Sector Strategies

WIOA provides a clear definition for sector or industry partnerships, requires the development or convening of industry or sector partnerships at the regional level, and mandates that strategies for convening sector partnerships be a clear part of a state's vision for achieving key workforce and economic development outcomes. The following are important identified strategies. Additional strategies may arise during the plan period particularly to further address joint priorities, especially deepening the integration of education in the entire workforce system, continuing to identify and close gaps in participant access to education, training, and job placement services, and further aligning and improving data across the system.

Sector partnerships are founded on a shared regional vision which helps to set a standard, drive change, and keep partners focused. Partners commit to aligning their policies, processes, and investment of resources to collaboratively meet the needs of the targeted sectors. Boards identify existing collaboratives or partnerships which already engage employers from the targeted industries. These partnerships include companies that share human resource challenges, as well as economic development organizations, training providers, education partners, local chambers, business and industry associations, education and industry consortiums, and other stakeholder groups.

Sector strategies are a guiding approach for how system partners collaboratively identify industries and workers' talent development needs and implement responsive, coordinated solutions at a region-wide, industry scale. There are three core components at the center of the Sector Strategies Framework: Engaged Partnerships, Data-Informed Decision Making, and

Worker Voice and Job Quality. These components play a key role in the successful execution of sector strategies and are woven into and through each element.

1. *Engaged partnerships* bring new perspectives, resources, and expertise to sector strategies work. Truly engaged partners build trusting relationships, collaborate toward shared goals, and co-create solutions that will reach those goals. Examples of organizations to include in a sector partnership are: Public workforce system partners; Key employers and industry-affiliated organizations; Education and training; and Community-based organizations.
2. *Data-informed decision making* provides insight into trends, challenges, and opportunities, enabling informed choices and targeted solutions. Data draws from varied sources throughout the lifecycle of the sector partnership. Data includes, but is not limited to, the following: Labor market information; Skills gap analysis; Worker and learner demographics; and Employer and worker feedback.
3. *Worker voice and job quality* incorporate worker representation and job quality in sector strategies ensure that solutions meet both worker and employer needs, successfully providing workers with pathways to careers and employers with skilled workers. Understanding and meeting worker needs can be accomplished in the following ways: Worker representation; Direct feedback; Including trusted community-based partners; and Development of job quality guidelines.

Targeted sectors identification is a mandatory part of the state and local planning process. Service priorities are developed and resources are dedicated based on area plans and investment strategies. Strategies will focus on demand-side aspects including connections to economic development and regional priorities, and the engagement of employers and industry groups. AWC strategies focus on the elements of a sector strategy, utilizing sector-based career pathways and training programs to prepare and connect qualified job seekers and workers to high-demand sector-based occupations and careers. Arkansas prioritizes genuine and sustained engagement with businesses from the same industry in a shared labor market region or local board that work with education, workforce development, economic development, local and regional chambers of commerce, and community partners to tackle common needs of the targeted industry.

Work-Based Learning

WIOA aims to create job-driven centers that focus on career connected learning, work-based learning, industry-recognized/postsecondary credentials, career pathways, and enhanced connections to registered apprenticeship. Work-based learning and other innovative strategies that can help individuals understand more clearly what it is like to work in a certain industry or company, is important to both improve learning outcomes, including development of essential employability skills and to help individuals understand their options through career exploration. We use work-based learning experiences, such as internships, job shadowing, and project-based learning opportunities, to help students apply their knowledge, gain valuable hands-on experience, and develop the day-one readiness and foundational skills necessary to succeed in the labor market.

Work-Based Learning (WBL) is a priority in Arkansas' State Plan. It is a framework of career awareness, exploration, preparation, and training that is both learner-relevant and directly linked to professional and industry-based expectations. WBL is structured learning in the

workplace or simulated environment that provides opportunities for sustained interactions with industry or community professionals that foster in-depth firsthand experience of the expectations and application of knowledge and skills required in each career field. Within the broad category of WBL, pre-apprenticeship and registered apprenticeships are a key priority. Key strategies to increase WBL are supported by local workforce development boards and community colleges, and include on-the-job training, pre-apprenticeships, registered apprenticeships, cooperative work experience, internships, practicums, and health care clinicals. WBL is focused on sustained interaction with business and industry, skill-attainment verification, and, when appropriate, earning of academic credit. A key component of the

Registered Apprenticeship is structured WBL. In the past, registered apprenticeship historically has been almost exclusively focused in construction and, to a lesser degree, industrial manufacturing or utilities. That is changing. Arkansas is creating registered apprenticeships in health, education, and informational technology occupations. Arkansas plans to continue the expansion of the registered apprenticeship model in these areas and others. Because Arkansas focuses on locally driven strategies and on being responsive to employer needs, there are many opportunities to expand registered apprenticeship to new businesses throughout the state, using statewide industry sector strategies.

Career Pathways

Career pathways are structured educational and training routes that help individuals transition into various industry sectors. They are designed to prepare learners for specific careers by integrating education, training, and job opportunities within these sectors. Career pathways are intended to encourage and expand the number of students, jobseekers, and workers who earn industry-recognized, post-secondary credentials that correspond to the skill needs of employers in high-demand industry sectors. Therefore, career pathways programs will engage employers and other stakeholders in:

- Identifying the skills that are needed by high-demand employers
- Determining how students are deemed proficient in these skills.
- Identifying the credentials that employers value in making labor market decisions
- Providing work-based learning opportunities for students
- Advising how to validate curricula and credentials.

Arkansas' career pathway programs include a full range of secondary, adult education, and postsecondary education options, including community colleges and registered apprenticeships. Under WIOA, career pathways are a critical element of academic programming for Title II, Adult Education and Family Literacy Programs, one of the six core programs of the Act. Title II providers have both programmatic and performance-based outcomes related to career pathways.

Arkansas has been a leader with community colleges focused on building Career Pathway credit bearing certificates at the college level. Colleges at twenty-four campuses work together to build a pathways alliance which supports the implementation and continuous improvement of

Career Pathways within their colleges such as the Arkansas State University with Career Pathways located on the campuses in Beebe, West Memphis, Mountain Home, Newport, and Malvern. Career Pathways stackable certificates are developed in collaboration with employer representatives and are approved at the state level based on local labor market information and other criteria.

Credentials, both academic and work-related, are important milestones for career pathways. Participants can earn credentials that verify educational attainment and mastery of skills and provide the ability to perform a task or operation. For our employers, credentials allow them to readily determine the skill or education level of a job applicant.

The State is focused on preparing individuals for success by offering a range of education and training strategies, career development support, and wraparound services, including:

- Registered Apprenticeships
- Contextualized instruction
- Integrated education and training
- Career ladders/lattices/roadmaps to careers
- Curriculum built on industry competency models
- Multiple entry/exit points
- Stackable credentials that lead to certificate/degree attainment
- Career navigation and supportive services.

These strategies utilize counseling and supportive services, which are a key component of career pathway programs. Case Managers assist the participants with crafting an individualized academic and career development plan that shows the steps she or he will take to reach her or his ultimate goal. Counseling supports an individual's journey through the pathway and provide "roadmaps" outlining the education and training that must be completed and credentials that must be earned to reach identified career goals. Counseling may include:

- Career assessment
- Academic and career counseling, planning, and navigation
- Academic support, including tutoring
- Social support, including referrals to resources and services
- Transition planning to employment or postsecondary education.

Supportive services are an important tool in addressing life issues that may occur during an individual's participation in a career pathways program. The Case Managers utilize counseling for ongoing assessment of an individual's need for assistance in a variety of areas such as childcare, transportation, and financial aid. These much-needed services allow individuals to participate more fully and help remove barriers to program completion.

Career pathway programs provide individuals with multiple entry points to accommodate academic readiness and multiple exit points to allow individuals to obtain employment and return to the program when they are ready to progress to the next level of credential attainment. This results in increased access to family-sustaining careers and career advancement over time

Title II Response:

The Office of Adult Education (OAE) oversees a statewide network of 34 adult education providers that deliver workforce education, training, and related services to support career preparation and advancement. OAE works to ensure that underemployed and unemployed adults can explore occupations of interest that are readily available in their communities and access aligned education and training. OAE gains this labor demand information through required participation with the Arkansas Workforce Development Board and regional advisory boards and through partnerships with industry sector initiatives, employers, registered apprenticeships, and other workforce development partners. Adult education providers identify opportunities to train and educate adults for program-specific needs as well as for broader credential and employment opportunities.

The Office of Adult Education addresses region-specific needs and goals through local workforce development boards (LWDBs) and individual advisory committees. Analysis from LWDBs, advisory committees, labor market information, and local and regional stakeholders drives program design and alignment of services, including the Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy (WAGE™) program and Integrated Education and Training (IET) opportunities that yield industry-recognized credentials and respond to current and emerging workforce needs to support strategies within Pillars I and III. Adult education programs utilize career pathway and apprenticeship models to address basic skills gaps and support incremental, stackable credential attainment. Using labor market information from the Division of Workforce Connections, OAE and its partners align industry credentials and certificates with the skills and competencies needed in each region, providing contextualized learning, IETs, and WAGE™ curriculum to help adults and businesses meet in-demand occupation and workforce needs.

Title IV ARS Response:

ARS works with education and training providers to support clients in moving through their career pathways. ARS counselors utilize labor market information to counsel and guide clients on how to best meet their individualized goals. ARS participates in local workforce development boards to address region specific needs and focus.

Title IV DSB Response: DSB works with education providers to support participants in moving through their career pathway. DSB counselors utilize labor market information to provide counseling and guidance to participants on how to best meet their individualized goals. DSB participates in local workforce development boards to address region specific needs and focus.

2. Strategies to Align Programs.

Describe the strategies the State will use to align the core programs, any Combined State Plan partner programs included in this Plan, required and optional one-stop partner programs, and any other resources available to the State to achieve fully integrated customer services consistent with the strategic vision and goals described above. ALSO DESCRIBE STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES IN REGARD TO WEAKNESSES IDENTIFIED IN SECTION II(A)(2)

Title I & III Response:

Arkansas will align core programs and move toward fully integrated customer service that supports the strategic goals of building strong partnerships, enhancing service delivery, increasing awareness of the talent development system, and addressing skills gaps. The State will leverage the agency reorganization that consolidated the core programs under Arkansas Workforce Connections within the Department of Commerce to drive alignment among the WIOA Title programs. Key strategies include unified governance and policy direction to ensure that policies, MOUs, and operating guidance are developed and implemented as part of a comprehensive system instead of in programmatic silos.

Titles I and III utilize a shared case management system so that participant records, service notes, activities, and outcomes are visible to authorized staff across programs, reducing duplication and enabling coordinated service delivery. Titles I and III utilize complementary service strategies to provide comprehensive services to eligible participants. Title III focuses on rapid engagement, job search, and labor exchange services, and providing referrals to partner services while Title I provides intensive services such as training, supportive services, work-based learning, and wraparound case management. Cross-training across all partners will ensure partners understand all services each partner offers allowing all to effectively refer clients to receive assistance as needed.

Consistent with the emphasis on employer partnerships and addressing skills gaps, Arkansas will operate employer services as a unified function. Business engagement staff will operate as a coordinated team across programs to prevent multiple, uncoordinated contacts with the same employer. Employer services teams will jointly deploy solutions for businesses and support regional sector partnerships, especially in priority industries.

To ensure that customers experience the system as a seamless network, the State will host shared learning collaboratives that bring together staff from multiple programs to reinforce a common identity and customer-centric culture.

Title II Response:

The Office of Adult Education policies reflect an ongoing effort to align local providers to the Combined State Plan's goals of strengthening the activities of utilizing a united effort to assist participants with all available resources provided by core programs. Adult education programs are required to either be colocated or have a presence at each of the comprehensive and in affiliate One Stops when beneficial. Adult education providers are also active participants on the local workforce development boards, which helps to strengthen communication and collaboration in the region and helps streamline services for both the clients and employers.

The Office of Adult Education (OAE) works with other programs outside of the core partners such as the Department of Human Services SNAP E&T and the Department of Higher Education. OAE utilizes aspects of the student intake process and specifically asks if potential students participate in other WIOA core programs upfront. This assists Adult Education staff in connecting with other partners' services to support student success with other WIOA core partners. Adult education is also colocated in most of the comprehensive workforce centers and works with core partners firsthand in connecting wrap-around services as provided by strategies in Pillars I, II and IV. Once participants begin services with Adult Education providers, the student completes a Student Education and Career Plan and identifies goals and

an action plan. Upon meeting measurable skill gains and targeted goals, learning plans are reassessed to connect to available resources and optimize customer service best practices to improve student success.

Although the local one-stop system has been restructured toward a more regional business engagement model, the commitment to high-quality customer service remains central. Adult education and its partners follow strong customer service practices that treat both partners and clients as customers, and Adult Education has trained staff and offered partner training in customer service and career services to support this effort. Adult education staff participate in annual required customer service training, either virtually or in person, and also receive specialized training such as Bridges Out of Poverty and Generational Differences to better understand the populations they serve. As a result, the retention rate of adult education learners has increased by more than 5% in the last two years.

Title IV ARS Response: ARS regional managers are members of the local workforce development boards sharing information regarding the provision of services to individuals with disabilities looking to obtain, maintain, or advance in competitive integrated employment. Staff receive ongoing training to improve service provision to clients and employers.

Title IV DSB Response: DSB staff are active members of the local workforce development boards. DSB staff participate in core partner activities to promote wrap around services to consumers. DSB also works with the Department of Education, American Indian Center of Arkansas, and the Department of Human Services to identify services for participants. All staff participate in training biannually to improve service provision and participant success. DSB provides biannual training to staff and attends WIOA Partners Meetings to enhance the knowledge of all staff on the services available through the workforce development system and other state agencies. DSB staff regularly participate in national trainings provided by UA Currents, CSAVR, and NCSAB.

Summary:

In addition to the WIOA Core programs and partners aforementioned, Arkansas strategically aligns its workforce, education and social services program under a seamless umbrella led by the Governor's taskforce. As an interagency body, the Governor's Workforce Cabinet serves as the central coordinating and decision-making entity overseeing the implementation and continuous improvement of the workforce strategy. The Governor's Workforce Cabinet is more than just a steering committee; it is a dynamic force driving the Arkansas Workforce Strategy. Its ongoing role is integral to the strategy's success, ensuring that the vision of a skilled, adaptable, and thriving Arkansas workforce is realized and sustained over time.

Collaboration is a guiding principle of the Arkansas Workforce Strategy. Addressing workforce challenges requires the expertise and insights of various sectors, including education, business, government, and community organizations. The complexities of the modern workforce system necessitate a coordinated approach. Collaboration breaks down silos between different entities, leading to more cohesive and efficient strategies. It acknowledges that building a resilient, dynamic, and skilled workforce is a collective effort, requiring the commitment and participation of all stakeholders. Arkansas prioritizes partnership and alignment across sectors and departments to create a cohesive workforce development effort.

In the pursuit of a robust and future-ready workforce, the Governor's Workforce Cabinet brings together a team of dedicated and experienced leaders. Each member plays a pivotal role in shaping the workforce strategy, drawing on their unique expertise and insights. Members and programs/one-stop partners include:

Chief Workforce Officer: Mike Rogers

Mike Rogers, as the Chief Workforce Officer, spearheads the strategic direction and coordination of Arkansas' workforce development initiatives.

Secretary of the Arkansas Department of Commerce: Hugh McDonald

Hugh McDonald oversees the state's economic development and works to ensure that the workforce strategy aligns with the evolving needs of Arkansas' business community.

Programs/One-Stop Partners: WIOA Titles I-IV, MSFW, TAA, JVSG, Unemployment Insurance

Secretary of the Arkansas Department of Education: Jacob Oliva

Jacob Oliva focuses on the educational aspects of workforce development, ensuring that our schools and educational institutions provide the skills and knowledge needed in the modern job market.

Programs/One-Stop Partners: Career & Technical Education Programs under Perkins Act of 2006.

Secretary of the Arkansas Department of Corrections: Lindsay Wallace

Wallace plays a key role in workforce reintegration strategies, focusing on providing opportunities and training for individuals re-entering society from the correctional system.

Programs/One-Stop Partners: Second Chance Act of 2007

Secretary of the Arkansas Department of Human Services: Janet Mann

Kristi Putnam's contribution involves addressing the human aspects of workforce development, including access to childcare, healthcare, and other support services that enable Arkansans to participate fully in the workforce.

Programs/One-Stop Partners: Senior Community Service Employment Programs (SCSEP), Community Services Block Grant,

Secretary of the Arkansas Department of Labor and Licensing: Daryl Bassett

Daryl Bassett's expertise lies in ensuring fair labor practices and fostering a regulatory environment conducive to business growth and protecting the public.

Secretary of the Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs: Col. Robert Ator II

Kendall Penn focuses on the integration of veterans into the workforce, ensuring that their valuable skills and experiences are recognized and utilized in civilian employment.

Secretary of the Arkansas Department of Transformation and Shared Services: Leslie Fiskien

Leslie Fiskien's role is instrumental in streamlining government services and processes to support workforce development, ensuring efficiency and effectiveness.

Role in the Arkansas Workforce Strategy:

- **Cross-Functional Partnership:** The Cabinet members work across roles, transcending traditional agency boundaries to partner on comprehensive solutions. This cross-functional collaboration ensures that every aspect of workforce development is addressed from multiple perspectives, providing dynamic solutions to complex challenges.
- **Barrier Removal and Simplification:** A core goal of the Cabinet is to dismantle obstacles that hinder workforce development and employment. This involves simplifying processes, making it easier for Arkansas residents to access the services they need without getting entangled in bureaucratic complexities.
- **Creative Problem Solving and Innovation:** Open communication and innovative thinking are at the forefront of the Cabinet's problem-solving approach. By fostering an environment of creativity and open dialogue, the Cabinet finds novel solutions to workforce challenges, ensuring that strategies are not only effective but also forward-thinking.
- **Operational Excellence Through Continuous Improvement:** The Cabinet's initiatives lead to operational excellence by continuously improving processes and workflows. This commitment to ongoing refinement ensures that the strategies implemented are efficient, effective, and aligned with the evolving needs of the workforce.
- **Seamless Service Transition for Residents:** One of the Cabinet's primary goals is to facilitate a seamless transition of services to Arkansas residents, eliminating the confusion and frustration often associated with navigating multiple government agencies. The Cabinet aims to create a streamlined, user-friendly experience for all who engage with workforce development services.
- **A Commitment to Collaborative Success:** Through these strategies, the Governor's Workforce Cabinet is not just addressing the immediate workforce needs of Arkansas but is also laying a foundation for sustained economic growth and individual empowerment. Their collaborative approach symbolizes a new era of workforce development, one where every stakeholder – from government to individual resident – plays a vital role in shaping a prosperous future for Arkansas.

Outside of the cabinet, Arkansas continues to work with other required partners to align workforce development strategies including: Job Corps, co-located in various Arkansas American Job Centers; Youth Build operated by the Little Rock Workforce Development Board; Native American programs offered through the American Indian Center of Arkansas; and Employment & Training activities carried out by the Department of Housing & Urban Development, offered through Arkansas Development Finance Authority (ADFA).

All required one-stop partners and programs are made accessible through Arkansas' one-stop delivery system.

III. OPERATIONAL PLANNING ELEMENTS

The Unified or Combined State Plan must include an Operational Planning Elements section that supports the State's strategy and the system-wide vision described in

Section II(c) above. Unless otherwise noted, all Operational Planning Elements apply to Combined State Plan partner programs included in the plan as well as to core programs. This section must include—

A. STATE STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

1. STATE BOARD FUNCTIONS

(1) Describe how the State board will implement its functions under section 101(d) of WIOA (i.e., provide a description of Board operational structures and decision-making processes to ensure such functions are carried out).

State Board Functions.

State Board/Title I Response:

The role of the state workforce board will evolve significantly if the waiver request allowing the state board to function as the local board under a single statewide planning region model is approved. The state board will adopt the functions of the local workforce development board and the composition of the board and its' committees will be re-established based on information found in the waiver section of this plan. Arkansas is fortunate to have multiple layers of governance and strategy as it relates to carrying out functions of the state workforce development board. In addition to the Arkansas Workforce Development Board, Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders issued Executive Order (EO) 23-16, which created the Governor's Workforce Cabinet and the position of the Chief Workforce Officer (CWO) to advise the Governor on issues regarding workforce development and career education in Arkansas and to undertake the following duties:

- Coordinate, integrate, and optimize services, funding, and resources to maximize desired outcomes and improve operational efficiencies.
- Ensure a talent-driven education and workforce system that addresses the current and future needs of Arkansas employers and individuals.
- Prepare and implement a data-driven workforce strategic plan using high-quality data and subject matter expertise.

The Arkansas WIOA Combined State Plan will address these goals. The anticipated outcome is to create a more collaborative, skills-based, customer-centric, and responsive workforce system that not only meets the current needs of employers and job seekers but is also poised to adapt to future economic and technological shifts.

The cabinet and workforce officer provide an overarching vision and mission for the state and acts as a Council for all government entities, including the Arkansas Workforce Development Board.

The roles and responsibilities of the Arkansas Workforce Development Board (AWDB) were established under Arkansas Act 907 of 2015 and WIOA Section 101(d). The AWDB has policymaking and oversight responsibilities for the Arkansas Workforce Development system.

Additionally, Arkansas Act 907 of 2015 gives the AWDB responsibility for oversight of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

The AWDB operates under a committee structure of three standing committees, which include the Executive Committee, Strategic Planning Committee, Program and Performance Evaluation Committee. .

The board and committees meet quarterly and may call special meetings as necessary. Each of the statutory roles and responsibilities outlined in WIOA Section 101(d) and A.C.A. §15-4-3706 have been assigned to the committee which best fits the function of the role or task. The chairs of the standing committees report to the full board at each quarterly meeting their activities and progress in accomplishing their goals.

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee shall be formed and meet as needed between the quarterly board meetings at the call of the chair of the executive committee or upon the request of seventy-five percent (75%) of the executive committee members.

The Executive Committee shall have the authority of the Board to act during the interim between Board meetings but shall defer to the Board, whenever practical, action on matters of major policy implications.

Strategic Planning Committee

The Strategic Planning Committee shall act in an advisory capacity to the Board to carry out the following functions:

- The development, implementation, and modification of the state workforce development plan;
- The review of statewide policies, of statewide programs, and of recommendations on actions that should be taken by the state to align workforce development programs in the state in a manner that supports a comprehensive and streamlined workforce development system in the state, including the review and provision of comments on the state plan, if any, for programs and activities of one-stop partners that are not core programs;
- The development and continuous improvement of the workforce development system in the state, including:
 - The development of strategies to support staff training and awareness across programs supported under the workforce development system;
 - The development and review of statewide policies affecting the coordinated provision of services through the state's one-stop delivery system;
 - The development of strategies for technological improvements to facilitate access to, and improve the quality of, services and activities provided through the one-stop delivery system, including such improvements to:
 - Enhance digital literacy skills;

- Accelerate the acquisition of skills and recognized postsecondary credentials by participants;
- Strengthen the professional development of providers and workforce professionals; and
- Ensure such technology is accessible to individuals with disabilities and individuals residing in remote areas;
- The development of allocation formulas for the distribution of funds for employment and training activities for adults, and youth workforce investment activities, to local areas.

Program and Performance Evaluation Committee

The Program and Performance Evaluation Committee shall act in an advisory capacity to the Board to carry out the following functions:

- The continuous improvement of the one-stop delivery system in local areas, including providing assistance to local boards, one-stop operators, one-stop partners, and providers with planning and delivering services, including training services and supportive services, to support effective delivery of services to workers, jobseekers, and employers;
- The development and updating of comprehensive state performance accountability measures, including state adjusted levels of performance, to assess the effectiveness of the core programs in the state;
- The identification and dissemination of information on best practices including best practices for:
 - The effective operation of one-stop centers, relating to the use of business outreach, partnerships, and service delivery strategies, including strategies for serving individuals with barriers to employment;
 - The development of effective local boards, which may include information on factors that contribute to enabling local boards to exceed negotiated local levels of performance, sustain fiscal integrity, and achieve other measures of effectiveness; and
 - Effective training programs that respond to real time labor market analysis, that effectively use direct assessment and prior learning assessment to measure an individual's prior knowledge, skills, competencies, and experiences, and that evaluate such skills, and competencies for adaptability, to support efficient placement into employment or career pathways;
- The objective criteria and procedures for use by local boards in assessing the effectiveness and continuous improvement of one-stop centers;
- The preparation of an annual report;

- The development of the statewide workforce and labor market information system;
- The development of such other policies as may promote statewide objectives for, and enhance the performance of, the workforce development system in the state; and
- The development of strategies for aligning technology and data systems across one-stop partner programs to enhance service delivery and improve efficiencies in reporting on performance accountability measures (including the design and implementation of common intake, data collection, case management information, and performance accountability measurement and reporting processes and the incorporation of local input into such design and implementation, to improve coordination of services across one-stop partner programs).

Additional committees will be created to carry out local board functions including: budget committee and one stop operations committee.

WIOA Partners Roundtable

The WIOA Partners Roundtable supports the integration of WIOA and continues as a permanent cross-agency body to coordinate and align policy and ensure continued implementation of WIOA at state and local levels. The WIOA Partners Roundtable operates as a de facto "committee" of the Arkansas Workforce Development Board due to the common members on each body.

The WIOA Partners Roundtable's membership includes the following members of the Arkansas Workforce Development Board and staff:

- Arkansas Workforce Development Executive Director
- Arkansas Workforce Connections Executive Director
- Arkansas Workforce Connections Director and Employment and Training Director (WIOA Titles I & III)
- Arkansas Adult Education Director (WIOA Title II)
- Arkansas Rehabilitation Services Commissioner (WIOA Title IV)
- Arkansas Division of Services for the Blind Director (WIOA Title IV)
- Arkansas Department of Human Services - Division of County Operations Director (SNAP E&T)
- Arkansas Office of Skills Development Director
- Arkansas Office of State Technology Chief Data Officer & Chief Research Officer
- Program Directors representing Unemployment Insurance, TAA, RESEA, LMI, Rapid Response, CTE Perkins V, and JVSG.

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF STATE STRATEGY

Describe how the lead State agency with responsibility for the administration of each core program or a Combined State Plan partner program included in this plan will implement the State's Strategies identified in II(c) above. This must include a description of—

A. CORE PROGRAM ACTIVITIES TO IMPLEMENT THE STATE'S STRATEGY

Describe the activities the entities carrying out the respective core programs will fund to implement the State's strategies. Also, describe how such activities will be aligned across the core programs and Combined State Plan partner programs included in this plan and among the entities administering the programs, including using co-enrollment and other strategies, as appropriate.

Title I Response:

The core programs have worked diligently together to align services across core programs and other program partners and are including other non-core programs such as Trade Adjustment Assistance and Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment. Staff from the core agencies are actively engaged in training opportunities that include all operational levels of the core partners and key stakeholders named in the combined plan. Arkansas has a good history of core programs alignment, but to better facilitate these activities, strategies including a common intake process, inter-agency data sharing, case management integration, and co-location of resources when possible, are being developed and implemented.

The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services shall use funds made available under WIOA Title I to support local workforce development board activities to provide services through the adult, dislocated worker, and youth programs. Services through these programs include career services such as outreach, intake, and orientation; initial assessment; labor exchange services; eligibility for services; referrals to programs; performance and cost information; information on unemployment insurance; financial aid information; and follow-up services. Additionally, for those who qualify, training and supportive services will be provided. Training services may include occupational skills training, on-the job training (OJT), Registered Apprenticeships, incumbent worker training, and skill upgrading and retaining.

Title II Response:

The Office of Adult Education requires Title II funded Adult Education providers to offer programs, activities, and services that include adult education, literacy, English language acquisition activities, workforce preparation activities, and integrated education and training. Family literacy, workplace activities, and Integrated English literacy and Civics Education activities are optional unless the provider was awarded IEL/CE funding in the request for proposal (RFP) process.

An adult education director, recommended or appointed by the Director of the Office of Adult Education, serves on each local workforce development board (LWDB) and works closely with the other core partners to serve those with barriers to employment and meet the needs of employers. Some adult education programs are colocated in the One-Stops, allowing better access to services. For example, in a few of the One-Stops, adult education provides adult basic education classes on-site, while others have a career coach that comes a few days a week to

assist individuals with career services activities. Even as the local One-Stop system has been restructured toward a more regional business engagement model, services remain coordinated, and Adult Education continues to receive referrals from workforce partners and provide instruction and support to shared clients. The Title I Adult Program has referred individuals whose native language isn't English to adult education for services. In contrast, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services has been instrumental in providing disability screening for adult learners interested in working. Arkansans that are co-enrolled typically have higher outcomes than those just enrolled in one program. The wraparound services and support have been key to their success.

To ensure that funded activities implement the State's strategy and remain aligned across core and partner programs, the local workforce development boards are utilized in the Office of Adult Education's request for proposal (RFP) process. Local workforce development boards are allowed to review and comment on the RFP application of each eligible adult education applicant. One of the considerations is how the eligible provider demonstrates alignment between proposed activities and services to the one-stop partners. This includes how the applicant plans to align with the LWDB regarding employment, training, education, and supportive services that adult education learners need. In addition, the eligible adult education application must include the applicant's proposed activities, services, and the regional needs identified in the LWDB proposed local plan, including strategies for concurrent enrollment and co-enrollment with other core and Combined State Plan partners.

To further align activities across core and partner programs, the State uses CiviForm as the one-stop intake and enrollment system and enables core partners to jointly screen, refer, and co-enroll participants across Titles I, II, III, IV, and Combined State Plan partners, as appropriate. Other strategies the Office of Adult Education uses to support this alignment include statewide assessment and credentialing initiatives, particularly the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) and the newly revised Test of Adult Basic Education Assessment (TABE) 13/14. Through the NCRC initiative, Adult Education provides targeted remediation for individuals who do not initially meet the required ACT WorkKeys scores. Certified adult education providers use the ACT WorkKeys curriculum to deliver focused instruction in reading, math, and language, helping learners successfully complete the WorkKeys curriculum and assessments and reducing the number of retakes and associated state costs. This support enables learners to sit for the Career Readiness Certificate (CRC) exam an employer-recognized indicator of job readiness and a verified measure of employability skill level. In addition, TABE 13/14, administered through the Office of Adult Education, establishes an academic baseline for all enrolled adult learners; this shared assessment data helps teachers and partners identify specific skill deficiencies, develop guided lesson plans, avoid duplicative services, and accelerate measurable skill gains. Together, shared intake, co-enrollment, and aligned assessment and remediation strategies shorten the time needed to earn a GED®, complete workforce preparation and training, and obtain industry-recognized certificates, which in turn supports Arkansas's goal of increasing the labor force participation rate. The entire process is aligned to Pillar III: Integrated Systems, in which services are streamlined across programs in a coordinated and collaborative manner.

Adult education providers must offer students integrated education and training (IET) programs. IET is a service approach that provides adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement. An IET program must include three components: adult education and literacy

activities, workforce preparation activities, and workforce training. In addition, as part of a career pathway, the design of an IET program should support the local and state workforce development board plans as required under WIOA. Adult Education providers rely heavily on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) and other educational entities for the training component. In addition, adult learners are connected to programs such as SNAP, TANF, WIOA, and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services to help pay tuition costs, as Title II funds cannot pay tuition on learners' behalf. This braided funding approach allows programs to maximize the services and allows adults to be co-enrolled in multiple programs.

Title III Response:

Wagner-Peyser Employment Services (ES) continues to knit all partners together by serving as the hub for all workforce development services. Employment services staff are housed at Arkansas Workforce Centers and provide career services and referral services to customers of all demographics. As front-line representatives, ES staff are trained to thoroughly interview, serve, and refer customers to intensive services offered through WIOA partners.

The ADWS will provide labor exchange services through funds provided under WIOA Title III including labor market information to the individuals seeking services. The information will include information on local, regional and national labor market areas such as:

- Job vacancies in labor market areas
- Information on job skills necessary to obtain the jobs
- Local, in-demand occupations and related earning potential
- Opportunities for advancement in those occupations

Additionally, One-Stops and partners must provide appropriate services for individuals to obtain or retain employment. These services include, but are not limited to:

- Individual Employment Plan (IEP)
- Career planning and counseling (no longer called case management)
 - Comprehensive assessment
- Occupational skills assessment
- Short-term prevocational services
- Internship and work experience including transitional jobs and industry partnerships
- Workforce preparation
- Out-of-area job search
- English language acquisition
- Financial literacy

Aligned closely with Wagner-Peyser services is the JVSG program, offered through the network of American Job Centers throughout the state. As a required one-stop partner, customers who qualify for veterans services will receive priority of service and receive individualized career-

and training-related services to eligible veterans and eligible persons with significant barriers to employment (SBEs), as well as other authorized populations. LVER staff will perform business outreach and strategically assist employers fill their workforce needs with job-seeking veterans.

Title IV ARS Response:

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) and the Division for Services for the Blind (DSB) anticipate that in calendar year 2027 legislation will be passed by the Arkansas Legislature and signed by the Governor to combine ARS and DSB into one general vocational rehabilitation agency. This is consistent with Pillar III: Integrated Systems of the America's Talent Strategy: Building the Workforce for the Golden Age. The goal of this effort is to address the fragmentation of duplicative programs by centralizing administration and program governance resulting in a more streamlined and coordinated system of workforce services for individuals with disabilities within the Department of Commerce. ARS and DSB understand that when this occurs a new comprehensive statewide needs assessment that reflects the needs of individuals with disabilities served by both agencies will be required as well as the development of a combined state plan. ARS and DSB understand that to assure compliance with federal requirements they will need to maintain regular contact with the state's liaison and other involved Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) staff throughout the planning and implementation of this project.

ARS assists individuals with disabilities in preparing for, maintaining, and advancing in competitive integrated employment. Services are divided into pre-employment transition, transition, and vocational rehabilitation services. Required pre-employment transition services target students with disabilities and help them determine career interests through job exploration, work-based learning experiences, counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs at institutions of higher education, workplace readiness training, and instruction in self-advocacy. Transition services assist students with disabilities to transition from secondary education into postsecondary education and employment. Clients and VR counselors jointly develop the individualized plan for employment (IPE). The individual's strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice are utilized in IPE development. The IPE identifies a client's vocational goal, necessary services, and roles and responsibilities to assist the client in goal achievement. Services provided may include vocational counseling, vocational training, restoration, assistive technology, on-the-job training, and job placement. ARS counselors are aware of services provided by other core programs and refer as determined appropriate.

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB provides vocational rehabilitation services to individuals who are Blind and Visually Impaired. These services ensure that individuals provide opportunities for those age 14 and older to have competitive integrated employment. Through Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) and Transition services, DSB can support Youth with a Disability and Students with a Disability in their transition from secondary education to postsecondary education and employment. Services are determined using informed choice of the participant with support from the DSB counselor to ensure the employment goal considers the participant's strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, and interests. DSB staff are

aware of the services and opportunities provided by other core programs and refer participants to additional resources and services when possible.

B. ALIGNMENT WITH ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE THE PLAN

Describe how the activities identified in (A) will be aligned with programs and activities provided by required one-stop partners and other optional one-stop partners and activities provided under employment, training (including Registered Apprenticeships), education (including career and technical education), human services and other programs not covered by the plan, as appropriate, assuring coordination of, and avoiding duplication among these activities.

Title I Response:

Through the WIOA Partners Roundtable, optional partners are at the table including Trade Adjustment Assistance, Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment, SNAP Employment & Training, and Job for Veterans State Grant. While these partners are optional, we consider their input as vital to making the Arkansas workforce development system streamlined and effective. Every policy developed for statewide implementation is reviewed by subject matter experts from both core and non-core programs.

Arkansas continues to work with other required partners to align workforce development strategies including: JVSG, programs/services offered within American Job Centers; CSBG-partnerships through the Department of Human Services and Community Action Agencies; Job Corps, co-located in various Arkansas American Job Centers; Youth Build operated by the Little Rock Workforce Development Board; Native American programs offered through the American Indian Center of Arkansas; and Employment & Training activities carried out by the Department of Housing & Urban Development, offered through Arkansas Development Finance Authority (ADFA).

Information on RA is shared with dislocated workers that attend information sessions while preparing for or recovering from a layoff. Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) staff routinely notify TAA eligible clients of the option to pursue RA as a viable training option. Registered Apprenticeships are presented to clients as a training option at both the TAA Information Sessions and during one-on-one assessments. In most recent years, the Arkansas Office of Skills Development has joined the WIOA Partners Roundtable and offers insight in the areas of work-based learning not limited to registered apprenticeships, incumbent worker training, and customized training. These additional partnerships ensure the greatest success for jobseekers and businesses.

Title II Response:

The Office of Adult Education (OAE) seeks strengthen its to offer more pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships opportunities to learners through its network of adult education providers. State staff has met with the Office of Skills Development, a division of the Department of Commerce, to discuss ways to expand apprenticeships to adult learners. Although a few providers currently work with apprenticeship providers in the state such as the National Apprenticeship Training Foundation, Arkansas Construction Education Foundation, and Little Rock Electrical JATC, there is a need for more partnerships in other sectors and across the state

which support workforce strategy within Pillar I. Apprenticeship programs can help satisfy the integrated education and training (IET) requirement of all adult education providers. IETs enable individuals to secure industry-relevant certifications or credentials, obtain employment within an occupational area, or advance to higher levels of future education and employment. IETs are selected based on the Local Workforce Development Plan, which outlines the sectors that are high-demand and lead to high-wages, ensuring that adult education and literacy activities are aligned with employment and training programs, including Registered Apprenticeships, developed with WIOA Title I and other workforce partners

Working with WIOA One-Stop Partners helps create a framework for existing education and workforce services to move from disconnection to integration into one system. This process of working with WIOA partners in conjunction with local workforce development boards and local advisory boards offers a more efficient and customer-centered approach to workforce development. Adult Education's best practices are shared with One-Stop Partners to collaborate monthly with WIOA partners through referrals and co-enrollment to minimize the duplication of services as required within Pillar III. The attention, timing, and education or training involved benefit from having core partners working together to bring shared services to align with the skill needs of industries and prepare individuals to be successful for future employment or postsecondary education opportunities, including apprenticeships.

Another partnership that the state office has formed is working with Arkansas Virtual Academy (AVA) through *iCEV*, an online Career Technical Education (CTE) training program. Adult learners will have access to training modules that lead to job-industry recognized certifications and AVA's career technical education instructors. Adult learners will be able to access workforce training opportunities no matter where they are in the state. Adult education uses workplace classes, the WAGE™ job-readiness program, and Literacy Task Analysis (LTA) to align foundational reading, writing, math, English language acquisition, digital literacy, and workforce preparation skills with these CTE offerings and employer-led training. This coordination allows adult education to fill basic skills gaps so that learners can enter and complete CTE, Registered Apprenticeship, and other training programs, complementing—not duplicating—the instruction provided by CTE providers, community colleges, and human service partners. Working with other organizations allows the state to expand opportunities for Arkansans as well as reduce duplication of services.

The public library is another partnership that local adult education providers are building. The Fayetteville Public Library and the Fayetteville School District Adult Education program have formed a partnership in which the adult education program is offering basic skills instruction, English Language Acquisition and integrating workforce preparation training and digital literacy into the course. In addition, the library provides workforce training programs in the Skilled Trades, Information Technology, Heavy Equipment Operation, and Culinary Arts that lead to a certification. The library is an excellent partner for the workforce training component of adult education's integrated education and training program. Similar partnerships with community-based organizations, human service agencies, and optional one-stop partners extend access to adult education, literacy, English language acquisition, workforce preparation, and integrated education and training, while using shared space, coordinated schedules, and aligned curricula to avoid duplication and to provide adult learners with clear, connected pathways from foundational skills instruction to occupational training, employment, and further education.

Title III Response:

ES staff frequently represent the agency and WIOA partner system at various community events and organizational meetings. Presentations are often delivered to civic groups including Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, Lions Club, and more. As a result, the Arkansas workforce system benefits from these collaborations by representing WIOA in many groups that are regionally and locally led. In many cases, memorandums of understanding and other agreements are established to define how services will be provided.

Title IV ARS Response: ARS has set a strategy to increase apprenticeships and on-the-job training opportunities in the Program Years 2024-2027. ARS works with the Department of Education to fully serve students with disabilities. ARS also works with apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship providers to secure opportunities consistent with the individual's strengths, interests, and abilities.

Title IV DSB Response: DSB is working to improve the availability of apprenticeships for individuals who are Blind and Visually Impaired by working with the Office of Skills Development (OSD) and the support of the Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Employment (VRTAC-QE). DSB also has an MOU with the American Indian Center of Arkansas to provide more complete services to individuals eligible for both programs. DSB works with the Department of Education and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services to fully serve Students with a Disability. DSB and ARS work together to identify co-enrolled participants to avoid duplication of services and more effective services for those participants.

C. COORDINATION, ALIGNMENT AND PROVISION OF SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS

Describe how the entities carrying out the respective core programs, Combined State Plan partner programs included in this plan, and required and optional one-stop partner programs will coordinate activities and resources to provide comprehensive, high-quality, customer-centered services, including supportive services (e.g. transportation), to individuals, including those populations identified in section II(a)(1)(B), and individuals in remote areas The activities described shall conform to the statutory requirements of each program.

Title I Response:

The Trade Adjustment Act (TAA) Program. The Arkansas TAA Program has transitioned to a fully centralized operational model, with two staff positions providing both programmatic and fiscal services virtually from the Central Office. All reporting responsibilities have also been consolidated at the Central Office. TAA actively collaborates with Local Workforce Centers, WIOA Title I staff, and other One-Stop partners to ensure seamless and coordinated reemployment support. This partnership facilitates participant access to a comprehensive suite of services, including:

- Job Search and Reemployment Assistance
- Current Labor Market Information (LMI)
- Targeted Training Services

All TAA participants receive an individualized assessment to explore employment options and identify career pathways aligned with current labor market needs. This assessment promotes co-enrollment with WIOA and other programs, maximizing access to critical resources such as:

- Supportive Services
- On-the-Job Training (OJT)
- Registered Apprenticeship (RA) opportunities

One-on-one assessments are provided to assist clients with review of employment opportunities. Quarterly meetings are held with partners and staff to discuss and remove any barriers to co-enrollment and seek opportunities to encourage participation in the programs available to them. During this period of waiting for Program reauthorization, Trade staff conducts outreach to Trade eligible clients to remind and offer the life-time training eligibility.

Title II Response:

Adult Education is the Department of Human Services (DHS) largest provider of the SNAP E&T program and has been providing employment and training services since 2017. Adult education providers work closely with the local Division of County Operations offices, and One Stops to ensure that activities are coordinated to meet the needs of SNAP clients. State staff train local program SNAP E&T Coordinators on policies, case management, supportive services, and customer service to ensure staff have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to work with special populations. Local adult education SNAP E&T Coordinators are required to earn a Career Service Provider (CSP) certificate within one year of hire. The CSP Course includes competencies in areas such as helping skills, labor market information, career assessment, employability skills, and program management to name a few. On the local level, the coordinators have been very instrumental in helping individuals with job search skills, resumes, mock interviews, identifying a career pathway, and enrolling in postsecondary education and training programs. In addition, coordinators help eligible individuals reduce barriers by providing supportive services such as childcare, assistance with transportation, tuition and supplies. These efforts support workforce strategies within Pillars I, III and IV, for accountability of shared outcomes and integrated support and service delivery. The adult education providers can provide individuals participating in adult education or work activities with gas cards and reimbursements with a receipt.

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services is another core partner that adult education utilizes, especially for those individuals who may have a potential learning disability. Programs must initiate the screening process for learning disabilities during participant intake. The process, administered by trained American Disabilities Act (ADA) personnel, includes the use of a validated learning disabilities screening tool, a follow-up interview to review the results of the screening tool, and appropriate further steps for investigating diagnostic referrals as warranted by the screening process.

As an education entity, professional development is vital to the infrastructure of adult education. Since those with barriers to employment tend to be the most marginalized, it's important to have an understanding about the population and provide excellent customer service to them. Adult education providers are required to participate in customer service training either virtually or in person annually. In addition, Bridges Out of Poverty and

Generational Differences are provided to ensure that Career Service Providers, teachers, and other staff can appropriately interact with individuals from all walks of life and can effectively handle various situations or conflicts that may arise.

Lastly, since Arkansas is a rural state, virtual case management along with distance education, are options for those who are unable to come onsite to an adult education center. Adult education providers also hold evening and weekend classes to give those with barriers to employment an opportunity to access services. On a limited basis, participants are also able to check out laptops and Chromebooks to reduce interruption of educational services.

Title III Response:

Similar to the WIOA Partners Roundtable model established on the state-level, each local workforce development area convenes quarterly meetings to discuss coordination, alignment, and service delivery. These quarterly meetings are led by one-stop-operators hired by the local boards charged with overseeing the coordination of services amongst partners. One best practice that Arkansas can highlight is during these meetings- partners often review data of those being served and identify areas with disparities, helping to establish goals for the upcoming quarters. This has proven to be effective in serving targeted populations from a unified perspective

Arkansas continues to work with other required partners to align workforce development strategies including: JVSG, programs/services offered within American Job Centers; CSBG-partnerships through the Department of Human Services and Community Action Agencies; Job Corps, co-located in various Arkansas American Job Centers; Youth Build operated by the Little Rock Workforce Development Board; Native American programs offered through the American Indian Center of Arkansas; and Employment & Training activities carried out by the Department of Housing & Urban Development, offered through Arkansas Development Finance Authority (ADFA).

Title IV ARS Response:

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services' counselors come to the Adult Education programs to provide services to eligible students. Likewise, adult education providers have offered classes onsite at some of the rehabilitation offices. This reduces transportation barriers and provides supports to clients to gain employment. ARS and local workforce boards offer on-the-job training to clients who qualify. ARS informs clients about services provided by other core partners and refers as appropriate.

Title IV DSB Response:

The Division of Services for the Blind works with participants to provide services in the manner that best benefits their success. Some participants receive services remotely or in their home, while others may attend overnight training or day training to accomplish their needs. DSB assists consumers with obtaining transportation to these services as necessary and works with vendors to ensure services are accessible across the state. DSB maintains a resource list of referral sources around the state to assist with removing barriers for individuals. DSB's rate setting process takes into consideration the rural nature of the state and how that may be a

barrier to service providers when defining rates for services to expand access to services to all 75 counties.

D. COORDINATION, ALIGNMENT AND PROVISION OF SERVICES TO EMPLOYERS

Describe how the entities carrying out the respective core programs, any Combined State Plan partner program included in this plan, required and optional one-stop partner programs will coordinate activities and resources to provide comprehensive, high-quality services to employers to meet their current and projected workforce needs and to achieve the goals of industry or sector partners in the state. The activities described shall conform to the statutory requirements of each program.

Title I & III Response:

Employer collaboratives are industry-led partnerships that play a crucial role in aligning workforce development efforts with the specific needs and challenges of various sectors. The primary focus of employer collaboratives is to convene businesses, industry leaders, and key stakeholders to work together to address workforce challenges and opportunities in their respective sectors.

Arkansas is engaged in a formal initiative named Talent Pipeline Management (TPM). TPM is a cutting-edge approach to meeting talent demand. Developed by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, TPM is revolutionizing how businesses address their workforce needs.

Role in the Arkansas Workforce State Plan:

- **Align Education with Industry Needs:** TPM helps align educational and training programs with the specific needs of industries, ensuring that students and job seekers acquire relevant, in-demand skills.
- **Close Skills Gaps:** By clearly articulating employer needs, TPM helps to close the skills gap, ensuring that the workforce is trained for the jobs that are available now and in the future.
- **Create Efficient Talent Pipelines:** Through collaboration with education providers and workforce development programs, TPM creates more efficient and targeted talent pipelines.
- **Enhance Workforce Data Analysis:** TPM's focus on data and metrics contributes to a more sophisticated understanding of labor market dynamics, assisting in strategic workforce planning.
- **Strengthen Employer Collaboration:** TPM fosters a collaborative environment where businesses within sectors and industries work together to address common workforce challenges.
- **Inform Policy and Strategy:** Insights from TPM inform state workforce policies and strategies, ensuring they are responsive to actual employer needs.

- **Support Economic Development:** By ensuring a skilled workforce, TPM aids in attracting new businesses and supporting the growth of existing ones, thereby driving economic development.
- **Enhance Career Pathways:** By providing clear information on industry needs, TPM helps in crafting career pathways that are aligned with real job opportunities.

In Arkansas, TPM is integrated into the workforce plan as a key tool for engaging employers and ensuring that workforce development efforts are closely aligned with the needs of the state's economy. By adopting TPM, Arkansas is taking a proactive, employer-centric approach to workforce development, setting the stage for a more responsive and effective workforce ecosystem.

The Arkansas WIOA Partners Roundtable, consisting of core partners, meets monthly to share information, identify resources, and build relationships. Because of the large number of members, working committees are utilized to work on specific issues and the policy committee is tasked with the coordination, alignment and provision of services to employers. A working group has been established that consists of leaders from each agency tasked with business relations from all of the core programs and key workforce stakeholders. The intent of this partnership is to allow for all business relations representatives to be versed in the services provided by all core programs and key stakeholders in order to provide this information to employers.

The Arkansas Workforce Center Certification Criteria requires the center to have a business liaison team as the single point of contact for business services. It is expected that staff involved with initiating employer contacts will participate on the team in a coordinated outreach program under the Arkansas Workforce Center name and marketing approach. The team will consist of business contact staff from all partner programs and will, at a minimum, provide the following structure and coordination in approaching the business community:

- A team leader to coordinate the activities of the team.
- A coordinated "script" to market the system to employers.
- Use of the Arkansas Workforce Center name as the primary marketing approach, with agency specialty areas (i.e., Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, Services for the Blind, DVOP/LVER Veterans Services) presented as a part of the overall system as needed.
- An information sharing strategy that makes contact results available to all team members.
- A clear menu of services across all partners.
- A division of duties with employer sector specializations as deemed appropriate for quality customer service.
- Multiple agency participation with clear cost and information sharing commitments.

- At a minimum, job search, employer contacts, job orders, or job development leads performed by any center staff as a result of outreach will be entered into the Wagner-Peyser database (Arkansas Job Link).

Arkansas has received several discretionary grants from the U.S. Department of Labor to address workforce development and training needs of Arkansas employers and jobseekers. Specifically, through the Arkansas Apprenticeship Pathway Initiative, Arkansas Sector Partnership, and the Arkansas Job Driven National Emergency Grant, the State has been able to connect with numerous employers throughout the state to identify existing and emerging occupations and training needs. These grants have enabled the state to be very flexible and immediately responsive to the training needs identified by employers. Through the use of project management teams comprised of core, mandatory, and optional partners in addition to Registered Apprenticeship, two- and four-year educational institutions, local workforce development boards, and non-profit organizations, the State is able to most effectively deliver services through these grants and maximize on subject matter expertise from all involved.

Arkansas understands that the WIOA legislative mandate has changed workforce development. As such, we are currently seeking a “business facing” workforce development solution that is a collaborative platform to connect people, jobs, programs, and data to advance the economic viability of our state.

ADWS began hosting Business Services Summits on a regular basis. These meetings serve as an opportunity for WIOA Business Services Teams to come together, strategize, and share best practices regarding the provision of workforce development services to Employers. Agenda topics include Networking and Building Sector Partnerships, Effective Recruiting Tips, Capitalizing on OJT/WBL Opportunities, Maintaining a Virtual Presence, Building Awareness, and Employer Outreach.

The JVSG program is a partner within Arkansas’s Workforce Development system. The JVSG program is required by law to provide services to veterans and other eligible persons. The JVSG-funded Consolidated Position (CP) staff are dedicated to their primary statutory responsibilities as defined by Veterans’ Program Letters (VPLs). The CP staff provide basic and individualized career services through case management to veterans with significant barriers to employment (SBE) and other eligible persons.

The CP staff are also fully integrated into and serve on local business service teams in Arkansas’ ten LWDAs. CP staff coordinate with members of the community to advocate to employers on behalf of veterans and to develop job opportunities specifically for veterans. Each business services team in the ten LWDAs in Arkansas meet monthly to discuss strategy, coordination, industry targets, and assignments for the current and upcoming quarters. This process ensures that representatives from all WIOA one-stop required partners are working seamlessly to produce outcomes and to avoid duplication of services.

The CP staff also train all Arkansas Workforce Center Staff to network for veterans and comply with priority of service requirements, with assistance from the Central Office Training Coordinator. In addition, All JVSG staff collaborate with community partners in order to provide the additional services needed for the veteran community to obtain meaningful careers. On a priority of service basis, workforce center staff member determines the eligible person’s

purpose for registering. The intake staff member, serving as the “greeter” is usually the first person that a veteran or other eligible person interact with at an Arkansas Workforce Center (AWC). Once the veteran or other eligible person is identified, the Workforce Center Staff conducts an initial assessment. This initial assessment uses a customized veteran intake questionnaire to help determine if the veteran or other eligible person has an SBE or if they are a member of another special priority group. If a determination is made that the client is a veteran with an SBE or meets other special criteria, they are referred to the CP staff for further assessment and individualized career services. Those veterans determined not to possess an SBE are provided career services.

These services include resume writing, computer skills, and interviewing techniques. If the Veteran or other covered person needs more specialized services, they may be referred to another service provider/program within the AWC. All individualized career services and training is provided on a priority of service basis.

Title II Response:

The Office of Adult Education (OAE) coordinates core programs and partner services to deliver comprehensive, high-quality services to employers through an integrated system led by Arkansas Workforce Connections and its business engagement team, Arkansas Industry Connect. Core WIOA partners jointly develop employer engagement strategies, reduce duplication, and streamline referrals so that business and industry can access a single, aligned system rather than separate, disconnected programs. Because these programs are housed within Arkansas Workforce Connections and co-located within the Arkansas Department of Commerce, regular communication and joint planning support employers facing both current and projected workforce needs, including restructuring, layoffs, possible closures, business expansion, and the arrival of new industries. In these situations, rapid response is crucial: core partners work together to connect affected workers quickly to appropriate services, for example, adult education for retooling and credentialing or Arkansas Rehabilitation Services for disability-related supports, while coordinating rapid response services that align talent pipelines with employer demand. Together, these coordinated activities ensure comprehensive, high-quality services to employers and support the goals of industry and sector partnerships across the state.

Employer Services: Workplace Classes and Literacy Task Analysis

Within this framework, the Office of Adult Education delivers WIOA Title II adult education and literacy services for employers. One of OAE’s key employer services is workplace classes, offered on-site or at convenient locations, to improve productivity through contextualized literacy, writing, math, English language acquisition, digital skills, and workforce preparation. Instruction can also include specialized industry vocabulary and reinforcement of basic workplace expectations such as attendance, punctuality, teamwork, and communication, with employers actively shaping curriculum to meet their organizational needs. Another employer-facing service is Literacy Task Analysis (LTA), in which a trained WAGE™ Coordinator consults with managers and experienced employees (subject matter experts) to identify the literacy, numeracy, communication, and problem-solving skills required for specific jobs supporting Pillar I, industry needs. LTA results guide development of training that integrates basic skills with actual job tasks, supports upskilling and promotion, and clarifies the skills needed for lateral moves within the company.

Career Services and Supportive Service Coordination

To support employer demand for a skilled workforce, the Office of Adult Education delivers required WIOA Career Services and specialized support that link job seekers to business needs. Core services include outreach, intake, and orientation; initial academic and employability assessments (literacy, numeracy, English language, digital skills, and supportive service needs); referrals and coordination with workforce and community partners; and information on performance outcomes, training providers, and supportive services. OAE also provides career exploration and individualized education and career plans; workforce preparation activities such as résumé development, financial literacy, time management, and digital literacy; workplace preparation and WAGE™ employability skill development; and cross-training for WIOA and partner staff on Title II services and referral pathways. Certified Career Services Providers (CCSPs) within Adult Education coordinate with SNAP E&T, TANF, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, and other partners to ensure participants can access supportive services (e.g., childcare, transportation, food assistance, mental health, and disability-related support), thereby maintaining continuity of service for Arkansans and helping employers access a more job-ready talent pool across all regions.

One-Stop Structure, Governance, and Regional Business Engagement

In 2024–2025, as Arkansas restructured one-stop operations and closed some workforce centers, the State eligible agency maintained the model of designating the adult education provider in each service area as the primary Title II partner. Local Workforce Development Boards define partner roles through MOUs and IFAs, and the Director of OAE appoints one Adult Education director from each region as the Title II representative on the Local WIOA Board to ensure alignment with local sector strategies. As the state transitions to a regional management model, regional business service managers will work directly with local employers to identify skill needs and coordinate with OAE on hiring pipelines, workplace classes, and joint initiatives. OAE programs will continue to provide services on-site, virtually, and by referral so that career, academic, and workforce preparation services remain available regardless of physical site configuration.

Title IV ARS Response:

The ARS Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work program is designed to assist employers in maintaining employees on the job who experience illnesses or injuries that result in disability. ARS also assists employers on how to accommodate employees with disabilities on the job. The Business Engagement Unit works with employers to secure referrals for potential employees and provides other services such as disability etiquette training.

Title IV DSB Response:

Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) collaborates with local and state chamber of commerce organizations and employers to open job connections for consumers. DSB has historically provided services to employers and continues to increase service delivery to employers. DSB continues to provide Disability Awareness Training and technical assistance to employers and to community partners to meet the needs of business and promote a diverse workforce. Training will continue to reinforce the use of common terminology in vocational rehabilitation and other WIOA partners, identify types of accommodations available to assist blind or visually impaired consumers in the workplace, to educate individuals with disabilities about employment opportunities, and to highlight the strengths of the vocational rehabilitation to business and the private sector.

Partnerships include chamber of commerce organizations, employers, and educational institutions. The Chamber of Commerce provides additional visibility to the efforts and outcomes for services available to employers through efforts of DSB. The partnerships established through these efforts are invaluable and allow opportunities for DSB to share job placement best practices and foster new opportunities with employers. Employer job fairs sponsored by Division of Services for the Blind creates a line of communication with employers to demonstrate technology abilities and consumer driven outcomes with employers. This approach has provided a foundation with employers who are open to hiring people who are blind or visually impaired. The partnership with the chamber of commerce has also influenced employer participation with the Pre-Employment Transition training and referral with summer intern options. Pre-employment transition services are provided to students with disabilities, including work experiences, to assure that youth and young adults are more prepared for the services needed by employers and to increase employment opportunities for consumers. Consistent communication with employers also assists to continue employer engagement and prepare blind consumers with job opportunities. Future opportunities to partner with employers through apprenticeships are under development to ensure blind or visually impaired consumers have access to careers.

E. PARTNER ENGAGEMENT WITH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND OTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROVIDERS.

Describe how the State's Strategies will engage the State's community colleges, adult education providers, area career and technical education schools, providers on the State's eligible training provider list, and other education and training providers, as partners in the workforce development system to create a job-driven education and training system. WIOA section 102(b)(2)(B)(iv). Include how the State's strategies will enable the State to leverage other Federal, State, and local investments to enhance access to workforce development programs at these institutions.

Title I Response:

Educational institutions are represented on all levels in the WIOA state and local structure. Leaders of Arkansas' finest institutions are members of local workforce boards and help to shape and frame policies that ensure optimum effectiveness.

Core and non-core programs have strong partnerships with the State's two- and four-year institutions of higher education, especially at the community college level. Several Arkansas Workforce Centers are located on community college campuses, which enable a streamlined process to move jobseekers into needed training or resources to upgrade their skills on the campus. Community colleges are at the forefront of workforce development in Arkansas and have strong connections with local employers, which enable core and non-core programs such as the WIOA Title I Youth, Adult, and Dislocated Worker programs, Trade Adjustment Assistance, and the TANF program to connect their customers to training that leads to occupations that are in-demand.

Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative provides funding to the State's community colleges to provide post-secondary training to low-income custodial parents that are TANF eligible. This

program provides supports to eligible parents to begin training in a career pathway that will enable them to move up the ladder of success in their chosen field.

Title II Response:

Adult Education has a strong partnership with educational institutions. Community colleges comprise 24 or 71% of local education agencies, whereas school districts comprise 7 or 21% of adult education providers in the state. Most adult education providers are located directly on community college campuses and, therefore, are often feeders to the community college regarding student enrollment by incorporating strategies within workforce Pillar III. Adult education providers collaborate opportunities through the integrated education and training (IET) program, offering adult learners workforce training. At the Northwest Technical Institute, North Arkansas College, and National Park College Adult Education programs, learners are dually enrolled in the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) and adult education program. SAU-Tech college allows the ASU-Tech Adult Education program to use its classroom space and equipment for a CNA program. The adult education program hires technical and ABE instructors. .

The Adult Education state staff also collaborates with the Arkansas Department of Education's Career Technical Education (CTE) Division to identify workforce training programs that adults can access outside of regular business hours. At the PEAK Innovation Center, a technical and career training center for high school students in Ft. Smith, Arkansas, the Ft. Smith Adult Education program utilizes the equipment to provide apprenticeships in construction and electrical in the evenings to adult learners. As mentioned, the state office and providers also work with Arkansas Virtual Academy (AVA), the state's virtual high school, to offer online career technical education courses to adult learners. Since adult education providers are required to have an integrated education and training (IET) program, the partnership helps recruit qualified CTE instructors to teach the contextualized portion of a training program while an ABE instructor does the basic skills portion. The Lonoke School District Adult Education program had learners complete the Microsoft Certifications with the instructional assistance of the AVA instructor. The IET model quickly teaches students literacy, work, and college-readiness skills, enabling them to progress through school and into living-wage jobs more quickly.

Adult education also collaborates closely with local workforce development boards (LWDBs). Oftentimes, adult learners are referred to one-stop centers to pay for training through Title I WIOA funds. Learners at Black River Technical College adult education program were able to enroll in CDL programs with funds from Title I WIOA youth program. Career Coaches work with adult learners to identify a career pathway and find training programs using the Eligible Training Provider List. If the adult learner qualifies for services, they can enroll in the program and still access adult education services for more academic support to complete the training successfully.

Title III Response: The best way to ensure that activities continue to be aligned with programs and activities provided by mandatory one-stop partners is through communication. The purpose of the WIOA law is to ensure that core state agencies work together to enhance the workforce development system. As a state, we have created a combined state plan that will serve as the blueprint of how the system will work. Local Workforce Development Boards have been restructured to ensure that all core agencies are represented including employers and

other optional-one stop partners. It is up to the Local Workforce Development Board to ensure that local activities are aligned with the State Plan and the law.

To best align services and resources, core and optional programs will develop joint policies and initiatives that spur collaboration, braiding of resources, and support the inclusion of key stakeholders in development and implementation. In order to continue to be inclusive of other programs and align with all workforce development resources in Arkansas, it is imperative that the work of the WIOA Partners Roundtable continue and transition from an implementation body to a coordination and continuous improvement body. By doing so, we set ourselves up to more efficiently bring in other federal, state, and private or non-profit resources to the benefit of our citizens. By utilizing this design, the WIOA Partners Roundtable can approach additional partner programs with a united front.

Through the WIOA Partners Roundtable, optional partners are at the table including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Trade Adjustment Assistance, Career and Technical Education, Carl D. Perkins (secondary and post-secondary), SNAP Employment & Training, and Jobs for Veterans State Grant. While these partners are optional, we consider their input as vital to making the Arkansas workforce development system streamlined and effective. Every policy developed for statewide implementation is reviewed by subject matter experts from both core and non-core programs.

Title IV ARS Response: Arkansas Rehabilitation Services provides training for individuals with disabilities through partnerships with two-year/four-year colleges and career technical education programs to create job-driven education and training opportunities for individuals with disabilities. ARS' leadership are members of The Advisory Council for the Education of Children with Disabilities and the Arkansas affiliate of the Association of Higher Education and Disability (Ark-AHEAD).

Title DSB Response: The Division of Services for the Blind provides training for individuals with disabilities through education and training programs. DSB partners with World Services for the Blind to promote credential earning training programs for individuals who are Blind and Visually Impaired, such as the medical coding and billing certification and the licensed massage therapist program.

F. IMPROVING ACCESS TO POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIALS

Describe how the State's strategies will improve access to activities leading to recognized postsecondary credentials, including Registered Apprenticeship certificates. This includes credentials that are industry-recognized certificates, licenses or certifications, and that are portable and stackable.

Title I & III Response:

Credential transparency revolutionizes how credentials are recognized and valued across the state's workforce and educational systems by creating clarity and uniformity in the credentialing landscape. It is intended to make the qualifications of job seekers more transparent and understandable to employers, educators, and individuals themselves.

Role in the Arkansas Workforce State Plan:

- **Establish Credential Registry:** Implements a comprehensive, state-wide registry that lists all available credentials, including degrees, certificates, licenses, badges, and apprenticeships, along with their associated skills and competencies.
- **Facilitate Skills-Based Practices:** Offers human and machine-readable data that demonstrates the relationship between skills, credentials, and learning opportunities, thereby aligning educational and occupational pathways with current market demands.
- **Increase Accessibility and Usability:** Ensures that information about credentials and programs is easily accessible and usable by all stakeholders, including job seekers, employers, and education providers.
- **Empower Job Seekers:** Individuals can better understand and communicate their qualifications, making informed decisions about their career paths and educational opportunities.
- **Aid Employers in Talent Acquisition:** Employers gain a clearer understanding of potential employees' skills and competencies, leading to more effective hiring and workforce development strategies.
- **Support Data-Driven Decision Making:** The credential registry provides valuable data that can inform policy decisions, educational program development, and workforce planning.

Credential transparency plays a crucial role in creating a more transparent, efficient, and responsive workforce system, one where every credential is recognized for its value and relevance in the broader economic context. This initiative enhances the alignment of education and training with real-world career opportunities, benefiting individuals, employers, and the state's economy alike.

Title II Response:

The Office of Adult Education (OAE) utilizes the Division of Workforce Services Labor Market Information to identify labor and occupational trends in the state. In addition, Adult Education staff participates in the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC) meetings and training to stay abreast of the companies that are either coming to Arkansas or expanding. This engagement, combined with ongoing review of LMI, allows OAE to anticipate demand in key industry sectors and align adult education services with emerging and expanding job opportunities. With the recent federal legislation of the CHIPS and Science Act, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and the Inflation Reduction Act, Arkansas has expanded opportunities to connect residents, especially those with barriers to employment, to new high-quality jobs. OAE works with WIOA core partners to leverage business outreach efforts and identify employers using these incentives so that adult education participants can access relevant training and employment pathways.

At the regional level, OAE has identified one Adult Education program center director in each of the ten Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDAs) to serve on the Local Workforce Development Boards. These representatives participate in regional workforce planning to ensure underemployed and unemployed adults are prepared for entry-level employment in in-demand occupations. They monitor Average Employment Changes and other regional indicators and then help shape instructional offerings, including WAGE™ Level I and Level II Certificate

programs that support high-skill, moderate-skill, and basic-skill occupations. OAE and local programs work closely with economic developers to track fast-growing and emerging sectors—such as expansions in broadband and telecommunications, manufacturing, and the lithium industry—and to ensure that participants completing a GED® or earning other credentials are positioned to benefit from employment within these new company investments. OAE receives new-hire employment information and training with skills requirements to support job awareness and employability training. For example, adult education supports occupations such as telecommunications tower technicians, aerial linemen, and underground drilling technicians by providing instruction that incorporates workplace training such as OSHA training, reading and locating information, and applied mathematics. Within the lithium and other industrial sectors, advanced courses such as WAGE™ Level II provide training that supports adult learners in understanding working environments, potential hazards, and job benefits, and exposes learners to further career pathways.

On a quarterly basis, OAE compares statewide and regional labor-demand trends with the top occupational interests of participants enrolled in adult education. By reviewing second and fourth-quarter employment outcomes, OAE help project potential learner interest and guide local programs in targeting instruction and career pathways in sectors such as Manufacturing; Trade, Transportation, and Utilities; Transportation and Warehousing; Information and Financial Activities; Education and Health Services; and Leisure and Hospitality. As a result, OAE has successfully connected participants to employment in occupations such as client service banking; mechanical drive technician (entry-level, Amatrol-certified positions with employers such as Simmons); chemical industry operator technician (e.g., Albemarle); certified nursing assistant; phlebotomist; pharmacy technician; clinical medical assistant; welder; commercial driver (trucking and warehousing); education paraprofessional; and early childcare assistant. Looking ahead, adult education programs are also aligning with economic trends such as the expansion of data centers (e.g., Google) by increasing opportunities for participants to pursue information technology credentials, industry-recognized certifications, and registered apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships that support Arkansas' evolving economy

Title IV ARS Response:

Credential attainment is a consideration in the development of ARS' client's individualized plan for employment. ARS' internal training unit Arkansas Career Development Center (ACDC) provides training programs that result in industry recognized credentials.

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB works with participants to identify credentials that will assist them in achieving their employment goals during the IPE development phase. For Pre-ETS students this also occurs during the provision of Counseling on Post-Secondary Enrollment. DSB supports participants in attending training towards credentials and with the necessary supports to succeed during those programs.

G. COORDINATING WITH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Describe how the activities identified in (A) will be coordinated with economic development entities, strategies, and activities in the State.

Title I & III Response:

Strategically positioned under the Arkansas Department of Commerce, Arkansas Workforce Connections and WIOA core programs are closely connected with the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC). This positioning allows for a unified approach to workforce development and economic development; two areas that cannot be disjointed.

The State recognizes that workforce development cannot be performed in a vacuum without the connection to economic development and the priorities established by both state and local economic development entities. To ensure that economic development strategies are at the forefront of state, regional, and local planning, representatives of economic development organizations are on the state and local boards. Furthermore, economic development representatives are members of the WIOA Partners Roundtable, which is the interagency WIOA planning team. Eight of the ten local workforce development boards have administrative and fiscal entities that are also local economic development organizations.

With new federal funding available through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), the Arkansas Office of the Infrastructure Coordinator was established to work closely with various stakeholders to maximize the impact of this funding across the State. In January 2023, Governor Sanders established the Arkansas Office of the Infrastructure Coordinator as a division within the Arkansas Department of Finance and Administration. This office works closely with stakeholders to maximize the impact of federal infrastructure funding across Arkansas. This includes engaging with federal agencies, city and county leaders, departments across state government, the Arkansas General Assembly, and the National Governor's Association to prioritize and implement a breadth of infrastructure projects, leveraging critical public and private partnerships where possible.

Over the next several years, the State of Arkansas anticipates leveraging billions of dollars in federal infrastructure funding through broadband, transportation, water, energy, and other vital sectors. This amount is expected to increase as departments identify and seek competitive funds.

The Governor's Office, Office of the Infrastructure Coordinator, department leaders, and other stakeholders identified the following five priority areas to guide Arkansas' infrastructure investments:

- Facilitating Statewide Economic Growth and Competitiveness,
- Keeping Communities Safe,
- Preparing the Infrastructure Workforce,
- Preserving and Promoting the Natural State, and
- Creating a Portfolio of Reliable, Efficient, and Secure Energy Options.

Title II Response:

The Office of Adult Education (OAE) utilizes the Division of Workforce Services Labor Market Information to identify labor and occupational trends in the state. In addition, Adult Education

staff participates in the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC) meetings and training to stay abreast of the companies that are either coming to Arkansas or expanding. This engagement, combined with ongoing review of LMI, allows OAE to anticipate demand in key industry sectors and align adult education services with emerging and expanding job opportunities. With the recent federal legislation of the CHIPS and Science Act, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and the Inflation Reduction Act, Arkansas has expanded opportunities to connect residents, especially those with barriers to employment, to new high-quality jobs. OAE works with WIOA core partners to leverage business outreach efforts and identify employers using these incentives so that adult education participants can access relevant training and employment pathways.

At the regional level, OAE has identified one Adult Education program center director in each of the ten Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDAs) to serve on the Local Workforce Development Boards. These representatives participate in regional workforce planning to ensure underemployed and unemployed adults are prepared for entry-level employment in in-demand occupations. They monitor Average Employment Changes and other regional indicators and then help shape instructional offerings, including WAGE™ Level I and Level II Certificate programs that support high-skill, moderate-skill, and basic-skill occupations. OAE and local programs work closely with economic developers to track fast-growing and emerging sectors—such as expansions in broadband and telecommunications, manufacturing, and the lithium industry—and to ensure that participants completing a GED® or earning other credentials are positioned to benefit from employment within these new company investments. OAE receives new-hire employment information and training with skills requirements to support job awareness and employability training. For example, adult education supports occupations such as telecommunications tower technicians, aerial linemen, and underground drilling technicians by providing instruction that incorporates workplace training such as OSHA training, reading and locating information, and applied mathematics. Within the lithium and other industrial sectors, advanced courses such as WAGE™ Level II provide training that supports adult learners in understanding working environments, potential hazards, and job benefits, and exposes learners to further career pathways.

On a quarterly basis, OAE compares statewide and regional labor-demand trends with the top occupational interests of participants enrolled in adult education. By reviewing second and fourth-quarter employment outcomes, OAE help project potential learner interest and guide local programs in targeting instruction and career pathways in sectors such as Manufacturing; Trade, Transportation, and Utilities; Transportation and Warehousing; Information and Financial Activities; Education and Health Services; and Leisure and Hospitality. As a result, OAE has successfully connected participants to employment in occupations such as client service banking; mechanical drive technician (entry-level, Amatrol-certified positions with employers such as Simmons); chemical industry operator technician (e.g., Albemarle); certified nursing assistant; phlebotomist; pharmacy technician; clinical medical assistant; welder; commercial driver (trucking and warehousing); education paraprofessional; and early childcare assistant. Looking ahead, adult education programs are also aligning with economic trends such as the expansion of data centers (e.g., Google) by increasing opportunities for participants to pursue information technology credentials, industry-recognized certifications, and registered apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships that support Arkansas' evolving economy

Title IV ARS Response:

ARS provides counseling to clients in the development of the individual plan for employment, which includes a vocational goal as a core component. The vocational goal considers the clients' interests, strengths, and abilities. As part of this process, the availability of jobs and skills required are included.

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB partners with the local and state economic development entities to ensure visibility for Division of Services for the Blind and consumers for employment related activities. DSB partners with WIOA partners to ensure activities implemented are accessible to blind and visually impaired consumers.

B. STATE OPERATING SYSTEMS AND POLICIES

(a) The Unified or Combined State Plan must include a description of the State operating systems and policies that will support the implementation of the State strategy described in section II Strategic Elements. This includes—

(1) State operating systems that support coordinated implementation of State strategies (for example labor market information systems, data systems, communication systems, case management systems, job banks, etc.).

Title I and III Response:

Arkansas Job Link (AJL) is Arkansas' integrated intake, case management, and reporting system and is a part of the America's Job Link Alliance (AJLA). The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services utilizes AJL as a staff assisted and self—service tool for the Labor Exchange, Employment Services, Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) beneficiaries and to assist employers when recruiting viable employment candidates.

AJL is the state's integrated web-based workforce development management information system (MIS) used by the state and local areas to share and manage participant data between the Wagner-Peyser program, the Trade Adjustment Assistance program and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act program. AJL provides jobseekers, employers, and workforce development professionals with tremendous flexibility and capacity for accessing, tracking, and reporting services: self-directed, staff-facilitated, staff-assisted, and case management.

All staff has access to and can view all services provided to clients regardless of individual program funding. This approach allows funding streams (regardless of specific target group) to consider the "complete package" of services provided or made available to the client reducing duplication of effort and maximizing outcomes. It also facilitates a single process to extract required data for the generation and submission of performance or demographic client details as required by current mandates. In short AJL provides all workforce partners with a "whole person view" of the services available, or provided to, each client or group.

Arkansas has taken a lead in the development of a direct electronic interface between our AJL and Unemployment Insurance (UI) systems. Through this interface we ensure that all UI

claimants are registered for work and eliminates repetitive information gathering from UI claimants. We have also implemented a proactive approach to Reemployment Services (RES) and Reemployment and Eligibility Assessments (REA) to claimants with the goal of reducing the average length of time a client is out of work. This effort would have been exponentially more difficult if we were not dealing with an integrated service delivery system. Through the use of electronic wage matching, records are regularly updated with information received from the State and other sources to identify those who have obtained employment and calculate average earnings.

Each quarter, quarterly wage record information is loaded into AJL to measure the progress on State and local common performance measures. The quarterly wage information includes wages paid to an individual, the social security account number, the name of the individual, and the Federal employer identification number of the employer paying the wages to the individual. State wage records are available to other member states through the Wage Record Interchange System (WRIS) on a quarterly basis. Likewise, Arkansas is able to track participants that work or move outside of Arkansas for performance measurement purposes through WRIS wage records from member states.

All local WIOA Title I service providers have access to the state wage record information for the purpose of measuring local common performance measures. AJL can be found at <https://www.arjoblink.arkansas.gov>.

Arkansas workforce partners utilizes multiple systems to provide services and to refer customers for appropriate services. Arkansas LAUNCH has become the state's universal talent marketplace platform for labor exchange along with related systems including CiviForm and Hope Hub, powered by Restore Hope.

Title II Response:

Literacy, Adult and Community Education System (LACES), designed by Literacy Pro, is the Office of Adult Education's (OAE) data management system that streamlines the evaluation and analytics of performance and outcomes in an easy to process and share across partners. OAE has used this data management system in Arkansas since the 2017-2018 program year. The policies and use of LACES are outlined in the Adult Education Assessment Policy and Distance Learning Guidelines, as well as the Adult Education Program Policies. LACES is a key component of planning, funding, and reporting. The system is built with many key automatic reports informative for students and program progress, and reports attendance and performance for all national reporting tables. OAE state staff have provided ongoing technical assistance to field users and aligned the policies to regulate the practice of reporting in a timely and accurate manner to help simplify the reporting metrics for partners in alignment with the America's Talent Strategy goals. With timely and accurate reporting, training can be focused on addressing possible errors or changes in policy, procedure, or practice to strengthen data validity under the "Streamlining Reporting Administration" goal of the America's Talent Strategy. Utilizing LACES features, monitoring is conducted at both the local level and the state level. Consistent and accurate reporting allows the state to monitor progress and trends over time. Consistency in reporting practices allows OAE to analyze accurate data, make informed decisions, and provide timely assistance. Functions in LACES allow Adult Education to provide files to the Arkansas Division of Higher Education (ADHE) and the Division of Workforce Services (DWS) for data matching purposes, which can then be uploaded into LACES for reporting.

Title IV ARS Response:

During PY 2024, ARS updated its case management system from Libra (System 7) to Alliance AWARE. Data migration and staff adaptation to the new operating system has presented challenges; however, progress in both areas appears promising.

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB has used Alliance's AWARE Enterprise case management system since 2012. Procedures for AWARE are included in DSB's training and policy guidance provided to staff. AWARE collects all the data used to identify DSB's success in performance measures and case history. The data from this system is used to review program success and develop improvement plans. DSB actively works with Alliance to improve reporting accuracy and adaptations to best meet the needs of the agency.

2. THE STATE POLICIES THAT WILL SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STATE'S STRATEGIES (FOR EXAMPLE, CO-ENROLLMENT POLICIES AND UNIVERSAL INTAKE PROCESSES WHERE APPROPRIATE). IN ADDITION, PROVIDE THE STATE'S GUIDELINES FOR STATE-ADMINISTERED ONE-STOP PARTNER PROGRAMS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO A ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM AND ANY ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE FOR ONE-STOP PARTNER CONTRIBUTIONS.

Title I & III Response:

Under the direction of Governor Sanders and the workforce cabinet, several new technologies and tools are being developed to support the implementation of the State's strategies.

One strategic activity to support integrated service delivery is the implementation of CiviForm, an innovative digital tool designed to streamline the application process for government and community services. Developed with support from Google.org, it simplifies the experience of finding and applying for various services, making them more accessible and efficient for residents.

Role in the Arkansas Workforce State Plan:

- **Facilitate Access to Workforce Services:** Integrated service delivery, enabled by tools like CiviForm, allows residents easy access to a range of services critical for employment and training.
- **Enhance Efficiency and Effectiveness:** By breaking down silos between different service providers, integrated service delivery ensures that resources are utilized more efficiently and effectively, leading to better outcomes for residents.
- **Data-Driven Service Improvement:** The data collected through integrated service delivery processes can be used to continuously improve service delivery, tailor services to meet emerging needs, and inform workforce policy decisions.
- **Enhance User Experience:** By providing a one-stop-shop for services, integrated service delivery makes it easier for residents to access the support they need, improving overall satisfaction and engagement.

This initiative is crucial for ensuring that all Arkansans can easily access the support and opportunities they need to succeed in today's dynamic job market.

As a part of the America's Talent Strategy: Building the Workforce for the Golden Age with Pillar II: Worker Mobility, the State helps more people enter, reenter, and advance within the labor market. The State is using the LAUNCH platform with technology and labor market information that empowers more Arkansans to move forward in today's economy. This system promotes reemployment and career mobility through multiple avenues: work-based learning, short-term credentials, and pathways that recognize prior experience and demonstrated ability.

LAUNCH is an online portal being developed, which will serve as a skills-based learning, employment, and advancement platform. It will serve as a one-stop hub for accessing a wide range of resources, including training programs, job listings, and career guidance, personalized to each individual's unique skills, experience, preferences, and goals. The portal will simplify the journey from learning to employment, making it more efficient and user-friendly for Arkansas residents.

Role in the Arkansas Workforce State Plan:

- **Skills-Based Matching:** Utilizing advanced matching algorithms, the portal will connect job seekers with employers based on skill compatibility
- **Leverage Learning and Employment Records (LERs):** Incorporating LERs, the portal will enable individuals to maintain a comprehensive and verified record of their skills and work history.
- **Connect Learning to Employment:** The platform will provide access to a range of learning and training opportunities, allowing individuals to acquire or upgrade skills in alignment with market demands.
- **Empower Individuals:** The platform will empower job seekers and workers by providing them with tools and information to navigate their career paths effectively.
- **Enhance Employer Engagement:** The portal will enable employers to identify and connect with candidates more efficiently, based on skill needs.
- **Facilitate Continuous Learning and Advancement:** The platform will promote a culture of continuous learning and skill development, crucial for career advancement and workforce adaptability.
- **Streamline Work Search Activities:** The portal will feature an intuitive dashboard for Unemployment Insurance claimants to track their required weekly work search activities to maintain benefit compliance while simultaneously connecting with jobs that match their skills and experience.

The online platform will provide an integrated digital environment where individuals can explore, acquire, and showcase their skills and competencies. The portal will support the overall Arkansas Workforce Strategy by seamlessly integrating education, training, and employment services into a unified platform, aligning individual skill sets and career aspirations with local employment and advancement opportunities.

As these new platforms are launched, policies and procedures will be developed to ensure optimum utilization by all WIOA core and non-core partners.

Arkansas currently has in place a Co-enrollment and Co-Funding Policy. WIOA Title I-B Policy Manual- Policy 2.7. The policy describes the requirements and regulations concerning co-enrollment and/or co-funding of WIOA Title I-B participants with various WIOA Title I-B programs, with other WIOA programs, with Arkansas Job Center partners, and with other appropriate entities, in accordance with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA), the WIOA Final Rule, Training and Employment Guidance Letters (TEGLs) published by the Employment and Training Administration of the U.S. Department of Labor (ETA), and policies of the Arkansas Workforce Development Board (AWDB).

Under WIOA I-B, participants may be eligible for Youth, Adult, and/or Dislocated Worker services. The participant may also be eligible for the services of other one-stop partners, as well as services for one-stop partners. WIOA I-B case managers must be informed about the services of all WIOA funding streams (including other titles and subtitles). Case managers must coordinate with other agencies as appropriate to provide the full array of services documented as needed by the participant [*WIOA § 134(b)(2)(A)(v); 20 CFR 680.230*]. Co-enrollment (or dual enrollment) and/or co-funding with other entities is encouraged in order to give participants the best array of services.

Title II Response:

Adult Education's request for proposal (RFP) application is aligned with the State Plan and outlines the requirements of eligible providers' role in supporting the implementation of the State's strategies. The state office provides the adult education providers a student intake form that each provider must follow and includes information such as demographics, contact, program referral information, and barriers to employment descriptors. This information is entered into the state's data management system, LACES, for tracking purposes. The state is in the final stages of a Common Intake Form, which will reduce the redundancy of basic information on behalf of Arkansans seeking services. The RFP also outlines the eligible adult education provider's role in supporting the infrastructure of the One-Stops.

Infrastructure costs and other partnering agreements are developed between sub-grant recipients and local workforce development boards. Infrastructure costs are paid using federal funds and state funds, if needed, to supplement the costs. Adult Education requires its local providers to negotiate and sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that addresses the service delivery elements required by WIOA with the workforce board of their respective regions. Two or more local areas in a region may develop a single joint MOU if they are in a region that has submitted a regional plan. The MOU includes a description of services to be provided through the One-Stop delivery system, an agreement on funding the costs of the services and the operating costs of the system (including funding of the shared services and operating costs of the One-Stop), methods for referring individuals between the One-Stop operators and partners for appropriate services and activities, methods to ensure the needs of workers, youth and individuals with barriers to employment. The duration, procedures for amending, and assurances of the MOU are reviewed to ensure substantial changes have not occurred, renewal, not less than once every 3-year period to ensure appropriate funding and delivery of services are included. The MOU may contain other provisions, including in-kind partner contributions and alternative funding, agreed to by the parties consistent with WIOA

Title I, the authorizing statutes and regulations of one-stop partner programs, and the WIOA regulations. The Title II Adult Education Director reviews and signs off on all adult education providers' MOUs and Infrastructure Funding Agreements (IFAs).

Title IV ARS Response:

ARS and core partners continue to collaborate to create a unified intake process that can be utilized by all agencies. The common intake form will enable all agencies to receive referral information for potential applicants. The common intake includes specific questions identifying individuals requiring partner consultation and referral.

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB is actively participating with the core partners to develop and implement the common intake form to share referrals from all potential applicants.

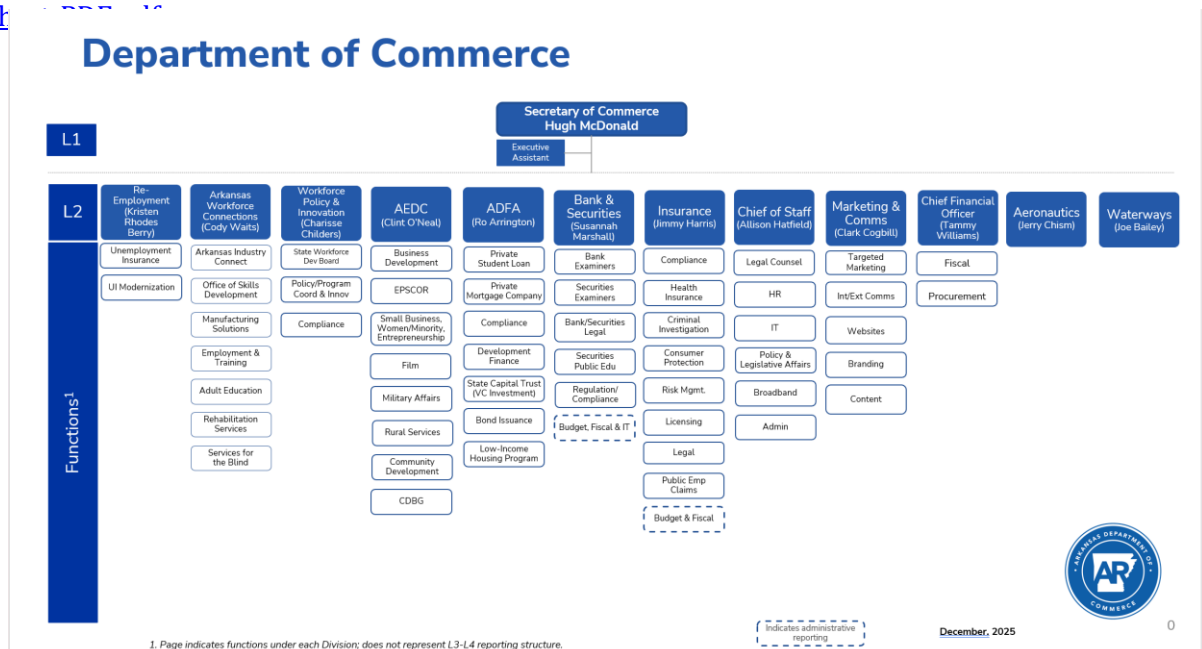
3. STATE PROGRAM AND STATE BOARD OVERVIEW

A. STATE AGENCY ORGANIZATION

- (A) Describe the organization and delivery systems at the State and local levels for the programs covered in the plan, including the organizational structure. Include an organizational chart.

Title I & III Response:

Arkansas Division of Workforce Services administers the majority of programs represented in this plan. The agency goal is to provide quality workforce services that support the development of a well-trained workforce that meets employer needs. The Division provides many services that support both jobseekers and employers and helps people succeed throughout their working lives. We support workers during times of unemployment, track and analyze labor market trends, and link businesses and jobseekers to a diverse range of employment services provided by the state’s workforce system. Through DWS’ local offices, the needs of employers and job-seeking individuals are facilitated by matching qualified workers with an employer’s specific employment needs.<https://dws.arkansas.gov/wp-content/uploads/Commerce-Org-Chart-2022-16>



DWS avidly supports Arkansas's employer community and is cognizant of their needs. DWS offers many services to Arkansas jobseekers and residents including: referral to suitable employment opportunities; job training assistance to economically disadvantaged individuals and those dislocated due to business closings, layoffs, and natural disasters; case management for disabled veterans; assessment of an individual's needs and referral to supportive agencies and programs.

The agency directors are appointed by the Secretary of the Arkansas Department of Commerce.

Below is a list of programs administered by the Division:

- Wagner-Peyser Employment Services
- Jobs for Veterans Grants Program
- WIOA Youth Program
- WIOA Adult Program
- WIOA Dislocated Worker Program
- Rapid Response and Layoff Aversion
- Trade Adjustment Assistance
- Foreign Labor Certification
- Workforce Opportunity Tax Credit
- Labor Market Information
- Unemployment Insurance
- Trade Readjustment Allowance
- New Hire Registry
- Career Readiness Certification
- Discretionary Grants
- State Office of Apprenticeship
- Arkansas Industry Connect
- Workforce Policy and Implementation

Note: Effective July 1, 2019, the Division added the Office of Adult Education and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services under the Governor's Transformation. The **Arkansas Division of Workforce Services** also serves as the Governor's Administrative Entity for WIOA Title I funding, provides staffing support for the Arkansas Workforce Development Board, provides technical assistance to local workforce development boards, and monitors their activities.

Title II Response:

The Office of Adult Education is one of the six core programs under Arkansas Workforce Connections, Department of Commerce. The Title II Adult Education Director, along with the Senior Management Team, oversees the adult education program in the state. The Office of Adult Education supports adult basic and literacy education programs for adults who lack basic skills, a high school diploma, or proficiency in the English language. Adult education and literacy activities may also include workplace adult education and literacy activities, family literacy activities, English language acquisition activities, integrated English literacy and civics education, workforce preparation activities, or integrated education and training (IET) that provides adult education and literacy activities, concurrently and contextually with both workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster and is for the purpose of educational and career advancement.

The Office of Adult Education has 34 providers that serve all 75 counties in Arkansas. The state office has seven middle managers or Commerce Supervisor/Experts who provide technical assistance to adult education programs and literacy councils by interpreting federal and state regulations and providing support and guidance to the field. Program Advisors also evaluate program effectiveness through annual on-site visits, program reviews, and desk audits to ensure program compliance and monitor and approve federal and state grant budgets, amendments, expenditure reports, and adult education and literacy council program project applications.

The Office of Adult Education also has a High School Equivalency team, supported 100% with state funds, comprising a Senior Manager and two administrative support staff who oversee and support the high school equivalency test, GED®, in Arkansas. The state office also subsidizes 85% of the cost of the GED® test on behalf of Arkansans.

The Office of Adult Education also has a finance team of three, whose primary role is to review and process grantee expenditure reports. The Finance Office ensures compliance with federal and state regulations, reviews and processes payments to the field, and conducts financial audits.

An Executive Assistant to the Director and two Administrative Specialists support the field program and staff in various vital administrative tasks.

Title IV ARS Response:

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services is the General Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency in Arkansas. Consistent with Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, states must appoint a state director and establish a State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) to receive federal vocational rehabilitation funds. In Arkansas, the ARS Commissioner is the state director of the vocational rehabilitation program. SRC members are Governor appointed. The Commissioner and senior management provide leadership to the agency's major components including, Field Services, the Arkansas Career Development Center, Access and Accommodations, and Business Engagement. Field Services provides services in three primary categories: pre-employment transition, transition, and general vocational rehabilitation. VR counselors determine client eligibility, develop the individualized plan for employment with the client, oversee case management, provide vocational rehabilitation counseling and related job readiness services to assist clients in obtaining or maintaining competitive integrated employment. ACDC, ARS' internal training unit, provides programs where clients receive industry-recognized credentials

as well as an array of supportive services. Access and Accommodations addresses clients' assistive technology needs at school and at work. The Business Engagement unit is ARS' primary link to employers and provides information about services and supports to businesses.

Title IV DSB Response:

The Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) is the Vocational Rehabilitation Agency for individuals who are Blind and Visually Impaired in Arkansas. DSB, while currently an independent commission, will be merged with ARS as a combined VR agency. DSB currently has board which is appointed by the Governor. The Director and leadership team provide guidance and support to all units of the agency including, Field Services, Business and Technology, Fiscal, Business Engagement, Outreach, and Quality Assurance. Field Services staff include counselors for Vocational Rehabilitation, Pre-Employment Transition Services, and Older Individuals who are Blind. The Business and Technology unit oversee the DSB Technology Lab to assess and train consumers on technology, Braille Services, and the Randolph-Sheppard Program.

B. STATE BOARD

Provide a description of the State Board activities that will assist State Board members and staff in carrying out State Board functions effectively. Also, provide a membership roster for the State Board consistent with 20 CFR 679.110-120, including members' organizational affiliations and position titles.

State Board/Title I & III Response:

The Arkansas Workforce Development Board was created by Arkansas Act 907 of 2015 and serves as the policymaking and oversight body for the State's workforce development system. The Arkansas Workforce Development Board is a 32-member private sector led board. Of the 32 members, 17 members are private sector business leaders from various industries from throughout Arkansas. Also represented on the board are representatives from organized labor, Registered Apprenticeship, chief elected officials, community-based organizations, and the directors of the state agencies responsible for workforce services, career education, economic development, vocational rehabilitation, education, and higher education.

The membership roster for the Arkansas Workforce Development Board can be found online at <http://dws.arkansas.gov> and includes the membership category of representation as well as their professional affiliation.

The board meets on a quarterly basis and has a standard agenda layout to ensure that all of the activities of the board are being reported consistently and that the Executive Committee is able to monitor those activities.

Membership Roster

Government/Lead State Program Directors

1. Governor Sarah Sanders- Governor, State of Arkansas
2. Cody Waits- Director, ADWS- Workforce Connections/State Workforce Agency (WIOA Title I-IV)

3. Joseph Baxter- Commissioner- Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, ADWS Workforce Connections- (VR- WIOA Title IV)
4. Dr. Trenia Miles- Office of Adult Education, ADWS Workforce Connections (WIOA Title II)
5. Nathan Winter Arkansas Division of Services for the Blind, ADWS Workforce Connections- (WIOA Title IV)
6. Clint O'Neal- Executive Director, Arkansas Economic Development Commission

Workforce 20% (6 Members)

7. William French-Business Manager, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (Labor Organization)
8. Vacant- Labor Organization
9. Karen Breashears- Director, National Apprenticeship Training Foundation (Labor or Apprenticeship)
10. Dr. Ken Warden- Commissioner, Arkansas Department of Higher Education
11. Kelly Sharp- Apprenticeship Construction Manager, University of Arkansas at Fayetteville (Community Based Organization)
12. Brian Marsh- CEO/President, Goodwill Industries of Arkansas (Community Based Organization)
13. Aaron Chastain – Director of Academic Innovation & Pathways, Subiaco Academy
14. Vacant- Veterans Rep
15. Vacant- Organization Serving Individuals with Barriers to Employment Rep (Justice Involved, Immigrants etc.)

Elected Officials (2 Members)

16. Judge Brandon Ellison- Judge, Polk County

Mayor Ray Bowman – Mayor, Southside

Business Representatives (13 members)

18. Thomas Anderson- President, T.A. Holdings LLC
19. Len Blaylock- Owner, Everette Operations, LLC
20. Miles Crawford- Owner & Operations Manager, Boss LLC.
21. Rebecca Ives- Operations Support Manager, Lockheed Martin Corporation
22. Candice Lawrence- Vice President, Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce
23. Randy Henderson- Safety Coordinator, Nucor Steele
24. George Nunally- Owner, George Nunally Chevrolet

25. Latanyua Robinson-Owner, Latrobe Inc
26. Dr. Teri Cox-Meadows - Owner, Cox Consulting
27. Barry Sellers - President/CEO, Sellers Marketing PR Inc.
28. Tim Thorne – Thorne Enterprises LLC
29. Vacant- replacing Julie Roberson
30. Vacant- replacing Rachel Mize
31. Vacant-
32. Vacant-

As of March 2026, there are currently 8 vacancies on the board. The team at the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services and the Arkansas Department of Commerce are working with the Office of Governor Sanders who will make appointments based on category and needs of the board. At the time of this plan submission, Arkansas acknowledges that it is not currently compliant with state board composition, due to the lack of business representatives. It is anticipated that all vacancies will be filled and the board will be in full compliance by July 2026.

4. ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION OF PROGRAMS AND ONE-STOP PROGRAM PARTNERS

A. ASSESSMENT OF CORE AND ONE-STOP PROGRAM PARTNER PROGRAMS.

(A) Describe how the core programs will be assessed each year based on State performance accountability measures described in section 116(b) of WIOA. Describe how other one-stop delivery system partner program services and Combined State Plan partner programs included in the plan will be assessed each year. This State assessment must include the quality, effectiveness, and improvement of programs broken down by local area or provider. Such state assessments should take into account local and regional planning goals.

Title I & III Response:

The State will assess its core programs through on-going continuous improvement strategies including:

- State and local level fiscal and programmatic monitoring (on-site and/or desk reviews) of all programs within our combined plan
- Customer Satisfaction Surveys (for both the jobseeker and employer) are conducted annually
- State and local level data validation of all programs within our combined plan
- The Program and Performance Evaluation Committee, a subcommittee of Arkansas Workforce Development Board, will meet quarterly to make recommendations on

performance standards for the forthcoming year and to review actual outcomes across programs, make recommendation for improvement and/or corrective action to ensure attainment of performance standards for all partners

- As a state agency, there are annual audits of programs conducted and specific, as needed, audits conducted by a third party

The state also ensures that local workforce development areas meet performance accountability measures and will provide technical assistance when needed.

Each agency will be responsible for conducting an evaluation of their programs and reporting results to the PPE Committee of the State Board.

WIOA System Evaluation

The Arkansas Workforce Development Board commissioned the University of Arkansas' Center for Business and Economic Research to complete a comprehensive WIOA Systems Evaluation, Skills Gap Analysis, and Customer Service Surveys. This evaluation was completed June 2024.

Arkansas Workforce Connections participated in a workforce and social services reform study conducted by the Arkansas General Assembly- Arkansas Legislative Council- Hospital, Medicaid, and Development Disabilities Study subcommittee in PY '2025. The report can be found [here](#).

Title II Response:

The Office of Adult Education uses multiple methods of program monitoring and assistance to align with Pillar IV: Accountability of America's Talent Strategy. State staff members monitor local programs through annual technical site visits and intensive three-day program reviews conducted on a rotating basis, with each program receiving one every four years. A program's review may be scheduled in fewer than four years if the program exhibits substantially increased risk or has excessive findings. Adult education providers are evaluated and monitored on the following in Program Reviews: Program Management and Operations, Instruction, Workforce Preparation and Training, Career Coach, Technology, Enrollment/Recruitment/Retention, Data Analysis, Advisory Committee, WIOA Partnerships and Collaboration, Financials, Facilities, Data Entry Staff Interview, Instructor Staff Interview, and ADA Coordinator Interview/Observation.

The site visit form is based on the most frequent findings of the Program Review and, therefore, may be modified annually. During site visits, Program Advisors review and check student folders and other documentation to ensure that they match the data management system entries.

Program Advisors also verify administrative compliance. Some of the areas reviewed include the completion of an Annual Self-Study, which includes strengths, weaknesses, and measurable goals with a plan showing how the findings will be utilized in the program's future planning, Analysis of Program Data, and Integrated Education and Training (IET) compliance. Program Advisors review whether the program is following the Assessment Policy, which includes, but is not limited to, pre-testing students within the first 12 hours of instruction, following post-testing guidelines, entering data by the deadline, etc. The state staff also verifies that Personnel Activity Reports and Certifications for faculty/staff paid with Adult Education funds are completed and accurate. Equipment purchased with Adult Education funds is checked, and the

Inventory Disposal Policy and Inventory Rotation Schedule are also reviewed for accuracy and compliance.

In 2025-2026, the Office of Adult Education is conducting onsite program visits in place of the annual site visits. These visits are being used to provide team-based technical assistance to each program, addressing issues that impact the entire program staff to ensure that everyone understands their role in the program's success. General topics include SWOT Analysis, State Workforce Goals, Student Barriers, NRS Tables, Manual Outcomes, GED®, WAGE™, Credential Attainment, Distance Learning, and Funding. Additional topics and areas of emphasis are determined during pre-visit meetings with local directors. Annual monitoring site visits will resume in 2026-2027.

In 2024-2025, the Office of Adult Education began using Technical Assistance Compliance (TAC) reports in order to more effectively assist programs with deficiencies. In the initial implementation of TAC reports, deficiencies are identified, such as not meeting minimum post-test, enrollment, or Effective and Efficient (E&E) rates, or failing to provide training opportunities for students as identified in the 2024-2027 RFP. Some additional measures were determined for those below the average program performance. For programs that received an initial TAC report, state staff members meet with the program director regularly throughout the year, until any identified deficiencies are resolved. State staff members generate progress reports based on each meeting and share them with the program director.

The Office of Adult Education also evaluates each program annually through an E&E (Effective and Efficient) calculation, currently based upon the programs' progress on the federally negotiated benchmarks in NRS Tables 4 and 5. Once a program year has ended, the OAE generates an Effective & Efficient (E&E) report based on each local provider's benchmarks of core performance indicators. Monthly Director's Reports, bi-weekly staff meeting data read-outs, and desk audits are data analytical mechanisms used to evaluate and assess performance. These reports are used with prior reports to help identify trends and rates of performance for a myriad of performing cohorts. Along with these reports, aspects of demographic information are shared for local programs to analyze state data versus local program data.

Programs that do not meet the E&E benchmarks are provided additional technical assistance to prepare a performance improvement plan. Implementation of the performance improvement plan is monitored throughout the year to assist programs in progressing toward efficient and successful performance. For programs that have not met benchmarks for two consecutive years, meetings occur bi-weekly with technical assistance from a team of program advisors, where goal-setting and crucial data analysis elements are identified and planned. Program advisors and local program directors set small, achievable goals for impacting performance bi-weekly. Technical assistance is provided to all programs, including those that meet or exceed the performance benchmarks, to address deficiencies in any specific EFL and to set and reach goals for performance improvement.

State and national performance data and negotiated targets are shared annually with local providers at Fall Administrators' meetings, through advisory committee meetings, specialized training, and the Adult Education committees that identified the professional development needs and requests to promote continued improvement in program performance. In the analysis of performance data, the Administrators' Meetings also highlighted training pieces that addressed recruitment and retention strategies, distance education software usage guidance

and strategies, addressing ESL needs, and incorporating IET programs into the services offered by each program to increase the credential attainment rate and assist participants in preparing for the workforce.

After the annual performance data is entered into the National Reporting System, the data is shared with local programs based on student educational levels and mode of delivery. In analyzing the data annually, statewide training needs are addressed. In recent years, targeted training has been provided related to enrollment and recruitment, targeted instruction and classroom management, retention strategies, curriculum development, and effective distance learning. An analysis of data revealed a need for additional professional development on the outcome follow-up process, and accurate data entry. Restructuring the day-long LACES Data Entry training and providing webinars, such as the one on entering credentials, has yielded more accurate and efficient reporting of student performance.

Title IV ARS Response:

Identified performance measures are assessed and reported quarterly. ARS, with SRC input, conducts consumer satisfaction surveys and piloted a consumer satisfaction evaluation system that occurs at four pre-determined points within the VR process in PY2024. The pilot project presented mixed results with continuation currently under consideration. Staff are evaluated yearly on position specific metrics and performance improvement plans are developed if necessary.

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB monitors performance measures quarterly to ensure progress is being made and works to correct deficiencies. DSB also conducts consumer satisfaction surveys as a metric of local performance. Staff are evaluated yearly on position specific metrics with performance improvement plans put in place as necessary to target improvements.

B. PREVIOUS ASSESSMENT RESULTS

For each four-year state plan and state plan modification, provide the results of assessments of the effectiveness of the core programs and other one-stop partner programs and Combined State Plan partner programs included in the Unified or Combined State plan during the preceding 2-year period (i.e. the 2-year period of the plan modification cycle), in accordance with methods described in 4(A)

Title I & III Response:

Core programs are mandated to submit an annual report to federal agencies by October.

This table below shows Arkansas' overall results and program score data for each program in PY2024. The overall program score is the average of all individual indicators within a program. States have a performance program failure if an overall score is below 90%.

Program	State	Overall Results		Individual Indicator Results				
		Score	Result	ERQ2	MEQ2	ERQ4	CRED	MSG
	AR							
Adult	AR	100.9	Meets/Exceeds Adjusted Level on Avg.(≥100.0%)	96.4	101.2	100.7	99.9	106.6
Dislocated Worker	AR	96.6	Below Adjusted Level on Avg. - No Failure (<100.0% & ≥90.0%)	93.7	78.5	94.1	114.1	102.6
Youth	AR	100	Meets/Exceeds Adjusted Level on Avg.(≥100.0%)	95.3	117.6	95.6	90.3	101.4
Wagner-Peyser	AR	99.3	Below Adjusted Level on Avg. - No Failure (<100.0% & ≥90.0%)	100.8	96.2	100.9		
Vocational Rehabilitation	AR	81.3	Below Adjusted Level on Avg. - Performance Failure (<90.0%)	83.6	111.6	68.9	54.7	87.6

These performance results are used to determine the overall effectiveness of each program. The results also assist in planning for the subsequent program years. Arkansas historically performed well and met or exceeded all performance targets as shown in the chart above. The state continues to face unique economic and workforce challenges that directly impact the median earnings of dislocated workers in the second quarter after program exit and the employment rate of second and fourth quarter after program exit and credential attainment of vocational rehabilitation. While the state has made significant strides in workforce integration and service delivery, several structural and regional factors have constrained earnings outcomes.

For the Adult program's PY2024 performance measures, 6 of the 10 local workforce development areas met or exceeded their negotiated rates overall; 3 of the 10 areas achieved 90% of their negotiated rates overall; and 1 of the 10 areas did not achieve more than 90% of their negotiated rates overall. However, the state exceeded 100% of its overall negotiated rates for the Adult performance measures for PY2024.

In addition, 1 of the 10 areas did not achieve at least 50% of the negotiated rate for the Credential Attainment individual indicator for the PY2024 Adult program.

For the Dislocated Worker program's PY2024 performance measures, 3 of the 10 local workforce development areas met or exceeded their negotiated rates overall; 2 of the 10 areas achieved 90% of their negotiated rates overall; and 4 of the 10 areas did not achieve more than 90% of their negotiated rates overall. However, the state achieved more than 98% of its overall negotiated rates for the Dislocated Worker performance measures.

In addition, 1 of the 10 areas did not achieve 50% of the negotiated rate for the Employment Rate 2nd Quarter After Exit individual indicator; 2 of the 10 local areas did not achieve 50% of the negotiated rate for the Median Earnings individual indicator; and 1 of the 10 areas did not achieve 50% of the negotiated rate for the Measurable Skill Gains individual indicator for the PY2024 Dislocated Worker program.

For the Youth program's PY2024 performance measures, 5 of the 10 local workforce development areas met or exceeded their negotiated rates overall; 2 of the 10 areas achieved 90% of their negotiated rates overall; and 3 of the 10 areas did not achieve more than 90% of

their negotiated rates overall. However, the state exceeded 100% of its overall negotiated rates for the Youth performance measures.

In addition, 1 of the 10 areas did not achieve 50% of the negotiated rate for the Employment Rate 4th Quarter After Exit individual indicator; and 1 of the 10 areas did not achieve 50% of the negotiated rate for the Credential Attainment individual indicator for the PY2024 Youth program.

The Office of Employment and Training provides ongoing technical assistance to the local workforce development areas regarding best practices for case management, follow-up, and performance.

Wagner Peyser consistently meets or exceeds the negotiated rates for the performance measures. In an attempt to improve the performance metric results, an evaluation of the service delivery method and effectiveness of the program resulted in implementation of the following strategic goals for 2026-2027: 1. Complete resume reviews for 50% of W/P participants. 2. Provide basic LMI information to 90% of W/P participants. 3. Provide 1 or more referrals to partner programs to 70% of all W/P participants. A training plan is being implemented to ensure staff mastery of the policies and procedures to meet these goals. The 2026-2027 year will provide the baseline for these three measures. Performance of these measures will be monitored quarterly, with additional training given to areas unable to meet the target percentages.

Title II Response:

The Office of Adult Education (OAE) evaluates each program annually through an E&E (Effective and Efficient) calculation, currently based upon the programs' performance of the federally negotiated benchmarks in NRS Tables 4 and 5 to ensure accountability under Pillar IV of America's Talent Strategy. NRS Tables 4 and 5 specifically refer to the overall Measurable Skills Gain percentage on Table 4, and the total performance metrics of 2nd Quarter Employment after Exit, 4th Quarter Employment after Exit, Median Earnings 2nd Quarter after exit, and Attained a Recognized Secondary or Postsecondary Credential on Table 5. Programs not meeting E&E standards are provided with intensive technical assistance to develop and implement a program improvement plan, with follow-up support throughout the remainder of the program year. In the program year 2024-2025, 31 of the 35 local programs (89%) met the E&E requirement. In 2023-2024, 33 of the 36 programs (92%) met the requirement. Only one program failed to meet the E&E requirement over the past two years.

For the two year reporting period, OAE's negotiated benchmark targets in 2023-2024 for Measurable Skill Gains was 51% and achieved 62% (+11%), Employment Rate 2nd Quarter after exit was 43% and achieved 55.12% (+12.12), Employment Rate 4th Quarter after exit was 30% and achieved 55.9% (+25.9%), Median Earnings 2nd Quarter after exit was \$4,600 and achieved \$5,850 (+\$1,250), and Credential Attainment was 51% and achieved 62% (+11%). In 2024-2025, the negotiated benchmark targets for Measurable Skill Gains (MSG) was 59.9% and achieved 63.11% (+3.1%), Employment Rate 2nd Quarter after exit was 48.5% and achieved 58.67 (+11.2%), Employment Rate 4th Quarter after exit was 48.5% and achieved 57.56% (+9.1%), Median Earnings 2nd Quarter after exit was \$5,200 and achieved \$6,513 (+\$1,313), and Credential Attainment was 59.9% and achieved 63.1% (+3.1%). Arkansas OAE has been in the

top reporting national quartile for both years in four of the five benchmarks, with Median Earnings 2nd Quarter after exit not meeting the top quartile.

: The Office of Adult Education (OAE) provides intensive technical assistance to programs that fall short of the required benchmarks. In the first year of not meeting the requirement, the program's regional Program Advisor meets with the program to identify deficiencies and assist in developing a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP), which is implemented by the program and monitored by the regional Program Advisor in the following year. If a program does not meet the E&E requirement for a second consecutive year, an adult education team meets with the program to identify deficiencies and assist in developing a PIP. Team members are chosen based on the needs of the program. This targeted technical assistance effectively assists local programs in making necessary changes for future success.

For the 2024-2025 program year, the Office of Adult Education (OAE) provided technical assistance through Technical Assistance Compliance (TAC) meetings that targeted areas for program improvement. These areas were identified by previous areas of low performance or areas of weakness. Meetings were held with directors to address these targeted areas and receive assistance in planning goals to make improvements. Additionally, OAE plans to conduct on-site training for each program and address areas for improvement with guidance and technical assistance for the 2025-2026 program year.

Adult Education updates its monitoring instruments for annual site visits and program reviews as needed to ensure that providers are operating in compliance of federal and state laws, policies, and procedures. The most recent updates included an increased focus on collaboration with One-Stop Partners, student credential completions, and the integration of career pathways, workplace literacy, digital literacy, etc., across the curriculum.

For PY2024 in the chart below, the Adult Education performance results reflect the two indicators scored **above 90% of the adjusted performance level** requiring no corrective action. Participants in this program are co-enrolled or co-located in the Title I, III, or IV programs.

Indicator	State	Model Predictions			Performance Levels			Performance Results	
		Estimate0	Estimate1	Adjustment Factor	Negotiated Level	Adjusted Level	Actual Level	Score	Result
	AR								
Employment Rate 2nd Quarter after Exit	AR	0.479	0.4571	-0.0219	0.475	0.4531	0.5867	129.4	Meets/Exceeds Adjusted Level (≥100.0%)
Measurable Skill Gains	AR	0.5698	0.6024	0.0326	0.599	0.6316	0.631	99.9	Below Adjusted Level - No Failure (<100.0% & ≥50.0%)

Title IV ARS Response:

In PY2024, ARS had 5,808 individuals apply for VR services and 9,494 participants received services. There were 964 clients who became successfully employed. ARS has become aware of discrepancies in its 2024 performance measures and continues to work with Alliance and RSA to secure accurate performance numbers.

During PY 2024, ARS and the SRC conducted its triennial comprehensive statewide needs assessment. Findings and recommendations from that assessment can be found in the Title IV - ARS section of this plan.

Title IV DSB Response:

In PY 2024, DSB served 907 participants with 155 rehabilitated closures. In PY 2024, the employment rate second quarter after exit was 38% and the fourth quarter rate after exit was 16.1%. The credential rate was 10.0% and the measurable skills gains rate was 2.1%. The median earnings second quarter after exit for PY 2024 was \$8,424.00, ranking us 10th in the nation.

Due to the overall performance score for DSB, the agency is under a Performance Improvement Plan with RSA. This plan includes reviews of the case management system and training for staff to enhance data entry and accuracy to improve performance measures for the PY 2025 program year. In addition DSB is meeting regularly with RSA and ARS to make sure measures are on track for improvement.

C. EVALUATION

Describe how the State will conduct evaluations and research projects of activities carried out in the State under WIOA core programs; how such projects will be coordinated with, and designed in conjunction with, State and local boards and with State agencies responsible for the administration of all respective core programs; and, further, how the projects will be coordinated with the evaluations provided for by the Secretary of Labor and the Secretary of Education under WIOA (WIOA Section 116(e)).

Title I & III/Office of State Technology Response:

The Arkansas Workforce Development Board commissioned the University of Arkansas' Center for Business and Economic Research at the Walton College of Business to complete a comprehensive WIOA Systems Evaluation, Skills Gap Analysis, and a series of Customer Surveys.

The entire evaluation report can be found at:

<https://www.dws.arkansas.gov/programs/workforce-innovation/>

The results of this evaluation, along with the review of the WIOA Titles I - IV program performance, annual monitoring, and ADWS' risk management protocol for our WIOA formula and discretionary grants under the purview of ADWS will continue to serve as the foundation for our ability to determine the effectiveness of our core programs.

Evaluation & Research Projects

An evaluation was conducted by the University of Arkansas' Counselor Education program.

The Contractor worked closely with ADWS, the Arkansas Workforce Development Board, and workforce partners throughout the evaluation process, and implemented processes and procedures necessary to ensure that accurate and relevant data was used for evaluation purposes.

For each assigned local area, contractors interviewed leadership to identify partner programs and non-profits that collaborated with the Workforce Centers. For these partners, the

contractor documented and reported on the existence of memoranda of understanding between the ADWS and partners, written referral procedures, documentation of training for partners regarding the services provided or alternative print materials to assist in collaboration OR, an alternative method to refer clients between the partners effectively.

The contractor researched and identified entities in the assigned local areas that provide services to the specific targeted populations required in the Bid Solicitation Document (See Appendix A).

For all programs identified as Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service programs, and Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) programs, the Contractor identified, from a sampled participant list, whether clients were referred or co-enrolled in other programs and developed case studies on effectiveness of identifying and closing Skills-Gaps. The Contractor interviewed staff for examples of skills-gap identification on either the occupation level, the demand level, or the skill-level based on interaction with an employer and determined the services that were provided to address the skills-gap. The Contractor also assessed and reported on the effectiveness of the services in achieving the objective using surveys, and interview techniques.

The Contractors reviewed a sample of Arkansas Workforce Centers against the State's certification policy and applicable laws and regulations for six centers (four comprehensive and two affiliate centers). Each of the six centers was located in a different Local Workforce Development Area.

Contractors conducted a customer service survey for exiting participants of WIOA Title I and Title III sampled over the most recent 12 months available.

Objective 1: In the Comprehensive Centers for the 3 Local Areas selected for sampling, the Contractor will report case studies on effectiveness of identifying and serving individuals from targeted populations.

Objective 2: In the Workforce Centers assigned for the study, evaluate the extent to which innovative tools as well as emerging and current technology are used to enhance service delivery.

Objective 3: Review a sample of Arkansas Workforce Centers against the State's certification policy and applicable laws and regulations for four comprehensive centers and two affiliate centers. Each of the six centers selected will be located in different Local Workforce Development Areas.

Objective 4: Conduct a statewide customer service survey for business customers of WIOA Title I and Title III receiving services over the most recent 12 months available.

Objective 5: Review existing policies and procedures in Arkansas and in other states and make recommendations for changes that will lead to optimal efficiency in the provision of services in the state in the following areas:

Objective 6 – a: Geographic alignment; do workforce center locations provide optimum access for customers, both businesses and individuals, related to public transportation, urban vs. rural communities and other considerations?

Objective 6 – b: Demographic alignment; do workforce center locations provide optimum outreach and access to priority and underrepresented populations as identified in the state’s data measures?

Objective 6 – c: Fiscal considerations; given rising costs associated with brick-and-mortar operations, what cost effective models can be implemented virtually to maintain the quality of services to our customers? How do we strike a balance between virtual and in-person services that ensures continued quality of services while lessening the financial impact of maintaining physical spaces?

Objective 7: Conduct additional research in Jefferson, Crittenden, Cross, Phillips, and St. Francis Counties in Arkansas. According to the American Community Survey (ACS), these counties have unemployment rates in excess of 4.5%, compared to the current statewide rate of 2.8%. The Contractors will attempt to document the factors that are responsible for this excessive unemployment rate and will make recommendations for change.

DELIVERABLES/PRESENTATION OF MATERIAL:

Written reports detailing project activities, methods of data collection, and data analysis were provided to ADWS at designated times. These reports included: (1) Progress reports provided monthly and upon completion of major parts of the project as stated in the scope of work; (2) An Executive Summary which summarized the major findings and recommendations; and (3) A Final Report which included: background information, methodology used in the project, study findings, a discussion of the implications, and recommendations.

The Executive Summary and Final Report were provided in print, disk, and electronic formats. Both the Executive Summary and Final Report were appropriately bound to enhance access to the material. The data and the analysis of the data was presented in charts, graphs, and tables, and in other configurations that promoted access to and understanding of the information. Sample survey questions were included in the Final Report to assist in providing an understanding of the information presented. The Contractor provided a sufficient number of reports to meet the needs of ADWS.

EVALUATION AND RESEARCH – ENROLLMENT TO EMPLOYMENT

In order to support evaluation and research efforts relevant to state strategy, policy, and practice needs, Arkansas worked with the Coleridge Initiative to develop a new Applied Data Analytics training program curriculum, titled “Evaluating Enrollment to Employment Pathways”. This program leverages the Arkansas workforce longitudinal data developed under the Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) to train participants on applied use of data analytics on integrated WIOA, SNAP, TANF, and work-based learning data to design and develop scalable research and products for supporting data-driven policy and practice, with a particular focus on co-enrollment and integrated service delivery. Two cohorts of up to 30 students each will be supported under WDQI, and DOL ETA has funded two additional cohorts.

The curriculum leverages a scalable data model based on interoperable layouts to support collaborative development and use of continuously improving data products by interagency, multistate, and cross-sector teams.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

The State assesses its core programs through on-going continuous improvement strategies including:

- State and local level fiscal and programmatic monitoring (on-site and/or desk reviews) of all programs within our combined WIOA state plan
- Customer Satisfaction Surveys (for both the jobseekers and employers) are conducted annually
- State and local level data validation of all programs within our combined plan
- The Program and Performance Evaluation Committee, a subcommittee of Arkansas Workforce Development Board, has the functions of making recommendations on performance standards for the forthcoming year and to review actual outcomes across programs, make recommendation for improvement and/or corrective action to ensure attainment of performance standards for all partners
- As a state agency, there are annual audits of programs conducted and specific, as needed, audits of local workforce areas are also conducted by third party vendors

The state also ensures that local workforce development areas meet performance accountability measures and provide technical assistance as needed.

The Arkansas Workforce Development Board commissioned the University of Arkansas' Center for Business and Economic Research to complete a comprehensive WIOA Systems Evaluation, Skills Gap Analysis, and Customer Service Surveys. This evaluation is currently underway.

This evaluation will identify any areas for improvement as well as recommendations designed to improve the effectiveness of the WIOA Programs' service delivery.

It is expected that the Board's Program and Performance Evaluation Committee will take the lead in developing a framework that provides a consistent snapshot of individual program results, despite the distinct variations in services, activities, and populations served.

The results of this evaluation, along with the review of the WIOA Titles I - IV program performance, annual monitoring, and ADWS' risk management protocol for our WIOA formula and discretionary grants under the purview of ADWS will continue to serve as the foundation for our ability to determine the effectiveness of our core programs.

Title II Response: To support statewide evaluation and research activities under WIOA Section 116(e) and aligning with Pillar IV: Accountability under the America's Talent Strategy, Arkansas Title II Adult Education redesigned its participant intake form to collect standardized WIOA-required data elements at the point of entry. The revised intake process aligns Title II participant data with the WIOA Joint Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL), enabling consistent identification of shared participants and facilitating coordinated analysis across WIOA Titles I, II, III, and IV. By capturing common eligibility, demographic, barrier-to-employment, and participation information upfront, Title II Adult Education strengthened data-sharing capabilities with State and local workforce development boards and partner agencies.

This alignment supports integrated evaluations of referral patterns, co-enrollment, common exit, and joint service delivery outcomes, and ensures that Title II data can be readily incorporated into evaluations conducted by the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education through a data-matching process. These evaluations allow Title II to analyze and review the data for research project opportunities to better understand how WIOA partners can better serve Arkansans.

Title IV ARS Response: N/A

Title IV DSB Response: N/A

5. DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS FOR CORE PROGRAMS

Describe the methods and factors the State will use in distributing funds under the core programs in accordance with the provisions authorizing such distributions.

A. FOR TITLE I PROGRAMS

Provide a description of the written policies that establish the State's methods and factors used to distribute funds to local areas for—

- (i) Youth activities in accordance with WIOA section 128(b)(2) or (b)(3),**

Title I Response:

Youth Activities in accordance with WIOA section 128(b)(2) or (b)(3). The AWDB coordinates and establishes policy for conducting all employment and training activities within the workforce investment system created by the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 and Arkansas Code §15-4-3707 through 15-4-3713, including all activities conducted in and through Arkansas's one-stop centers. The criteria for funding the programs included in this plan will be consistent with the federal and state laws governing those programs and are described in detail in the funding sections below.

Currently, the chief elected official or lead elected official in a local workforce development area will serve as the local grant recipient for, and shall be liable for any misuse of, the grant funds allocated to the local area for youth, adult, and dislocated worker activities under Sections 128, 129, 132, and 133 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

In a case in which a local workforce development area includes more than one unit of general local government, the chief elected officials of such units will execute an agreement that specifies the respective roles of the individual chief elected officials, including responsibility for maintaining the integrity of the allocated funds. If, after a reasonable effort, the chief elected officials are unable to reach agreement about this responsibility, the Governor makes the

determination. The local plan must include the agreement concerning this responsibility.

In order to assist in the disbursement of the grant funds, the chief elected official or lead elected official of a local workforce development area may designate an entity to serve as a local grant sub-recipient for such funds or as a local fiscal agent. Such designation shall not relieve the chief elected official or lead elected official of the liability for any misuse of grant funds. The local grant recipient or sub-recipient will disburse such funds for workforce development activities at the direction of the local board. The local grant recipient or sub-recipient will disburse the funds immediately on receiving such direction from the local board. The local board, in partnership with the chief elected official(s), will conduct oversight with respect to local programs of youth activities authorized under WIOA Section 129, local employment and training activities authorized under WIOA Section 134, and the One-Stop delivery system in the local area.

WIOA Title I Youth Funding Allocation Formula The in-state allotment of funds to local workforce development areas for Title I youth activities under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act will be made using the formula required in WIOA Section 128(b)(2)(A)(i), as follows:

- 33 1/3 percent of the funds to the local workforce development areas will be based on the relative number of unemployed individuals in areas of substantial unemployment in each workforce development area compared to the total number of unemployed individuals in all areas of substantial unemployment in the state.
- 33 1/3 percent of the funds will be based on the relative excess number of unemployed individuals in each workforce development area compared with the total excess number of unemployed individuals in the state.
- 33 1/3 percent of the funds will be based on the relative number of disadvantaged youth in each workforce development area compared to the total number of disadvantaged youth in the state.

To ensure that youth funds are distributed equitably and to avoid significant shifts in funding levels to local areas, a hold-harmless provision will be applied. Under this provision, a local area will not receive an allocation percentage for a fiscal year that is less than 90 percent of the average allocation percentage of the local area for the 2 preceding fiscal years, as required in WIOA Section 128(b)(2)(A)(ii). Amounts necessary for increasing such allocations to local areas to comply with the preceding sentence will be obtained by ratably reducing the allocations to be made to other local areas, as also required in WIOA Section 128(b)(2)(A)(ii).

With the approval of the waiver for the state board to act as local board, the same formula funding methodology will be used. In lieu of funds being distributed to the chief elected officials through local workforce development boards, funds will be allocated to each local workforce development area but retained at the state level for program activities. The waiver request will yield an approximated \$6M dollars to be used for participant services,

based on estimates and strategies to reduce operational and overhead costs. The same methodology is applicable for WIOA Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker programs.

(ii) Adult and training activities in accordance with WIOA section 133(b)(2) or (b)(3),

Title I Response:

The in-state allotment of funds to local workforce development areas for Title I adult activities under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act will be made using the formula required in WIOA Section 132(b)(1)(B)(ii):

- 33 1/3 percent of the funds will be based on the relative number of unemployed individuals in areas of substantial unemployment in each workforce development area compared to the total number of unemployed individuals in all areas of substantial unemployment in the state.
- 33 1/3 percent of the funds will be based on the relative excess number of unemployed individuals in each workforce development area compared with the total excess number of unemployed individuals in the state.
- 33 1/3 percent of the funds will be based on the relative number of disadvantaged adults in each workforce development area compared to the number of disadvantaged adults in the state.

To ensure that adult funds are distributed equitably and to avoid significant shifts in funding levels to local areas, a hold-harmless provision also will be applied. Under this provision, required by WIOA Section 132(b)(1)(B)(iv), a local area will not receive an allocation percentage for a fiscal year that is less than 90 percent of the average allocation percentage of the local area for the two preceding fiscal years. Amounts necessary for increasing such allocations to local areas to comply with the preceding sentence will be obtained by ratably reducing the allocations to be made to other local areas.

(iii) Dislocated worker employment and training activities in accordance with WIOA section 133(b)(2) and based on data and weights assigned.

Title I Response:

In compliance with WIOA Section 133(b)(2)(B)(i), funds for dislocated workers will be allocated based on an allocation formula prescribed by the Governor of Arkansas. This formula may be amended by the Governor not more than once for each program year. The formula will use the most appropriate information available to the Governor to distribute amounts to address Arkansas's worker readjustment assistance needs. The in-state allotment of funds to local workforce development areas for Title I dislocated worker activities under the Workforce

Innovation and Opportunity Act will be distributed by placing the following weights on six factors:

- 5 percent insured unemployment
- 15 percent unemployment concentrations
- 30 percent plant closings and mass layoffs
- 15 percent declining industries
- 5 percent farmer-rancher economic hardship
- 30 percent long-term unemployment

To ensure that dislocated worker funds are distributed equitably and to avoid significant shifts in funding levels to local areas, a hold-harmless provision also will be applied. Under this provision, as required by WIOA Section 133(b)(2)(B)(iii), a local area will not receive an allocation percentage for a fiscal year that is less than 90 percent of the average allocation percentage of the local area for the two (2) preceding fiscal years. Amounts necessary for increasing such allocations to local areas to comply with the preceding sentence will be obtained by ratably reducing the allocations to be made to other local areas.

Not more than twenty-five percent of the total state allotment will be reserved for Rapid Response activities. Rapid Response services are provided by the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services to support employers and workers during closures or workforce reductions. Immediately upon receiving notice of a closure or reduction, the Rapid Response team, part of the Dislocated Worker Services unit, contacts company officials to offer assistance.

B. FOR TITLE II

I. DESCRIBE THE METHODS AND FACTORS THE ELIGIBLE AGENCY WILL USE TO DISTRIBUTE TITLE II FUNDS.

Title II Response:

The Office of Adult Education follows the federal mandates in the distribution of the State Basic Grant funds and is distributed by the following: Administrative costs (5%), Leadership (12.5%), and Correctional/Institutional Education (up to 20%). The remaining funds are distributed among the adult education providers.

The Office of Adult Education distributes Section 231 or State Basic Grant federal funding through a needs and performance-based formula. The funding formula was developed by a task force composed of Office of Adult Education staff and adult education directors of local programs from various types of local education agencies and regions of the state. The funding formula went through a legislative process and review in 2017.

Seventy percent (70%) of the federal funding for Basic State Grant is based on student enrollment and contact hours, whereas the other 30% is based on meeting the federal benchmarks for measurable skill gains.

For programs that will submit a Request for Proposal (RFP) application for Section 225 Correctional/Institutional funds, funding will be distributed based on enrollment of participants

in institutional settings. Office of Adult Education will set aside 8.25% of the State Basic Grant for Correctional Education. Likewise, adult education providers who applied for Section 243 Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education funding will be based on English Language Learners enrollment and the ability to provide Integrated Education and Training to English Language Learners. The total number of participants will be divided by the total grant award amount allocated for IELCE in Arkansas.

II. DESCRIBE HOW THE ELIGIBLE AGENCY WILL ENSURE DIRECT AND EQUITABLE ACCESS TO ALL ELIGIBLE PROVIDERS TO APPLY AND COMPETE FOR FUNDS AND HOW THE ELIGIBLE AGENCY WILL ENSURE THAT IT IS USING THE SAME GRANT OR CONTRACT ANNOUNCEMENT AND APPLICATION PROCEDURE FOR ALL ELIGIBLE PROVIDERS.

Title II Response:

The Office of Adult Education ensures that all eligible providers were given direct and equitable access to compete for Title II, AEFLA sections 225 (Correctional/Institutional), 231 (Direct and Equitable), and 243 (Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education) federal funds. The same grant announcement, application, and process were used for all eligible providers, and each proposal was treated the same in the evaluation.

The Request for Proposal (RFP) announcement was placed in the statewide newspaper, both physical and online editions. In addition, the announcement was placed on the Office of Adult Education's website. Before the announcement of an RFP, the Office of Adult Education Senior Management Team provided training to state staff to ensure internal control and standardization of the RFP process. Once the RFP been publicly announced, no staff member may discuss anything regarding the RFP application or process with any applicant. Any inquiries were e-mailed to adulted@arkansas.gov, which is the office's primary e-mail address. Every week, the date, name of the person, question, and response were placed on the website in a cumulative RFP Questions and Answers spreadsheet. This ensures that all eligible applicants have direct and equitable access to the questions and their responses.

All applicants who have shown and met the demonstrated effectiveness requirement will also be evaluated using the 13 Statutory Considerations found in the law at 231 (e) (1-13). The considerations included:

In accordance with 34 CFR Sec. 463 Subpart C, eligible programs will be funded as stated in "Distribution of Funds for Core Programs" using the previously stated competitive processes. Respondents must describe:

- (1). The degree to which the eligible provider would be responsive to—
 - (i) Regional needs as identified in the local workforce development plan; and
 - (ii) Serving individuals in the community who were identified in such plan as most in need of adult education and literacy activities, including individuals who—
 - (A) Have low levels of literacy skills; or
 - (B) Are English language learners;

(2) The ability of the eligible provider to serve eligible individuals with disabilities, including eligible individuals with learning disabilities;

(3) The past effectiveness of the eligible provider in improving the literacy of eligible individuals, especially those individuals who have low levels of literacy, and the degree to which those improvements contribute to the eligible agency meeting its State-adjusted levels of performance for the primary indicators of performance described in § 677.155;

(4) The extent to which the eligible provider demonstrates alignment between proposed activities and services and the strategy and goals of the local plan under section 108 of the Act, as well as the activities and services of the one-stop partners;

(5) Whether the eligible provider's program—

(i) Is of sufficient intensity and quality, and based on the most rigorous research available so that participants achieve substantial learning gains; and

(ii) Uses instructional practices that include the essential components of reading instruction;

(6) Whether the eligible provider's activities, including whether reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, and English language acquisition instruction delivered by the eligible provider, are based on the best practices derived from the most rigorous research available, including scientifically valid research and effective educational practice;

(7) Whether the eligible provider's activities effectively use technology, services and delivery systems, including distance education, in a manner sufficient to increase the amount and quality of learning, and how such technology, services, and systems lead to improved performance;

(8) Whether the eligible provider's activities provide learning in context, including through integrated education and training, so that an individual acquires the skills needed to transition to and complete postsecondary education and training programs, obtain and advance in employment leading to economic self-sufficiency, and to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship;

(9) Whether the eligible provider's activities are delivered by instructors, counselors, and administrators who meet any minimum qualifications established by the State, where applicable, and who have access to high-quality professional development, including through electronic means;

(10) Whether the eligible provider coordinates with other available education, training, and social service resources in the community, such as by establishing strong links with elementary schools and secondary schools, postsecondary educational institutions, institutions of higher education, Local WDBs, one-stop centers, job training programs, and social service agencies, business, industry, labor organizations, community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, and intermediaries, in the development of career pathways;

(11) Whether the eligible provider's activities offer the flexible schedules and coordination with Federal, State, and local support services (such as child care, transportation, mental health services, and career planning) that are necessary to enable individuals, including individuals with disabilities or other special needs, to attend and complete programs;

(12) Whether the eligible provider maintains a high-quality information management system that has the capacity to report measurable participant outcomes and to monitor program performance; and

(13) Whether the local area in which the eligible provider is located has a demonstrated need for additional English language acquisition programs and civics education programs.

In addition to the RFP application, eligible providers will have a rubric that shows how applications will be evaluated in the most recent competition. The proposal process is below.

1. Proposals were due to the Office of Adult Education by 5:00 p.m. on **March 1, 2024**. Written proposals were pre-screened to verify the inclusion of all required components in the order specified in the RFP. Proposals not meeting all pre-screen requirements were not read. Applications that did not illustrate demonstrated effectiveness were not considered. Applicants not meeting the pre-screening requirement were notified, along with all declined applicants.
 - a. Only applications from eligible providers of demonstrated effectiveness were forwarded for review, scoring, and consideration for funding.
2. Written proposals were submitted to the Local Board for review by **March 4, 2024**. The Local Board reviewed each application in its respective area and provided feedback to the state on its alignment with the local plan by **March 11, 2024**.
3. A review panel established by the Office of Adult Education evaluated the written proposals. The panel was composed of individuals with expertise in adult education and literacy, WIOA partner agency representatives, and Office of Adult Education personnel. Reviewers were trained and rated proposals.
4. The Office of Adult Education considered the results of the local board's review for alignment with the strategies and goals of the local plan and the extent to which the application addresses the required considerations in its scoring.
5. Declined applicants were notified by **March 14, 2024, at 12:00 p.m.**, and had an opportunity to submit an appeal by **March 21, 2024, at 12:00 p.m.**
 - a. If an applicant's proposal is not approved, the applicant may send a *Letter of Appeal* to the Director for Office of Adult Education by **March 21, 2024, by 12:00 p.m.** The letter must provide a thorough justification for the appeal. The Director and the state leadership team will make the final determination regarding the appeal. A response will be e-mailed to the applicant within five calendar days of receiving the appeal letter. All appeal decisions will be final.
6. Awarded applicants may be provisionally awarded funds for a maximum of four (4) years. Provisional grantees will be reviewed six months and 12 months post-award. Based on the findings, the grantee may continue with a provisional award and receive guidance from the state office to improve program performance. Future funding may be affected if the program has not achieved satisfactory performance results.
7. The review panel will recommend proposals to receive awards and funding levels.

A formula method will be used to determine the amount of funding and consider the literacy rate and the core performance indicators as outlined in Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) law. The state will identify, assess, and award grants using the RFP process of providers who have demonstrated effectiveness in providing adult education activities to eligible individuals. An eligible individual is an individual who has attained 16 years of age; who is not enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under State law; and who is basic skills deficient; does not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent and has not achieved an equivalent level of education; or is an English language learner.

In addition, other factors that will be considered is the ability of the eligible providers to meet the literacy needs in the area may include, but not limited to, the ability to comply with WIOA and state expectations, the ability to provide services to special populations such as an individual with barriers to employment as defined in WIOA Section 3 (24), past performance of the entity in providing literacy instruction and meeting programmatic goals, overall program management, timely submission of financial and quarterly reports to the state office, and the overall qualification and expertise of the providers' personnel. Again, the criteria used to evaluate demonstrated effectiveness and the scoring rubric have been made available as part of the RFP process. At the end of two years, the state will reevaluate the providers to determine whether to conduct a new Request for Proposal competition.

Currently, the adult education providers in the state are divided into five regions: Northeast, Southeast, Southwest, Northwest, and Central Regions. Although multiple providers may exist within an area, the state has reconfigured all 75 counties to better align with the ten local workforce development boards (LWDBs). The purpose of restructuring the state was to help align service delivery under WIOA and enhance the coordination and support of the overall economic development of the State.

Adult education/literacy providers are housed under a local education agency, such as school districts, community colleges, institutions of higher education, and literacy organizations. Other eligible providers have been and will continue to be considered using a direct and equitable process. Funding is awarded to local adult education/literacy providers through a competitive grant process based on literacy rate and the core performance indicators outlined in Title II of the WIOA law. Applications are competitive, open, and available to all eligible applicants. Grants/contracts are awarded for one year, with two one-year renewals based on performance and available funding.

No less than 95% of federal funds shall be expended for carrying out adult education and literacy activities, and the remaining amount, not to exceed 5%, shall be used for planning, administration (including carrying out the requirements of section 116), professional development, and the activities described in WIOA paragraphs (3) and (5) of section 232.

C. VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

In the case of a State that, under section 101(a)(2)(A)(i) of the Rehabilitation Act designates a State agency to administer the part of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan under which VR services are provided for individuals who are blind, describe the process and the factors used by

the State to determine the distribution of funds among the two VR agencies in the State.

Title IV ARS/DSB Response:

In Arkansas, vocational rehabilitation funds are first distributed to Arkansas Workforce Connections, the state's designated state agency (DSA). Funds are then directed to Arkansas Rehabilitation Services and the Division of Services for the Blind. Under written agreement and taking into consideration the incidence and severity of disability and the historical cost of rehabilitation for the two populations, the VR funds are distributed 88% to ARS and 12% DSB.

6. PROGRAM DATA

A. DATA ALIGNMENT AND INTEGRATION

Describe the plans of the lead State agencies with responsibility for the administration of the core programs, along with the State Board, to align and integrate available workforce and education data systems for the core programs, unemployment insurance programs, and education through postsecondary education, and to the extent possible, the Combined State Plan partner programs included in this plan. The description of the State's plan for integrating data systems should include the State's goals for achieving integration and any progress to date. Describe data-collection and reporting processes used for all programs and activities, including the State's process to collect and report data on co-enrollment, and for those present in the one-stop centers.

Title I & III Response:

The Department of Commerce operates a collection of different IT systems to capture participant information, services, and outcomes. While Titles I & III utilize a common system, the other core WIOA partner programs continue to use legacy systems that were transferred to Commerce as programs were moved to the Department. The Department of Commerce supports efforts to increase efficiency while maintaining quality levels of service through judicious use of resources and adhering to policy (local, state, and federal). Prior to the establishment of the Department of Commerce on July 1, 2019, the WIOA Partners Roundtable (consisting of each WIOA core partner) had been evaluating workforce system solutions in other states to better unite the case management and job search functions of our programs. We are increasing these efforts now that each of Arkansas' WIOA core partners under the Department of Commerce umbrella. Our intentions are to identify ways to either integrate or replace these legacy systems. The Department of Commerce believes that our efforts will eventually lead to the implementation of a data warehouse and analytics platform that will support oversight, consumer education, and decision-making at all levels of the workforce system. The integrated warehouse may also be a means to deliver some of the benefits that an integrated case management system is envisioned as providing. This model will allow Commerce to work to develop advanced statistical models that can help identify not only who most needs services but to also help prescribe the types of services that may be most effective for a given customer based on what we learn from having served similarly situated customers in the past.

Common Intake Efforts that will Support Assessment and Evaluation-

Employment Services and the Adult, Youth, and Dislocated Workers programs share a common case management system. The contractor, AJLA, has the following deliverables that are contingent on partner program's case management systems adopting the common file referenced below and working with the AJLA to establish the API process for each system:

- Create new tables to store API data from partner agencies
- Add new fields to Data Base for Arkansas Common Intake Web Service
- Create email notification for stub accounts
- Create enrollment for partner agencies
- Process for determining matches
- Create API to send data to partners
- Create API to consume data from partners (Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitative Services (vision impaired, and Adult Education)
- Process for creating Common ID
- Create stub account in Arkansas JobLink (AJL)

These processes will allow the partner's databases to be matched, compared, and updated, regardless of which program interacts with the potential client first. Although the service has been offered, partner programs have not been able to connect to the program to date. Having this combined database will enhance our ability to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of the system of the state's workforce development programs.

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- Process for creating Common ID
- Create stub account in Arkansas JobLink (AJL)

These processes will allow the partner's databases to be matched, compared, and updated, regardless of which program interacts with the potential client first. Although this service has been offered, partner programs have not been able to connect to the service due to funding. The Core Partner Programs continue to make this effort a priority.

Once established, the new database that results from partners' connected systems will advance goals by:

- Increasing staff access to systems services;
- Integrating and aligning WIOA systems and services;
- Equipping staff, Boards and their partners, and service providers with innovative technology and tools;
- Delivering excellent customer service and customer experiences in our Arkansas Workforce Centers;
- Delivering excellent customer outcomes; and
- Streamline mission critical case management services and activities for staff and Workforce Boards, that will address complicated integration and/or lack of integration between our multiple stand-alone systems and platforms of varying ages.

The state board has established data systems alignment as one of its objective under the overall goal of enhancing service delivery to workforce customers. The Board has charged staff with researching the availability of an integrated data system that will enable the sharing of information between partner agencies to more efficiently service both employers and jobseekers. The identification of such a system must be in compliance with the Governor's overall vision.

Until such time that an integrated system can be built, the core program agencies will work cooperatively to produce the required federal performance reports utilizing Unemployment Insurance wage data and the Arkansas Longitudinal Data System, which connects data from education, higher education and workforce programs.

CiviForm and "LAUNCH" are major components of Governor Sanders' workforce strategy. All state agencies will be mandated to use the systems upon its initial launch in 2024. CiviForm will serve as the "door" to all workforce development agency's management information systems. Although many of the agencies will continue to utilize their own systems, application programming interfaces (API) will be used to share data across systems. Customers will apply for programs using CiviForm and key demographic information will be sent to each program notifying staff of the pending application. A customer will be referred to all programs that provide a service matching with an interest or barrier. CiviForm will serve as the primary intake system for all workforce development programs in Arkansas. LAUNCH will serve as the state's primary labor exchange system and is currently active by [clicking here](#).

Title II Response:

The Office of Adult Education's (OAE) data management system (LACES) has aligned key intake data fields to match the Combined State Agency's common intake process and plans to continue to utilize CiviForm's API process for integrating student data into CiviForm's information

system. The LACES data fields match the federal reporting tables and the key reporting federal benchmarks we share: Measurable Skill Gains, 2nd Quarter Employment after Exit, 4th Quarter After Exit, Median Earnings 2nd Quarter After Exit, and Credential Attainment.

Students' progress, performance, and attendance are collected, including follow-up information, surveys, and manual outcomes after they exit. At the end of the Program Year, a file is prepared for the Department of Higher Education and the Department of Labor to gather data and match participant information to supplement ongoing manual outcomes and any follow-up information local providers complete throughout the year. All the student's information is available for co-enrollment in other core WIOA programs at any time during the student's participation. This information is also updated and kept for other WIOA partners to use as adult education participants are referred to those core WIOA partners.

Title IV ARS Response:

ARS is working with other core programs to develop a common intake and referral system, which will streamline the referral process so all core partners can access the individual's information.

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB is participating in the project to develop a common intake and referral system for all core programs. This program will be able to make referrals to all core programs based on information provided into any one programs case management system.

(ii) Describe the State's plans to integrate data systems to facilitate streamlined intake and service delivery to track participation across all programs included in this plan.

Title I & III/Office of State Technology Response:

Integrated service delivery is a holistic approach to providing public services that focuses on efficiently and effectively meeting the needs of individuals through coordinated and streamlined processes. It is characterized by the integration of services across different agencies and sectors to provide a comprehensive support system for individuals seeking employment, training, or other related services.

One strategic activity to support integrated service delivery is the implementation of CiviForm, an innovative digital tool designed to streamline the application process for government and community services. Developed with support from Google.org, it simplifies the experience of finding and applying for various services, making them more accessible and efficient for residents.

Role in the Arkansas Workforce State Plan:

- **Facilitate Access to Workforce Services:** Integrated service delivery, enabled by tools like CiviForm, allows residents easy access to a range of services critical for employment and training.

- **Enhance Efficiency and Effectiveness:** By breaking down silos between different service providers, integrated service delivery ensures that resources are utilized more efficiently and effectively, leading to better outcomes for residents.
- **Data-Driven Service Improvement:** The data collected through integrated service delivery processes can be used to continuously improve service delivery, tailor services to meet emerging needs, and inform workforce policy decisions.
- **Enhance User Experience:** By providing a one-stop-shop for services, integrated service delivery makes it easier for residents to access the support they need, improving overall satisfaction and engagement.

Integrated service delivery reflects the commitment to a more coordinated, efficient, and customer-centric approach to workforce development. This initiative is crucial for ensuring that all Arkansans can easily access the support and opportunities they need to succeed in today's dynamic job market.

CiviForm is a major component of Governor Sanders' workforce strategy. All state agencies will be mandated to use the system upon its initial launch in the summer of 2024. CiviForm will serve as the "door" to all workforce development agency's management information systems. Although many of the agencies will continue to utilize their own systems, application programming interfaces (API) will be used to share data across systems. Customers will apply for programs using CiviForm and key demographic information will be sent to each program notifying staff of the pending application. A customer will be referred to all programs that provide a service matching with an interest or barrier. CiviForm will serve as the primary intake system for all workforce development programs in Arkansas.

The AWDB has been highly engaged in the development of the Governor's workforce strategy. The Arkansas Governor's Workforce Cabinet has developed a comprehensive strategy that is employer-led, demand-informed, and data-driven. The strategy was developed leveraging established best practices, broad stakeholder engagement, user-centered design, a national network of experts, emerging technological advances, and Arkansas' mature foundation for data-driven transformation and shared services. Employer-facing supports include Talent Pipeline Management for timely signaling of evolving job and skill needs, and support for hiring, upskilling, and retention through workforce analytics, digital credentials, and skills-based hiring. Education and training providers will receive timely information for continuously aligning programs with employer needs and the ability to communicate program enrollment needs to close employer demand gaps. State and community-based programs and the public-facing Launch portal will support all residents on pathways to employment and economic security, maximizing the impact of braided state, federal, and philanthropic funding through "no wrong door" integrated service delivery strategies. The entire system will be supported by secure, compliant, privacy-preserving data sharing, integration, and analytics for continuous monitoring, improvement, evaluation, and research.

AWDB members are actively involved in the development of two new ground-breaking platforms that will improve the one-stop delivery system and strategies for technological improvements to improve the services and activities of the one-stop delivery system.

[Google.Org CiviForm](#) (WIOA Common Intake)

Google.Org is a philanthropic organization through which Google employees can serve on six-month, pro-bono fellowships in the public sector and develop open-source products for public benefit. Google fellows have been working with Arkansas for 18 months to modify CiviForm for statewide use.

Arkansas will be the first to leverage CiviForm statewide, with 9 other states showing interest in adoption. All civic entities benefit from continuous, collective innovation to the platform, which is owned and led by a public sector governance board.

CiviForm is a major component of Governor Sanders' workforce strategy. All state agencies will be mandated to use the system upon its initial launch in the summer of 2024. CiviForm will serve as the "door" to all workforce development agency's management information systems. Although many of the agencies will continue to utilize their own systems, application programming interfaces (API) will be used to share data across systems. Customers will apply for programs using CiviForm and key demographic information will be sent to each program notifying staff of the pending application. A customer will be referred to all programs that provide a service matching with an interest or barrier. CiviForm will serve as the primary intake system for all workforce development programs in Arkansas.

RIPL DOORS (LAUNCH)*(Career, Program & Job Recommendations)*

Research Improving People's Lives (RIPL) is a tech-for-social-impact nonprofit that works with governments to help them use data, science, and technology to improve policy and lives.

Arkansas has received philanthropic funding through Walmart.Org to implement the DOORS platform for data-driven career, training, and job recommendations (Netflix for your Career).

Arkansas is soft launching the same platform used by Hawaii, Colorado, New Jersey, Washington, Virginia, and Rhode Island. A first-in-the-nation enhanced version (DOORS+) will go live for public access in 2024 as "LAUNCH" as branded by Governor Sanders.

In efforts to engage required one-stop partners, several meetings were convened to introduce the platform and receive feedback from all stakeholders. The AWDB consists of state program directors from WIOA Titles I-IV, all of which were provided with demonstrations, overviews, and user studies. The convenings occurred during state board meetings and committee meetings, WIOA partner roundtable meetings, joint staff meetings, and at WIOA partners conferences where all required partners are encouraged to attend. Pilots are being conducted at local workforce centers throughout the state to gain additional feedback from customers.

The AWDB developed a pilot to create a virtual Employment Services "ES" Service Center during the WIOA Plan Year 2024-2027. The ES Service Center will compliment services that are being provided at Arkansas Workforce Centers but will make these career and related services available through a hybrid approach. Customers who wish to visit a center in-person will have that option. Other customers who choose to connect with a live workforce specialists from the convenience of their home, library or from any electronic device, can receive virtual services through video-conferencing platforms. The ES Service Center will operate in conjunction with the UI Service Center and customers may be transferred from one program to other programs to apply for jobs, learn about training opportunities and resources, and hear about labor market information. The ES Service Center is being considered an exemplary service delivery model serving special populations and will be funded by Wagner-Peyser 7b funds. The goal is to

provide access to customers in communities that no longer have an Arkansas Workforce Center physical location. Those who have barriers including transportation and childcare will benefit from this model. This strategy is one example of the customer-centric approach that Arkansas is implementing.

A responsive workforce system is agile, adaptable, and capable of responding to changing economic conditions, labor market trends, and individual needs. It is crucial to cater to the diverse and evolving needs of job seekers and workers, providing support that is tailored to individual pathways and career goals. This strategy is about ensuring that Arkansas' workforce is dynamic, forward-thinking, and capable of meeting the challenges of a rapidly evolving job market. By embracing adaptability and responsiveness, Arkansas can ensure its workforce is prepared for the future, contributing to the state's overall economic resilience and growth.

Performance management, evaluation, continuous improvement, and communication are essential components of this plan, ensuring that the strategic initiatives are not only effective but also adaptable and responsive to changing needs and conditions. Arkansas will use the following methods to measure effectiveness:

Performance Management Framework:

- Establish Key Performance Indicators (KPIs): Developing clear KPIs aligned with the strategic goals, such as employment rates, skill gap closure, employer satisfaction, and participant engagement levels.
- Regular Monitoring: Implementing systems for the regular collection and analysis of performance data to assess progress against objectives.

Evaluation Mechanisms:

- Program Evaluations: Conducting periodic evaluations of all programs and initiatives to assess their effectiveness, impact, and return on investment (ROI).
- Stakeholder Feedback: Gathering and incorporating feedback from participants, employers, educators, and other stakeholders to understand the effectiveness of initiatives from multiple perspectives.

Continuous Improvement Processes:

- Data-Driven Decision Making: Utilizing data and insights gained from performance management and evaluations to inform decisions and improve strategies.
- Adaptive Approach: Remaining flexible by adapting strategies and initiatives in response to performance outcomes and emerging trends.
- Innovation and Best Practices: Encouraging innovation and the adoption of best practices to enhance program effectiveness and efficiency.

Communication and Transparency:

- Regular Reporting: Sharing performance results with stakeholders through reports, dashboards, and presentations to maintain transparency and accountability.
- Collaborative Review Sessions: Hosting regular sessions with key stakeholders to review performance data, discuss challenges, and identify opportunities for improvement.

These processes ensure that the implementation of the strategy remains effective, relevant, and aligned with the state's strategic workforce initiatives. By fostering a culture of accountability, adaptability, and continuous learning, the strategy is well-positioned to make a meaningful impact on Arkansas' workforce ecosystem.

(ii) Describe the State's data systems and procedures to produce the reports required under section 116, performance accountability system. (WIOA section 116(d)(2)).

Data Systems and Procedures to Produce the Reports Required under Section 116.

Title I & III/Office of State Technology Response:

Arkansas is using its Workforce Data Quality Initiative - WDQI Round 8 grant to develop and produce information and reports required under section 116.

Although the minimum requirements for WIOA reporting are currently met, some systems lack the level of data and programming to produce enhanced products beyond the minimum that is required. Arkansas has established a longitudinal administrative database (LP2), the state must expand its current capacity to further the vision of WIOA and to more effectively analyze the impact of certifications, work experience, education, training programs, and federal workforce programs.

Arkansas objectives for expanding and enhancing the longitudinal data system are centered around the needs of two complementary strategies for promoting continuous learning and improvement in workforce and education. The first strategy is to help the state leaders and service providers continuously improve programs and services and align resources to the evolving needs of citizens to deliver better workforce and education outcomes.

The second strategy is to facilitate continuous learning and collaboration through shared standards and governance, analytic capacity building, coordinated research and data products, and inter-agency, interstate, and cross-sector collaboration to support improved policy outcomes and an engaged community of practice.

Both strategies are heavily reliant upon the availability of:

- A comprehensive database of high-quality, timely, linked administrative longitudinal data
- Training for analyzing data and applying insights for improved performance and policy
- Mechanisms for providing secure, governed, tiered data access and data products to a wide range of state workforce, research, and public users.

Arkansas objectives for the major activities supported by this funding opportunity include:

- Expanding the workforce longitudinal database – The state seeks to expand the scope of the SLDS to support application of the above strategies to WIOA Title I, II, III, and IV programs, Registered Apprenticeship Programs, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).
- Improving the quality of workforce data – The state seeks to improve the quality of workforce data by maturing from a legacy repository data warehouse approach to a modern data hub approach that extends SLDS analytical capabilities with best practice data governance and data quality management capabilities including metadata management (data dictionaries), data quality management, and master data management.
- Expanding capacity to match workforce and education data – The state seeks to expand its capacity for administrative data linkage by leveraging advanced probabilistic identity resolution across a broader population and adding support for household linkage.
- Using data for analysis of workforce and education programs – The state seeks to develop a statewide skills gap analysis to support program improvement and alignment as well as products to support analysis of co-enrollment, equity, program cost effectiveness, credential attainment, skills gains, career pathways, work history, and apprenticeships.
- Producing and disseminating workforce training provider performance information and outcomes – The state seeks to disseminate workforce training provider performance information and outcomes via provider performance dashboards.
- Creating user-friendly portals to inform consumer choice – The state seeks to support user-friendly options for informing consumer choice by adding products to the state open data portal and the learning management system informed by user-centered design.

Outcomes

The measurable outcomes expected to result from the project include:

- Increase the employment outcome reporting frequency from annual to quarterly (300%)
- Increase the annual completers covered by the skills gap analysis by 250%
- Increase Arkansas labor force coverage in the SLDS
- Increase coverage of credential attainment in the SLDS
- Provide applied data analytics training on integrated workforce data to 60 participants.

- Increase the number of consumer-facing workforce outcome products from 1 to 6 (500%)

Title II Response:

LACES is the Office of Adult Education's (OAE) online student data management software program. LACES allows client users to easily set baselines and parameters to track program progress and student goals that match the National Reporting System (NRS) federal reporting tables and benchmark standards with similar table formats. The federal table structure used by LACES is automatically updated as local programs enter data throughout the program year. Programs are to enter data by monthly deadlines and utilize the diagnostic report features in LACES for error correction and data validation.

The OAE staff generate monthly reports using the data in LACES to analyze trends over time, anomalies in performance and enrollment, and for planning and strategies with partners for growth and opportunity.

By managing the report parameters, OAE can export files and data match with the Department of Higher Education and the Department of Labor for accurate postsecondary participation and employment verification. At the end of the program year, a "freeze" term is used to describe the period when no more data can be entered until after the freeze, which indicates the time for the state to assess, correct, and validate the data to ensure accuracy, and begin the end-of-year summaries. This data freeze occurs when the files are merged through the LACES system, deduplicated, and updated for reporting, so files can be created for data matching with DOL and DHed.

Title IV ARS Response:

During PY 2024, ARS updated its case management system, from Libra (System 7) to Alliance AWARE. Data migration and staff adaptation to the new operating system has presented challenges. ARS continues to work with Alliance and RSA's data unit to obtain accurate results.

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB utilizes the AWARE case management system to collect and report all data on the VR program. The system allows DSB to require and set parameters to enhance accuracy of data entry and collection of all required data elements. DSB has worked closely with RSA's data unit and Alliance to improve the adaptations in AWARE to provide the most accurate and timely performance results for the program.

B. ASSESSMENT OF PARTICIPANTS' POST-PROGRAM SUCCESS

Describe how lead State agencies will use the workforce development system to assess the progress of participants who are exiting from core programs in entering, persisting in, and completing postsecondary education, or entering or remaining in employment. States may choose to set additional indicators of performance.

Title I & III Response:

Lead agencies are invested in and committed to the Governor's vision for workforce development in Arkansas. The Departments of Labor & Workforce Development, Education, Economic & Community Development, Human Services, Adult Education, and Rehabilitation are poised to offer educational and employment transitional services. Much of the progress of participants will be tracked and our system will incorporate workforce data to help to identify, assess, and certify skills for successful careers, and help to promote economic development by connecting workforce development with job creation and growth. The core workforce partners will utilize the WIOA Performance Measures for the Core Programs to monitor and improve all WIOA core programs. These performance measures include the following: Second Quarter and Fourth Quarter after Exit, Median Earnings, Credential Attainment Rate, Measurable Skill Gains, and Effectiveness in Serving Employers. Performance for each of these measures will be segmented by Adults, Dislocated Workers, Youth, Adult Education, Wagner-Peyser, and Vocational Rehabilitation. State and local workforce boards will utilize these performance measures in measuring the progress of the core partners in their area. These measures will assist Arkansas in determining the effectiveness of its workforce development system and allow the state to continuously improve this system.

The state will use the Eligible Training Provider (ETP) system to monitor the completion and employment rate of all participants receiving training services through the workforce system. The ability to review educational programs to ensure that participants are becoming employed in the occupations in which they are trained will assist both the educational system and the workforce system in determining the effectiveness of the training programs being developed and offered in our state. Programs eligible to receive workforce funding for the training of participants will be reviewed on an annual basis and the programs not meeting performance levels set by the state may be removed. Arkansas' response to the Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI), will connect a diverse range of tools for common presentation to customers and integrative use of common data. Arkansas will be linked to the State Department of Education's Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS), and together they will conduct analysis, implement continuous process improvement in the delivery of workforce and education services, enhance return on investment, and drive strategic policy making.

Title II Response:

The Office of Adult Education (OAE) has a highly effective strategy in addressing the progress of participants who exit from adult education and enter postsecondary and employment opportunities. Of all 50 states and other reporting territories, Arkansas' Office of Adult Education currently ranks 4th in the nation in 2nd Quarter and also holds that same spot for 4th Quarter Employment after exit. Arkansas adult education numbers reached 2nd in the nation for Credential Attainment. Although the MSG indicator is not highly considered an outcome indicator, helping participants achieve a measurable skills gain helps them persist in attaining and maintaining their next achievable educational or employment goal. Arkansas finished 11th in the nation at 63.11% in that metric.

The Office of Adult Education has streamlined the process of aligning postsecondary opportunities, along with Integrated Education and Training (IET) opportunities with the adult education providers. Similarly, many of these IET opportunities are tied to ready-to-work jobs and/or linked to an employer partnership ready to hire or advance that employee in the

workforce. These opportunities are sought by planning, strategizing, collaborating, and building opportunities with partners, employers, workforce boards and education advisory boards.

The OAE has built in surveys and manual outcome processes and procedures that we train providers to follow. These processes are written into our Adult Education policies to guide best practices in reporting and data collection as well. Of these processes and procedures, one of them is the quarterly follow-up/surveys built into our LACES system. Call-back reports are easily accessible and targeted questions related to postsecondary education and employment are presented in a template for easy-to-use accessibility. Another of these processes is included in multiple training that happen throughout the year that target correct data entry. Making sure participants have correct exit dates, are enrolled in postsecondary opportunities, have correct employment start dates, and have various other critical, valid, and correct data is vital to accuracy.

As participants enter adult education provider services throughout the state of Arkansas, the WAGE™ program is designed as a foundational tool to bring all participants into a workforce engagement aspect. As they map out their educational goals with intake staff and Career Coaches, the WAGE™ curriculum is meant to establish a foundation for moving forward and moving ahead in the workplace. As participants attain their WAGE™ *Workforce Preparation Certificate*, they plan with Career Coaches and education staff stackable goals that include attaining their GED®, industry certificates, and credentials that are associated with, or in conjunction with, Integrated Education and Training (IET) and postsecondary options for the best route to better employment or sustainable employment circumstances.

After participants have completed and exited, adult education providers practice follow-up procedures and a manual outcome process to ensure participants have moved on to postsecondary opportunities or have attained and maintained employment. As adult education providers complete the follow-up procedures mandated and monitored by the Office of Adult Education, the development of the workforce and workplace opportunities of those participants exiting adult education is assessed. The performance indicators derived from the collected data are measured and compared to national standards and negotiated benchmarks. Data is also reviewed and analyzed in many strategic ways to identify differences between those attaining MSG versus those who did not attain an MSG and how it affected earnings; those who earned lower-level certificates and credentials (including WAGE™ I certificates) versus those who did not, and how it affected wages; and those who attained industry-recognized credentials versus those who did not, and how it affected wages. Longitudinal data collected in this respect were reviewed and analyzed over time to show differences in those making gains and those who did not. Data is shared with core partners at various monthly and quarterly meetings, and goals are set to address performance improvements.

Those performance measures are reassessed at the state level, with core partners, and with local providers. They continue to be addressed with all providers to ensure the persistence of improving best practices for raising the outcomes and circumstances of adult education participants.

Additional section goals are also established to make ongoing benchmark improvements in areas of performance, literacy activities, and workforce preparation. The Office of Adult

Education's goals are established in-house and monitored by the Senior Management Team and the Division director. Similarly, the WIOA Executive Committee also sets and tracks performance goals across WIOA partners. These goals are established through the WIOA Executive subcommittee groups to promote better practices in shared reporting and cross-agency functions, aiming to improve co-enrollment wrap-around services and participant performance.

Title IV ARS Response:

In PY2024, ARS and the SRC piloted a consumer satisfaction evaluation system that occurs at four pre-determined points within the rehabilitation process – eligibility, plan development, service provision, and closure. The pilot received mixed results with continuation currently under consideration. ARS and the SRC conducted its triennial comprehensive statewide needs assessment (CSNA) during PY 2024. The CSNA assesses the needs of individuals with disabilities within the state as viewed by its clients, employers, and other partners and is used in developing goals, priorities, and strategies to better meet client needs. ARS meets with WIOA core partners on a scheduled basis to review performance data to identify successes, challenges, and how to better serve our clients.

Title IV DSB Response:

Division of Services for the Blind meets with WIOA core programs and core partner agencies monthly to review and analyze the WIOA implementation in Arkansas. Discussions focus on progress of partnership at the state and local levels, integration of services, co-location and outcomes for job seekers who receive services. DSB also works with partners to track consumers across core programs to ensure data collection is accurate for federal reporting. The data captured provides insight into the number of individuals and type of services received through WIOA partnerships. The information also provides an opportunity to identify how services are delivered statewide and highlight efforts made by each region. Using employment data, the core programs and partner agencies can pinpoint success and/or gaps that require additional resources and attention. Consumer and business satisfaction surveys are collected annually to determine progress and to gather recommendations for continuous improvement.

C. USE OF UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (UI) WAGE RECORD DATA

Explain how the State will meet the requirements to utilize quarterly UI wage records for performance accountability, evaluations, and as a source for workforce and labor market information, consistent with Federal and State law. (This Operational Planning element applies to core programs.)

Title I/Office of State Technology Response:

Unemployment Insurance (UI) Wage Record Data will be utilized for data matching purposes for assessing and reporting on state and local employment and training program performance, evaluating training provider performance, and for other purposes allowed by state law and data sharing agreements among state agencies. By utilizing UI Wage Data, the State can measure

entered employment, employment retention, and earnings of the individual. This will help measure the success of the workforce development services being provided.

Furthermore, the State will utilize State Wage Record Interchange System (SWIS) data to track performance outcomes. The use of SWIS data permits state workforce program performance agencies to secure wage data of individuals who have participated in workforce investment programs in one state, then subsequently secured employment in another. By participating in SWIS, the State has a more robust picture of the effectiveness of workforce development programs and is able to report more comprehensive outcomes against their performance measures.

Title II Response:

The Office of Adult Education (OAE) accesses UI wage data, state wage data, and SWIS wage data only for purposes permitted under the WIOA act, state law, and approved data-sharing agreements with the Department of Labor and the Department of Higher Education to evaluate performance and accountability and share with partners for planning and better preparing individuals for the workforce. This data is analyzed to identify gaps, trends, and opportunities to better serve clients. This information supplements the data already collected through intake and surveys, as well as manual outcomes.

The OAE's records are compiled and sent to the Department of Labor and the Department of Higher Education to complete our federal tables, which represent the outcomes and employment of participants who qualify. This information is then used in federal reporting and shared with key committees to develop strategies and improve operations.

Title IV ARS Response:

ARS uses UI Wage Record Data to report participant employment at the 2nd and 4th quarter after exit and median earnings for the 2nd quarter after exit. This data is gathered by ARS staff with approved access to the UI Wage records and placed in the case management system. To ensure confidentiality, only authorized staff have access to this data in both the UI system and the case management system.

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB uses UI Wage Record Data to report on the 2nd and 4th Quarter After Exit employment of participants. This data also provides the data for the 2nd Quarter After Exit Median Earnings for DSB participants. This data is gathered by DSB staff with approved access to the UI Wage records and placed in AWARE. To ensure confidentiality only a few staff have access to this data in the UI system and AWARE.

D. PRIVACY SAFEGUARDS

Describe the privacy safeguards incorporated in the State's workforce development system, including safeguards required by section 444 of the General Education Provisions Act (20 U.S.C. 1232g) and other applicable Federal laws.

Title I & III Response:

The State is aware that a key element of success to utilizing data across agencies for either improved customer service or improved measurement and tracking of outcomes is ensuring the integrity of all data and ensuring confidential data is treated as such. The data retention policies are required by the State to identify and adopt a records retention schedule for the retention of documents and data following state and federal mandates.

This is accomplished with various technical safeguards and ensuring personnel handling this data are properly trained in all relevant regulations and the fundamentals of handling personal and confidential data. Technical safeguards may include:

- Approved processes that limit access to the data to only those personnel who require access to carry out their daily job functions;
- Network security, monitoring, firewalls, etc. to prevent unauthorized access to data from entities outside of State government;
- Encryption technology; and
- Secure data transport mechanisms.

Data Sharing Agreements are used when confidential information is shared with another entity. All partners that will provide and share data in collaboration efforts will enter into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) and/or a data sharing agreement to ensure security of sensitive information.

The privacy requirements for Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) outlined in section 444 of the General Education Provisions Act (20 U.S.C. 1232g) are enforced through role-based user operations that ensure separation of duties and data disclosure. The state mandates the local system staff must be compliant and must sign state confidentiality agreements following data security training.

All data sharing agreements and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) documents are strictly enforced and utilized for all data sharing.

All partners expressly agree to abide by all applicable federal, state, and local laws regarding confidential information and to adhere to the same standards of confidentiality as state employees, including but not limited to: 29 U.S.C. 2935; as amended by WIOA - reports, recordkeeping, and investigations. 29 U.S.C. 2871(f)(3); as amended by WIOA - regarding confidentiality. 20 CFR Part 603 - safeguards and security requirements regarding disclosed information under Unemployment Compensation. 42 U.S.C. 503 - regarding state laws governing Unemployed Insurance operations. 20 CFR 617.57(b) - regarding disclosure of information under the Trade Act. 29 U.S.C. 491-2(a)(2); as amended under WIOA - regarding information to be confidential under the Wagner-Peyser Act. The Privacy Act (5 U.S.C. 552). The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (20 U.S.C. 1232g). 34 CFR 361.38 - protection, use, and release of personal information of Vocational Rehabilitation Services participants. HIPAA: 45 CFR 164.500 - 164.534. 2 CFR 200.303 - regarding reasonable measures to safeguard protected personally identifiable information.

Title II Response:

Title II Adult Education has a program policy specifically on Student Confidentiality. According to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974, enacted as Section 438 of the General Education Provisions Act, student information that is considered "private" cannot be shared with anyone who is not designated on a release of confidential information form that has been signed by the student. Examples of confidential information disclosures include disabilities, recovering substance abuse condition, AIDS/HIV, or other medical information. If the student discloses any condition or disability that falls under the Privacy Act, the disclosed information cannot be shared with anyone without a Release of Confidential Information Form, including all appropriate signatures.

Adult education providers are responsible for securing confidential student information. The personal confidentiality statement should be completed and signed by all persons with access to student records for legitimate educational and/or reporting purposes. Care must be taken to ensure that student data is safe from access by unauthorized persons. All confidential student data should be aggressively protected, especially a student's social security number. The Office of Adult Education collects social security numbers to allow for authorized use in data match with other state agencies. Students must give permission for programs to use their information for data match.

Title IV ARS Response:

ARS ensures that only staff as part of their duties have access to confidential information. ARS conducts background checks on all employees. State networking security and firewall procedures are implemented and followed. Participant information is not shared unless the individual has given written permission.

Title IV DSB Response: DSB ensures that only staff who need access as part of their duties can access confidential information. DSB conducts background checks on all employees. State networking security and firewall procedures are implemented and followed for all DSB staff. DSB staff require a signed release from participants before any information is shared.

7. PRIORITY OF SERVICE FOR VETERANS.

(A) Implementation of Priority of Service for Veterans

Describe how the State will implement the priority of service provisions for covered persons in accordance with the requirements of the Jobs for Veterans Act, codified at section 4215 of 38 U.S.C., which applies to all employment and training programs funded in whole or in part by the Department of Labor.

Title I & III Response:

Arkansas provides veterans' priority of service as mandated by Veterans Program Letter 07-09 "Implementing Priority of Service for Veterans and Eligible Spouses in all Qualified Job Training Programs Funded in Whole or in Part by the U.S. Department of Labor" and 38 U.S.C 4215. Service is provided to ensure veterans and eligible spouses, both referred to as covered persons, receive consideration for all opportunities, for which they qualify. This increased focus includes

the implementation of strategies and policies designed to ensure covered persons receive the highest level of quality service within the framework of priority of service. Arkansas increased its focus on veterans' priority of service as a direct result of federal regulations. The requirements of veterans' priority of service as promulgated in Federal regulations are communicated via a statewide Veterans Priority of Service Policy, WIOA-1-8. 2-2. Covered persons receive priority at all One Stop Career Centers to receive the full array of employment, training, and placement services available. This includes first level priority enrollment for all universal access programs funded by Department of Labor and other DOL programs if they meet the program requirements. Priority means that veterans and eligible spouses are entitled to precedence over non-covered persons for services. Under Priority of Service, veterans and eligible spouse are defined as follows:

Veteran

A veteran who is eligible or spouse of an eligible veteran who is entitled to receive priority of service is a person who has served at least one day in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released from service under any condition other than a condition classified as dishonorable. This definition includes Reserve units and National Guard units activated for Federal Service.

Eligible Spouse

An "eligible spouse" means a spouse of any of the following:

- A spouse of any veteran who died of a service-connected disability;
- A spouse of any member of the Armed Forces serving on active duty who, at the time of application for the priority, is listed in one or more of the following categories and has been so listed for a total of more than 90 days;
 - Missing in action;
 - Captured in the line of duty by a hostile force; or
 - Forcibly detained or interned in the line of duty by a foreign government or power.
- A spouse of any veteran who has a total disability resulting from a service-connected disability, as evaluated by the Department of Veterans Affairs; or
- A spouse of any veteran who died while a disability was in existence.

CP Referrals

Consolidated CP Specialists focus their efforts on assisting veterans, who meet the service requirements, that are most in need of services including eligible veterans and eligible persons with an SBE, Vietnam-era, and/or veterans between 18-24 years of age, and others designated by the Secretary of Labor as in need of services.

Local areas must ensure that covered persons, eligible veterans, and eligible persons are served first and that this protocol is addressed in functional alignment plans and customer flow processes. After the assessment, covered persons who are not eligible for CP service will be referred to a Wagner-Peyser funded ES Counselor, and those who meet the requirements for CP

service will be referred to CP Specialists (when available) or Wagner-Peyser staff members for the provision of Individualized Career Services and other resources required to meet their goals.

During the registration process, a series of questions identifies a customer's veteran status. Once the veteran or eligible person is identified, the first available WFC staff conducts an initial assessment. This initial assessment uses a customized intake form, to help determine if the eligible veteran or eligible person has a Significant Barrier to Employment (SBE) or that they may be a member of another special priority group; they are only required to self-attest unless another program requires additional documentation. If, during the initial assessment it is determined to be eligible, they will be immediately referred to a Consolidated Specialist (CP) or, if not available, to other trained staff for the provision of Individual Career Services and other services the veteran may need to meet their career goals.

ADWS regularly monitors Priority of Service through scheduled trainings, calls with managers and supervisors, and when making on-site visits at the Local Workforce Centers.

Signage – Effective signage plays a pivotal role in ensuring priority of service is implemented successfully. As such, Arkansas has designed, published, and distributed appropriate signage to all centers and affiliate service sites throughout the state. Signage must be placed prominently at or near the entrance, to encourage customers to register first so that veteran status can be determined and documented as soon as possible. The placement of additional signage to support priority of service is at the discretion of the Center Manager. It is strongly advised that the additional signage be placed in strategic locations and high traffic areas throughout the center, such as resource rooms and common waiting areas.

DSB has quarterly meetings with the Disabled Blinded Veterans of Arkansas liaison to provide information and strategies to ensure this population is up to date on veterans' preference and other opportunities in the workforce. Blind veterans have access to job opportunities and training in the local workforce centers and DSB technology lab to ensure services are available in accordance with state and federal laws. The Division of Services for the Blind Board supports further coordination with other veteran-focused and veteran-serving organizations, including the federal and state offices of Veterans Affairs to aid in additional resources and supports available to veterans.

(B) Monitoring of Priority of Service Provisions for Veterans

Describe how the State will monitor priority of service provisions for veterans.

Title I & III Response:

Annual audits of all workforce development programs are conducted by ADWS internal program and financial monitors. A monitoring instrument is used to evaluate that all rules and regulations are in compliance with federal requirements. Participant records will be sampled

by auditors and interviews will be conducted with staff to gauge the understanding and implementation of all requirements.

Monitoring hiring practices ensures actions align with agency policies related specifically to priority of service for veterans and eligible spouses. Monitoring includes desk audits, personnel oversight and review of annual recruitment.

(C) Triage and Referral Process

Describe the triage and referral process for eligible veterans and other populations determined eligible to receive services from the Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) program's Consolidated Position.

Title I & III Response:

Providing services to veterans is considered a privilege in Arkansas. To easily identify veterans, posters are placed at or near the front entrance of every Arkansas Workforce Center. Veterans and spouses are asked to identify themselves so they may be provided priority of service. The poster also mentions that Consolidated (CP) specialists are available to provide individualized career services to eligible veterans and spouses.

Once identified, veterans and their spouses are given a Veterans Eligibility Triage Form to complete, which is then evaluated by staff to provide priority of service. After the initial assessment and intake, Veterans are referred to various services and programs based on barriers, needs, and goals. The same process is used for veterans who simply are seeking assistance with resume' development, job search assistance and other career services.

DSB does not receive JVSG grant funds.

8. ADDRESSING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Describe how the one-stop delivery system (including one-stop center operators and the one-stop delivery system partners), will comply with section 188 of WIOA (if applicable) and applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.) regarding the physical and programmatic accessibility of facilities, programs, services, technology, and materials for individuals with disabilities. This also must include a description of compliance through providing staff training and support for addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities.

Describe the State's one-stop center certification policy, particularly the accessibility criteria.

Title I & III Response:

The workforce center delivery system (including one-stop center operators and the workforce delivery system partners) will comply with section 188 of WIOA and applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.) with regard to the physical

and programmatic accessibility of facilities, programs, services, technology, and materials for individuals with disabilities. The State ensures that Arkansas Workforce Center system complies with section 188 of WIOA and applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 through ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 6.4 (Certification of Arkansas Workforce Centers Policy and Procedures) that outlines all requirements of the system. Reviews are conducted annually by the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services Equal Opportunity Office to make sure that workforce centers meet requirements. According to ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 6.4 (Certification of Arkansas Workforce Centers Policy and Procedures), all Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance requirements must be met before a center is eligible to receive the Arkansas Workforce Center certification or use the Arkansas Workforce Center name and logo. In addition to the annual review by the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services Equal Opportunity Office, local workforce development boards must include evaluations of how well the one-stop center ensures equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities to participate in or benefit from the one stop center services as part of their certification review every three years. Representatives of Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) and the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) who provide services in a workforce center are expected to bring to the attention of the One-Stop Operator any accessibility issues that they find in that center.

Furthermore, training is offered at least annually to equal opportunity officers of the local workforce development boards. To demonstrate compliance with this provision, the one-stop center operators and the delivery system partners will collaborate to develop and provide periodic and new-hire staff training and system-wide support for addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities. A rotating certification review team will be established, to provide scheduled evaluation, certification, and recertification of the physical and programmatic accessibility of facilities, programs, services, technology, and materials for individuals with disabilities and to address any compliance issues that arise.

DSB offices are located in the One Stop Centers. DSB works with local partners to ensure that offices are accessible and comply with all policies and regulations. DSB staff support by providing review and testing of accommodations for those who are Blind and Visually Impaired.

9. ADDRESSING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Describe how the one-stop delivery system (including one-stop center operators and the one-stop delivery system partners) will ensure that each one-stop center is able to meet the needs of English language learners, such as through established procedures, staff training, resources, and other materials. Describe how English language learners will be made aware of the opportunity to enroll and/or co-enroll in all the core programs for which they are eligible.

Title I & III Response:

The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services has contracts with various vendors to provide interpreter services in multiple languages. These interpreter services may be accessible by

phone or in person, depending on the workforce centers. Workforce centers are encouraged to use the “I Speak” or other such process for assisting English-language learners. In addition, Adult Education classes are available in every local area to individuals who are English Language learners. Local areas are required follow WIOA §188 in making their activities easily assessable to individuals who are English Language learners, youth, have a disability, or have difficulties with the written language. This compliance includes writing information in plain language.

If at least 10 percent of workforce center’s targeted service area speak a particular language, the following documents are required to be available in that language: grievance procedures, application, and any documents a participant or reportable individual must sign. Workforce centers are encouraged to provide other information in languages commonly spoken in the service area.

DSB provides interpreter services for communication with persons with limited English-speaking ability on a contractual basis. A member of the Business and Technology staff is fluent in Spanish. Reader service, guide service, and any special adaptive equipment are made available to applicants for services, DSB participants, and DSB personnel. Information is also available in the medium of choice for persons making application for DSB services and for persons with disabilities who are employed by DSB.

DSB has been a long—standing partner with the Arkansas Deafblindness Project: Children and Youth with Sensory Impairment (CAYSI), formerly known as the Deaf/Blind Consortium. DSB refers participants to CAYSI and serves on its Advisory Committee, which provides training for parents and professionals to foster stronger partnerships among agencies who work with this population. The project maintains a deafblind registry and requests related information from DSB.

IV. COORDINATION WITH STATE PLAN PROGRAMS

Describe the methods used for joint planning and coordination among the core programs, and with the required one-stop partner programs and other programs and activities included in the Unified or Combined State Plan.

Title I & III Response:

Since implementing WIOA, the core workforce partners have participated in the WIOA Partners Roundtable, which meets regularly and includes representatives from TAA, UI, SNAP E&T, registered apprenticeship, higher education, secondary education, two- and four-year educational institutions, Carl D. Perkins secondary and post-secondary programs, career and technical education, human services, and elected officials to engage in discussions about integration of services provided by a multitude of service providers. The WIOA Partners Roundtable has individual committees to focus on critical areas in WIOA implementation, including finance, IT system integration, policy development, core performance measures, sector strategies, and the state workforce development plan.

The WIOA Partners Roundtable also develops strategies to align programs, prevent duplication, and increase access to services for job seekers and employers.

Each year, the WIOA Partners Roundtable hosts a statewide conference for workforce system partners. Approximately 300 individuals typically attend these conferences, including representatives of state and local workforce boards and board members, core and optional workforce partner programs, secondary and higher education, state and regional economic development associations, community-based organizations, employers, and elected officials.

Title II Response:

The Title II Adult Education director serves on the Arkansas Workforce Development Board. In addition, the Title II Adult Education Director is the co-chair of the WIOA Executive Committee, which oversees the implementation of WIOA and comprises partners in the Combined State Plan.

The WIOA Executive Committee is also responsible for updating and submitting the Combined State Plan, reviewing the local workforce development boards' plans, overseeing the WIOA subcommittees, and planning the annual WIOA Partners' Conference.

Subcommittees of the WIOA Executive Committee include Strategic Alignment, Business Engagement, Performance Measures, Out-of-School Youth/Transition, Information Technology, and Communications and Logistics. These subcommittees carry forth the goals and activities of the State Plan and serve as workgroups to help meet the objectives of the State Plan.

The WIOA Executive Committee meets every other month. During these meetings, topics include collaboration opportunities, updates, and reports from subcommittees. More recently, the WIOA Executive Committee discussed further collaboration efforts, including expanding pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships across the state, as well as increasing and tracking referrals as a priority. A recent partnership involved all titles working collaboratively to meet an employer's needs. Title II coordinated a virtual student informational meeting prior to the on-site interviews. Title III provided a mobile unit where applicants could apply for a job onsite, and Title IV hosted and coordinated the event, along with logistics at their site.

Title IV ARS and DSB Response:

Like the Adult Education director and the ARS commissioner, the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) director is an Arkansas Workforce Connections senior leadership team member, Arkansas Workforce Development Board member, and serves on the WIOA Executive Committee. DSB also has staff serving on all ten local workforce development boards. DSB has 14 regional offices co-located with either ARS or the Arkansas Workforce Centers. DSB participates in the annual WIOA Partners' Conference and assists in drafting and implementing the WIOA State Plan.

V. COMMON ASSURANCES (FOR ALL CORE PROGRAMS)

Title I, II, III, IV ARS and DSB Response:

The State Plan must include	
1. The State has established a policy identifying circumstances that may present a conflict of interest for a State Board or local board member, or the entity or class of officials that the member represents, and procedures to resolve such conflicts;	Yes
2. The State has established a policy to provide to the public (including individuals with disabilities) access to meetings of State Boards and local boards, and information regarding activities of State Boards and local boards, such as data on board membership and minutes;	Yes
3. The lead State agencies with optimal policy-making authority and responsibility for the administration of core programs reviewed and commented on the appropriate operational planning elements of the Unified or Combined State Plan, and approved the elements as serving the needs of the populations served by such programs;	Yes
4. (a) The State obtained input into the development of the Unified or Combined State Plan and provided an opportunity for comment on the plan by representatives of local boards and chief elected officials, businesses, labor organizations, institutions of higher education, the entities responsible for planning or administering the core programs, required one-stop partners and the other Combined Plan programs (if included in the State Plan), other primary stakeholders, including other organizations that provide services to individuals with barriers to employment, and the general public, and that the Unified or Combined State Plan is available and accessible to the general public; (b) The State provided an opportunity for review and comment on the plan by the State Board, including State agency official(s) for the Unemployment Insurance Agency if such official(s) is a member of the State Board;	Yes
5. The State has established, in accordance with WIOA section 116(i), fiscal control and fund	Yes

The State Plan must include	
accounting procedures that may be necessary to ensure the proper disbursement of, and accounting for, funds paid to the State through allotments made for the core programs to carry out workforce development activities;	
6. The State has taken appropriate action to secure compliance with uniform administrative requirements in this Act, including that the State will annually monitor local areas to ensure compliance and otherwise take appropriate action to secure compliance with the uniform administrative requirements under WIOA section 184(a)(3);	Yes
7. The State has taken the appropriate action to be in compliance with WIOA section 188, Nondiscrimination, as applicable;	Yes
8. The Federal funds received to carry out a core program will not be expended for any purpose other than for activities authorized with respect to such funds under that core program;	Yes
9. The State will pay an appropriate share (as defined by the State board) of the costs of carrying out section 116, from funds made available through each of the core programs;	Yes
10. The State has a one-stop certification policy that ensures the physical and programmatic accessibility of all one-stop centers with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA);	Yes
11. Service providers have a referral process in place for directing eligible populations to DVOP services, when appropriate.	Yes
12. Priority of service for veterans and eligible spouses is provided in accordance with 38 USC 4215 in all workforce preparation, development or delivery of programs or services funded directly, in whole or in part, by the Department of Labor.	Yes

VI. PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR CORE PROGRAMS

**PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH
ACTIVITIES UNDER TITLE I-B**

A. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

1. REGIONS AND LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AREAS

(A) Identify the regions and the local workforce development areas designated in the State.

Title I Response:

The ten local workforce development areas and the counties they serve are:

1. Northwest (Benton, Washington, Carroll, Madison, Boone, Newton, Marian, Searcy, and Baxter)
2. North Central (Fulton, Izaard, Sharp, Stone, Independence, Van Buren, Cleburne, White, Jackson, and Woodruff)
3. Northeast (Randolph, Clay, Lawrence, Greene, Craighead, Poinsett, and Mississippi)
4. Western (Crawford, Franklin, Logan, Sabastian, Scott, Polk)
5. West Central (Johnson, Pope, Conway, Yell, Perry, Montgomery, Garland, Pike, Clark, and Hot Spring)
6. Central (Saline, Faulkner, Lonoke, Prairie, Monroe, and Pulaski, with the exception of Little Rock)
7. Little Rock (city of Little Rock)
8. Eastern (Cross, Crittenden, St. Francis, Lee, Phillips)
9. Southwest (Howard, Sevier, Little River, Miller, Hempstead, Nevada, Ouachita, Dallas, Calhoun, Lafayette, Columbia, Union)
10. Southeast (Grant, Jefferson, Arkansas, Cleveland, Lincoln, Desha, Bradley, Drew, Ashley, Chicot)

Central and Little Rock areas form the only region designated by the Governor.

(B) Describe the process and policy used for designating local areas, including procedures for determining whether the local area met the criteria for “performed successfully” and “sustained fiscal integrity” in accordance with 106(b)(2) and (3) of WIOA. Describe the process used for identifying regions and planning regions under section 106(a) of WIOA. This must include a description of how the State consulted with the local boards and chief elected officials in identifying the regions

Title I Response:

The local workforce development areas were selected based on infrastructure already in place under the previous federal law (Workforce Investment Act) and the alignment those areas have with local economic development planning districts.

The criteria used by the governor was explained, which included:

- Reviewing each local areas' sustained fiscal integrity under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA).
- Reviewing each local areas' performance under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA).
- Reviewing each local areas' alignment with the state's existing economic development districts.
- Reviewing each local areas' existing infrastructure.

Local boards and chief elected officials were consulted during the formation of both the local workforce development areas and regions. The opportunity for public comment was also provided and many chief elected officials provided positive comments in support of the current structure.

Governor's Executive Order 15-20 was signed, certifying the ten (10) local workforce development boards in Arkansas.

On June 9, 2015, the Arkansas Workforce Development Board (AWDB) discussed and passed without opposition to move forward with the designation of local workforce development areas for the purposes of implementing the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Subsequent designation would depend on the area's recertification of local boards and local workforce centers.

The AWDB, local workforce development boards, the Governor, and local chief elected officials have continued this method for the designation of local areas. Subsequent designation depends on whether the local area has performed successfully and sustained fiscal integrity in accordance with WIOA § 106(b)(3). For this purpose, the term "performed successfully" means that the local area met or exceeded the negotiated levels of performance for primary indicators. The term "sustained fiscal integrity" means that there has not been a formal determination, during either of the last two consecutive years, that the local workforce development area misspent funds due to willful disregard of the requirements, gross negligence, or failure to comply with accepted standards of administration.

The aforementioned policy is effective under the current plan. The 2026-2027 WIOA combined WIOA plan modification seeks to retain each of the local workforce development areas as established, but dissolve local workforce development boards; with these functions being carried out by the state board, with Governor Sarah Sanders becoming the Chief Elected Official for the state and single statewide planning region. Arkansas has and will facilitate numerous stakeholder engagement events involving chief elected officials, local workforce boards, workforce and education partners, business leaders and other interested parties. All feedback will be recorded in this plan through the formal public comment process.

C. Provide the appeals process and policy referred to in section 106(b)(5) of WIOA relating to designation of local areas.

Title I Response:

ADWS Policy No. WIOA I – 6.1 (Arkansas Grievance, Complaint, and Appeal Procedures for WIOA Title I Activities) outlines the grievance and appeal procedures for all WIOA title I activities administered by the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (ADWS). Some policy and procedures affect all types of grievance, complaints, and appeals.

All complaints, grievances, and appeals must be emailed to ADWS.WIOAAppeals@arkansas.gov. Appeals must be simultaneously emailed to ADWS.Tribunal.WIOA@arkansas.gov. All complaints, grievances, and appeals must meet submission timelines as described in this document.

Within 14 calendar days of receipt of the complaint/grievance/appeal, the Director of ADWS or his/her designee will acknowledge receipt of the grievance. The acknowledgement of receipt will:

- Provide a synopsis of the issues to be decided;
- Outline the steps to be taken to resolve the matter, including an attempt to reach an informal resolution;
- Notify all parties of that there will be an investigation;
- Notify the parties of the deadline to submit a position statement that details all facts of the complaint/grievance/appeal, along with all supporting documentation; and
- Notify all parties of the right to request a hearing if verbal evidence is more appropriate for the complaint/grievance/appeal than documentation.

The request for the hearing must be made within 10 days of the receipt of the letter from the hearing officer.

When statements and documentation are sent to the hearing officer, it must be simultaneously sent to the other party. No new documentation may be submitted after the deadline given by the hearing officer.

The Director of ADWS or his/her designee will conduct an administrative fact-finding investigation. The investigation will include:

- Opportunities for all parties to submit an in-depth position statement, including documentary supportive data and/or records;
- Access to and review of appropriate official records; and

- A written decision, to be made by the Director of ADWS or designee within 60 days of receipt of the grievance or complaint if the grievant or the appellant presents requested documentation on time.

The following procedures will apply to a hearing, if requested:

- All documents must be presented according to the timeline given by the hearing officer in the initial letter unless an extension has been granted by the hearing officer.
- The hearing will be informal. Technical rules of evidence will not apply. Hearsay evidence will be admissible at the discretion of the hearing officer.
- Hearings will be held at a time and place determined by the Director of ADWS or his/her designee after reasonable written notice has been sent to the parties and the witnesses.
- The party requesting the hearing will have the burden of establishing the facts and the entitlement to the relief requested.
- Either party may be represented by an attorney or other representative, but no such representative is required.
- Either party may bring witnesses, but no information may be submitted that was not submitted during the investigation or written documentation. All documentary evidence must be presented during the investigation state.
- The respondent will cooperate by making available any person under his or her control or employ to testify, if appropriate.
- Either party or representative will have the opportunity to question any witnesses.
- A recording will be made of the proceedings.
- A written decision will be made by the Director of ADWS or his/her designee within 60 days of receipt of the grievance/complaint/appeal if all information required from the appellant or complainant is presented in the time requested.

A written decision will contain the following:

- Statement assuring that all steps included in these procedures have been adhered to;
- Issue(s) being decided;
- Statement of facts;
- Reasons for the decision;
- Remedies to be offered, if appropriate;
Summary; and
- Advisement of the right to appeal the decision, if allowed for the particular type of complaint/grievance/appeal. (Information about appeals is provided in this policy for each type of complaint/grievance/appeal.)

The guidelines specifically for a unit of local government that has requested designation as a local area but has been denied such designation are:

- A unit of general local government (including a combination of such units) or grant recipient that requests, but is not granted, initial or subsequent designation of an area as a local area under WIOA § 106(b)(2), WIOA § 106(b)(5), or 20 CFR 679.250 may submit an appeal to the Arkansas Workforce Development Board (State Board) within 30 days of the decision not to grant such request. The State Board may request the assistance of a hearing officer to conduct the appeal.
- The appeal must be sent simultaneously to both ADWS.WIOAAppeals@arkansas.gov and ADWS.Tribunal.WIOA@arkansas.gov.
- The State Board or the State Board's designee will investigate the appeal, including conducting a hearing in accordance with the rules outlined in Section IV.B.5 of this policy, and the State Board or the State Board's designee will make a decision within 60 days of the receipt of the appeal.
- If the appeal does not result in designation, an appeal may be made to the Secretary of Labor within 30 days of the appeal decision of the State Board. This appeal must be submitted by certified mail, return receipt requested, to Secretary of Labor at the address in Section IV.C.2.c of this policy, with a copy to the ETA Regional Administrator at the address in Section IV.C.2.c of this policy.
- A copy of the appeal to the Secretary of Labor must be simultaneously provided to the State Board at ADWS.WIOAAppeals@arkansas.gov. The appellant must establish that it was not accorded procedural rights under the appeal process set forth in this policy or establish that it meets the requirements for designation in WIOA § 106(b)(2) or WIOA § 106(b)(3), and also in 20 CFR 679.250. If the Secretary determines that the appellant has met the burden of establishing that it was not accorded procedural rights under this appeal process, or that it meets the requirements for designation listed in this paragraph, the Secretary may require that the area be designated as a local area. In making the determination, the Secretary may consider any comments submitted by the Arkansas Workforce Development Board in response to the appeal. The Secretary will issue a written decision to the Governor and the appellant.

(D) Provide the appeals process referred to in section 121(h)(2)(E) of WIOA relating to determinations for infrastructure funding.

Title I Response:

General rules for an appeal are listed above in VI.a.1.C. Specific policies and procedures relating to appeals and the determinations for infrastructure funding are also located in ADWS Policy No. WIOA I – 6.1 (Arkansas Grievance, Complaint, and Appeal Procedures for WIOA Title I Activities).

An Arkansas Workforce Center partner that believes the determination of the partner's portion of funds to be provided for one-stop infrastructure costs is unfair.

A required Arkansas Workforce Center partner may appeal a determination regarding the portion of funds to be provided to operate the Arkansas Workforce Center system on the basis

that such determination is inconsistent with the requirements in WIOA § 121(h); the proportionate share requirements in 20 CFR 361.735(a), 463.735(a), or 678.735(a); the cost contributions limitations in 20 CFR 361.735(b), 463.735(b), or 678.735(a); or the cost contribution caps in 20 CFR 361.738, 463.738, or 678.738; or the issuances of the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (ADWS).

The appeal must be made no later than 21 calendar days after the determination regarding the infrastructure funding, and it must be sent simultaneously to both ADWS.WIOAAppeals@arkansas.gov and ADWS.Tribunal.WIOA@arkansas.gov.

The designated hearing officer will investigate the appeal, including conducting a hearing in accordance with the rules outlined in Section IV.B.5. of this policy and make a decision within 60 days of the receipt of the appeal. The decision will include instructions to the appropriate party for redistribution of funds, depending on the facts. This decision will be consistent with the requirements of 20 CFR 683.630 and the issuances of ADWS. If appropriate, a state funding mechanism may be developed.

If the appeal to the state results in a change to the infrastructure costs, the Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA) portion of the One-Stop Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) must be updated to reflect the final partner infrastructure cost contributions.

2. STATEWIDE ACTIVITIES

(A) Provide State policies or guidance for the statewide workforce development system and for use of State funds for workforce investment activities.

Title I Response:

Arkansas adopts the regulations cited in WIOA Law § 682, Subparts A, B, C

The state makes information on state-imposed requirements—such as guidance for the statewide workforce development system, including policy for the use of state funds for workforce investment activities—available to the public.

The following materials are readily accessible through the AWC website:

[WIOA services guidelines – overview, vision, and helpful links](#)

[Current WIOA title I-B policy manual](#)

[Additional policy issuances, annual reports, enabling legislation, and resources](#)

(B) Describe how the State intends to use Governor’s set aside funding for mandatory and discretionary activities, including how the State will conduct evaluations of Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth activities.

Title I and III Response:

Arkansas has historically carried out all required statewide employment and training activities as described in § 682.200. In addition to all required activities, the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services plans to use governor's set aside funding for the following activities:

- Allot additional funding to workforce activities involving employers for work-based learning projects including registered apprenticeships, incumbent working training, on-the-job training programs, and customized training.
- Partially fund the position of the governor's chief workforce officer to assist with strategic planning, coordination efforts amongst cabinet level departments and program awareness.
- Conduct outreach and events targeting justice-involved individuals and re-entry initiatives.
- Convene the annual WIOA Partners Conferences, which bring together stakeholders from WIOA core and non-core programs with the goal of training, development, and planning.

The Arkansas Workforce Development Board commissioned the University of Arkansas' Center for Business and Economic Research at the Walton College of Business to complete a comprehensive WIOA systems evaluation, skills gap analysis, and a series of customer surveys. This evaluation was funded through state set aside funds.

Rapid Response is a pro-active, business-focused, and flexible program designed to respond to layoffs and plant closings by quickly coordinating services and providing immediate aid to companies and affected workers. The ADWS Rapid Response team works with employers and employees to quickly maximize public and private resources and minimize disruptions associated with job loss. Rapid Response can provide customized services on site at an affected company, accommodate work schedules, and assist companies and workers through the painful transitions associated with job loss.

C. Describe how the State will utilize Rapid Response funds to respond to layoffs and plant closings and coordinate services to quickly aid companies and their affected workers. States also should describe any layoff aversion strategies they have implemented to address at risk companies and workers.

Title I and III Response:

Rapid Response works closely with the Arkansas Workforce Centers to deliver a full range of services to workers affected by layoffs. Services for individuals may include résumé assistance, interview skills workshops, career counseling, job search support, information about training opportunities, and access to income support programs. Rapid Response also provides valuable support to employers, offering guidance on layoff aversion strategies, access to skilled job seekers, and facilitation of incumbent worker training programs.

Arkansas' Rapid Response program operates a fleet of Mobile Workforce Centers, each fully equipped with internet connectivity, computers, printers, and copiers. All Mobile Workforce Centers include a computer with Jobs Application with Speech (JAWS) software and are fully

accessible to individuals with disabilities. ADWS deploys these centers throughout the state to supplement local resources and ensure workforce services are readily available where they are needed most.

(D) Describe the State policies and procedures to provide Rapid Responses in cases of natural disasters including coordination with FEMA and other entities.

Title I and III Response:

Following confirmation of a natural disaster, the state Rapid Response coordinator works with local workforce development boards and ADWS leadership to quickly organize service delivery and determine if a Mobile Workforce Center is needed. ADWS staff direct impacted individuals to the Arkansas Workforce Connections website and hotline for assistance with filing unemployment insurance and disaster unemployment insurance claims. The Rapid Response coordinator also works with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) or other disaster-response organizations to assist those in the affected area. Contact will be made with the company(s) and labor officials where applicable, affected by the natural disaster to hold an Employer Meeting. This meeting can be conducted via phone or virtually as the need arises. Information will be gathered on workforce and determine the best plan for Worker Information Meetings. The company will need to send Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) to the employees' last known address, even if their homes were destroyed.

The Rapid Response coordinator contacts the company(s) and labor officials affected by the natural disaster to set up an initial meeting. During the meeting, the Rapid Response team works with employers to plan worker assistance workshops for impacted workers and determine what information and resources ADWS and partners need to provide. Typical services covered in the workshops include assistance with unemployment claims, job search, career counseling, training in a new career, and health care information. Rapid Responses invites other state agencies and community-based organizations to participate.

Attendees take a dislocated worker survey, providing ADWS with demographic information for potential emergency grant applications.

(E) Describe how the State provides early intervention (e.g., Rapid Response) and ensures the provision of appropriate career services to worker groups on whose behalf a Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) petition has been filed. (Section 134(a)(2)(A) and TAA Section 221(a)(2)(A) .) This description must include how the State disseminates benefit information to provide workers in the groups identified in the TAA petitions with an accurate understanding of the provision of TAA benefits and services in such a way that they are transparent to the dislocated worker applying for them (Trade Act Sec. 221(a)(2)(A) and Sec. 225; Governor-Secretary Agreement). DESCRIBE how the State will use funds that have been reserved for Rapid Response to provide services for every worker group that files a TAA petition and how the state will ensure the provision of appropriate career service to workers in the groups identified in the petition (TAA Sec. 221(a)(2)(A)).

Title I Response:

Arkansas' Rapid Response Team is comprised of individuals that provide information, resources, and services to assist affected employers and workers. The team oversees planning implementation, and tracking/reporting of Rapid Response services, including Layoff Aversion at the local level.

The team works closely with:

- WIOA Title I
- Wagner Peyser – Title III
- Local Trade Coordinators
- Business Engagement representative
- Department of Human Services
- Adult and Basic Education
- Vocation Rehabilitation Business Services representative
- Local Veterans Employment Representative (LVER)

Workforce staff will provide early intervention to impacted worker groups through a functionally aligned and coordinated effort. Delivering early intervention before and immediately following dislocations where TAA benefits may be available is essential to ensure those affected receive information detailing the comprehensive services offered through TAA and its partner programs.

The process begins with Arkansas Rapid Response coordinators reviewing WARN notices and other layoff notifications and speaking with company representatives to make an initial determination regarding potential Trade eligible factors evident in the layoff. Rapid Response submits a petition to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) for review, along with any supporting documentation, once there is evidence of impact. A worker list may have already been requested by Rapid Response; however, if it has not been received by the time the petition is filed, company representatives are advised that the list will be required if the petition is certified. This list is necessary to verify that workers were laid off (not terminated for cause or resigned) and that they are part of the trade-affected worker group. TAA coordinators attend all initial Rapid Response meetings with company officials to explain the program's benefits and discuss the potential for a Trade certification based on the dislocation circumstances. The state TAA program coordinator submits a petition to DOL once there is evidence of impact and if a petition still needs to be filed.

TAA coordinators disseminate basic TAA program information to impacted workers at the workshops held by Rapid Response, in addition to an overview of all benefits available to dislocated workers, while emphasizing that these benefits will be accessible if the petition is certified. Additionally, all potentially-eligible workers receive a brochure containing information on TAA program benefits.

Upon certification of a Trade petition, TAA coordinators schedule workshops and conduct targeted outreach to notify impacted workers of eligibility and disseminate program

information. Outreach includes letters, emails, newspaper publications, and any other means necessary to reach all workers certified under the petition. State staff coordinate with the employer and local area staff to host in-person workshops at various locations and times to ensure all workers receive the information. For example, if a manufacturing plant that runs three shifts is closing and is trade certified before the layoff occurs, TAA holds workshops on location at the plant at the beginning of each of the three shifts. Workshops also take place at the Arkansas Workforce Centers, other community locations, or virtually if needed when workshops cannot be conducted on location. These meetings provide a full presentation on all Trade benefits, including apprenticeships and on-the-job training, Job Search Assistance, Relocation Assistance, RTAA, TRA, and case management. Eligibility requirements are reviewed and information specific to their corresponding Trade petition is provided. This comprehensive approach provides impacted workers with all essential information on the TAA program and a clear path forward to apply for and utilize the available benefits.

Due to the TAA termination provisions that took effect July 1, 2022, the Department of Labor cannot conduct new investigations or issue certifications of eligibility for new groups of workers. However, workers who were separated or threatened and covered under petitions certified on or before 06/30/2022 may still have benefits and services. Currently-enrolled participants may continue their training uninterrupted and eligible participants can apply for TAA benefits and services as usual.

B. ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKERS PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

1. WORK-BASED TRAINING MODELS

If the State is utilizing work-based training models (e.g. on-the-job training, incumbent worker training, transitional jobs, and customized training) as part of its training strategy and these strategies are not already discussed in other sections of the plan, describe the State's strategies for how these models ensure high quality training for both the participant and the employer.

Title I Response:

Work-Based Training Models are described in other sections of this plan.

2. REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP

Describe how the State will incorporate Registered Apprenticeship into its strategy for service design and delivery (e.g., outreach to sponsors and prospective sponsors, identifying potential participants and connecting them to apprenticeship opportunities).

Title I Response:

Arkansas created [Policy 3.5 in its WIOA Title I-B Policy Manual](#) to guide how the state incorporates Registered Apprenticeships into its service design and delivery. This policy reflects a collaborative approach across the state's workforce development system, ensuring that

apprenticeship programs are integrated into strategies for outreach, participant engagement, and employer partnership.

The Office of Skills Development (OSD), within the Division of Arkansas Workforce Connections in the Department of Commerce, plays a central role in these efforts. OSD strategically invests in all levels of the Arkansas workforce, from students to incumbent workers. By raising education and skill levels, meeting the needs of companies operating in Arkansas, and balancing workforce and employer interests. These efforts ultimately lead to greater economic achievement for both workers and employers.

The Arkansas Office of Apprenticeship, a unit within OSD, provides technical assistance to apprenticeship program sponsors and employers. They engage with companies interested in using apprenticeships as a workforce strategy, guiding them through program design, implementation, and compliance. Through targeted funding opportunities, the office offers instructor reimbursement and financial support for curriculum and training equipment in construction-related occupations. For other industries, cost reimbursement is provided for related technical instruction to employers.

Arkansas also supports participants through pre-apprenticeship and youth apprenticeship programs. The Arkansas Certified Pre-Apprenticeship Program allows individuals to gain foundational technical instruction before becoming registered apprentices, providing them with insight into industry expectations. The Youth Apprenticeship Program enables high school and college students to begin their apprenticeships while completing their education, combining classroom learning with hands-on occupational experience.

Through these combined efforts, Arkansas ensures that Registered Apprenticeships are fully integrated into the workforce development system. This strategy is accomplished by continuously connecting prospective participants to opportunities, supporting employers in building skilled talent pipelines, and fostering strong partnerships that align workforce readiness with economic growth

POLICY:

A registered apprenticeship program (RA) is one of the training services that may be provided with Adult and Dislocated Worker funds [TEGL 19-16]. RA may also be provided for out-of-school Youth (OSY) when the local area determines that the work experience (Program Element 3) is appropriate [TEGL 13-16].

RA combines paid on-the-job training with related instruction to progressively increase workers' skill levels and wages. It is also a business-driven model that provides a way for employers to recruit, train, and retain skilled workers [TEGL 13-16]. The U.S. Registered Apprenticeship System is authorized through the National Apprenticeship Act of 1937 (29 U.S.C. 50 et seq.). The Office of Apprenticeship (OA) in conjunction with State apprenticeship agencies is responsible for registering apprenticeship programs that meet Federal and State standards, issuing certificates of completion to apprentices, encouraging the development of new programs, protecting the safety and welfare of apprentices, and assuring that all programs provide high-quality training [TEGL 13-16].

The list of WIOA approved apprenticeship programs in Arkansas can be found in provider services at Training Provider Search - Arkansas JobLink.

A pre-apprenticeship, designed to prepare an individual to enter and succeed in an apprenticeship program, is category of work experience (Program Element 3) for Youth [WIOA § 129(c)(2)(C)(ii); 20 CFR 681.480; TEGL 21-16].

3. TRAINING PROVIDER ELIGIBILITY PROCEDURE

Provide the procedure, eligibility criteria, and information requirements for determining training provider initial and continued eligibility, including Registered Apprenticeship programs (WIOA Section 122).

Title I Response:

POLICY:

As the Governor's Administrative Entity, ADWS has established criteria, information requirements, and procedures regarding the eligibility of providers of training services to receive funds provided under WIOA section 133 (b) for the provision of training services throughout local areas in the state after consultation with the Arkansas Workforce Development Board. [4.5 Eligible Training Provider Policy and Procedures, Change 3, 4.5-Arkansas-ETPL-Policy-and-Procedures-9-29-2023-final-1.pdf](#).

An eligible training provider is the only type of entity that receives funding for occupational skills training as defined in 20 CFR 681.540. The funding is in the form of an individual training account (ITA) [20 CFR 680.410]. A training provider that is not on the Arkansas ETPL cannot receive WIOA funds for training services. (Some training interventions, including on-the-job training and customized training, are supported via contract, not an ITA, as noted below.)

In accordance with 20 CFR 680.410, an ETP must be included on the Arkansas eligible training provider list (ETPL), must provide a program of training services, and must be one of the following types of entities:

- An institution of higher education that provides a program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential;
- Entities that carry out programs registered under the National Apprenticeship Act; or
- Other public or private providers of training services that may include:
 - Community-based organizations;
 - Joint labor-management organizations; and
 - Eligible providers of adult education and literacy activities under Title II of WIOA if the activities are provided in combination with training services.

Arkansas' list of eligible training providers, training provider programs, and accompanying information must be made available in a manner that does not reveal personally identifiable

information about an individual participant [20 CFR 680.500]. ADWS does not share or sell information from the WIOA and non-WIOA participants.

With the exception of Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs), Arkansas state colleges and universities, and other training providers listed in A.C.A. 6-51-603, training providers in Arkansas must be licensed by the State Board of Private Career Education in order to operate in Arkansas [A.C.A.6-51-605] and to be placed on the ETPL. It is the responsibility of the Board of Private Career Education to protect the Arkansas individuals from unethical private career schools as described in A.C.A. 6-61-601 – 623. Therefore, before training providers from other states may be placed on the ETPL, they must be approved by the State Board of Private Career Education if they would qualify for licensing by this Board if they were located in Arkansas [A.C.A. 6-61-301(a)(1)(B)].

Programs of study offered by Arkansas state-supported institutions must be approved by the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board before offering courses that lead to a degree, certificate of proficiency, or technical certificate [A.C.A. 6-61-301(a)(2)]. More information concerning degree and certificate requirements may be obtained by the individual state-supported institutions or the Arkansas Division of Higher Education.

A postsecondary education institution in another state may be required to obtain certification from the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board before offering a course or degree in this state (either physically or online to Arkansans) unless the institution is a school that is exempted under A.C.A. 6-51-603 or a school regulated by the Cosmetology Technical Advisory Committee, or a school regulated by the State Board of Private Career Education [A.C.A. 6-61-301(a)(1)(B)]. Local areas and or ADWS must contact the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services before placing an out-of-state postsecondary education institution on the ETPL.

Except in specific circumstances listed in WIOA § 122(h), WIOA § 134(c)(3)(G)(ii), 20 CFR 680.320, TEGL 19-16, and TEGL 8-19, Occupational Skills Training is provided for WIOA title I Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Out-of- School Youth through an individual training account (ITA) that is used to purchase training from an Eligible Training Provider [WIOA § 134(c)(3)(G)(a); TEGL 19-16; TEGL 3-18; TEGL 8-19]. Eligible training providers (ETPs) must be certified by the State before they may receive funding through ITAs. Only ITAs require the use of an eligible training provider. Other training services required by contracts are not required to be certified as an ETP [TEGL 8-19].

An ITA is a payment agreement established on behalf of a participant with a training provider on the eligible training provider list (ETPL). An ITA may be used to pay for any allowable type of training, as listed in WIOA Sec. 134(c)(3)(D), 20 CFR 680.200, TEGL 19-16, and TEGL 8-19, as long as the program of study is on the state list of eligible training providers. However, ITAs are usually used for occupational skills training.

Occupational skills training is 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. Such training must [20 CFR 681.540]:

- Be outcome oriented and focused on an occupational goal specified in an ISS or IEP;
- Be of sufficient duration to impart the skills needed to meet the occupational goal;

- Lead to the attainment of a recognized postsecondary credential per WIOA Section 3(52);
- Meet the quality standards in WIOA section 123.

Arkansas ETPL Application and Program Instructions:

- Prospective Eligible Training Providers must apply for eligibility approval status for their programs electronically using AJL ProviderLink, a web-based training application. To be included on the ETPL, training providers must set up a user account for the ETPL application in AJL ProviderLink for the area where they wish to provide training services. The instructions to set up the user account for the AJL ProviderLink ETPL Application are included with this link, <https://dws.arkansas.gov/wp-content/uploads/AJL-ProviderLink-ETPL-Application-and-Program-Instructions-2.pdf>.
- The user account is designed to enable prospective providers to simultaneously apply for program approval for the WIOA Title I Individual Training Accounts (ITAs).

Notwithstanding RAPs, being placed on the State ETPL is contingent upon the approval of a training institution's electronic application and at least one postsecondary occupational program.

Eligibility status for a training institution is one year from the date of approval by the State; however, provider and program approvals will end on a program year basis annually by July 1st thru June 30th. After the initial and first renewal or subsequent program performance reporting data is approved in AJL ProviderLink, eligibility status for a training institution can be approved for one year from the date of renewal or subsequent performance by the State.

An entity that carries out programs under the National Apprenticeship Act will be included and maintained on the ETPL for so long as their program remains registered or unless a substantial violation has occurred as described later. ADWS is responsible for advising current RAP sponsors of their automatic eligibility for the statewide ETPL and the advantages of doing so. ADWS is also responsible for establishing a mechanism to advise newly registered programs of their automatic eligibility in agreement with the State Director of the Office of Apprenticeship. The Office of Apprenticeship will verify the registration status of programs at least every two years consistent with TEGL 8-19, and ADWS will ensure new RAPs are added to the statewide ETPL at least every six months.

Demand Occupations and Projected Employment Opportunities:

Local WDBs may approve a training provider program if there is a demand for an occupation. Local WDBs are responsible for giving training institutions information on occupations in-demand and sectors of the economy that have a high potential for sustained demand or growth within the labor market area. Using labor market information, a local WDB is responsible for determining occupational demand in its local area or in another local area to which a youth, adult or dislocated worker is likely to be willing to relocate. There is an exception, however, for Registered Apprenticeship programs (RAPs), which are automatically to be considered "in demand" if the program is taking applications.

Notwithstanding RAPs, local WDBs should instruct providers wishing to explore occupations in-demand in the Arkansas economy to view labor market data found on the Discover Arkansas Labor Market Information Section, Projected Employment Opportunities List, for the State or local area. An occupation is considered an in-demand or employment opportunity for a local area if it appears on the <https://www.discover.arkansas.gov/docs/Publications/Projected-Employment-Opportunities-List1/Projected-Employment-Opportunities-List.pdf> for the State or local area. Occupations on an adjacent local area's list, including local areas in other states, may also be considered employment opportunities in the local area. If a local area would like to train in an occupation that is not on their local area's Projected Employment Opportunities List, but is on the list of an adjacent area, they should contact the Division of Workforce Services with the information located in the Labor Market Information section, "Adding to the List", of the occupation within the Discover Arkansas Labor Market Information Section web site. For local areas in other states, the LWDB must provide the adjacent area's projected employment opportunities list, along with the adjacent state's contact information and occupations to be trained in before the occupations can be added.

Procedures:

To be included on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL), providers must submit an electronic application for each training program they wish to be included. Each occupation associated with the training program must be on the current Projected Employment Opportunities List, <https://www.discover.arkansas.gov/docs/Publications/Projected-Employment-Opportunities-List1/Projected-Employment-Opportunities-List.pdf>.

An entity that carries out programs under the National Apprenticeship Act will be included and maintained on the ETPL for so long as their program remains registered. These programs are placed on the statewide ETPL with the provision of minimal information as follows:

- Occupations included in the RAPs;
- The name and address of the RAP sponsor;
- The name and address of the Related Instruction provider(s) and the location(s) of instruction if different from the program sponsor's address. (Note: If the provider of Related Instruction is different from the program sponsor, cost of the instruction may be requested; this is the only time that cost pertaining to a RAP may be requested.)
- The method and length of instruction; and
- The number of active apprentices.

Required Information for Initial Eligibility [TEGL 8-19] (not including RAPs):

The information to be included on the initial application is described below.

- A description of each training program to be offered, including the costs of tuition, books, and fees.
- The State's completion rate factor must be related to WIOA performance indicators.

- To calculate: The number of all participants who completed the program during the reporting period divided by the total number of all participants who participated in the program.
- If the training provider is in a partnership with business/industry and an explanation of the partnership.
- If the training program leads to a recognized postsecondary credential and a description of the credential.
- If the program aligns with in-demand industry sectors and occupations.

The Initial Eligibility Certification Process:

- Providers eligible to apply under this section will complete an online electronic application for “initial certification” through the automated Arkansas ETPL Application and Program Instructions located at <https://www.arjoblink.arkansas.gov/training>. Providers must apply for each individual program.
- The service provider will receive the application via AJL ProviderLink if (1) The program’s CIP Code appears on the current Projected Employment Opportunities List for the State or Local Workforce Development Area, and
- Required items are completed and meet minimum qualifications.
- The service provider will electronically approve or disapprove each application received via AJL ProviderLink. The service provider is responsible for ensuring that the provider’s performance information meets or exceeds the State minimum levels.
- Upon approval the provider will be automatically placed on the AJL ProviderLink website as a WIOA Eligible Training Provider for the applicable program.

If the training provider does not have performance data because the training program is a new program, then the provider must submit the following information to the LWDB of application to include:

- Written justification for the missing data, and
- The process that will be used to track and record the required information for re-certification.

The Continued Eligibility Certification Process (does not apply to RAPs):

- Providers eligible to apply under this section will complete an online electronic application for “continued certification” through the automated AJL ProviderLink ETPL Application and Program Instructions is located at <https://www.arjoblink.arkansas.gov/training>. Providers must apply for each individual program.
- The service provider will receive the application via AJL ProviderLink if (1) The program’s CIP Code appears on the current Projected Employment Opportunities List for the State or Local Workforce Development Area, and

- Required items are completed and meet minimum qualifications.
- The service provider will electronically approve or disapprove each application received via AJL ProviderLink. The service provider is responsible for ensuring that the provider's performance information meets or exceeds the State minimum levels.
- Upon approval, the provider will be automatically placed on the AJL ProviderLink website as a WIOA Eligible Training Provider for the applicable program.

Continued Eligibility [TEGL 8-19]:

The information to be included on the continued application is described below.

- The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program
- The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program
- The median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program
- The percentage of program participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, during participation in or within 1 year after exit from the program
- Information on cost of attendance, including cost of tuition and fees, for program participants
- Information on the program completion rate for program participants
- A description of how the provider provides access to training services, including to rural areas, including the use of technology
- A description of the degree to which training program(s) align with in-demand industries and occupations in the State, as identified in State and Local Plans
- Any applicable state licensure requirements of training providers and licensing status of providers of training is applicable
- A description of training provider's ability to offer industry-recognized certificates and/or credentials
- A description of training provider's ability to offer programs that lead to a recognized post-secondary credentials
- A description of the quality of the program of training services including a program that leads to a recognized post-secondary credential
- A description of the ability of the providers to provide training services that are physically and programmatically accessible for individuals who are employed and individuals with barriers to employment, including individuals with disabilities
- The timeliness and accuracy of the eligible training provider's performance reports

- Relevant information reported to State agencies on Federal and State training programs other than programs within WIOA Title I-B.

The ADWS will not limit customer choice nor decrease the number of available training providers. We will prioritize certain individual criteria elements listed above during our evaluation for continued eligibility. Our primary focus will be placed upon the WIOA performance criteria, Numbers 1-4; followed by criteria Numbers 5-8. The remaining criteria elements will be given no special emphasis.

Performance:

Historically, LWDBs have the authority to increase the levels of performance required by the State and require additional verifiable program-specific information from training providers for initial eligibility. (This does not pertain to RAPs.) The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services/Employment Assistance (EA) Section must be notified if these levels of performance are increased.

To facilitate the public and stakeholder access to such information, training provider outcomes information will also be published on <https://www.trainingproviderresults.gov/>.

Performance Data Requirements for ETP Annual Reporting (Excluding Registered Apprenticeship programs):

- ETPs must submit accurate and timely information for participants receiving training under WIOA Title I-B.
- ETPs must provide the information necessary to determine program performance and to meet requirements per WIOA. The ETP must agree to make their data, including participant social security numbers, available to validate the information submitted for reporting,
- The annual performance reports must contain individual-level data for all participants in programs offered by the ETP that include at least one (1) student receiving WIOA funding.
- The performance data is due in AJL ProviderLink and ADWS between July 1 through August 31 of every year.

State Minimum Performance Standards for Training Providers

	ALL PARTICIPANT PERFORMANCE MEASURES Programs must meet the State minimum level for the performance measure.	
Performance Measure	Calculation	State Minimum Level

	ALL PARTICIPANT PERFORMANCE MEASURES Programs must meet the State minimum level for the performance measure.	
Program Completion Rate	The number of all participants who completed the program during the reporting period divided by the total number of all participants.	19.5 %

Besides the requirements above, the State has established additional minimum performance standards to evaluate the Renewal/Continued Eligibility determination for programs at the end of each program year (July 1- June 30). The State Minimum Performance Standards implemented by State in accordance with the requirements stipulated by Section 116 of the WIOA for eligible training provider programs inclusion to the state's ETPL for all are:

Performance Criteria for All Participants in the Program of Study:

- Credential Attainment Rate (state minimum performance level: 25%)

The percentage of those participants enrolled in an education or training program who attain a recognized postsecondary credential or a secondary school diploma, or its recognized equivalent, during participation in or within one year after exit from the program.

- Employment Rate 2nd Quarter after Exit (state minimum performance level: 30%)

The percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program.

- Employment Rate 4th Quarter after Exit (state minimum performance level: 35%)

The percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program.

- Median Earnings – 2nd Quarter After Exit (state minimum performance level: \$1,900 per quarter).

The median earnings of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program.

Registered Apprenticeship Program [TEGL 8-19]:

Registered Apprenticeship programs (RAPs) are automatically eligible to be included on the ETPL as previously stated. They are an exception to the initial and continued eligibility

certification process and are exempt from performance and reporting-related requirements. If RAP sponsors are interested in enrolling in a training program for participants possibly being paid through WIOA , they should follow the instructions in this link, <https://dws.arkansas.gov/wp-content/uploads/Registered-Apprenticeship-Arkansas-ETPL-Application-and-Program-Instructions-6-17-2024-1.pdf>.

Substantial Violation:

Under WIOA, an institution commits a substantial violation when it: (1) fails to meet the state's procedure for timely and accurately submitting required information for annual ETP performance reporting, (2) fails to meet the state's procedure for timely and accurately submitting all required information for initial or continued eligibility, (3) intentionally provides false information, or (4) violates any provision of WIOA Title I or its regulations, including the nondiscrimination and equal opportunity provisions.

The State will consider exceptional circumstances beyond the institution's control (e.g., natural disasters, unexpected personnel transitions, and unexpected technology-related issues) when determining if an institution committed a substantial violation for failing to timely and accurately submit required information. If it is determined that exceptional circumstances existed, then a substantial violation did not occur. If it is determined that an institution committed a substantial violation, the institution is prohibited from having its programs on the published ETPL for a minimum of two years and it is liable to repay any WIOA Youth, Adult, and Dislocated Worker Program funds it received during the period of noncompliance.

Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (ADWS) Responsibilities:

The ADWS is the designated state agency for WIOA administration and is responsible for:

- Ensuring that the information contained on the ETPL is accurate and current.
- Establishing a process for adding programs to the ETPL and verifying their "approved" status.
- Contacting the following entities to advise them of the ETPL process: State Workforce Agencies; State Workforce Administrators, State and Local Workforce Board Chairs and Directors, State Labor Commissioners, State Apprenticeship Agencies, State Director of the Office of Apprenticeship, Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Representatives, and Local Veteran Employment Representatives as advised by [TEGL 8-19].
- Contacting Registered Apprenticeship program (RAP) sponsors based on a mechanism/process developed in concert with the USDOL Office of Apprenticeship to advise them of their automatic eligibility and provide them with an opportunity to allow them to indicate interest or "opt in."
- Maintaining the list of eligible training providers and programs approved by LWDB.
- Providing an updated list to all LWDBs and the public through the State's website.
- Establishing initial eligibility criteria for new training providers and setting minimum levels of performance for all training providers to remain eligible (with the exception of RAPs).

- Submitting all reports to the appropriate Federal Agency as required.
- Distributing the ETPL, accompanied by credential, cost and performance information for each ETPL training program throughout Arkansas.
- Allowing training providers to appeal a denial or removal of eligibility, including an opportunity for a hearing at the state level, after a training provider receives an unsatisfactory decision.
- Providing technical assistance to the local areas and the training providers.

State Workforce Board as Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB) Responsibilities:

Workforce development boards are responsible for carrying out the procedures assigned to them including: [20 CFR 430 (c)].

Boards must:

- Carry out procedures, such as determining the initial eligibility of entities providing a program of training services, with the exception of Registered Apprenticeship programs (RAPs), renewing the eligibility of providers and programs, and considering the possible termination of an eligible training provider due to the provider's submission of inaccurate eligibility and performance information or the provider's substantial violation of WIOA requirements;
- Maintain the minimally burdensome process established by the state for RAP sponsors and implement the regulatory exceptions associated with these programs (e.g., no reporting or performance requirements);
- Work with the State Board to ensure there are sufficient numbers and types of providers of training services, including eligible providers with expertise in assisting individuals with disabilities and eligible providers with expertise in assisting adults in need of adult education and literacy activities described under WIOA sec. 107(d)(10)(E), serving the local area; and
- Ensure the dissemination and appropriate use of the State list of eligible training providers and programs through the local one-stop delivery system, including formats accessible to individuals with disabilities [20 CFR.430 (c)(3)].
- Collect performance information required by the state and determine if the providers meet the state's performance criteria [20 CFR 680.430 (c)(1)]

WDBs cannot limit choices for WIOA participants. WDBs have the option, by law to establish higher performance levels and make a case for in-demand occupations that may differ from the State's (RAPs excepted). The WDB is responsible for:

- Reviewing training programs for initial eligibility;
- Ensuring that all participants are enrolled in approved training programs, as identified on the ETPL;

- Collecting performance and cost information and any other required information related to programs from training providers;
- Monitoring training providers for compliance and performance;
- Evaluating performance data of all training providers during the continued eligibility review to verify that the training programs meet minimum performance standards; and
- Allowing training providers to appeal a denial or removal of eligibility of programs that includes an opportunity for a hearing , a timely decision and a right to appeal if the provider is unsatisfied with the decision.
- Each WDB must develop and maintain procedures to determine the eligibility of a training provider's programs in an objective and consistent manner. Each WDB must define procedures, consistent with the requirements of this policy, for all training providers and programs, with the exception of RAPs. Procedures must clearly describe how reviewer(s) will apply any local policies related to the following factors:
 - Quality training programs linked to in-demand occupations as determined by the local WDB.
 - Performance and cost information, including program-specific performance and cost information of the local outlet(s) of multi-site eligible training providers.
 - Information indicating how programs are responsive to local requirements.
 - Other appropriate information related to the objectives of WIOA.

Denial, Removal, and/or Appeal of Training Providers and/or Programs:

A training provider must meet the requirements for eligibility and provide accurate information in order to retain its status as an eligible training provider. Only the Governor's Administrative Entity can remove eligible training providers and programs from the ETPL after appropriate due process.

WDBs may take steps to request removal of eligible training providers and/or programs from the ETPL in consultation with the ADWS ETP Coordinator. The State Board can deny and/or remove a program, an eligible training provider, or both when the individual:

Denial of a Program/Provider (may reapply for approval after 6 months):

- Fails to meet the minimum criteria for initial eligibility as specified above;
- Fails to complete the initial eligibility application in AJL ProviderLink;
- Failure to have a license to operate by a private career school as required in the state of Arkansas;
- Fails to add the subsequent eligibility performance reporting ending dates and performance data in AJL ProviderLink as required;
- Program renewal expired past the renewal date and/or

- Program not approved by the board.

Removal of a Program/Provider (may reapply for approval after 1 year):

- Fails to supply available participant data required for the performance review within due dates established and unwilling to supply required and available participant data by the ADWS staff;
- Violates state and/or local laws;
- State or local required performance levels are not met;
- Loses its educational license or accreditation;
- Fails to notify any program changes including, but not limited to, costs or location of training;
- Ceases to be in business and/or lost its license to operate;
- Fails to meet criteria or minimum performance levels as part of the annual or biennial review of initial or continued eligibility;
- Does not meet the requirements of a reciprocal agreement.

Removal of a Provider (may reapply for approval after 2 years):

- Substantially violates any provision of Title I of WIOA and its regulations including 29 CFR Part 38, the nondiscrimination and equal opportunity provisions, and
- Intentionally supplies inaccurate data.

NOTE: Eligible participants who were already approved prior to these denied or removed programs can continue their training with WIOA funding if available. This will ensure those participants are not created a hardship to continue their training through no fault of their own.

Appeal of Training Providers and Programs:

If a provider of training services has its eligibility denied or removed due to substantial violations, failure to provide requested performance information without reasonable justification, or otherwise are removed for good cause based on the items listed above, the training provider will be notified that their training program is being removed from the State's training provider list. This information regarding the decision will be submitted to the contact person listed on the training provider's account.

The training provider may appeal the denial or termination within ten (10) calendar days from the date of receipt of notice of termination by submitting an appeal request to the following email address: ADWS.WIOAAppeals@arkansas.gov.

The State will review the appeal, provide opportunity for a hearing, and issue a written decision/response within (30) calendar days of the receipt of the appeal. The State's Director will appoint a hearing officer to review the appeal.

The ADWS ETP Coordinator or designee shall remove a provider and/or program that was determined to be no longer eligible no earlier than the 31st calendar day from the issuance of the removal notice.

However, if a training provider initially chooses to appeal, a training provider and/or program that is subject to removal shall remain on the state ETPL until the appeal is concluded.

After official removal of a training provider and/or program from the ETPL, local WDBs cannot fund WIOA participants enrolled in the removed training provider and/or its programs.

Per WIOA Section 122, a training provider removed from the ETPL for failure to meet performance or is in violation of the WIOA regulations, cannot apply for eligibility for one year or two years as noted above after the official removal date. Training providers may appeal a removal decision under the appeal process.

Monitoring:

The ADWS will monitor for ETPL compliance during annual monitoring visits or desk reviews. The ADWS Monitors will randomly select WIOA participant files and validate that the data has been uploaded into the system correctly, ensuring that the annual report is accurate.

Reciprocal Agreement:

States may enter into agreements, on a reciprocal basis, with other states to permit eligible providers of training services to accept individual training accounts from providers in another state. [WIOA §122 (g)] Under the current policy, training providers must have a physical and permanent Arkansas mailing address. Arkansas currently has reciprocal agreements with the state of Missouri. These agreements allow Arkansas participants to use ETPs if that training provider appears on the other State's ETPL. Similarly, WIOA participants in the reciprocal states can utilize programs that are on Arkansas' ETPL.

If an out-of-state provider is applying for an online program, the training provider must contact the Arkansas Division of Higher Education (ADHE) to ensure that the provider may legally provide online training programs in Arkansas.

The private career education/schools and out-of-state online providers must be licensed by ADHE and must submit their license from ADHE by uploading it as a Supplementary Document in the AJL ProviderLink system, before the program can be approved by the local area and State in the AJL ProviderLink system with inclusion on the ETPL.

The licensing for the private career education and online providers can contact the ADHE as follows:

Arkansas State Board of Private Career Education

101 E. Capitol Ave., Suite 300

Little Rock, AR 72201

Phone: 501-371-2000

Email: dhe.private.careered@adhe.edu

Email: Alana.Colburn@adhe.edu

Only providers located in states bordering the state of Arkansas, approved Apprenticeship Sponsors, and licensed private career education and online providers with approved programs by ADHE are eligible for inclusion on the Arkansas ETPL.

4. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR FOR THE ADULT PRIORITY OF SERVICE REQUIREMENT IN WIOA SECTION 134 (C)(3)(E) THAT REQUIRES AMERICAN JOB CENTER STAFF, WHEN USING WIOA ADULT PROGRAM FUNDS TO PROVIDE INDIVIDUALIZED CAREER SERVICES AND TRAINING SERVICES, TO GIVE PRIORITY OF SERVICE TO RECIPIENTS OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE, LOW-INCOME INDIVIDUALS, AND INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE BASIC SKILLS DEFICIENT (INCLUDING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS).

Title I Response:

ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 2.3 (Eligibility for Adult Program) details the order of priority of services that is listed in TEGLs 10-09 and 19-16:

First priority of service is veterans and eligible spouses (see ADWS Policy No. 1.2 for definition) who are also included in the groups given statutory priority for WIOA Title I-B Adult formula funds. This means that veterans and eligible spouses who are also recipients of public assistance, are other low-income individuals, or are individuals who are basic skills deficient will receive first priority for individualized career services and training services provided with WIOA Adult formula funds.

Second priority of service is individuals who are not veterans or eligible spouses, but who are recipients of public assistance, are other low-income individuals, or are individuals who are basic skills deficient.

Third priority of service is given to veterans and eligible spouses who are not recipients of public assistance, are not other low-income individuals, and are not basic skills deficient.

Fourth priority of service is individuals who are not veterans, are not recipients of public assistance, are not other low-income individuals, and are not basic skills deficient, but are individuals with other barriers to employment.

The last priority of service is given to individuals who are not veterans, eligible spouses, recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, basic-skills deficient, or individuals with other barriers to employment.

ADWS Policy No. ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 2.8 (Priority for Individuals with Barriers to Employment) lists the categories of “individuals with barriers to employment,” including individuals who are basic skills deficient and low-income individuals, and the policy refers readers to the location of the definitions of each category.

ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 2.3 also requires written policies and procedures to be established to ensure that the required priority for participants served in the WIOA Title I-B Adult program is followed. These policies and procedures are reviewed in the annual monitoring visit.

5. DESCRIBE THE STATE’S CRITERIA REGARDING LOCAL AREA TRANSFER OF FUNDS BETWEEN THE ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKER PROGRAMS

Title I Response:

ADWS' Issuance PY 22-02, [AM-22-02-ADWS-WIOA-Funds-Transfer-Issuance-Revision-.pdf](#), describes the state's policy on transferring funds between adult and dislocated worker programs.

"Revision to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Funds Transfers Process"

1. Purpose: To revise the process for transferring funds between the adult and dislocated worker funding streams under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

funding streams under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

2. Reference: WIOA sec. 133(b)(4) provides the authority for local workforce areas, with approval from the Governor, to transfer up to 100 percent of the adult Activities funds for expenditure on Dislocated Worker Activities, and up to 100 percent of Dislocated Worker Activities funds for expenditure on Adult Activities. As the Governor's administrative entity for the WIOA, the director of the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services has the authority to approve these funds transfers.

3. Change: Effective July 1, 2022, No funds transfers will be approved during the first program year of an award. Funds transfers will only be approved starting with the second program year of the award. This will give adequate time to serve DLW participants. Service providers should make every effort to expend DLW funds in the manner in which the grant is awarded. This includes developing and executing strategic outreach and service delivery plans.

4. General Information:

Funds transfers will be processed similarly to the initial formula adult and dislocated worker subgrant award packages and using the same forms.

6. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S POLICY ON WIOA AND TAA CO-ENROLLMENT AND WHETHER AND HOW OFTEN THIS POLICY IS DISSEMINATED TO THE LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARDS AND REQUIRED ONE-STOP PARTNERS. TRADE ACT SEC. 239(F), SEC. 235, 20 CFR 618.325, 20 CFR 618.824(A)(3)(I).

Title I Response:

ADWS' Policy 6.2 describes the state's policy on WIOA/TAA Co-enrollment.

POLICY: It is the shared responsibility of TAA and WIOA to attempt to determine eligibility for and to co-enroll every applicant who is laid off as a result of a permanent closure or a substantial layoff of a trade-affected company and who desires assistance in obtaining new employment, unless that person does not qualify for WIOA and/or TAA services [20 CFR 618.325]. If the applicant is eligible for only one program, the program for which the individual qualifies is responsible for attempting to enroll the individual and to give appropriate services. The worker may enroll as a participant in WIOA as soon as he or she receives a lay-off notice or the company has made a general announcement (as defined by the local area) that the facility will close within 180 days, assuming all other eligibility requirements are met [WIOA § 3(15); ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 2.4]. A worker cannot enroll as a TAA participant until the company

is determined trade-affected. If a trade-affected worker chooses to decline co-enrollment in WIOA, he or she may not be denied TAA benefits and services solely for declining co-enrollment [20 CFR 618.325]. It is the responsibility primarily of TAA and WIOA to co-enroll, and not primarily the responsibility of the individuals [Preamble to 20 CFR 618]. Individuals who complete an application, but are not eligible, for a program must be enrolled as Reportable Individuals for that program [TEGL 14-18].

It is also the shared responsibility of TAA and WIOA to work together to give co-enrolled participants the best array of services appropriate for these participants. This includes, but is not limited to, WIOA title II Adult Education and Literacy, WIOA title III Vocational Rehabilitation Services (ARS and DSB), and all other Arkansas Workforce Center (AFW) Partners [20 618.325]. It is the responsibility of the One-Stop Operator (OSO) to convene the meeting of partners if needed. In order to provide the best array of services, TAA and WIOA may share initial assessments, other assessments, and Individual Employment Plans (IEPs) with each other and other Arkansas Workforce Center Partners as appropriate [WIOA § 134(c)(2)(B); 20 CFR 618.335].

It is the shared responsibility of TAA, WIOA, the Dislocated Worker Services Unit, ES (ADWS Employment Services), and the Arkansas Workforce Center (AWC) Operator (One-Stop Operator) to share layoff information with other appropriate entities, including AWC partners, as soon as such sharing is allowed by the company closing and/or laying off employees.

Nothing in this policy may be construed to say that a TAA participant may be co-enrolled only in the WIOA DLW program. He or she may be enrolled, either also or instead of the DLW program, in the Youth and/or Adult program if he or she is eligible for that program and if the services best match the needs of the applicant. In addition, he or she may be co-enrolled in any partner program that is appropriate. Each partner's files must contain proper information and documentation, as required by each respective program.

7. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S FORMAL STRATEGY TO ENSURE THAT WIOA AND TAA CO-ENROLLED PARTICIPANTS RECEIVE NECESSARY FUNDED BENEFITS AND SERVICES.
TRADE ACT SEC. 239(F), SEC. 235, 20 CFR 618.816(C)

Title I Response:

PROCEDURES:

A. Ongoing Strategy:

1. The local One-Stop Operator is the conduit for updating contact information, as they are responsible for the "coordination of services" in their respective local areas. Therefore, TAA, Dislocated Worker Services Unit, as well as WIOA title I-B program managers should notify their One-Stop Operator of changing Points of Contact (POCs) within their local area.
2. The flow of the enrollment and referral process for TAA and WIOA is described in detail in "Before TAA Certification of Company/Workers" (Part B of this policy).
3. TAA and WIOA front-line staff will meet regularly to discuss upcoming events, common applicants and participants, eligibility requirements, allowed services, and other topics

that will help both programs to serve individuals who have been laid off because of a plant closing or downsizing.

4. TAA and WIOA will coordinate services for co-enrolled participants to give them the best mix of appropriate services, keeping in mind the requirements of each of the programs.
5. When service providers know about a potential plant closure or substantial layoff and they are allowed to share the information, they will notify the Dislocated Worker Services Unit, TAA, and the One-Stop Operator about the potential layoff and business contacts for these layoffs. Within the local area, WIOA and ES will share such information that does not breach confidentiality agreements. The One-Stop Operator will assist with the dissemination of such information.
6. The Dislocated Worker Services Unit will send Layoff Business Contacts monthly to an established Point of Contact (POC) for each local One-Stop Operator, and the One-Stop Operator POC will disseminate the information to other POCs.
7. Each One-Stop Operator will maintain the contact list for Layoff Business Contacts and provide updates to the Dislocated Worker Services Unit.
8. One-Stop Operators must send updated contact information to WIOA@arkansas.gov as soon as possible after the replacement POCs.
9. The Dislocated Worker Services Unit must send the Layoff Business Contacts with read receipts, and they must notify the One-Stop Operator if the email fails, so that research can be done to determine if there was a failure to report a change in the POC.
10. 10. Assessments (initial, comprehensive, and specialized) and Individual Employment Plans (IEP) may be shared between TAA and WIOA title I-B, as appropriate *[[WIOA § 134(c)(2)(B); 20 CFR 618.335; 20 CFR 618.605]* With permission from the participant, supporting documentation may also be shared as appropriate.

B. Before TAA Certification of Company/Workers:

1. The Dislocated Worker Services Unit will notify the designated representatives for the One-Stop Operator, WIOA DLW Program, and TAA of the pending Worker Assistance Workshops as soon as the workshop is scheduled.
2. WIOA staff will be allowed 10 minutes at the beginning of the Worker Assistance Workshop for Information about the WIOA DLW program and how a worker may apply for assistance. Applications will be distributed, and assistance will be given, if needed, after the presentations. Appointments will also be set after the presentations. If possible, appointments should be set for no more than seven (7) days from the date of the workshop.
3. The worker may apply first to either WIOA or TAA. Generally, he or she will qualify first for WIOA because a Dislocated Worker is eligible for WIOA services when he or she receives a lay-off notice or the company has made a general announcement that the facility will close within 180 days, assuming all other eligibility requirements are met.

(See most recent versions of ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 2.4 (*Eligibility for Dislocated Worker Program*) and ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 2.1 (*Common Eligibility Requirements*) for more details.) Workers do not become eligible for TAA until the company is certified as trade-affected by DOL.

4. The program to which the worker first applies (either WIOA or TAA) has the first responsibility to refer the worker to partner programs for which the worker may qualify. This includes WIOA/TAA, but the referral is not limited to these. This responsibility continues until the worker is co-enrolled in all appropriate entities.
5. Each program will use its own normal referral process to refer applicants and participants to other programs, as appropriate. The referrals will be primarily to, but are not limited to, AWC partner programs.
6. It is important to note that training and/or other services and activities should not be delayed in anticipation of a potential TAA certification.
7. If training is appropriate for the worker and WIOA is funding the training, such training need not be TAA-approved. Likewise, if TAA is funding the training, such training need not be WIOA-approved. The needed mix of WIOA and TAA funding over time should be considered in the worker's individual employment plan (IEP).
8. WIOA may pay supportive services, however, only to allow a worker to participate in WIOA-allowed training and activities, whether or not WIOA actually funds the training or activity. Likewise, TAA may pay supportive service only to allow a worker to participate in TAA-allowed training and activities, whether or not TAA actually funds the training or activity.
9. After determination of WIOA eligibility, an initial assessment, and an individual employment plan (IEP), if further services are to be delayed, planned services must be entered in the S & T with the status of "scheduled". This could happen when the worker cannot yet attend training or other services because of work. Details concerning scheduling services are in ADWS Issuance PY 20-01.
10. Some trade-affected workers who do not meet the Selective Service registration requirement are not eligible for the WIOA Dislocated Worker Program. (Compliance with the Selective Service Act is not required for the TAA program.) Such workers are exempt from the co-enrollment requirement [20 CFR 618.325(b)(3)].
11. It is Arkansas policy that residency in a particular local area or state cannot be a requirement or preference for the WIOA Dislocated Worker Program [ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 2.1 (*Common Eligibility Requirements*)].
12. WIOA will determine eligibility, enroll all eligible workers, assess the needs, and provide career services to all workers who request and qualify for these services/activities.
13. For workers who want occupational skills training, eligibility for training will be determined, and training will be arranged as appropriate. In order for WIOA to fund or provide supportive services for such training, workers and the training provider must meet the eligibility requirements in ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 3.1 (*Services for Adults and Dislocated Workers*) and ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 3.3, Change 1 (*Occupational*

Skills Training). Worker eligibility for training includes the three requirements for the participant listed in WIOA § 134(c)(3)(A)(i)(I); 20 CFR 680.210(a) & 680.220(a); and TEGL 19-16: WIOA will provide all appropriate services allowed in ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 3.1 (*Services for Adults and Dislocated Workers*). It should be noted that services are not limited to occupational skill training. Other services that meet the needs of the participants must be made available.

- Is unlikely or unable to obtain or retain employment that leads to economic self-sufficiency, as determined by the WDB, or wages comparable to or higher than wages from previous employment [generally, the employment from which a worker was laid off], through career services alone;
- Is in need of training services to obtain or retain employment leading to economic self-sufficiency, as determined by the WDB, or to wages comparable to or higher than wages from previous employment [generally, the employment from which a worker was laid off]; and
- Has the skills and qualifications to participate successfully in training services.
- In addition, the training provider must be on the Arkansas Eligible Training Provider List or meet the alternate requirements given in ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 3.3, Change 1.\

14. WIOA will provide all appropriate services allowed in ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 3.1 (*Services for Adults and Dislocated Workers*). It should be noted that services are not limited to occupational skill training. Other services that meet the needs of the participants must be made available.

C. After the Company is Certified as Trade-affected:

1. WIOA staff will be allowed 10 minutes at the beginning of each Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Information Session for WIOA to present information about the DLW program.
2. The TAA lead and the WIOA case manager will check in monthly to share information about participants -- both co-enrolled participants and potentially co-enrolled participants. If needed, the OSO will convene these meetings. Information about the meetings will be documented.
3. Each participant will contact either the TAA lead or the WIOA case manager at least monthly to update him or her. The main contact person for the participant will be determined by the TAA lead and the WIOA case manager within the first month of co-enrollment. The TAA lead and the WIOA case manager will share information and documentation. Planned services must be entered on both IEPs, even though a WFC partner is providing the services.
4. Once a worker is determined to be TAA-affected, TAA is the priority source of funding if such funding is allowed by TAA.

5. Beginning with the first semester of WIOA/TAA co-enrollment, TAA will be the first funding provider for any services for which TAA is allowed to provide funds. Usually, these services include the following, when applicable: tuition, fees required of all students, required books, transportation (if travel is outside the normal commuting area), supplies required of all students in the training, subsistence payments, relocation allowances (90% reimbursement), job search allowances (90% reimbursement), and On-the-Job Training (OJT).
6. When training costs are paid by TAA, WIOA will pay for any appropriate costs allowed under the local and state policies that are not paid by TAA. This may include, but is not limited to, childcare, mileage not allowed under TAA, vehicle repairs, work experience, and other supportive services. WIOA may pay for supportive services only for training/career services that can be provided by WIOA, whether or not the training is paid for by WIOA.)
7. If the participant is enrolled in occupational skills training that is allowed by WIOA title I-B, but not TAA, WIOA title I-B will pay all appropriate training or supportive services. Co-enrollment is still expected because TAA may provide other appropriate services. In addition, TAA and WIOA are also encouraged to refer the participant to other appropriate AWC partners (and other entities) that can provide needed services.
8. If TAA begins the training funding, the training is allowed by WIOA local and state policies, and TAA has reached its maximum funding for the training, WIOA will fund the remainder of the training for the co-enrolled participant, being careful to be compliant with ADWS Issuance PY 19-09.

D. After Co-enrolled Participant Exits both programs:

1. WIOA will provide follow-up services as allowed by the local policy, in compliance with state and federal policies.
2. WIOA will give any appropriate follow-up information to their local TAA case manager. WIOA will document such services and will share these documents, as well as any other appropriate information, with TAA.

8. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S PROCESS FOR FAMILIARIZING ONE-STOP STAFF WITH THE TAA PROGRAM. 20 CFR 618.804(J), 20 CFR 618.305

Title I Response:

The State ensures that one-stop staff are fully informed about the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Program through a coordinated and consistent approach led by the State staff. As the central point for service coordination within each local area, the State Staff facilitates regular cross-training for the One-Stop Staff, information sharing, and collaborative service planning among TAA staff, the Dislocated Worker Services Unit, and all WIOA Title partners.

This process includes:

- Scheduled quarterly cross-training sessions to ensure staff understand TAA eligibility, benefits, and service requirements.

- Shared resources and guidance provided through the One-Stop Operator, ensuring consistent messaging and updated program information.
- Collaborative case management and referral practices that support seamless service delivery for customers.
- Ongoing communication between TAA and local partner programs to identify needs, resolve service issues, and support co-enrollment opportunities.

THROUGH THIS COORDINATED STRUCTURE, ONE-STOP STAFF REMAIN KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT TAA PROGRAM OPERATIONS AND ARE EQUIPPED TO PROVIDE ACCURATE INFORMATION, MAKE APPROPRIATE REFERRALS, AND SUPPORT THE SUCCESSFUL DELIVERY OF TAA SERVICES TO ELIGIBLE PARTICIPANTS.

C. YOUTH PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS.

With respect to youth workforce investment activities authorized in section 129 of WIOA, States should describe their strategies that will support the implementation of youth activities under WIOA. State's must--

1. Identify the State-developed criteria to be used by local boards in awarding grants or contracts for youth workforce investment activities and describe how the local boards will take into consideration the ability of the providers to meet performance accountability measures based on primary indicators of performance for the youth program as described in section 116(b)(2)(A)(ii) of WIOA.¹¹ Further, include a description of how the State assists local areas in determining whether to contract for services or to provide some or all of the program elements directly.

Title I Response:

When selecting an entity as the service provider for youth workforce investment activities, the WDB must consider the entity's programmatic and fiscal integrity, compliance with public policy, record of past performance and other factors that demonstrate transparency and responsibility.

State policy requires that boards award grants for local youth activities through a competitive procurement process in accordance with procurement procedures which must be in compliance with the provisions of applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations and based on recommendations of the Youth Committee and/or Workforce Development Board.

The procurement must be a process that provides for full and open competition and avoids even the appearance of a conflict of interest (either individually or organizationally). Procurement actions must be conducted in a manner that provides for full and open competition and prevents the existence of conflicting roles that might bias judgment and cause unfair competitive advantage.

Such actions must assure separation of those who develop or issue the solicitation, or are involved in the selection process, from those who bid upon it. Supporting documentation of the history of each procurement action must be maintained. Such documentation must include a rationale for: the method of procurement, selection of contract type, contractor selection or rejection, and the basis for the contract price.

Such documentation also includes evaluation criteria or rating factors to support the provider's ability to perform successfully, with consideration given to integrity, compliance with public policy, record of past performance, in addition to financial and technical resources, that follow state and federal guidelines.

Contracts must be awarded based on the vendor's:

- Ability to deliver services to the targeted population in accordance with locally established guidelines;
- Experience in working with youth in similar programs and activities;
- Past and current collaboration with other service providers
- Past performance record, including both programmatic and fiscal integrity;
- Understanding of and commitment to meeting goals and objectives; and
- Demonstration of understanding of and commitment to continuous improvement methods.

2. Explain how the State assists local workforce boards in achieving results for out-of-school and in-school youth. Describe promising practices or partnership models that local areas are implementing and the state's role in supporting and scaling those models within the state for both in-school and out-of-school youth.

Title I Response:

In order to improve the outreach and recruitment of out-of-school youth, the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services and its divisions will partner with the Department of Human Services, and other community-based organizations to create a streamline pathway and align services to meet the needs of youth participants. Core programs will no longer serve out-of-school youth in silos, but rather through a referral system leveraged within these partnerships. Local workforce development boards will work with referrals of able-bodied young adults in the SNAP Employment & Training sector of the Department of Human Services, juvenile offenders within the juvenile justice system, clients receiving housing assistance through the local housing authority agencies and community organizations assisting homeless youth to boost enrollment and performance in the out-of-school youth core programs. These partners may prove beneficial in addressing persons with identified and unidentified disabilities, high school equivalency credentials, leadership development and supportive service needs.

The State will focus a higher percentage of Out-of-School Youth (OSY) Funding on direct costs to OSY since this population of youth is more difficult to locate, engage, and will potentially require a longer range of services to be successfully served. We also expect as a result of higher expenditure requirements of OSY funds:

- Increased collaboration amongst core partners through sharing of costs and information to ensure that youth have access to all available clusters of needs-based services.
- A focus on forming and/ or improving alliances with the Department of Education, Pre-Apprenticeship Programs, Employers, Training Providers as well as Community Based Organization which have traditional connections to disconnected youth.

- Greater disseminating of documented strategies among Workforce Development Boards that demonstrate success in locating and engaging eligible youth. The state will also support this practice by adopting best practices demonstrated by local partners and/or agencies and other nationally recognized programs that have successfully served similar populations of youth with state, federal or other limited funds.

As part of the State's overarching outreach strategy, Regional Outreach Coordinators are devoted to providing comprehensive outreach on behalf of core programs to jobseekers, employers, and community-based organizations that serve similar populations, including Out-of-School youth. This staff creates synergy and alignment among WIOA core and non-core partners.

The State is focused on its partnerships with Vocational Rehabilitation to provide transition services to youth with disabilities to ensure high school completion.

By reviewing the plans of Adult Education and Family Literacy Act providers, service providers will also have an opportunity to drive performance toward those established for youth in the WIOA programs further enhancing coordination efforts. The state will continue to direct staff to utilize a portion of the out-of-school youth funding on re-engagement strategies and program related transitional planning for reconnecting disconnected youth to the education and workforce system.

3. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE ASSISTS LOCAL WORKFORCE BOARDS IN IMPLEMENTING INNOVATIVE MODELS FOR DELIVERING YOUTH WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING EFFECTIVE WAYS LOCAL WORKFORCE BOARDS CAN MAKE AVAILABLE THE 14 PROGRAM ELEMENTS DESCRIBED IN WIOA SECTION 129(C)(2); AND EXPLAIN HOW LOCAL AREAS CAN ENSURE WORK EXPERIENCE, INCLUDING QUALITY PRE-APPRENTICESHIP AND REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP, IS PRIORITIZED AS A KEY ELEMENT WITHIN A BROADER CAREER PATHWAYS STRATEGY.

Title I Response:

[Arkansas' Policy 3.2- Services for Youth](#) mandates that local programs must make each of the 14 youth elements available to youth participants. Local programs may determine what services a youth participant receives based on their objective assessment results and individual service strategy. Local programs are not required to provide every element to participants and should partner with other entities to provide program elements that cannot be provided by the local program.

As a routine monitoring activity, service providers submit a list of providers in their regions for each of the 14 youth elements.

Work-based learning services including youth job shadowing, internships, work experiences, on-the-job training, and pre-apprenticeship are valuable training methods. In recent years, there has been an uptick of pre-apprenticeship programs within the state, due to the launch of the Arkansas Certified Pre-Apprenticeship Program (ARPAP). ARPAP is led by the Office of Skills Development (OSD)- a division of the Arkansas Department of Commerce. OSD strategically invests in all levels of the Arkansas workforce, from youth, students, adults, dislocated workers and incumbent workers, by raising education and skill levels, and meeting the needs of

companies operating in Arkansas. This strategy of balancing workforce and employer interest, will lead to greater economic achievement for workers and companies.

OSD is the State agency responsible for educating, facilitating, and supporting the expansion of the registered apprenticeship model as a workforce development strategy for employers. OSD offers funding support to offset training costs associated with implementing an approved Arkansas Certified Pre-Apprenticeship Program (ARPAP) and starting new registered apprenticeship programs.

Pre-apprenticeship programs provide instruction and/or training to increase math, literacy, and other vocational and pre-vocational skills needed _to gain entry into a Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP).

Requirements state that local youth programs must expend at least 20 percent of the youth funds allocated to them to provide in-school youth (ISY) and out-of-school youth (OSY) with paid and unpaid work experience activities.

State staff reviews ISY and OSY expenditures, to include the 20% work experience requirement, on an ongoing basis. Program and financial monitors conduct regular fiscal technical assistance sessions for all local workforce development areas. The sessions include a review of funding utilization rates and forecasts on future expenditures.

Technical assistance sessions include guidance on ways in which the local area may be able to appropriately spend their funds, as needed. Several local areas have implemented local processes for reviewing this information, such as regularly pulling financial reports and reviewing them with their local workforce development board financial committees.

Arkansas encourages a career pathway design. Career planners and participants should work together to identify appropriate career pathways by utilizing the objective assessment results.

4. PROVIDE THE LANGUAGE CONTAINED IN THE STATE POLICY FOR “REQUIRING ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE TO ENTER OR COMPLETE AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM, OR TO SECURE AND HOLD EMPLOYMENT” CRITERION FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH SPECIFIED IN WIOA SECTION 129(A)(1)(B)(III)(VIII) AND FOR “REQUIRING ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE TO COMPLETE AN EDUCATION PROGRAM, OR TO SECURE AND HOLD EMPLOYMENT” CRITERION FOR IN-SCHOOL YOUTH SPECIFIED IN WIOA SECTION 129(A)(1)(C)(IV)(VII). IF THE STATE DOES NOT HAVE A POLICY, DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL ENSURE THAT LOCAL AREAS WILL HAVE A POLICY FOR THESE CRITERIA.

Title I Response:

Arkansas requires the local area to define “requiring additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program, or to secure and hold employment” for youth to best accommodate the needs of the local area. State policy requires that this definition be in the local plan if the local area uses the barrier.

ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 2.6 (Eligibility for Out-of-School Youth Program) contains the policy for “requiring additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program, or to

secure and hold employment” criterion for out-of-school youth in its list of eligibility requirements for out-of-school youth:

“A low-income individual who requires additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment, as defined by the WDB in the state or statewide regional Plan.”

[ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 2.5](#) (Eligibility for In-School Youth Program) contains the policy for “requiring additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program, or to secure and hold employment” criterion for in-school youth in its list of eligibility requirements for in-school youth:

“A low-income individual who requires additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment, as defined by the WDB in the Plan approved by the State Board (limited to 5% of the ISY participants).”

The definition must include required documentation to establish eligibility for this barrier.

D. SINGLE-AREA STATE REQUIREMENTS

1. ANY COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD THAT REPRESENT DISAGREEMENT WITH THE PLAN. (WIOA SECTION 108(D)(3).)

Title I Response:

Not applicable

2. THE ENTITY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DISBURSAL OF GRANT FUNDS, AS DETERMINED BY THE GOVERNOR, IF DIFFERENT FROM THAT FOR THE STATE. (WIOA SECTION 108(B)(15).)

Title I Response:

Not applicable

3. A DESCRIPTION OF THE TYPE AND AVAILABILITY OF WIOA TITLE I YOUTH ACTIVITIES AND SUCCESSFUL MODELS, INCLUDING FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES. (WIOA SECTION 108(B)(9).)

Title I Response:

Not applicable

4. A DESCRIPTION OF THE ROLES AND RESOURCE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE ONE-STOP PARTNERS.

Title I Response:

Not applicable

5. THE COMPETITIVE PROCESS USED TO AWARD THE SUBGRANTS AND CONTRACTS FOR TITLE I ACTIVITIES.

Title I Response:

Not applicable

6. HOW TRAINING SERVICES OUTLINED IN SECTION 134 WILL BE PROVIDED THROUGH INDIVIDUAL TRAINING ACCOUNTS AND/OR THROUGH CONTRACTS, AND HOW SUCH TRAINING APPROACHES WILL BE COORDINATED. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL MEET INFORMED CUSTOMER CHOICE REQUIREMENTS REGARDLESS OF TRAINING APPROACH.

Title I Response:

Not applicable

7. HOW THE STATE BOARD, IN FULFILLING LOCAL BOARD FUNCTIONS, WILL COORDINATE TITLE I ACTIVITIES WITH THOSE ACTIVITIES UNDER TITLE II. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE BOARD WILL CARRY OUT THE REVIEW OF LOCAL APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED UNDER TITLE II CONSISTENT WITH WIOA SECS. 107(D)(11)(A) AND (B)(I) AND WIOA SEC. 232.

Title I Response:

Not applicable

8. COPIES OF EXECUTED COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WHICH DEFINE HOW ALL LOCAL SERVICE PROVIDERS WILL CARRY OUT THE REQUIREMENTS FOR INTEGRATION OF AND ACCESS TO THE ENTIRE SET OF SERVICES AVAILABLE IN THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM, INCLUDING COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH ENTITIES ADMINISTERING REHABILITATION ACT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES.

Title I Response:

Not applicable

E. WAIVER REQUESTS (OPTIONAL)

States wanting to request waivers as part of their title I-B Operational Plan must include a waiver plan that includes the following information for each waiver requested:

Arkansas PY 2026-PY 2027 Waiver Requests

Under the Secretary of Labor's waiver authority outlined in Section 189(i)(3)(A) of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and 20 CFR 679.600, the Secretary may waive certain provisions of WIOA Title I Subtitle A, B, and E and provisions found in Sections 8-10 of the Wagner-Peyser Act. WIOA Section 189(i)(3)(B) and 20 CFR 679.620 identify elements that must be included in a waiver request. A state may request a waiver in its Unified or Combined State Plan submission or modification.

Required Elements - Waiver #1

Title: State Board Acts as Local Board

The statutory and/or regulatory requirements the state would like to waive:

As outlined in Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 05-25, **the State of Arkansas is seeking a waiver of the requirements outlined in WIOA sec. 107(b) to allow the state board to act as the local board.** This waiver would allow the Governor to designate the Arkansas Workforce Development Board to carry out the roles and responsibilities of the local boards for the purpose of operating as a single statewide planning area in accordance with 20 CFR 679.310(f).

Actions the state has undertaken to remove state or local barriers:

Arkansas's program directors and legal staff are drafting potential legislation to amend state laws that potentially limit the Governor's authority to designate a single statewide planning area with the state board fulfilling the roles of the local boards or otherwise create potential barriers to implementing the requested waiver. Upon the approval by the Department and the Governor, Arkansas will coordinate with stakeholders, elected officials, and legislators for support and passage of the proposed legislation by the General Assembly. Arkansas is currently working to identify any rules and policies and will follow the appropriate administrative processes to propose changes to any rule or policy that may serve as limiting the Governor's authority or create a barrier to implementing the requested waiver.

A description of the state's strategic goal(s):

The Arkansas Workforce Strategy is a collaborative, competency-based, customer-centric, and responsive workforce system that meets current and future needs of employers, incumbent workers, and job seekers. The strategy fosters partnerships across sectors to align workforce development with industry needs; aligns training and career pathways with real-world skills and competencies; tailors services to meet the unique needs and goals of job seekers, incumbent workers, and employers; and adapts quickly to economic changes and labor market trends for timely alignment of workforce efforts. These themes collectively aim to create a more dynamic and effective workforce ecosystem in Arkansas.

Arkansas's primary goal for this waiver is to limit annual overhead and streamline operational expenses to maximize the limited funding available for direct services, especially training and work-based learning. It is the state's intent to serve the largest number of customers possible with the available funding. Based on preliminary projections, the state anticipates more than \$6 million of current funding to be redirected from operational and overhead expenses to

direct participant costs (i.e., training, supportive services, etc.). The statewide structure will enhance Arkansas's ability to transform operations into a demand driven system that directly supports local community partnerships without the need for additional overhead.

This structure will also enable further integration of titles I and III operations strengthening the "no wrong door" customer-centric service delivery model outlined in the Arkansas Workforce Strategy. Uniform statewide governance and integration will help Arkansas increase labor force participation and provide consistent high-quality services in all areas.

The state board will continue to include local input into its activities through the establishing of regional business councils comprised of employers who reside and/or work in local workforce areas; maintaining the integrity of the local board structure inclusive of representatives from industry. Appointments for state board members from the business category will be reflective of Arkansas' unique geographic footprint. The state board will allocate funding to each local area in the state using current formula funding methodologies.

A discussion of how the waiver complements Department of Labor priorities (i.e. expansion of apprenticeship, improved employer engagement, etc.):

Approval of this waiver aligns with the following DOL strategic pillars from America's Talent Strategy: Building the Workforce for the Golden Age:

- *Industry-Driven Strategies:* This waiver will allow Arkansas to ensure the workforce system is aligned with economic priorities and further scale high-quality apprenticeship and work-based learning models. The Arkansas Workforce Strategy emphasizes sector strategies through employer collaboratives using the Talent Pipeline Management approach driven by industry. By maximizing the funding available for direct support activities, Arkansas will be well positioned to target investments toward initiatives designed to fill talent shortages in priority industries. Arkansas has begun establishing a state-led business services model that is aligned with the state's economic development agency and affiliates. In this model, Arkansas Industry Connect, along with regional outreach coordinators will serve as the public-facing employer experts equipped to engage businesses throughout the state and provide a myriad of services and resources in a fashion that is centralized and preferred by business leaders.
- *Worker Mobility:* This pillar calls for bringing more individuals into the labor force and supporting their advancement through career pathways by using innovative technology, labor market data, and valued credentials. Arkansas is leading the way in emphasizing skills-based practices to support worker mobility including the establishment of a statewide credential registry as well as digital learning and employment records (LERs). This waiver will enable Arkansas to continue connecting more individuals to the workforce and opportunities that lead to self-sufficiency.
- *Integrated Systems:* This waiver will allow Arkansas to fully integrate outreach, intake, eligibility determination, and case management processes across WIOA Titles I and III as

well as possible future integrated expansion with other programs. This waiver transforms the fragmented system of workforce programs into a cohesive streamlined workforce ecosystem, reducing duplication of effort and unnecessary overhead expenses. As previously stated, Arkansas anticipates an estimated \$6M of current overhead and operating expenses that can be redirected into direct support of job seekers and employers.

- *Accountability:* This waiver will allow Arkansas to ensure workforce programs deliver results that link investments to outcomes and program performance. Programs and strategic initiatives will be monitored for continuous improvement to ensure consistent delivery of strong results and measurable impact. The performance information will be publicly available for enhanced transparency across the workforce development system.
- *Flexibility and Innovation:* This waiver will allow Arkansas to maintain an agile and adaptable workforce system, capable of evolving in step with economic shifts. As state economic priorities change, so will the prioritization of industry investments. Streamlined operations and effective governance structure statewide allow these shifts to occur more quickly and efficiently.

Quantifiable projected programmatic outcomes resulting from implementation of the waiver:

Arkansas's proposal will generate substantial and measurable improvements in service delivery and fiscal efficiency while maintaining the high-quality standards of existing performance metrics. Based on the anticipated restructuring of workforce operations in Arkansas, this proposal will redirect approximately \$6M annually from duplicative operating and administrative structure expenses to direct participant services. Arkansas anticipates that these cost savings will impact WIOA customers two-fold by: (1) increasing funding available for existing participants that have additional barriers not yet fully resolved; and (2) providing direct support funding for more than 200 additional Title I participants statewide each year.

Also, in the spirit of WIOA's intent, Arkansas will be able to emphasize spending program funds towards those individuals most in need who can benefit from intensive intervention and direct training and support, all of which positively impacts the achievement of performance goals and may boost the outcome metrics incrementally once the effects of the new framework have been fully realized. In addition, this proposal will streamline governance, reduce compliance risk, and ensure consistent statewide policy implementation, strengthening Arkansas's ability to meet the needs of employers, jobseekers, and communities.

Expected Levels of Performance

WIOA Title I Adult-

Employment Rate (Q2) 72.9%, Employment Rate (Q4) 71.1%, Median Earnings \$7,750.00, Credential Rate 73.0%, Measurable Skills Gains 66.3%

WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker-

Employment Rate (Q2) 74.7%, Employment Rate (Q4) 72.3%, Median Earnings \$8,280.00, Credential Rate 75.0%, Measurable Skills Gains 66.3%

WIOA Title I Youth-

Education and Employment Rate (Q2) 68.9%, Education and Employment Rate (Q4) 69.3%, Median Earnings \$3,950.00, Credential Rate 52.2%, Measurable Skills Gains 65.9%

WIOA Title III- Wagner Peyser

Employment Rate (Q2) 63.7%, Employment Rate (Q4) 63.1%, Median Earnings \$6,905.00

Individuals, groups, or populations benefitting, or otherwise impacted by the waiver from the waiver:

This waiver will strengthen Arkansas's ability to deliver coordinated, high-impact WIOA services for individuals with barriers to employment including low-income adults, out-of-school youth, justice-involved individuals, English language learners, individuals with disabilities, dislocated workers, veterans and transitioning service members, older workers, migrant and seasonal farmworkers, individuals experiencing homelessness, single parents, long-term unemployed individuals, and other Arkansans facing significant socioeconomic or educational barriers.

Streamlined operations and reduced operating/overhead costs will provide the opportunity for additional resources to meet the needs of employers, job seekers, and incumbent workers. Additionally, the waiver will allow Arkansas to continue to promote the cost benefits of improved administrative efficiencies, encouraging the increased leveraging of resources within the workforce ecosystem. As a result, Arkansas will increase services such as enhanced education, employment, and training opportunities for disadvantaged populations and individuals with multiple barriers to employment.

How the state plans to monitor waiver implementation, including collection of measurable waiver outcome information:

Upon DOL's approval of this waiver request, Arkansas will communicate the waiver allowance to stakeholders within the workforce ecosystem. Arkansas will monitor progress under this waiver by reviewing monthly performance and expenditure reports compared to historical performance and expenditure levels. Arkansas will also monitor the quality of services provided statewide to ensure continuous improvement. Arkansas will report waiver outcomes in the state's WIOA Annual Report. If the state requests renewal of this waiver, then Arkansas will provide the most recent outcomes data available.

The implementation timeline will begin in the same quarter that USDOL approves the plan and waiver, allowing Arkansas to immediately initiate a structured, phased transition that protects service continuity while standing up a unified statewide system. Local workforce boards will begin closeout activities on a phased schedule aligned with each board's remaining program-year funds, ensuring an orderly wind-down of operations without disrupting participant services. During this same period, the state will recruit, hire, and train new staff to

assume statewide service delivery and oversight functions, while also reshaping the State Workforce Development Board's composition to fully meet WIOA requirements for a board acting in a local capacity. This sequenced approach ensures compliance, minimizes disruption, and positions Arkansas to fully realize the benefits of a single statewide planning area.

Required Elements - Waiver #2

Title: Flexibility to Reallocate Funds Across Local Workforce Areas

The statutory and/or regulatory requirements the state would like to waive:

The State of Arkansas is seeking a waiver from the provisions of WIOA 128(c)(3) and 133(c)(3), regarding reallocation among local areas. This waiver would provide flexibility to Arkansas in redistributing funds among workforce areas.

Actions the state has undertaken to remove state or local barriers:

Upon approval of this waiver, Arkansas will initiate implementation through a policy issuance to notify all affected stakeholders of the additional criteria designated for reallocation consideration. The existing recapture and redistribution processes will be updated to include the additional reallocation consideration factors to ensure a smooth transition.

A description of the state's strategic goal(s):

Approval of this waiver request would allow Arkansas to meet the following strategic goals:

- Redistribution of recaptured funds to workforce areas based on factors established to ensure that funds are redistributed to workforce areas with the greatest need. These factors may include the following:
 - o Requested amount.
 - o Demonstrated need for and ability to use additional funds to serve low-income individuals, public assistance recipients, dislocated workers, and unemployment insurance claimants;
 - o Demonstrated capacity to expend the formula funds;
 - o Alignment with the state's economic priorities through investment by industry (i.e., advanced manufacturing, construction, healthcare, energy, information technology etc.); and
 - o Performance in the current and previous program years.
- Maximize the impact of recaptured federal funds. Arkansas seeks to redistribute workforce funds to workforce areas that have achieved not only targeted expenditure levels but also established performance targets. Redistributing funds based solely on whether a workforce area achieves its expenditure target does not address performance issues, such as whether the workforce area met employer needs for a highly skilled and job-ready workforce.

- Improvement of Administrative Efficiencies. Approval of this waiver will serve to minimize administrative processes and costs of contracting by using similar redistribution procedures that support workforce system integration.

A discussion of how the waiver complements Department of Labor priorities (i.e. expansion of apprenticeship, improved employer engagement, etc.):

Approval of this waiver aligns with the following DOL strategic pillars from America's Talent Strategy: Building the Workforce for the Golden Age:

- Industry-Driven Strategies. This waiver will allow Arkansas to ensure the workforce system is aligned with economic priorities. Reallocation consideration factors will provide incentives to ensure training investments are aligned with the needs of employers, especially manufacturing and other industries that serve as the foundation for the state and national economy.
- Accountability. This waiver will allow Arkansas to ensure workforce programs deliver results that link investments to outcomes and program performance. Programs that consistently deliver strong results would be expanded with reallocated funds, while those that fail to show measurable impact would not be awarded with reallocated funds. The performance information will be publicly available for enhanced transparency across the workforce development system.
- Flexibility and Innovation. This waiver will allow Arkansas to maintain an agile and adaptable workforce system, capable of evolving in step with economic shifts. As state economic priorities change, so too would the prioritization of industry investments for fund reallocation consideration. An example of this flexibility would include a scenario where expiring grant funds in one area were recaptured and reallocated to address a mass layoff in another area. This flexibility would allow Arkansas with the provisions to shift funds to where they are most needed driven by market demand.

Quantifiable projected programmatic outcomes resulting from implementation of the waiver:

The existing statutory reallocation requirements can be fulfilled; however, the amount of funds available for reallocation may also be so small that it is cost prohibitive. By using this waiver for the redistribution of funds, Arkansas can ensure that federal funds will be more effectively and efficiently managed for maximum service provision and program performance. Approval of this waiver will provide the opportunity for recaptured funds to be redistributed to workforce areas where the greatest potential impact may be realized. This waiver will streamline administrative practices, allowing for greater efficiency in meeting the workforce development needs of employers and job seekers. Furthermore, it will enhance the quality of services in those workforce areas that have demonstrated consistent performance outcomes. Approval of this waiver will result in a reduction of unnecessary administrative processes. Based on current funding obligation rates in the local workforce development areas, Arkansas estimates that \$120,000 of funding could be subject to recapture and subsequent redistribution in the current year. By focusing the reallocation on areas with demonstrated need, capacity to expend additional funds, alignment with state economic priorities, and other factors for consideration, these funds could impact an additional 15 participants. Arkansas anticipates the estimated funding amount and corresponding impacted participants to fluctuate each year based on local expenditure levels.

Arkansas's proposal will generate substantial and measurable improvements in service delivery and fiscal efficiency while maintaining the high-quality standards of existing performance metrics. In the spirit of WIOA's intent, Arkansas will be able to emphasize spending program funds towards those individuals most in need who can benefit from intensive intervention and direct training and support, all of which positively impacts the achievement of performance goals and may boost the outcome metrics incrementally once the effects of the new framework have been fully realized. In addition, this proposal will strengthen Arkansas's ability to meet the needs of employers, jobseekers, and communities.

Expected Levels of Performance

WIOA Title I Adult-

Employment Rate (Q2) 72.9%, Employment Rate (Q4) 71.1%, Median Earnings \$7,750.00, Credential Rate 73.0%, Measurable Skills Gains 66.3%

WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker-

Employment Rate (Q2) 74.7%, Employment Rate (Q4) 72.3%, Median Earnings \$8,280.00, Credential Rate 75.0%, Measurable Skills Gains 66.3%

WIOA Title I Youth-

Education and Employment Rate (Q2) 68.9%, Education and Employment Rate (Q4) 69.3%, Median Earnings \$3,950.00, Credential Rate 52.2%, Measurable Skills Gains 65.9%

WIOA Title III- Wagner Peyser

Employment Rate (Q2) 63.7%, Employment Rate (Q4) 63.1%, Median Earnings \$6,905.00

Individuals, groups, or populations benefitting, or otherwise impacted by the waiver:

Workforce areas that provide quality services will have access to additional resources to meet the employer's needs, job seekers, and incumbent workers. Additionally, the waiver will allow Arkansas to continue to promote the cost benefits of improved administrative efficiencies, encouraging the increased leveraging of resources within the workforce areas. As a result, Arkansas will increase services such as enhanced education, employment, and training opportunities for disadvantaged populations and individuals with multiple barriers to employment.

This waiver will strengthen Arkansas's ability to deliver coordinated, high-impact WIOA services for individuals with barriers to employment including low-income adults, out-of-school youth, justice-involved individuals, English language learners, individuals with disabilities, dislocated workers, veterans and transitioning service members, older workers, migrant and seasonal farmworkers, individuals experiencing homelessness, single parents, long-term unemployed individuals, and other Arkansans facing significant socioeconomic or educational barriers.

How the state plans to monitor waiver implementation, including collection of measurable waiver outcome information, as well as provide notice to affected parties:

The waiver requests were presented to the Arkansas Workforce Development Board during a special-called meeting, which was accessible to the general public and any interested parties in-person and via livestream. Arkansas leadership has met with the Executive Directors of all ten local workforce development boards to discuss the waiver requests and their potential impact to the current workforce system operations.

Upon DOL's approval of this waiver request, Arkansas will communicate the waiver allowance to all stakeholders and workforce system partner programs. Arkansas will monitor progress under this waiver by reviewing monthly performance and expenditure reports, through regularly scheduled conference calls with stakeholders, and through its monitoring and performance accountability system. Arkansas will report waiver outcomes in the state's WIOA Annual Report. If the state requests renewal of this waiver, then Arkansas will provide the most recent outcomes data available.

The implementation timeline will begin in the same quarter that USDOL approves the plan and waiver.

Required Elements - Waiver #3

Title: Network of Affiliate Sites in lieu of Comprehensive Centers

The statutory and/or regulatory requirements the state would like to waive:

As outlined in Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 05-25, **the State of Arkansas is seeking a waiver of the requirement to establish and maintain at least one physical comprehensive center in each of the state's local workforce development areas (20 CFR 678.300(c)).** This waiver would allow Arkansas to leverage virtual and remote services as well as utilize a robust network of affiliated sites that leverage strategic co-location with partners to minimize infrastructure costs while maximizing reach.

Actions the state has undertaken to remove state or local barriers:

Arkansas is currently working to identify any rules and policies and will follow the appropriate administrative processes to propose changes to any rule or policy that may create a barrier to implementing the requested waiver. The state board will continue to include local input into its activities and allocate funding to each local area in the state to ensure quality and balanced service delivery statewide.

Arkansas has successfully implemented a virtual employment services hotline, "CONNECT", that provides real-time services to individuals and employers who cannot physically visit an American Job Center location. Additionally, Governor Sarah Sanders rolled out the "LAUNCH" online platform that serves at the state's labor exchange and talent marketplace hub. Both models have proven to be effective and increased access to services for those who live in rural areas or who have transportation issues.

State program directors continue to review lease agreements and evaluate methods to reduce costs associated with traditional brick and mortar physical locations. The state has been successful with negotiating with property owners to reduce costs where possible. Colocations have also been a means to share costs across multiple partners and direct funds back to participant services.

A description of the state's strategic goal(s):

The Arkansas Workforce Strategy is a collaborative, competency-based, customer-centric, and responsive workforce system that meets current and future needs of employers, incumbent workers, and job seekers. The strategy fosters partnerships across sectors to align workforce development with industry needs; aligns training and career pathways with real-world skills and competencies; tailors services to meet the unique needs and goals of job seekers, incumbent workers, and employers; and adapts quickly to economic changes and labor market trends for timely alignment of workforce efforts. These themes collectively aim to create a more dynamic and effective workforce ecosystem in Arkansas.

Arkansas's primary goal for this waiver is to reduce the financial and administrative burden on the partners required to support the infrastructure costs of a comprehensive center. This waiver does not eliminate access to comprehensive services; it allows the state to:

- Deliver comprehensive services through mobile units, partner-embedded sites, and virtual platforms.
- Maintain comprehensive functionality without requiring a fixed physical location in every local area.
- Allocate resources based on customer need and geography, not building and overhead requirements.
- Shift inflated infrastructure costs to direct participant activities, state initiatives, tools, and personnel necessary to deliver services in a hybrid customer-centric model.
- Eliminate the barrier of identifying available real estate and staffing requirements to accommodate a comprehensive center in rural areas of Arkansas.

The flexibility provided under this waiver will allow Arkansas to transform the workforce ecosystem in a manner that aligns directly with both State and Federal priorities. Requiring a fixed comprehensive center in every local area reflects an earlier service model based on geographic presence rather than customer need. This waiver enables Arkansas to modernize service delivery to better reflect how individuals access services today. By shifting from a facility-based requirement to a function-based model, Arkansas can ensure that comprehensive services are delivered wherever customers are – at community partner sites, through mobile units, and via digital platforms – thereby advancing priorities for access while maintaining efficiency. Established partner sites across the state including adult education centers, AR Department of Human Services (DHS) county offices, and vocational rehabilitation offices will be utilized as access points for workforce services, specifically in rural areas.

A discussion of how the waiver complements Department of Labor priorities (i.e. expansion of apprenticeship, improved employer engagement, etc.):

Approval of this waiver aligns with the following DOL strategic pillars from America's Talent Strategy: Building the Workforce for the Golden Age:

- *Industry-Driven Strategies.* Requiring fixed comprehensive centers can limit the system's ability to meet employers where they operate. This waiver enables Arkansas to deploy workforce services directly into employer settings through on-site hiring events, sector-based pop-up service delivery, mobile recruitment and screening units, and rapid response to employer expansion needs. By allowing services to move to employers rather than requiring employers to engage with fixed centers, the waiver strengthens demand-driven strategies and improves the speed and effectiveness of matching talent.

Studies show that up to 80 percent of all new jobs are created by existing companies. A successful business retention and expansion strategy serves the key purposes of demonstrating to existing firms that the community appreciates their contribution to the local economy, encourages expansion that leads to sustainable job growth, helps businesses solve their problems and challenges and assists local businesses in gaining awareness of available resources.

Regional Outreach Coordinators will be positioned to help implement effective business retention and expansion tools and strategies and ensure communities are familiar with the variety of resources available to help existing companies stay strong and grow.

- *Worker Mobility.* Worker mobility is hindered when access to services is tied to transportation, geography, or office hours. This waiver improves mobility by delivery services in trusted community locations, providing virtual access options, reducing travel barriers for rural and low-income individuals, and enabling services to reach individuals during key life transitions. Data from program operations (number of office visits) reflect a greater need and preference by customers, to access services virtually in lieu of visiting a physical center. By removing geographic constraints, the waiver ensures that workers can engage with the workforce ecosystem regardless of location, thereby improving participation and advancement opportunities.
- *Integrated Systems.* A facility-based requirement reinforces program silos by tying services to specific locations. This waiver supports a "no wrong door" integrated service delivery model by enabling partner-embedded access points, co-location with human services and education providers, unified intake and shared customer profiles, and coordinated service delivery without requiring multiple office visits. Customers will experience a seamless system where comprehensive services are delivered through a network of access points rather than a single building, directly advancing DOL's vision of an integrated workforce ecosystem.
- *Accountability.* This waiver strengthens accountability by shifting resources from facility maintenance to direct services and measurable outcomes. Arkansas will maintain full compliance with federal performance requirements while improving time to service, engagement rates, rural access metrics, and employment and retention outcomes. Data from mobile, partner-embedded, and virtual services will be integrated into the statewide system, ensuring transparency and enabling continuous improvement.

- **Flexibility and Innovation.** This waiver directly supports flexibility and innovation by allowing Arkansas to pilot and scale modern service delivery models, including expanded utilization of the existing mobile workforce units, virtual career navigation, behavioral design strategies, and comprehensive services delivered through a network of affiliate partner sites. By removing structural barriers tied to fixed facilities, Arkansas can test and implement innovative approaches that better serve customers and employers, positioning the state as a national leader in workforce modernization.

Quantifiable projected programmatic outcomes resulting from implementation of the waiver:

Arkansas anticipates increased customer reach statewide through this service delivery model resulting in increased program enrollments and improved engagement with rural communities. Arkansas also projects a reduced “time to first service” for customers with transportation barriers. Improved access to services will result in improved employment and retention outcomes for job seekers and employers. Reduced facility-related tasks may also result in a reduction of administrative burden for staff. Over a series of years, Wagner Peyser funds have been stretched thin due to rising infrastructure costs resulting in a reduction of qualified workforce specialists available to provide direct services to residents. This jeopardizes the standard of a high-performing and quality job center by compromising staff availability in ratio to customers need. Arkansas anticipates an overall increase in customer satisfaction and additional cost savings statewide.

Expected Levels of Performance

WIOA Title I Adult-

Employment Rate (Q2) 72.9%, Employment Rate (Q4) 71.1%, Median Earnings \$7,750.00, Credential Rate 73.0%, Measurable Skills Gains 66.3%

WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker-

Employment Rate (Q2) 74.7%, Employment Rate (Q4) 72.3%, Median Earnings \$8,280.00, Credential Rate 75.0%, Measurable Skills Gains 66.3%

WIOA Title I Youth-

Education and Employment Rate (Q2) 68.9%, Education and Employment Rate (Q4) 69.3%, Median Earnings \$3,950.00, Credential Rate 52.2%, Measurable Skills Gains 65.9%

WIOA Title III- Wagner Peyser

Employment Rate (Q2) 63.7%, Employment Rate (Q4) 63.1%, Median Earnings \$6,905.00

Individuals, groups, or populations benefitting, or otherwise impacted by the waiver:

Arkansas’s proposal will generate substantial and measurable improvements in service delivery and fiscal efficiency while maintaining the high-quality standards of existing performance metrics. Based on the anticipated restructuring of workforce operations in Arkansas, this proposal will redirect approximately \$6M annually from duplicative operating and administrative structure expenses to direct participant services. Arkansas anticipates that these

cost savings will impact WIOA customers two-fold by: (1) increasing funding available for existing participants that have additional barriers not yet fully resolved; and (2) providing direct support funding for more than 200 additional Title I participants statewide each year. Also, in the spirit of WIOA's intent, Arkansas will be able to emphasize spending program funds towards those individuals most in need who can benefit from intensive intervention and direct training and support, all of which positively impacts the achievement of performance goals and may boost the outcome metrics incrementally once the effects of the new framework have been fully realized. In addition, this proposal will streamline governance, reduce compliance risk, and ensure consistent statewide service delivery implementation, strengthening Arkansas's ability to meet the needs of employers, jobseekers, and communities.

This waiver will strengthen Arkansas's ability to deliver coordinated, high-impact WIOA services for individuals with barriers to employment including low-income adults, out-of-school youth, justice-involved individuals, English language learners, individuals with disabilities, dislocated workers, veterans and transitioning service members, older workers, migrant and seasonal farmworkers, individuals experiencing homelessness, single parents, long-term unemployed individuals, and other Arkansans facing significant socioeconomic or educational barriers.

How the state plans to monitor waiver implementation, including collection of measurable waiver outcome information:

Upon DOL's approval of this waiver request, Arkansas will communicate the waiver allowance to stakeholders within the workforce ecosystem. Arkansas will monitor the quality of services provided statewide in order to ensure continuous improvement. Arkansas will report waiver outcomes in the state's WIOA Annual Report. If the state requests renewal of this waiver, then Arkansas will provide the most recent outcomes data available.

The implementation timeline will begin in the same quarter that USDOL approves the plan and waiver, allowing Arkansas to immediately initiate a structured, phased transition that protects service continuity while standing up a unified statewide system.

Required Elements - Waiver #4

Title: WIOA Training Dollars & Supportive Services- Funding Flexibility

The statutory and/or regulatory requirements the state would like to waive:

As outlined in Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 05-25, **the State of Arkansas is requesting flexibility in the implementation of WIOA sec. 134 (c)(3)(B) as well as 20 CFR 680.210 (c), 20 CFR 680.230, 20 CFR 680.900, and WIOA sec. 129 (c)(3)(A).** Specifically, Arkansas is seeking a waiver of the requirement to determine inability to obtain other grant assistance prior to funding training and supportive services for adult, dislocated workers, and youth. Arkansas also seeks the allowance of self-attestation for lack of other available funding options.

Actions the state has undertaken to remove state or local barriers:

Arkansas is currently working to identify any rules and policies and will follow the appropriate administrative processes to propose changes to any rule or policy that may serve as a barrier to implementing the requested waiver.

Arkansas will continue to encourage participants to apply for other funding sources including Pell grants and will coordinate the braiding of funding when feasible. Arkansas will ensure that there is no duplication of payment among multiple programs providing funding and will document the reasonableness of all costs allocated to WIOA funds.

A description of the state's strategic goal(s):

The Arkansas Workforce Strategy is a collaborative, competency-based, customer-centric, and responsive workforce system that meets current and future needs of employers, incumbent workers, and job seekers. The strategy fosters partnerships across sectors to align workforce development with industry needs; aligns training and career pathways with real-world skills and competencies; tailors services to meet the unique needs and goals of job seekers, incumbent workers, and employers; and adapts quickly to economic changes and labor market trends for timely alignment of workforce efforts. These themes collectively aim to create a more dynamic, inclusive, and effective workforce ecosystem in Arkansas.

Arkansas's primary goal for this waiver is to eliminate delays of training enrollment, reduce administrative burden for workforce boards and title I-B service providers, remove barriers for low-income participants, and reduce complexity of funding provisions.

A discussion of how the waiver complements Department of Labor priorities (i.e. expansion of apprenticeship, improved employer engagement, etc.):

Approval of this waiver aligns with the following DOL strategic pillars from America's Talent Strategy: Building the Workforce for the Golden Age:

- *Industry-Driven Strategies*. The requested flexibility advances this pillar by enabling timely access to training aligned with in-demand occupations, ensuring workers can obtain skills when opportunities arise rather than after administrative delays. The reduced time to training will enable rapid enrollment and eliminate delays caused by Pell verification and other aid coordination. When training start dates are missed due to aid verification delays, employer-driven cohorts may lose candidates. A streamlined approach lets the system respond more timely to employer demand. This waiver also strengthens sector strategies by reducing administrative friction, which helps to build reliable pipelines for employers.
- *Worker Mobility*. This waiver removes procedural barriers that prevent individuals from advancing through rapid upskilling/reskilling. This flexibility also expands practical access for low-income and rural participants. Streamlining recognizes real-world barriers such as FAFSA processing delays, documentation hurdles, and program start timing which can impede an individual's access to other funding sources. Data from customer service surveys and feedback from service providers reflect a dissatisfaction with the current "last dollar" rule; with workforce boards attributing the decrease in enrollments is due to the complexities of funding eligibility and the processes connected to receiving grant assistance. "

- *Integrated Systems*. This waiver allows for standardization of a single, cross-program resource coordination workflow that improves co-enrollment operations and simplifies the customer's experience. The no wrong door approach is supported by reducing the number of handoffs for referrals and verification loops.
- *Accountability*. The requested flexibility shifts the system from process compliance to results accountability. Instead of measuring success by how thoroughly staff document a funding sequencing rule, the waiver emphasizes measurable outcomes, completion, credential attainment, employment, and wage gains. This enables cleaner cost/outcome analysis and preserves fiscal integrity through targeted safeguards.
- *Flexibility and Innovation*. This waiver allows rapid reskilling pilots when layoffs happen or when new tech adoption accelerates. As the system needs to enroll people quickly, the front-end paperwork reduction supports more timely access to training and supportive services for affected individuals. This waiver also supports innovative funding models and short-cycle credentials. Many high-value credentials are short, modular, and cohort-based; strict sequencing can be disproportionate to the training duration. Streamlining enables more experimentation with accelerated pathways.

Quantifiable projected programmatic outcomes resulting from implementation of the waiver:

Arkansas anticipates this waiver will accelerate enrollment into training, reduce administrative burden, improve access for underserved populations, increase credential attainment, and support employer demand.

Expected Levels of Performance

WIOA Title I Adult-

Employment Rate (Q2) 72.9%, Employment Rate (Q4) 71.1%, Median Earnings \$7,750.00, Credential Rate 73.0%, Measurable Skills Gains 66.3%

WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker-

Employment Rate (Q2) 74.7%, Employment Rate (Q4) 72.3%, Median Earnings \$8,280.00, Credential Rate 75.0%, Measurable Skills Gains 66.3%

WIOA Title I Youth-

Education and Employment Rate (Q2) 68.9%, Education and Employment Rate (Q4) 69.3%, Median Earnings \$3,950.00, Credential Rate 52.2%, Measurable Skills Gains 65.9%

WIOA Title III- Wagner Peyser

Employment Rate (Q2) 63.7%, Employment Rate (Q4) 63.1%, Median Earnings \$6,905.00

Individuals, groups, or populations benefitting, or otherwise impacted by the waiver:

Arkansas will increase services such as enhanced education, employment, and training opportunities for disadvantaged populations and individuals with multiple barriers to employment, including those with lower educational levels and those who are underskilled and underemployed. Employers will reap the benefits of being connected to qualified and

skilled laborers and professionals who are a part of a talent pipeline helping to meet labor market demands.

This waiver will strengthen Arkansas's ability to deliver coordinated, high-impact WIOA services for individuals with barriers to employment including low-income adults, out-of-school youth, justice-involved individuals, English language learners, individuals with disabilities, dislocated workers, veterans and transitioning service members, older workers, migrant and seasonal farmworkers, individuals experiencing homelessness, single parents, long-term unemployed individuals, and other Arkansans facing significant socioeconomic or educational barriers.

How the state plans to monitor waiver implementation, including collection of measurable waiver outcome information:

Upon DOL's approval of this waiver request, Arkansas will communicate the waiver allowance to stakeholders within the workforce ecosystem. Arkansas will monitor the quality of services provided statewide in order to ensure continuous improvement. Arkansas will report waiver outcomes in the state's WIOA Annual Report. If the state requests renewal of this waiver, then Arkansas will provide the most recent outcomes data available.

The implementation timeline will begin in the same quarter that USDOL approves the plan and waiver.

Required Elements - Waiver #5

Title: State Plan Acts as Regional Plan

The statutory and/or regulatory requirements the state would like to waive:

The State of Arkansas is seeking a waiver of the requirements outlined in 20 CFR 679.510 through 20 CFR 679.540 to allow the state plan to act as the regional plan in accordance with the overall vision of operating as a single planning region and area.

Actions the state has undertaken to remove state or local barriers:

Arkansas's program directors and legal staff are drafting potential legislation to amend state laws that potentially limit the Governor's current authority to designate a single statewide planning area or otherwise create potential barriers to implementing the requested waiver. Upon the approval by the Department and the Governor, Arkansas will coordinate with stakeholders, elected officials, and legislators for support and passage of the proposed legislation by the General Assembly. Arkansas is currently working to identify any rules and policies and will follow the appropriate administrative processes to implement the proposed changes.

A description of the state's strategic goal(s):

The Arkansas Workforce Strategy is a collaborative, competency-based, customer-centric, and responsive workforce system that meets current and future needs of employers, incumbent workers, and job seekers. The strategy fosters partnerships across sectors to align workforce development with industry needs; aligns training and career pathways with real-world skills and competencies; tailors services to meet the unique needs and goals of job seekers, incumbent workers, and employers; and adapts quickly to economic changes and labor market trends for timely alignment of workforce efforts. These themes collectively aim to create a more dynamic, inclusive, and effective workforce ecosystem in Arkansas.

Arkansas's primary goal for this waiver is to support the state's strategic vision of operating the workforce system with the efficiency and coordination of a single statewide service delivery network. Specifically, the waiver will enable Arkansas to streamline planning processes, align sector strategies across the entire state economy, reduce administrative burden, accelerate implementation of statewide workforce initiatives, and improve statewide employer engagement and sector partnership development.

A discussion of how the waiver complements Department of Labor priorities (i.e. expansion of apprenticeship, improved employer engagement, etc.):

Approval of this waiver aligns with the following DOL strategic pillars from America's Talent Strategy: Building the Workforce for the Golden Age:

- *Industry-Driven Strategies.* This waiver will allow Arkansas to ensure the workforce system is aligned with economic priorities. This structure allows the state to coordinate programs across the entire labor market rather than fragmented regional planning structures. Consistent sector strategies across the state will allow employers operating in multiple areas to engage with a unified workforce system.
- *Worker Mobility.* This pillar calls for bringing more individuals into the labor force and supporting their advancement through career pathways by using innovative technology, labor market data, and valued credentials. Through statewide coordination of workforce strategies, the ability of participants to access training and employment opportunities across local workforce development areas will be improved. This will enhance career pathway alignment, portability of services, and access to high-quality training providers statewide.
- *Integrated Systems.* This waiver will strengthen Arkansas's use of integrated data systems to evaluate workforce outcomes and ensure continuous improvement across the system.
- *Flexibility and Innovation.* This waiver will allow Arkansas to maintain an agile and adaptable workforce system, capable of evolving in step with economic shifts. As state economic priorities change, so too would the prioritization of industry investments. Streamlined operations and effective planning strategies statewide allow these shifts to occur more quickly and efficiently.

Quantifiable projected programmatic outcomes resulting from implementation of the waiver:

Expected outcomes include improved alignment of workforce strategies statewide and increased administrative efficiency through reduced duplicative planning processes as well as improved employer engagement and service delivery consistency. This waiver will enable employers to interact with a coordinated statewide system rather than fragmented regional strategies.

Arkansas's proposal will generate substantial and measurable improvements in service delivery and fiscal efficiency while maintaining the high-quality standards of existing performance metrics. Based on the anticipated restructuring of workforce operations in Arkansas, this proposal will redirect approximately \$6M annually from duplicative operating and administrative structure expenses to direct participant services. Arkansas anticipates that these cost savings will impact WIOA customers two-fold by: (1) increasing funding available for existing participants that have additional barriers not yet fully resolved; and (2) providing direct support funding for more than 200 additional Title I participants statewide each year. Also, in the spirit of WIOA's intent, Arkansas will be able to emphasize spending program funds towards those individuals most in need who can benefit from intensive intervention and direct training and support, all of which positively impacts the achievement of performance goals and may boost the outcome metrics incrementally once the effects of the new framework have been fully realized. In addition, this proposal will streamline governance, reduce compliance risk, and ensure consistent statewide policy implementation, strengthening Arkansas's ability to meet the needs of employers, jobseekers, and communities.

Expected Levels of Performance

WIOA Title I Adult-

Employment Rate (Q2) 72.9%, Employment Rate (Q4) 71.1%, Median Earnings \$7,750.00, Credential Rate 73.0%, Measurable Skills Gains 66.3%

WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker-

Employment Rate (Q2) 74.7%, Employment Rate (Q4) 72.3%, Median Earnings \$8,280.00, Credential Rate 75.0%, Measurable Skills Gains 66.3%

WIOA Title I Youth-

Education and Employment Rate (Q2) 68.9%, Education and Employment Rate (Q4) 69.3%, Median Earnings \$3,950.00, Credential Rate 52.2%, Measurable Skills Gains 65.9%

WIOA Title III- Wagner Peyser

Employment Rate (Q2) 63.7%, Employment Rate (Q4) 63.1%, Median Earnings \$6,905.00

Individuals, groups, or populations benefitting, or otherwise impacted by the waiver from the waiver:

This waiver will benefit multiple stakeholders within the workforce system including job seekers and program participants, employers and industry partners, and education and training providers. Participants will benefit from more consistent service delivery and

expanded access to statewide initiatives. Employers will benefit from improved coordination of workforce services and sector partnerships. As a result, Arkansas will increase services such as enhanced education, employment, and training opportunities for disadvantaged populations and individuals with multiple barriers to employment.

This waiver will strengthen Arkansas's ability to deliver coordinated, high-impact WIOA services for individuals with barriers to employment including low-income adults, out-of-school youth, justice-involved individuals, English language learners, individuals with disabilities, dislocated workers, veterans and transitioning service members, older workers, migrant and seasonal farmworkers, individuals experiencing homelessness, single parents, long-term unemployed individuals, and other Arkansans facing significant socioeconomic or educational barriers.

How the state plans to monitor waiver implementation, including collection of measurable waiver outcome information:

Upon DOL's approval of this waiver request, Arkansas will communicate the waiver allowance to stakeholders within the workforce ecosystem. Arkansas will monitor progress under this waiver by reviewing implementation of statewide strategies, performance outcomes, and employer engagement analysis. Arkansas will also monitor the quality of services provided statewide in order to ensure continuous improvement. Arkansas will report waiver outcomes in the state's WIOA Annual Report. If the state requests renewal of this waiver, then Arkansas will provide the most recent outcomes data available.

The implementation timeline will begin in the same quarter that USDOL approves the plan and waiver, allowing Arkansas to immediately initiate a structured, phased transition that protects service continuity while standing up a unified statewide system. Local workforce boards will begin closeout activities on a phased schedule aligned with each board's remaining program-year funds, ensuring an orderly wind-down of operations without disrupting participant services. During this same period, the state will recruit, hire, and train new staff to assume statewide service delivery and oversight functions, while also reshaping the State Workforce Development Board's composition to fully meet WIOA requirements for a board acting in a local capacity. This sequenced approach ensures compliance, minimizes disruption, and positions Arkansas to fully realize the benefits of a single statewide planning area.

Required Elements - Waiver #6

Title: State Board Composition Flexibility

The statutory and/or regulatory requirements the state would like to waive:

As outlined in Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 05-25, **the State of Arkansas is seeking a waiver of the requirements outlined in WIOA Section 101(b)(1), (b)(3) and (c) as well as the corresponding regulations at 20 CFR 679.110(b)-(c), which specify board membership and category/subcategory representation requirements.** This would

allow the state to change the structure and operation of the state board to streamline overall state board membership and better address the employment and skills needs of the state. This would also allow the state to document dual representation for members who fall under multiple categories.

Actions the state has undertaken to remove state or local barriers:

The Arkansas Workforce Cabinet was created via Governor's Executive Order in February 2023, to enable a single entity to coordinate workforce development and career education services statewide. This same order created the position of Chief Workforce Officer to coordinate, manage, and direct the workforce policies and career education strategy for the State of Arkansas. As a result, Arkansas's Workforce Strategy was released in February 2024, detailing ways to grow and develop Arkansas's workforce.

Arkansas's program directors and legal staff are drafting potential legislation to amend state laws that potentially limit the Governor's current authority or otherwise create potential barriers to implementing the requested waiver. Upon the approval by the Department and the Governor, Arkansas will coordinate with stakeholders, elected officials, and legislators for support and passage of the proposed legislation by the General Assembly. Arkansas is currently working to identify any rules and policies and will follow the appropriate administrative processes to implement proposed changes.

A description of the state's strategic goal(s):

The Arkansas Workforce Strategy is a collaborative, competency-based, customer-centric, and responsive workforce system that meets current and future needs of employers, incumbent workers, and job seekers. The strategy fosters partnerships across sectors to align workforce development with industry needs; aligns training and career pathways with real-world skills and competencies; tailors services to meet the unique needs and goals of job seekers, incumbent workers, and employers; and adapts quickly to economic changes and labor market trends for timely alignment of workforce efforts. These themes collectively aim to create a more dynamic, inclusive, and effective workforce ecosystem in Arkansas.

Arkansas's primary goal for this waiver is to create a more agile board poised to innovate and strengthen alignment among programs. By incorporating the Arkansas Workforce Cabinet and the Arkansas Career Education Workforce Development Board into a single statewide board, the result will eliminate the administrative maze and inefficiency of multiple entities working independently. Local representation will remain through fewer newly created regional workforce business councils designed to improve service delivery for regional employer talent needs. Consolidation of workforce governance structures will enable the state to streamline decision-making, improve cross-system coordination, and align workforce strategies across programs.

A discussion of how the waiver complements Department of Labor priorities (i.e. expansion of apprenticeship, improved employer engagement, etc.):

Approval of this waiver aligns with the following DOL strategic pillars from America's Talent Strategy: Building the Workforce for the Golden Age:

- *Industry-Driven Strategies.* This waiver will allow the State Board to more effectively integrate expertise from key economic sectors, workforce partners, and education systems. The current structure of multiple workforce-related entities may result in fragmented strategic planning, duplicative governance processes, and inconsistent policy direction. By consolidating these structures, the state will be better positioned to coordinate workforce policies across workforce programs, economic development initiatives, education and training systems, and industry sector partnerships. This integrated governance model will enable the state to more effectively align workforce investments with high-growth industries and emerging economic opportunities, ensuring that workforce strategies support the broader economic competitiveness of the state.
- *Worker Mobility.* This waiver will improve coordination among workforce programs that serve job seekers, including programs that support individuals facing barriers to employment. Consolidation of workforce-related boards will allow the state to implement more integrated strategies that address workforce participation, training access, and employment outcomes. Improved governance alignment will also support stronger coordination among partners, ensuring that workforce investments support labor market mobility and access to opportunities statewide.
- *Integrated Systems.* This waiver will strengthen Arkansas's use of integrated data systems to evaluate workforce outcomes and ensure continuous improvement across the system. An integrated governance structure will enable a stronger, more unified emphasis on the importance of using data to drive performance across programs.
- *Accountability.* Consolidating workforce governance bodies will allow Arkansas to establish clearer accountability structures for workforce system performance. A unified governance framework will facilitate improved oversight of workforce programs, better coordination of performance measurement strategies, and more effective use of workforce data to inform policy decisions. This approach will support the state's ability to evaluate outcomes, identify areas for improvement, and ensure that workforce investments deliver measurable results for job seekers, employers, and communities.
- *Flexibility and Innovation.* This waiver will allow Arkansas to maintain an agile and adaptable workforce system, capable of evolving in step with economic shifts. As state economic priorities change, so too would the prioritization of industry investments. Streamlined operations and unified planning strategies statewide allow these shifts to occur more quickly and efficiently.

Quantifiable projected programmatic outcomes resulting from implementation of the waiver:

This waiver will allow greater flexibility, speed, and focus on the customer. A unified governance structure will facilitate stronger collaboration among programs responsible for career pathways, credential attainment, work-based learning, and skills-based learning. This alignment will improve the ability of the workforce system to scale training strategies that lead to high-quality employment opportunities. Expected outcomes include improved alignment of workforce strategies statewide and increased administrative efficiency through reduced duplicative planning processes as well as improved service delivery consistency.

Arkansas's proposal will generate substantial and measurable improvements in service delivery and fiscal efficiency while maintaining the high-quality standards of existing performance metrics. Based on the anticipated restructuring of workforce operations in Arkansas, this proposal will redirect approximately \$6M annually from duplicative operating and administrative structure expenses to direct participant services. Arkansas anticipates that these cost savings will impact WIOA customers two-fold by: (1) increasing funding available for existing participants that have additional barriers not yet fully resolved; and (2) providing direct support funding for more than 200 additional Title I participants statewide each year. Also, in the spirit of WIOA's intent, Arkansas will be able to emphasize spending program funds towards those individuals most in need who can benefit from intensive intervention and direct training and support, all of which positively impacts the achievement of performance goals and may boost the outcome metrics incrementally once the effects of the new framework have been fully realized. In addition, this proposal will streamline governance, reduce compliance risk, and ensure consistent statewide policy implementation, strengthening Arkansas's ability to meet the needs of employers, jobseekers, and communities.

Expected Levels of Performance

WIOA Title I Adult-

Employment Rate (Q2) 72.9%, Employment Rate (Q4) 71.1%, Median Earnings \$7,750.00, Credential Rate 73.0%, Measurable Skills Gains 66.3%

WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker-

Employment Rate (Q2) 74.7%, Employment Rate (Q4) 72.3%, Median Earnings \$8,280.00, Credential Rate 75.0%, Measurable Skills Gains 66.3%

WIOA Title I Youth-

Education and Employment Rate (Q2) 68.9%, Education and Employment Rate (Q4) 69.3%, Median Earnings \$3,950.00, Credential Rate 52.2%, Measurable Skills Gains 65.9%

WIOA Title III- Wagner Peyser

Employment Rate (Q2) 63.7%, Employment Rate (Q4) 63.1%, Median Earnings \$6,905.00

Individuals, groups, or populations benefitting, or otherwise impacted by the waiver from the waiver:

This waiver will benefit multiple stakeholders within the workforce system including job seekers and program participants, employers and industry partners, and education and training providers. Participants will benefit from more consistent service delivery and expanded access to statewide initiatives. Employers will benefit from improved coordination of workforce services and sector partnerships. As a result, Arkansas will increase services such as enhanced education, employment, and training opportunities for disadvantaged populations and individuals with multiple barriers to employment.

How the state plans to monitor waiver implementation, including collection of measurable waiver outcome information:

Upon DOL's approval of this waiver request, Arkansas will communicate the waiver allowance to stakeholders within the workforce ecosystem. Arkansas will monitor progress under this waiver by reviewing implementation of statewide strategies, performance outcomes, and employer engagement analysis. Arkansas will also monitor the quality of services provided statewide in order to ensure continuous improvement. Arkansas will report waiver outcomes in the state's WIOA Annual Report. If the state requests renewal of this waiver, then Arkansas will provide the most recent outcomes data available.

The implementation timeline will begin in the same quarter that USDOL approves the plan and waiver, allowing Arkansas to immediately initiate a structured, phased transition that protects service continuity while standing up a unified statewide system. Full implementation will occur once legislation is passed in 2027. Local workforce boards will begin closeout activities on a phased schedule aligned with each board's remaining program-year funds, ensuring an orderly wind-down of operations without disrupting participant services. During this same period, the state will recruit, hire, and train new staff to assume statewide service delivery and oversight functions, while also reshaping the State Workforce Development Board's composition to fully meet WIOA requirements for a board acting in a local capacity. This sequenced approach ensures compliance, minimizes disruption, and positions Arkansas to fully realize the benefits of a single statewide planning area.

Required Elements - Waiver #7

Title: Youth Program Elements Flexibility

The statutory and/or regulatory requirements the state would like to waive:

As outlined in Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 05-25, **the State of Arkansas is seeking a waiver of the requirements outlined in WIOA Section 129 (c)(2) regarding the 14 youth program elements. This waiver would enable increased flexibility in providing the services most needed. This will allow Arkansas to focus on work-based learning and occupational skills training opportunities in demand statewide while remaining agile and responsive to emerging needs.**

Actions the state has undertaken to remove state or local barriers:

The current four-year plan includes two approved youth waivers designed to address previously identified barriers. The two-year modification includes evidenced collaboration from CTE programs by embedding the Perkins V plan. This action strengthens support for youth as well as clearly defines the state's plan to deliver services to ISY and OSY.

A description of the state's strategic goal(s):

The Arkansas Workforce Strategy is a collaborative, competency-based, customer-centric, and responsive workforce system that meets current and future needs of employers, incumbent workers, and job seekers. The strategy fosters partnerships across sectors to align workforce development with industry needs; aligns training and career pathways with real-world skills and competencies; tailors services to meet the unique needs and goals of job seekers, incumbent workers, and employers; and adapts quickly to economic changes and labor market trends for timely alignment of workforce efforts. These themes collectively aim to create a more dynamic, inclusive, and effective workforce ecosystem in Arkansas.

Arkansas's primary goal for this waiver is to prioritize the youth program elements most responsive to labor market needs in order to enable the workforce system to deploy resources more strategically. The state's workforce network is robust and inclusive of multiple required and additional partners who collaborate to provide an array of services through the use of technology on shared platforms and referral systems; this ensures that necessary and suitable services to youth will not lack because of this waiver.

A discussion of how the waiver complements Department of Labor priorities (i.e. expansion of apprenticeship, improved employer engagement, etc.):

Approval of this waiver aligns with the following DOL strategic pillars from America's Talent Strategy: Building the Workforce for the Golden Age:

- *Industry-Driven Strategies.* This waiver will allow the state to prioritize services that most directly connect youth to in-demand occupations. Waiving this requirement will allow Arkansas to strategically emphasize program elements that support industry-driven strategies such as work-based learning opportunities, occupational skills training aligned with high-demand sectors, internships and apprenticeships, and career exploration linked to sector partnerships. This flexibility will allow the state to focus resources on services that lead directly to employment in industries critical to Arkansas's economic growth.
- *Worker Mobility.* This waiver will enable the state to design service delivery strategies that more effectively support youth in achieving long-term economic mobility. The state will be able to emphasize services that support career pathway development, including occupational skills training, industry-recognized credential attainment, career coaching and navigation, and paid work experiences that connect youth to long-term employment opportunities. This approach strengthens the system's ability to help youth transition into high-quality employment and build sustainable careers.
- *Integrated Systems.* This waiver will ensure that existing community and partner resources are leveraged to support a broad range of services without requiring the state to independently administer or secure every program element. This approach supports coordinated service delivery across agencies rather than duplicated across programs.
- *Accountability.* This waiver will not hamper the state's responsibility to meet expected performance measures for the youth program. The state will remain fully accountable for achieving performance outcomes under WIOA and will continue to monitor service delivery to ensure youth participants receive the services necessary to achieve successful employment and education outcomes. This waiver will allow the state to focus resources on services that most directly contribute to measurable performance outcomes while maintaining oversight through the existing monitoring framework.

- ***Flexibility and Innovation.*** This waiver will enable the state to design innovative service strategies tailored to the needs of youth participants and employers. This flexibility will support the development of new program models that incorporate employer-led training programs, sector-based youth initiatives, innovative work-based learning models, and partnerships with community organizations. By removing rigid program design requirements, this waiver will enable the workforce system to pilot new approaches that improve youth engagement and employment outcomes.

Quantifiable projected programmatic outcomes resulting from implementation of the waiver:

Expected outcomes include increased youth participation in work-based learning experiences, improved employment and education outcomes, and increased attainment of industry-recognized credentials, as well as reduced administrative burden, improved cross-program partnerships, and greater program innovation.

Expected Levels of Performance

WIOA Title I Youth-

Education and Employment Rate (Q2) 68.9%, Education and Employment Rate (Q4) 69.3%, Median Earnings \$3,950.00, Credential Rate 52.2%, Measurable Skills Gains 65.9%

Individuals, groups, or populations benefitting, or otherwise impacted by the waiver from the waiver:

This waiver will primarily benefit youth program participants. However, employers and industry partners will also benefit from increased alignment with economic priorities and workforce development needs.

How the state plans to monitor waiver implementation, including collection of measurable waiver outcome information:

Upon DOL's approval of this waiver request, Arkansas will communicate the waiver allowance to stakeholders within the workforce ecosystem. Arkansas will monitor progress under this waiver through the existing monitoring framework including analysis of WIOA performance measures and program enrollments. Arkansas will also monitor the quality of services provided statewide in order to ensure continuous improvement. Arkansas will report waiver outcomes in the state's WIOA Annual Report. If the state requests renewal of this waiver, then Arkansas will provide the most recent outcomes data available.

The implementation timeline will begin in the same quarter that USDOL approves the plan and waiver.

WAIVER REQUEST- RENEWALS

1) Statutory or Regulatory Requirement for which Waiver is Requested and Intended Goals.

Waiver #1: The State of Arkansas is seeking a waiver renewal from the WIOA Section 129(a)(4)(A) and 20 CFR Part 681.410, which require not less than 75 percent of funds allotted to states under Section 127(b)(1)(C), reserved under Section 128(a), and available for statewide activities under subsection (b), and not less than 75 percent of funds available to local areas under subsection (c), shall be used to provide youth workforce investment activities for Out-of-School Youth (OSY).

Arkansas is requesting to:

- Lower the minimum OSY expenditure requirement to 50 percent for formula funding at both the state and local levels; and
- Eliminate the minimum OSY expenditure requirement for WIOA Statewide Activities funding when providing direct services to youth.

Arkansas has continuously met the 75% OSY requirement, and although Arkansas recognizes the importance of serving the OSY population, we have also determined that a shift in being able engage more in-school youth (ISY) earlier on may help yield better results in Arkansas' overall workforce strategies. We believe that early intervention will reduce the likelihood of youth becoming disconnected or disengaged from the labor force.

Currently, the 75% OSY requirement limits the ability of the State and local areas to:

- Effectively support Governor Sanders work-based learning initiatives
- Partner with state programs such as Arkansas' Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) and several CTE programs, including those who offer pre-apprenticeships that lead to registered apprenticeship programs directly after the completion of a secondary education program.
- Provide valuable services to Arkansas' young adults who are at risk of becoming opportunity youth

Creating a system where unified services are available to at-risk young adults through State initiatives and programs are projected to strengthen long-term positive outcomes for this population.

Waiver #2: The State of Arkansas is seeking a waiver renewal from the WIOA Section 20 CFR 681.550 to allow WIOA individual training accounts (ITAs) for in-school youth (ISY). This requirement impedes the ability of Arkansas to implement its plan to improve the workforce development system. The approval of this waiver will not impede the State's efforts to prioritize OSY, including outreach to the OSY population.

Arkansas is requesting to:

- waive the requirement limiting ITAs to only out-of-school youth (OSY), ages 16–24. In addition to these OSY, the State requests to use ITAs for ISY, ages 16–21.

This waiver request is in response to Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders' Executive Order (EO) 23-16, which created the Governor's Workforce Cabinet and the position of the Chief Workforce

Officer (CWO) to advise the Governor on issues regarding workforce development and career education in Arkansas and to undertake the following duties:

- Coordinate, integrate, and optimize services, funding, and resources to maximize desired outcomes and improve operational efficiencies.
- Ensure a talent-driven education and workforce system that addresses the current and future needs of Arkansas employers and individuals.
- Prepare and implement a data-driven workforce strategic plan using high-quality data and subject matter expertise.

Skill Gaps and Labor Force Participation: Arkansas is challenged by a noticeable skills gap, where employers struggle to find candidates with the necessary skills, especially in fast-growing industries. Additionally, labor force participation rates lagged behind national averages, pointing to untapped potential in the state's workforce.

Educational Alignment with Industry Needs: There is a growing recognition that educational pathways need better alignment with industry requirements to ensure that students and job seekers are prepared for successful careers.

(2) Actions Undertaken to Remove State or Local Statutory or Regulatory Barriers.

There are currently no state or local statutory or regulatory barriers to implementing the requested waiver. Current State of Arkansas laws, regulations, and policies follow federal law, regulations, and guidance.

(3) Goals of Waiver and Expected Programmatic Outcomes if Granted.

These waiver requests aligns with Arkansas' goals outlined in the State Plan.

Specifically, strategic goals:

Strategic Goal 1: Develop an efficient partnership with employers, the educational system, workforce development partners, and community -based organizations to deliver a platform that will prepare a skilled workforce for existing and new employers.

Strategic Goal 2: Enhance service delivery to employers and jobseekers.

Strategic Goal 3: Increase awareness of the State's Talent Development System.

Strategic Goal 4: Address Skills Gaps

(4) Waiver Alignment with Policy Priorities.

- (A) supporting employer engagement;
- (B) connecting education and training strategies;
- (C) supporting work-based learning;
- (D) improving job and career results, and

(E) other guidance issued by the Department.

WIOA places an emphasis on pre-employment education and training as well as access to a continuum of work-based learning opportunities. Further, as stated in TEN 31-16, Registered Apprentices is a valuable work-based training opportunity and a proven model of job preparation that combines paid on-the-job training and related instruction to progressively increase workers' skill level and wages. The approval of these waivers will provide more flexibility to utilize funding to support these strategies in high schools, connecting students to the training and education they need and providing employers with an expanded talent pipeline of available workforce. Additionally, while students who are defined as "in-school" theoretically already have supports available, many students are close to disengaging from the education system and the utilization of this waiver will allow local boards to connect with those students prior to dropping out, connecting them to different education and training strategies that will increase their likelihood of success and improving job and career results.

Expected Levels of Performance

WIOA Title I Youth-

Education and Employment Rate (Q2) 68.9%, Education and Employment Rate (Q4) 69.3%, Median Earnings \$3,950.00, Credential Rate 52.2%, Measurable Skills Gains 65.9%

(5) Individuals affected by the waiver and Impact of Waiver on Services for Disadvantaged Populations or Individuals with Multiple Barriers to Employment.

These waivers will provide the flexibility to serve more youth and young adults in work-based learning, including apprenticeship, regardless of school status. It will facilitate the provision of the necessary funding and the ease of current regulations essential to designing programs that will aid youth and young adults in the preparation for long-term participation in Arkansas' labor force. Economic growth in Arkansas and its high-growth industries will be sustained with the infusion of skilled workers ready to fill current job openings and adequately trained for future openings. Additionally, this waiver supports Governor Sanders overall workforce vision and ensures all Arkansas students have opportunities for meaningful work-based learning experiences. Arkansas' students and eligible youth population, as well as Arkansas' employers who need immediate assistance to fill open positions and train their future workforce, will benefit from these waivers.

(6) Processes to be Used.

- (A) Monitor the progress in implementing the waiver;
- (B) Provide notice to any local board affected by the waiver;
- (C) Provide any local board affected by the waiver an opportunity to comment on the request;
- (D) Ensure meaningful public comment, including comment by business and organized labor, on the waiver.
- (E) Collect and report information about waiver outcomes in the State's WIOA Annual Report.

State staff will monitor the implementation and outcomes of this waiver through monthly tracking of youth expenditures, utilization of reporting from the statewide data management system, and through programmatic and fiscal monitoring. All LWDBs, business, and organized labor will be provided the opportunity to comment on the waiver request through the public comment period of the PY26-27 WIOA Combined State Plan modification. The state assures all data collected and reported, including waiver outcomes, will be included in the WIOA Annual Report as required.

The implementation timeline will begin in the same quarter that USDOL approves the plan and waiver.

(7) The most recent data available regarding the results and outcomes observed through implementation of the existing waiver, in cases where the State seeks renewal of a previously approved waiver.

The State is requesting renewal of the two previously approved waivers detailed above to enhance access, flexibility, service alignment, and effectiveness in serving youth participants.

While only three local workforce development boards have leveraged the approved waivers in the current plan period, the state board, under the proposed service delivery model, will prioritize the utilization of the the waivers if approved for renewal. The outcomes for initial usage indicate that more ISY participants were able to be served and provided with work experience in those three areas.

(8) A description of the state's strategic goal(s):

Arkansas's primary goal for this waiver is to prioritize the youth program services that are most responsive to labor market needs in order to enable the workforce system to deploy resources more strategically. Occupational skills training and work-based learning models are proven to be more effective amongst youth who receive this category of service.

A discussion of how the waiver complements Department of Labor priorities (i.e. expansion of apprenticeship, improved employer engagement, etc.):

Approval of this waiver aligns with the following DOL strategic pillars from America's Talent Strategy: Building the Workforce for the Golden Age:

- Industry-Driven Strategies. This waiver will allow the state to prioritize services that most directly connect youth to in-demand occupations. Waiving this requirement will allow Arkansas to strategically emphasize program elements that support industry-driven strategies such as work-based learning opportunities, occupational skills training aligned with high-demand sectors, internships and apprenticeships, and career exploration linked to sector partnerships. This flexibility will allow the state to focus resources on services that lead directly to employment in industries critical to Arkansas's economic growth.
- Worker Mobility. This waiver will enable the state to design service delivery strategies that more effectively support youth in achieving long-term economic mobility. The state will be able to emphasize services that support career pathway development, including occupational skills training, industry-recognized credential attainment, career coaching and navigation, and paid work experiences that connect youth to long-term

employment opportunities. This approach strengthens the system’s ability to help youth transition into high-quality employment and build sustainable careers.

- *Integrated Systems.* This waiver will ensure that existing community and partner resources are leveraged to support a broad range of services without requiring the state to independently administer or secure every program element. This approach supports coordinated service delivery across agencies rather than duplicated across programs.
- *Accountability.* This waiver will not hamper the state’s responsibility to meet expected performance measures for the youth program. The state will remain fully accountable for achieving performance outcomes under WIOA and will continue to monitor service delivery to ensure youth participants receive the services necessary to achieve successful employment and education outcomes. This waiver will allow the state to focus resources on services that most directly contribute to measurable performance outcomes while maintaining oversight through the existing monitoring framework.
- *Flexibility and Innovation.* This waiver will enable the state to design innovative service strategies tailored to the needs of youth participants and employers. This flexibility will support the development of new program models that incorporate employer-led training programs, sector-based youth initiatives, innovative work-based learning models, and partnerships with community organizations. By removing rigid program design requirements, this waiver will enable the workforce system to pilot new approaches that improve youth engagement and employment outcomes.

TITLE I-B ASSURANCES

Title I Response:

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The State has implemented a policy to ensure Adult program funds provide a priority in the delivery of training services and individualized career services to individuals who are low income, public assistance recipients and basic skills deficient;	Yes
2. The State has implemented a policy to ensure local areas have a process in place for referring eligible veterans with employment barriers to career services provided by the JVSG program’s Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist;	Yes
3. The State established a written policy and procedure that set forth criteria to be used by	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
chief elected officials for the appointment of local workforce investment board members;	
4. The State established written policy and procedures to ensure local workforce investment boards are certified by the governor every two years in accordance with WIOA section 107(c)(2);	Yes
5. Where an alternative entity takes the place of a State Board, the State has written policy and procedures to ensure the alternative entity meets the definition under WIOA section 101(e) and the legal requirements for membership;	Yes
6. The State established a written policy and procedure for how the individuals and entities represented on the State Workforce Development Board help to determine the methods and factors of distribution, and how the State consults with chief elected officials in local areas throughout the State in determining the distributions;	Yes
7. The State will not use funds received under WIOA Title I to assist, promote, or deter union organizing in accordance with WIOA section 181(b)(7);	Yes
8. The State distributes adult and youth funds received under WIOA by formula, and no local area shall “receive an allocation percentage for a fiscal year that is less than 90 percent of the average allocation percentage of the local area for the 2 preceding fiscal years” [(WIOA Section 133(b)(2)(A)(ii)];;	Yes
9. If a State Workforce Development Board, department, or agency administers State laws for vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, that board, department, or agency cooperates with the agency that administers Wagner-Peyser services, Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and Youth Programs under Title I;	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
10. The State agrees to report on the impact and outcomes of its approved waivers in its WIOA Annual Report.	Yes
11. The State has taken appropriate action to secure compliance with the Uniform Guidance at 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 2900, including that the State will annually monitor local areas to ensure compliance and otherwise take appropriate action to secure compliance with the Uniform Guidance under section WIOA 184(a)(3);	Yes

ADULT PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Title I Response:

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY2024 Projected Actual Rating	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	81.0%	81.0%	79.1%	81.0%	81.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	79.0%	79.0%	78.1%	79.0%	79.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	7,750.00	7,750.00	7,750.13	7,750.00	7,750.00
Credential Attainment Rate	73.0%	73.0%	73.8%	73.0%	73.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	73.7%	73.7%	82.4%	73.7%	73.7%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹		Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

DISLOCATED PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Title I Response:

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY2024 Projected Actual Rating	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	83.0%	83.0%	77.1%	83.0%	83.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	83.0%	83.0%	77.7%	83.0%	83.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	9,200.00	9,200.00	7,140.01	9,200.00	9,200.00
Credential Attainment Rate	75.0%	75.0%	84.0%	75.0%	75.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	75.6%	75.6%	86.7%	75.6%	75.6%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹		Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

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The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

YOUTH PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Title I Response:

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY2024 Projected Actual Rating	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	76.6%	76.6%	71.5%	76.6%	76.6%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	77.0%	77.0%	71.4%	77.0%	77.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	3,950.00	3,950.00	4,515.50	3,950.00	3,950.00
Credential Attainment Rate	58.0%	58.0%	53.7%	58.0%	58.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	65.9%	65.9%	69.4%	65.9%	65.9%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹		Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

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The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR WAGNER-PEYSER PROGRAM (EMPLOYMENT SERVICES)

A. EMPLOYMENT SERVICE STAFF

1. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL STAFF THE PROVISION OF LABOR EXCHANGE SERVICES UNDER THE WAGNER-PEYSER ACT, SUCH AS THROUGH STATE EMPLOYEES, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO STATE MERIT STAFF EMPLOYEES, STAFF OF A SUBRECIPIENT, OR SOME COMBINATION THEREOF.

Title III Response:

As the Wagner-Peyser agency for Arkansas, the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services has historically utilized state merit staff employees to provide labor exchange services. In the future, the Agency would like to implement other available options to provide more flexibilities, due to funding constraints. Currently, the employment services team is comprised of eligibility specialists who assist jobseekers and employers, both in American Job Centers throughout the state as well as through a virtual call center. Upon approval of the waiver requests, Wagner Peyser staff will become a part of an integrated service delivery model for WIOA titles I and III

assisting with enrollment for multiple programs under the Arkansas Workforce Connections umbrella.

2. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL UTILIZE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES FOR EMPLOYMENT SERVICE STAFF TO ENSURE STAFF IS ABLE TO PROVIDE HIGH QUALITY SERVICES TO BOTH JOBSEEKERS AND EMPLOYERS

Title III Response:

The state uses professional development activities for Employment Services staff such as targeted training activities to cross-train in specific program areas (Veterans and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Unemployment Insurance) to ensure staff is able to provide quality services to both jobseekers and employers.

Additionally, the State Employment Services Program Manager conducts periodic group and individual technical assistance and training sessions designed to address specific program issues identified during reviews of program performance data.

Both of these methods enable staff to assist jobseekers with knowing and improving their skills, obtaining the best job possible, and progressing in a career pathway. Staff has been provided with the required information about programs and hear a consistent message regarding expected levels of performance, service delivery and service quality.

Employment services staff are also encouraged to take advantage of training offered through Google certificates in the areas of artificial intelligence and project management- in hopes to maximize productivity and technology to carry out their roles. Managerial staff are engaged in statewide certified public manager programs designed to equip emerging leaders for public administration readiness.

The state is also soliciting the support of third-party partners for training and coaching related to regional planning and community asset mapping. This will strengthen the capacity of all WIOA partners to share resources, refer, and serve customers through a unified service delivery strategy.

3. DESCRIBE STRATEGIES DEVELOPED TO SUPPORT TRAINING AND AWARENESS ACROSS CORE PROGRAMS AND THE UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (UI) PROGRAM AND THE TRAINING PROVIDED FOR EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND WIOA STAFF ON IDENTIFICATION OF UI ELIGIBILITY ISSUES AND REFERRAL TO UI STAFF FOR ADJUDICATION

Title III Response:

Effective methods of communication have been established to provide all staff with updates to programs and services offered by the core and required partners. Employment Service staff are currently trained to identify and refer those issues to UI staff for investigation. Training the Employment Services staff on identifying UI issues, and the referral process has been provided.

Refresher training sessions will be provided to staff performing employment services, and updates to the UI program will be shared as they occur.

B. EXPLAIN HOW THE STATE WILL PROVIDE INFORMATION AND MEANINGFUL ASSISTANCE TO INDIVIDUALS REQUESTING ASSISTANCE IN FILING A CLAIM FOR UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION THROUGH ONE-STOP CENTERS, AS REQUIRED BY WIOA AS A CAREER SERVICE

Title III Response:

Career services, including assistance in filing a claim for unemployment compensation, are offered in every Arkansas Workforce Center. Arkansas is uniquely setup to serve UI claimants through a service center model accessible statewide by customers. Employment services staff and one-stop partners are cross-trained to understand the basic requirements of all programs within the one-stop center. Individuals who seek assistance in filing UI claims, are provided with instructions on how to file and are also assisted with following through with those claims whether it be through helping a customer connect to the hotline via technology and equipment within the office, or providing accessibility options for customers who might need special accommodations or assistance. Each customer is provided with a center orientation that details all available services including labor exchange services and referrals to other programs and resources.

C. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S STRATEGY FOR PROVIDING REEMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE TO UI CLAIMANTS AND OTHER UNEMPLOYED INDIVIDUALS

Title III Response:

The Division of Reemployment administers the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program, which uses claimant demographic data to identify Unemployment Insurance (UI) claimants who are most at risk of exhausting their benefits before securing employment. To remain eligible for UI benefits, participants are required to complete a one-on-one assessment and attend a RESEA Workshop.

During the one-on-one assessment, claimants are provided with the following services:

- An orientation to the Arkansas Workforce Center system
- A review of continued eligibility for Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits
- An overview of RESEA program requirements
- Targeted labor market information
- Development of an Individual Employment Plan (IEP)
- Referrals to partner services to address identified barriers
- Referrals to education or training, as requested
- Job search assistance
- Résumé review
- Information on short-term credentials such as the NCRC/WAGE Certificates.
- ID Verification

In the week following the one-on-one assessment, claimants are required to participate in a RESEA Workshop. Currently, four RESEA workshops are offered: Career Path Explorations, Job Search Strategies, LinkedIn Optimization and Networking, and Reemployment Services and Interview Preparation. Claimants may choose the workshop that best supports their job search, with guidance from their Program Eligibility Specialist.

The purposes of the RESEA program are identified in Section 306(b) of the Social Security Act (SSA):

- (1) To improve employment outcomes of UC recipients and reduce the average duration of UC receipt through employment;
- (2) To strengthen program integrity and reduce improper UC payments through the detection and prevention of such payments to ineligible individuals;
- (3) To promote the alignment with the broader vision of WIOA of increased program integration and service delivery for job seekers, including UC claimants; and
- (4) To establish reemployment services and eligibility assessments as an entry point for UC claimants into other workforce system partner programs.

D. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE W-P FUNDS TO SUPPORT UI CLAIMANTS, AND THE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN W-P AND UI, AS APPROPRIATE INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING:

Title III Response:

Currently claimants who file initial, additional or reopened claims for unemployment insurance benefits through ADWS' EZARC system simultaneously create registrations through the Arkansas Job Link "AJL" system, which can still be utilized for job services. It is also used by Workforce Center staff for case management.

With the introduction of the Arkansas Launch for Job Seekers platform, claimants are now able to utilize the work search strategies and suggestions to locate the labor market information in their area to best provide information for best job opportunities. As the unemployment program is now requiring the reporting of work search at the weekly certification process, Arkansas Launch for Job Seekers allows them to capture these work search activities for their weekly certifications, while they are looking for work.

Once registered, jobseekers have access to all of the online features, such as searching for jobs, identifying employment occupational information, using the virtual recruiter to automatically receive alerts of new jobs that match the job skills in their resume, and having the resume viewable by employers registered in the system.

Claimants who file initial, additional, or reopened claims for unemployment insurance through methods other than ADWS' EZARC system are required to register for work through Arkansas Launch for Job Seekers.

UI claimants must submit weekly certifications through Arkansas Launch or via ArkLine (Telephone) that they satisfied the continuing eligibility requirements of the unemployment insurance program. Those requirements are: continue to be totally unemployed or working part-time; able to work; available for work; and actively seeking work as demonstrated by completing five work search activities per week. -Claimants who fail to meet all of the eligibility requirements are referred to unemployment insurance staff members for further analysis and if applicable, to adjudication staff.

Employment Services staff are trained and equipped to provide career services to UI claimants. Through tools such as CiviForm, the common intake and digital referral system mentioned in this plan, customers will receive services in a holistic manner. A single contact number is used by claimants and staffed by Reemployment and Workforce Connections staff that allows individuals to receive services through one point of entry. This system provides claimants with access to various services and allows for a bridge or hand-off to occur in real-time.

E. AGRICULTURAL OUTREACH PLAN (AOP). EACH STATE AGENCY MUST DEVELOP AN AOP EVERY FOUR YEARS AS PART OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN REQUIRED UNDER SECTIONS 102 OR 103 OF WIOA. THE AOP MUST INCLUDE AN ASSESSMENT OF NEED. AN ASSESSMENT NEED DESCRIBES THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF FARMWORKERS IN THE AREA BASED ON PAST AND PROJECTED AGRICULTURAL AND FARMWORKER ACTIVITY IN THE STATE. SUCH NEEDS MAY INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO: EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING, AND HOUSING.

1. ASSESSMENT OF NEED. PROVIDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF FARMWORKERS IN THE AREA BASED ON PAST AND PROJECTED AGRICULTURAL AND FARMWORKER ACTIVITY IN THE STATE. SUCH NEEDS MAY INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO: EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING, AND HOUSING.

Title III Response:

Arkansas is a major producer of a variety of agronomic crops. Agriculture is Arkansas' largest industry, adding around \$16 billion to the state's economy annually. The Natural State's diverse landscape and climate produce a wide variety of Arkansas agricultural products. Arkansas is a major exporter of rice, soybeans, cotton, poultry and feed grains. There are 41,900 farms statewide and 96 percent of Arkansas' farms are family-owned.

Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers (MSFWs) generally live in rural, isolated areas throughout Arkansas. Approximately 90 percent are of Hispanic/Latino origin; many are primarily monolingual in Spanish; and more than 70 percent are from Mexico. These farmworkers have several obstacles to employment which include transportation, childcare, limited English-speaking abilities and education, and job training. All of these barriers are major reasons for their lack of economic mobility.

Assessing the unique needs of the MSFW population in Arkansas, like many other states, presents several challenges. The MSFW is difficult to identify, share information with or locate. Despite high agricultural activity within the state, it appears a significant number of MSFWs

pass through Arkansas for seasonal work and continue to other states, looking at Arkansas as merely a “stopover”.

In 2023, efforts were redoubled to create and strengthen relationships with other State agencies, such as the Arkansas Department of Agriculture. This partnership has already yielded benefits in the ability to identify the needs of the State's agricultural employers. Additionally, connections have been made with non-profit and private organizations such as the Mexican Consulate, Arkansas Human Development Corporation, and the University of Arkansas - Little Rock Extension Service. These efforts are designed to develop a more complete and comprehensive outreach plan into both the employer and farmworker populations in Arkansas. These relationships will provide the basis for reaching out to farmworkers to assess and address their employment, training, and housing needs.

Typical comments from employers and their permanent, full-time field supervisors suggest that MSFWs come here to work, earn their money and move to the next location. They most generally are sending a significant portion of their pay to their families and must bring in a paycheck.

They have no time for training for other employment, unless they can no longer work in the fields due to age, health or other factors. Employers, obviously, want to keep these valued workers and would be reluctant to encourage training or employment outside of meeting the agricultural needs they have. Based upon comments from our agricultural employers, many of these workers may benefit from ESL or "soft skills" training during their stay in this country.

Other factors such as healthcare, schooling for children, employer requirements, rights, insurance, health & safety information, availability of adequate work clothing and transportation, among others, are needs of the MSFWs. Lack of identification and contact makes it difficult to know how great the needs are. MSFWs are rarely provided transportation to be able to come to town or a career center. Career centers are not available during the hours when they are not working. The needed information must be brought to the MSFWs in the fields, communities, or frequented businesses/services they utilize.

2. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITY IN THE STATE MEANS: 1) IDENTIFYING THE TOP FIVE LABOR-INTENSIVE CROPS, THE MONTHS OF HEAVY ACTIVITY, AND THE GEOGRAPHIC AREA OF PRIME ACTIVITY; 2) SUMMARIZE THE AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS' NEEDS IN THE STATE (I.E. ARE THEY PREDOMINANTLY HIRING LOCAL OR FOREIGN WORKERS, ARE THEY EXPRESSING THAT THERE IS A SCARCITY IN THE AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE); AND 3) IDENTIFYING ANY ECONOMIC, NATURAL, OR OTHER FACTORS THAT ARE AFFECTING AGRICULTURE IN THE STATE OR ANY PROJECTED FACTORS THAT WILL AFFECT AGRICULTURE IN THE STATE

Title III Response: The main agricultural crops in Arkansas are soybeans, hay rice, corn, and cotton, with an estimated projected harvest of nearly seven million acres that were harvested in program year 2022. Most of these main agricultural crops are concentrated in Central, Eastern, and Northeastern Arkansas. While production continues year round, the heaviest months of activity are January through October.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, most of these main agricultural crops are concentrated in the following regions:

- District 60 (East Central Arkansas) — Arkansas, Cross, Crittenden, Lee, Lonoke, Monroe, Prairie, Phillips, St. Francis, and Woodruff counties.
- District 30 (Northeastern Arkansas) — Clay, Craighead, Greene, Independence, Jackson, Lawrence, Mississippi, Randolph, and White counties.
- District 90 (Southeast Arkansas) — Ashley, Chicot, Desha, Drew, Jefferson, and Lincoln counties.

These are seasonal jobs requiring more than four thousand migrant and seasonal workers to cultivate and plant, till and harvest these crops. Agricultural employers are increasingly faced with the lack of domestic labor willing and able to do these long and hard jobs outdoors in all kinds of weather. The majority of these seasonal workers are foreign born workers entering the country on H2-A Visas (temporary agriculture) and most of the returning workers are coming from Mexico. The next highest percentage of workers are traveling from South Africa. Free housing is included for these workers and any domestic worker that is unable to return to his/her home each day.

The effects of increased rainfall, flooding, and extreme temperatures have impacted and will continue to impact Arkansas' economy and agriculture production. The tightened labor market has created job opportunities with increased pay rates and additional incentives that lure farmworkers from seasonal and temporary farm labor. Agricultural employers are continuing to increase their utilization of the H-2A program annually in Arkansas.

There are estimated to be approximately 4,500 migrant and seasonal farmworkers (MSFWs) in the state at any time; most H2-A workers enter from Mexico and Spanish is the native language spoken. There was a 37 percent increase in the number of new agricultural jobs entered into the Arkansas JobLink system in PY25 from the PY22.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture - National Agricultural Statistics Services, the top five (5) labor-intensive crops, months of heavy activity, and geographic area of prime activity are detailed in the chart below.

Agricultural Activity in Arkansas – Calendar 2022

CROPS	ACRES HARVESTED 2022	PRODUCTION	DURATION OF HARVEST	GEOGRAPHIC AREA/COUNTY
Soybeans	3,180,000	163,280,000 BU	July 15 - November 15	Lee, Phillips, St Francis, Cross
Rice	1,084,000	80,340,000 CWT	August 10 - October 1	Arkansas, Monroe, Prairie
Corn	695,000	120,235 BU	June 25 - August 31	Lee, Phillips, Cross
Cotton	630,000	1,548,000 BALES	August 15 - October 21	Mississippi, Craighead, Crittenden

CROPS	ACRES HARVESTED 2022	PRODUCTION	DURATION OF HARVEST	GEOGRAPHIC AREA/COUNTY
Hay	1,093,000	2,188,000 TON	November 30 - March 1	Lonoke, Prairie, Lee, St. Francis

3. PROVIDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF FARMWORKERS MEANS SUMMARIZING MIGRANT AND SEASONAL FARM WORKER (MSFW) CHARACTERISTICS (INCLUDING IF THEY ARE PREDOMINANTLY FROM CERTAIN COUNTRIES, WHAT LANGUAGE(S) THEY SPEAK, THE APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF MSFWs IN THE STATE DURING PEAK SEASON AND DURING LOW SEASON, AND WHETHER THEY TEND TO BE MIGRANT, SEASONAL, OR YEAR-ROUND FARMWORKERS). THIS INFORMATION MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT DATA SUPPLIED BY WIOA SECTION 167 NATIONAL FARMWORKER JOBS PROGRAM (NFJP) GRANTEES, OTHER MSFW ORGANIZATIONS, EMPLOYER ORGANIZATIONS, AND STATE AND/OR FEDERAL AGENCY DATA SOURCES SUCH AS THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR (DOL) EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ADMINISTRATION

Title III Response:

Arkansas' foreign MSFWs primarily are from Mexico. The other main country of origination for our foreign MSFWs is South Africa. The primary language spoken by MSFWs is Spanish with some MSFWs speaking Afrikaans, with English frequently being a primary or secondary language for South Africa.

A review of Arkansas' Foreign Labor Certification program for the past three years finds that H-2A posted 80% of their job openings during December – February of each year. The remaining 20% were posted throughout the remaining months of the year.

We estimate that there are approximately 8, 500 MSFWs in the State during peak season and approximately 1,500 during low season. This means that approximately 80% of these workers are migrant workers, approximately 10% are seasonal, and the remaining 10% are year-round farmworkers.

There may be additional MSFWs that may meet the guidelines of seasonal farm workers, based upon information from the Arkansas Human Development Corporation, the National Farmworkers Jobs Program (NFJP), Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) section 167 grantee. The partnership will continue in an ongoing effort to serve MSFWs.

Unique Needs of MSFWs

MSFWs are a unique and very important segment of Arkansas' agricultural economy as they are willing to complete the necessary harvesting and manual labor job duties. However, MSFWs also face a number of challenges seldom faced by other workers. Based upon the experience of the State's NFJP grantee and other organizations serving MSFWs, the major challenges this population faces include the following:

- Education: the education level among MSFWs tends to be low

- Language: general lack of ability to speak and read English and, at times, Spanish
- Economic Status: the income level of MSFWs frequently falls well below the poverty level
- Limited access to public transportation in most rural areas of the state

4. OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

The local offices outreach activities must be designed to meet the needs of MSFWs in the State and to locate and contact MSFWs who are not being reached through normal intake activities. Describe the State agency's proposed strategies for:

(A)Contacting farm workers who are not being reached by the normal intake activities conducted by the employment service offices on an ongoing basis. The plan must identify the number of full-time and part-time outreach staff positions in the State and must demonstrate that there are sufficient outreach staff to conduct MSFW outreach in each service area of the State and to contact a majority of MSFWs in the State annually. The plan must explain the materials, tools, and resources the SWA will use for outreach.

Title III Response:

Arkansas recognizes the importance of outreach in providing services to MSFWs and uses a robust approach that includes full-time outreach staff, local office staff, and coordination with partners to reach as many in the MFSW community as possible.

Arkansas strives for continuous improvement in interacting with and providing assistance to the MSFW community. Arkansas was designated in October 2023 as a significant MSFW state. Additionally, the Forrest City and West Memphis workforce centers were designated as significant Multilingual One-Stop Centers.

Strategy 1: Hire full-time, bilingual staff for the identified areas with the largest concentration of MSFWs.

ADWS has a full-time, bilingual Workforce Specialist for Jonesboro. Although attainment of additional outreach staff has been a challenge, ADWS continues to seek full-time, bilingual Workforce Specialists for Forrest City, West Memphis, and the surrounding areas. Arkansas United assisted ADWS in efforts to provide awareness of the position being open for a bilingual individual. Arkansas United assists immigrants statewide with various services such as, but not limited to family-based legal services as they work towards expanding options for the immigrant communities.

Strategy 2: Strengthen established partnerships as well as develop new partnerships with entities serving MSFWs and domestic workers.

Outreach staff coordinates outreach to workers with the Arkansas Human Development Corporation (AHDC). This provides AHDC the opportunity to meet with the employers, workers, and offer services available under the NFJP. This additionally aided in removing a barrier for the NFJP grantee in meeting workers where it may have been an issue in the past with an employer.

The partnership with the Mexican Consulate yielded opportunities for staff to coordinate outreach efforts during events. The Mexican Consulate sets up an event each month to provide services such as, but not limited to birth certificates and processing passports among other services. ADWS schedules a mobile unit for some of these events and provides services such as setting up an Arkansas JobLink account, applying for jobs, and building resumes. These partnerships demonstrate how coordination and collaboration delivers a wide array of services during one event.

The ADWS MSFW Outreach Specialist and State Monitor Advocate continue to seek and establish partnerships with relevant agencies that have not been a part of MSFW efforts, as well as building on partnerships already previously established. Some partnerships include, Arkansas Department of Agriculture, Legal Aid of Arkansas, the Mexican Consulate and various other organizations for the express purposes of identifying other available services for Arkansas' MSFW population.

A new potential partner is UADA-Extension's Center for Rural Resilience & Workforce Development, which increases the capacity of planning and development districts to serve Rural, Hispanic, and Marshallese communities through culturally relevant program support. In particular, the Center focuses on training and technical assistance, applied research, and dissemination of information. Using workforce development data for targeted outreach, the Center may support increased awareness to community, workforce, and economic development partners state-wide with a regional focus through events offered in Spanish and English.

Partnership information will be incorporated into the training that is provided to our Local Office Outreach staff.

Outreach Staff have incorporated the use of appearances at Laundromats, Grocery Stores and other areas where MSFWs congregate. Additionally, we place information, in Spanish, in area churches and local community buildings to expand our reach beyond our normal employment services offices.

ADWS has a mini-mobile unit for use by the MSFW Outreach Specialist. This unit allows full delivery of available services to MSFWs.

Strategy 3: Increase staff and partner awareness regarding identifying MSFWs and the services available to them through WIOA and partner programs.

ADWS will continue providing technical assistance and training to staff on identifying MSFWs and the services available to them such as webinars, office visits, etc. Potential events to assist in increasing awareness would be events such as WIOA Partner Meetings if available.

Strategy 4: Increase employer awareness of services available to them as an employer as well as the services available to MSFWs.

Outreach staff and partner programs will provide technical assistance to the Local Workforce Business Services Teams on the services available to employers and MSFWs. This will provide employers an additional resource for their business as well as their workers. Potential events to assist in increasing awareness would be events catered to employers such as the Arkansas Grown Conference & Expo.

Strategy 5: Use modern technology for awareness and communication with MSFWs.

ADWS uses a call center to assist individuals seeking assistance. Additionally, a vendor has been procured for interpretation services. This service provides the local offices to expand their communication with non-English speaking individuals in order to best assist them with services and referrals for services. The ADWS website has a [web page dedicated to MSFWs](#) and employers on the services available, worker rights, workforce centers, the complaint system (Posters in English and Spanish), resources, and instruction on how to use a search engine that converts the website to a chosen language.

(B) Providing technical assistance to outreach staff.

Title III Response:

ADWS developed and conducted training to our Local Office merit staff. This training not only included WIOA Titles I & III and the ES Complaint system, but it also provided technical assistance on how to identify MSFWs and the services available to them. Technical assistance continues through scheduled webinars as well as upon request. Staff attended Foreign Labor Certification Trainings, Agricultural seminars, and Wage and Hour trainings to learn more as well as reenforce current knowledge. Potential opportunities for technical assistance include WIOA Partner Meetings, Local Office Manager meetings, Workforce GPS, as well as coordinating with other local office visits to offer training as needed. Once interpretation services are in place, staff will receive additional training on the use of software to allow them to meet the needs of the workers.

(C) Increasing outreach staff training and awareness across core programs including the UI program and the training on identification of UI eligibility issues.

Title III Response:

ADWS developed and conducted training to our Local Office merit staff. This training included WIOA Titles I & III, including the ES Complaint system. Staff attended Foreign Labor Certification trainings, Agricultural seminars, State Monitor Advocate trainings/monthly calls, and Wage and Hour trainings to learn more as well as reinforce current knowledge. Staff is encouraged to seek events for professional development and networking opportunities to assist them. Networking opportunities promote technical assistance through peer-to-peer learning and best practices.

(D) Providing outreach staff professional development activities to ensure they are able to provide high quality services to both jobseekers and employers.

ADWS developed and conducted training to our Local Office merit staff. This training not only included WIOA Titles I & III and the ES Complaint system, but it also provided technical assistance on how to identify MSFWs and the services available to them. Technical assistance continues through scheduled webinars as well as upon request. Staff attended Foreign Labor Certification Trainings, Agricultural seminars, and Wage and Hour trainings to learn more as well as reenforce current knowledge. Potential opportunities for technical assistance include WIOA Partner Meetings, Local Office Manager meetings, Workforce GPS, as well as coordinating with other local office visits to offer training as needed. Once interpretation services are in place, staff will receive additional training on the use of software to allow them to meet the needs of the workers.

ADWS developed and conducted training to our Local Office merit staff. This training included WIOA Titles I & III, including the ES Complaint system, and log through scheduled webinar meetings, in-person meetings, networking opportunities also promote technical assistance through peer-to-peer learning and best practices.

(E) Coordinating outreach efforts with NFJP grantees as well as with public and private community service agencies and MSFW groups

Similar to other states, ADWS entered into a statewide memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Arkansas Human Development Corporation (AHDC), the State's National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) grantee. This MOU assists in establishing and demonstrating effective outreach coordination.

The NFJP grantee, AHDC, provides career and training services and related assistance for MSFWs, along with Arkansas Workforce Center staff. The cooperative agreement between ADWS and AHDC was developed to coordinate and enhance service delivery to MSFWs. This partnership provides for the sharing of labor market information, basic, individualized, and career services, training, supportive services and job-related resources available to MSFWs. As stated previously, this partnership coordinates outreach to workers with AHDC. This provides AHDC the opportunity to meet with the employers, workers, and offer services available under the NFJP. This additionally aides in removing the barrier for the NFJP grantee in meeting workers at the work site where it may have been an issue in the past with employers. Another partner coordination of efforts includes the use of the mobile units and outreach staff with the Mexican Consulate events. These events allow individuals to take advantage of resume writing, job searches, and one on one with a specialist while waiting for services with the remote services of the Mexican Consulate.

5. SERVICES PROVIDED TO FARMWORKERS AND AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS THROUGH THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM

(A) Providing the full range of employment and training services to the agricultural community, both farmworkers and agricultural employers, through the one-stop delivery system. This includes:

- (i) How career and training services required under WIOA Title I will be provided to MSFWs through the one-stop centers; and**
- (ii) How the State serves agricultural employers and how it intends to improve such services.**

Title III Response:

All Arkansas Workforce Centers provide core, intensive employment and training services. Staff will determine the service needs of the MSFW customers and either provide those services or direct these customers to staff who can provide the needed services. Outreach specialists will be strategically assigned to Workforce Centers for the purpose of providing employment and training services to both agricultural employers and MSFWs.

Outreach materials are disseminated throughout the state, especially in the areas of the state where MSFWs are likely to gather and work.

Through the Arkansas Job Link (AJL) job matching system, agricultural jobs are listed statewide and are available to all jobseekers in the state as well as out of state by creating an account and searching for suitable employment. An AJL employer account provides the ability to post job openings, search resumes for qualified employees, receive emails on new jobseeker resumes and receive assistance listing the agricultural job opening. ADWS will provide agricultural employers with applicants who meet the job-related selection criteria established by the employers.

Our goal for this year is to better meet the needs of agricultural employers. As such, ADWS will continue to improve the agricultural referral process including, but not limited to, the following:

- Providing information regarding available services to workers when arriving at job sites;
- Engaging agricultural employers to determine short- and long-term employment goals;
- Providing agricultural employers with information related to farmworker rights;
- Developing strategies to facilitate and coordinate the engagement of the agricultural industry into the workforce development system; and
- Assisting agricultural employers in creating year-round, permanent jobs.

ADWS continues its partnership with the Arkansas Department of Education's Migrant Education Program (ARMEP). The Arkansas Migrant Education Division administers programs that provide supplemental academic and supportive services to the children of families who migrate to find work in the agricultural and fishing industries.

The programs are designed to help migrant children, who are uniquely affected by the combined effects of poverty, language, cultural barriers, and the migratory lifestyle, to meet the same challenging academic content and student academic achievement standards that are expected of all children. The State Monitor Advocate receives training from the Regional and National Monitor Advocates regarding the Agricultural Recruitment System and how it is used to assist employers get domestic labor prior to the introduction of H2-A worker requests.

To meet agricultural employers' needs, ADWS will continue its efforts to partner with agricultural associations that host educational seminars to provide information to agricultural employers. This will include the development of specific sections on both the ADWS and the AHDC websites that provides information related to MSFWs.

The SMA and outreach staff encourages the use of the Agricultural Recruitment System (Arkansas JobLink) by promoting it at outreach events, employer orientations, agricultural associations, conferences, and with print advertisements. Additionally, we plan to begin utilizing our Local Workforce Area Business Services Teams to assist in marketing the ARS to our agricultural employers.

(B) Marketing the Complaint System to farmworkers and stakeholders.

Title III Response:

The State Monitor Advocate and MSFW Outreach Staff promote the Statewide Complaint System to farmworkers and farmworker advocacy groups during outreach, employer orientations, conferences, training sessions, and meetings.

An overview of the Statewide Complaint System is provided as a presentation and as part of an informational packet to farmworkers and farmworker advocacy groups. Each of the Local Offices have a poster specifying who to contact for complaints in addition to having it posted to the ADWS website for MSFWs.

Since 2022, all Local Offices have been trained and began using the USDOL's Complaint/Apparent Violation Form. The complaint form may be found on the ADWS website. To date, Local Offices receive training through scheduled webinars and office visits. Office visits are conducted in a coordinated effort on the Statewide Complaint System in addition to other topics such as, but not limited to new Virtual Reality (VR) headsets for the local office staff to use in outreach efforts. The VR headsets provide individuals the opportunity to train through the use of modern technology. The modules allow the individual to select an occupation, learn, and see what the occupation is all about.

Arkansas has continued its collaborative agreement with the Arkansas Human Development Corporation and other agencies in the state, such as, Wage & Hour and the Department of Labor's Office of Foreign Labor Certification and will seek to re-establish as well as develop partnerships with other key stakeholders and organizations to provide a more cohesive approach. Additionally, a relationship with the Arkansas Department of Agriculture has been developed in 2022 and continues to be an integral part of servicing employers.

As previously mentioned, outreach staff and partner programs will provide technical assistance to the Local Workforce Business Services Teams on the services available to employers and MSFWs. This will provide employers an additional resource for their business as well as their workers. Potential events to assist in increasing awareness would be events catered to employers such as, but not limited to, the Arkansas Grown Conference & Expo which is catered to employers and partner events.

Moving forward, the MSFW Outreach Specialist and the State Monitor Advocate will seek to strengthen the partnerships previously established with organizations such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). LULAC has five (5) local councils in Central and Northwest Arkansas which provide advocacy for and services to the Latino population in Arkansas. Additionally, the Outreach Staff and the State Monitor Advocate will seek out other organizational partnerships to build a stronger marketing campaign.

(C) Marketing the Agricultural Recruitment System for U.S. Workers (ARS) to agricultural employers and how it intends to improve such publicity.

Title III Response:

The agricultural recruitment system (ARS) is a network managed by the U.S. Department of Labor that connects agricultural employers with temporary and seasonal workers. It works by having employers submit job orders through local career centers, which are then advertised both locally and across states to find U.S. workers, and can be used to facilitate the H-2A visa

program for foreign workers. The system aims to match available job seekers with temporary farm labor needs and helps ensure the employment conditions meet federal regulations.

All Arkansas agricultural jobs are entered into Arkansas Job Link and posted for at least 50% of the employment period. ADWS has a dedicated website for employers which includes information on the ARS and important links. Arkansas also conducted several employer roundtable discussions around the state in 2025 to answer questions and disseminate information about the ARS.

6. OTHER REQUIREMENTS

A. COLLABORATION

Describe any collaborative agreements the State Workforce Agency (SWA) has with other MSFW service providers including NFJP grantees and other service providers. Describe how the SWA intends to build upon/increase collaboration with existing partners and establish new partners over the next four years (including any approximate timelines for establishing agreements or building upon existing agreements).

Title III Response:

ADWS is fortunate to have strong partnerships with the NFJP programs within Arkansas. The Arkansas Human Development Corporation is co-located in many of the Arkansas Workforce Centers and staff of AHDC serve on local workforce development boards. Collaboration will continue to increase by involving non-core partners in staff briefings, meetings, events and training opportunities. Additionally, the State Monitor Advocate, employed by the SWA, serves as a board member of the ADHC organization, providing leadership and advisory services. Partnerships are also being forged with the Migrant Education program, which will allow more access to the MSFW population.

B. REVIEW AND PUBLIC COMMENT

In developing the AOP, the SWA must solicit information and suggestions from NFJP grantees, other appropriate MSFW groups, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations, and other interested organizations. In addition, at least 45 calendar days before submitting its final AOP, the SWA must provide a proposed plan to NFJP grantees, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations, and other organizations expressing an interest and allow at least 30 days for review and comment. The SWA must: 1) Consider any comments received in formulating its final proposed AOP; 2) Inform all commenting parties in writing whether their comments have been incorporated and, if not, the reasons therefore; and 3) Transmit the comments and recommendations received and its responses with the submission of the AOP.

Title III Response:

The 30-day public comment review period for the Agricultural Outreach Plan began with the posting of the Arkansas WIOA Combined State Plan to the Arkansas Workforce Connections (formerly Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (ADWS)) website. As part of the Arkansas WIOA Combined State Plan, the Agricultural Outreach Plan section was e-mailed to key

stakeholders to ensure awareness as well as the opportunity to provide comment. NFJP grantees, other appropriate MSFW groups, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations and other interested employer organizations have been given an opportunity to comment on the AOP.

Title III Response:

The stakeholders who received an e-mail regarding the Agricultural Outreach Plan were as follows:

- Arkansas Human Development Corporation
- Arkansas United
- Arkansas Division of Workforce Services
- Communities Unlimited
- U. S. Small Business Administration
- University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service

Comments were received from the Arkansas Human Development Corporation and the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service. All comments were incorporated into the plan. No additional comments were received from any of the above-mentioned stakeholders.

C. DATA ASSESSMENT

Review the previous four years Wagner-Peyser Act data reports on performance. Note whether the State has been meeting its goals to provide MSFWs quantitatively proportionate services as compared to non-MSFWs. If it has not met these goals, explain why the State believes such goals were not met and how the State intends to improve its provision of services in order to meet such goals.

Title III Response:

Based upon the information provided by our USDOL Regional Monitor, our statewide MSFW Service Level Indicators report for the for the period of July 1, 2020 through September 30, 2023 showed MSFWs received services equitable to those provided to non-MSFWs:

- Received Basic Career Services - Non-MSFW = 97.9%, MSFW = 98.4%
- Received Individual Career Services - Non-MSFW = 36.9%, MSFW = 42.2%
- Received Staff Assisted Career Guidance Services – Non-MSFW = 0.7%, MSFW = 1.4%
- Received Staff Assisted Job Search Activities - Non-MSFW = 11.6%, MSFW = 11.3%
- Received UI Claim Assistance – Non-MSFW = 45.0%, MSFW = 44.0%
- Referred to Employment - Non-MSFW = 16.0%, MSFW = 21.3%

- Referred to Federal Training – Non-MSFW = 5.2%, MSFW = 4.9%
- Referred to Other Fed/State Assistance – Non-MSFW = 0.0%, MSFW = 0.0%

While Arkansas Division of Workforce Services did not meet all the Equity Ratio Indicators, the margins were small and MSFWs are receiving services in an equitable manner. The indicators and Minimum Service Level Indicators were not met due to staff turnover and shortages. Arkansas has mitigated these issues and now has a State Monitor Advocate and full-time MSFW Outreach Specialist. The SMA has and will continue to visit local offices to train staff, discuss challenges and explore opportunities to increase engagement with the MSFWs and the community. The MSFW Outreach Specialist meets with employers as well as workers while conducting outreach. In addition to providing handouts and explaining available services, ADWS has secured a dedicated mobile unit with full capabilities to provide those services. Arkansas is also increasing engagement with partner agencies such as the National Farmworker Jobs Program. The SMA is also coordinating with the Regional Monitor Advocate to establish proper procedures for monitoring the Significant MSFW One-Stop Centers in Forrest City and West Memphis. Arkansas has also entered into a contract with a vendor to provide translation services for all One-Stop centers statewide.

D. ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS

Title III Response:

The plan must include an explanation of what was achieved based on the previous AOP, what was not achieved and an explanation as to why the State believes the goals were not achieved, and how the State intends to remedy the gaps of achievement in the coming year.

The State Workforce Agency and State Monitor Advocate will continue to work collaboratively to train and monitor staff to ensure that the requirements of WIOA and the Wagner- Peyser Act sections 20 CFR, parts 651,652,653, and 658 are met.

As such, MSFWs are being offered and provided the full array of employment and training services equitable and quantitatively comparable to that offered and provided to non-MSFWs. With one full-time MSFW outreach staff hired, ADWS is still seeking an additional full-time MSFW outreach staff who is bilingual in English/Spanish.

In the last four years, H-2A Foreign Labor Certification program activities have more than tripled. The increased usage of this program has been a challenge; however, we are increasing our efforts in identifying partner agencies and organizations to assist our efforts.

Despite our challenges, we believe that we have experienced progress in the following areas:

- Identification of significant documents, informational materials and other items used daily by our centers which need translation to Spanish, the primary non- English language identified;
 - Identification of pertinent agricultural groups, organizations and associations and pursuing alliances with them;

- Ongoing training to center staff with a desk aid for proper identification of MSFWs; desk aid with new MSFW definition trained upon and provided. This training will be ongoing.
- Dedicated web page for MSFWs and employers.
- Continued streamlining of processes.
- Continued training for staff and partners.
- Improved partnership with our NFJP partner; and
- Identification of community-based events related to MSFWs or their communities is ongoing.

E. STATE MONITOR ADVOCATE

Title III Response:

The plan must contain a statement confirming the State Monitor Advocate has reviewed and approved the AOP.

Upon completion of the initial draft of the AOP, a request for comment was emailed to the State Monitor Advocate. After review, the State Monitor Advocate responded that they did not have any comments regarding the AOP.

WAGNER-PEYSER ASSURANCES

Title III Response:

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service is co-located with one-stop centers or a plan and timeline has been developed to comply with this requirement within a reasonable amount of time (sec 121(e)(3));	Yes
2. If the State has significant MSFW one-stop centers, the State agency is complying with the requirements under 20 CFR 653.111, State Workforce Agency staffing requirements;	Yes
3. If a State Workforce Development Board, department, or agency administers State laws for vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, that board, department, or agency cooperates with the agency that administers Wagner-Peyser Act services, Adult and Dislocated	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
Worker programs and Youth Programs under Title I; and	
4. SWA officials: 1) Initiate the discontinuation of services; 2) Make the determination that services need to be discontinued; 3) Make the determination to reinstate services after the services have been discontinued; 5) Approve the removal of an employer's clearance orders from interstate or intrastate clearance if the employer was granted conditional access to ARS and did not come into compliance within 5 calendar days; 6) Enter into agreements with State and Federal enforcement agencies for enforcement-agency staff to conduct field checks on the SWAs' behalf (if the SWA so chooses); and 7) Decide whether to consent to the withdrawal of complaints if a party who requested a hearing wishes to withdraw its request for hearing in writing before the hearing.	Yes
5. The SWA has established and maintains a self-appraisal system for ES operations to determine success in reaching goals and to correct deficiencies in performance (20 CFR 658.601).	Yes

WAGNER PEYSER PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Title III Response:

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY2024 Projected Actual Rating	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	70.8%	70.8%	69.4%	70.8%	70.8%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	70.1%	70.1%	69.5%	70.1%	70.1%

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY2024 Projected Actual Rating	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	6,905.00	6,905.00	7,403.00	6,905.00	6,905.00
Credential Attainment Rate	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Measurable Skill Gains	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

1

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAMS

A. ALIGNING OF CONTENT STANDARDS (WIOA [section 102\(b\)\(2\)\(D\)\(ii\)\(I\)](#))

Describe how the eligible agency has aligned its content standards for adult education with State-adopted challenging academic content standards, as adopted under section 1111(b)(1) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (20 U.S.C. 6311(b)(1)).

Title II Response:

The Office of Adult Education has adopted the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE)'s College and Career Readiness (CCR) Standards for Adult Education developed by Susan Pimentel. The CCR Standards cover literacy and mathematic skills, the foundations of education. The literacy standards cover five areas: reading, writing, speaking and listening, language, and reading foundational skills. Mathematics are also broken down into specific categories covering elements of broader areas such as geometry or algebra. However, to provide an overview, the standards cover numbers and number systems, operations, expressions and equations, ratios and proportional relationships, algebra, functions, geometry, measurement and data, statistics and probability.

Over the past several years, the Office of Adult Education has participated in initiatives designed to support the implementation of CCR Standards. Adult Education has had teams participate in the Cohort 1 of the Teaching Skills that Matter project in Fall 2019 as well as Cohort 6 in the Spring of 2023. Teaching Skills that Matter trains teachers to integrate the nine important skills for adults: adaptability and willingness to learn, communication, critical thinking, interpersonal skills, navigating systems, problem solving, processing and analyzing information, respecting

differences and diversity, and self-awareness across the five critical topic areas of civics education, digital literacy, financial literacy, health literacy and workforce preparation. The nine skills are taught using integrated and contextualized, problem-based, and project-based learning. Teachers who participated in these trainings were able to share lessons learned with others in the state and additional sharing opportunities are planned. Office of Adult Education also participated in the Student Achievement in Reading (STAR) initiative, provided by the Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education. The STAR program has provided targeted training of teachers in reading instructional strategies. Lessons learned in the various initiatives are continually woven into professional development offerings and classroom instruction.

During the annual Teacher Summit, teachers statewide gather for professional development. During the 2025 Teacher Summit, sessions such as, Transitioning Adult Learners to College and Career, and the Teacher's Role in IET from Intake to Employment provided practical information on using the standards to guide instruction.

To further support teachers in teaching the CCR Standards, the Office of Adult Education provides academic software, such as Essential Education and Aztec Learning, designed to support the CCR Standards to all adult education and literacy providers it funds. These platforms support the standards being taught and are used by teachers in the classroom for distance learning students and as off-site reinforcement of in-class instruction.

Through the Arkansas Adult Learning Resource Center, several workshops were held such as the Career & College Readiness Implementation Institute for ELA/Literacy and one for Mathematics led by Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS) trainers. Each is a two-day, face-to-face, intensive training that introduces the CCR standards in the relative subject and takes participants through a breakdown of the standards, providing the methods and materials needed to impact instruction. Follow-up sessions such as the virtual Career and College Readiness Implementation Institute for Mathematics Reflection offer opportunities to deepen understanding of the material. Incorporating CCR Standards allows instructors to teach the skills students need immediately in the context of high standards. Students learn more important workplace, life, and academic skills in the process of meeting their goals. Furthermore, requiring CCR Standards in adult education helps maintain its relevance and ensure that learners have the knowledge and skills required of a high school equivalency diploma.

B. LOCAL ACTIVITIES

ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY ACTIVITIES (SECTION 203 OF WIOA)

Describe how the eligible agency will, using the considerations specified in section 231(e) of WIOA and in accordance with 34 CFR 463 subpart C, fund each eligible provider to establish or operate programs that provide any of the following adult education and literacy activities identified in section 203 of WIOA, including programs that provide such activities concurrently. The Unified or Combined State Plan must include at a minimum the scope, content, and organization of these local activities.

Title II Response:

The Office of Adult Education provides Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE), and English Second Language (ESL) services to all eligible adult education and literacy programs in Arkansas. In accordance with 34 CFR Sec. 463 Subpart C, eligible programs will be funded as stated in "Distribution of Funds for Core Programs" using the previously stated competitive processes. Respondents must describe:

(1). The degree to which the eligible provider would be responsive to—

(i) Regional needs as identified in the local workforce development plan; and

(ii) Serving individuals in the community who were identified in such plan as most in need of adult education and literacy activities, including individuals who—

(A) Have low levels of literacy skills; or

(B) Are English language learners;

(2) The ability of the eligible provider to serve eligible individuals with disabilities, including eligible individuals with learning disabilities;

(3) The past effectiveness of the eligible provider in improving the literacy of eligible individuals, especially those individuals who have low levels of literacy, and the degree to which those improvements contribute to the eligible agency meeting its State-adjusted levels of performance for the primary indicators of performance described in § 677.155;

(4) The extent to which the eligible provider demonstrates alignment between proposed activities and services and the strategy and goals of the local plan under section 108 of the Act, as well as the activities and services of the one-stop partners;

(5) Whether the eligible provider's program—

(i) Is of sufficient intensity and quality, and based on the most rigorous research available so that participants achieve substantial learning gains; and

(ii) Uses instructional practices that include the essential components of reading instruction;

(6) Whether the eligible provider's activities, including whether reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, and English language acquisition instruction delivered by the eligible provider, are based on the best practices derived from the most rigorous research available, including scientifically valid research and effective educational practice;

(7) Whether the eligible provider's activities effectively use technology, services and delivery systems, including distance education, in a manner sufficient to increase the amount and quality of learning, and how such technology, services, and systems lead to improved performance;

(8) Whether the eligible provider's activities provide learning in context, including through integrated education and training, so that an individual acquires the skills needed to transition to and complete postsecondary education and training programs, obtain and advance in employment leading to economic self-sufficiency, and to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship;

(9) Whether the eligible provider's activities are delivered by instructors, counselors, and administrators who meet any minimum qualifications established by the State, where

applicable, and who have access to high-quality professional development, including through electronic means;

(10) Whether the eligible provider coordinates with other available education, training, and social service resources in the community, such as by establishing strong links with elementary schools and secondary schools, postsecondary educational institutions, institutions of higher education, Local WDBs, one-stop centers, job training programs, and social service agencies, business, industry, labor organizations, community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, and intermediaries, in the development of career pathways;

(11) Whether the eligible provider's activities offer the flexible schedules and coordination with Federal, State, and local support services (such as child care, transportation, mental health services, and career planning) that are necessary to enable individuals, including individuals with disabilities or other special needs, to attend and complete programs;

(12) Whether the eligible provider maintains a high-quality information management system that has the capacity to report measurable participant outcomes and to monitor program performance; and

(13) Whether the local area in which the eligible provider is located has a demonstrated need for additional English language acquisition programs and civics education programs.

Eligible provider's activities include reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, and English language acquisition instruction delivered by the eligible provider, will be based on the best practices derived from the most rigorous research available and appropriate, including scientifically valid research and effective educational practice.

All providers receiving state and/or federal funding from the Office of Adult Education are required to provide the following services: adult education and literacy activities, workforce preparation, and integrated education and training (IET). As applicable, providers are also required to provide the following services: English language acquisition, Integrated English Language Literacy and Civics Education, and Correctional/Institutional instruction. Optional services that may be provided throughout the grant period include workplace classes and family literacy activities. In addition, the Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy (WAGE™), a job readiness program for unemployed and underemployed adults, which incorporates financial literacy, digital literacy, and workforce preparation shall be integrated into the curriculum. (State Requirement).

1. Adult Education and Literacy Activities include instruction and education services below a postsecondary level in reading, writing, and speaking in English, and computing and solving problems. These services increase a student's ability to achieve a secondary school diploma or equivalent, transition to postsecondary education and training, and obtain employment.

1a. Scope: All organizations receiving WIOA Title II funds, hereinafter "local providers," will offer Adult Education and Literacy Activities.

1b. Organization: The organization of Adult Education and Literacy Activities may vary according to the population served and the resources available, but all programs will follow the state's *Adult Education Policies*, the *Assessment Policy and Distance Learning Guidelines*, which outlines enrollment, orientation, assessment, instruction, and test taking.

2. English Language Acquisition includes adult education and literacy activities for English language learners with an additional skill requirement, comprehension of the English language.

Note: Eligible providers with less than 500 adults in their county (ies) that speak English “less than very well,” based on the most current census data, are not required to offer English language acquisition programs. (State requirement)

2a. Scope: All providers will offer English Language Acquisition activities if there is a sufficient number of adult English language learners in their service areas.

2b. Organization: The organization of English Language Acquisition Activities may vary according to the populations served and the resources available, but all programs shall follow the state’s Adult Education Policies and the Assessment Policy and Distance Learning Guidelines, which outlines enrollment, orientation, assessment, instruction, and test taking.

3. Family Literacy Activities include interactive literacy activities between parents or family members and their children. To offer family literacy activities as defined in WIOA requires coordination with other services for the children’s component. Providers will assist students in their roles as parents and family members by providing foundational skills that enable them to support their children’s learning needs and enhance their families’ economic self-sufficiency.

Family literacy defined in WIOA must integrate all of the following activities:

- Parent or family adult education and literacy activities that lead to readiness for postsecondary education or training, career advancement, and economic self-sufficiency.
- Interactive literacy activities between parents or family members and their children.
- Training for parents or family members regarding how to be the primary teachers for their children and full partners in the education of their children.
- Age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences.

3a. Scope: Local providers may offer Family Literacy Activities in partnership with other agencies or organizations such as schools. The scope of family literacy activities will be determined by the interest of external partners.

3b. Organization: Family literacy activities will be organized collaboratively between local providers and their partners, but all programs will follow the state’s *Adult Education Policies*, the *Assessment Policy and Distance Learning Guidelines*, which outline enrollment, orientation, assessment, instruction, and test taking. Family literacy is an optional activity.

4. Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education will provide Immigrants and English learners access to English language acquisition services and civics education in combination with an integrated education and training program. English infused with civics education helps immigrants and English learners understand the American system of government and what it means to be a citizen and to be involved in civic activities. To live and work in the United States means not only a command of the language, but equally important are the civics-related skills and knowledge necessary to become involved parents, workers, and community members.

Therefore, every adult education and literacy council program offering English language acquisition services will also include civics education. Refer to WIOA, Section 243.

4a. Scope: Local providers who can demonstrate adequate numbers of adult English language learners in their service areas may apply to offer Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education Activities. In addition, providers who meet the criteria and demonstrate effectiveness in delivering integrated English literacy and civics education, combined with integrated education and training activities, will be awarded. Depending upon the amount of funding from the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE), the State will fund between 4-6 providers in areas of greatest need using Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education funds. Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education is a requirement for only those providers who apply and receive IEL/CE funding.

4b. Organization: The organization of Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education Activities may vary according to the populations served and the resources available, but all programs will follow the state's *Adult Education Policies, the Assessment Policy and Distance Learning Guidelines*, which outlines enrollment, orientation, assessment, instruction, and test taking.

5. Workforce Preparation includes activities, programs, or services designed to help individuals acquire a combination of basic academic skills and employability skills such as critical thinking skills, digital literacy skills, and self-management skills. These activities include competencies in utilizing resources, using information, working with others, understanding systems, and obtaining skills necessary for successful transition into and completion of postsecondary education or training, or employment. Workforce preparation skills will be integrated into the adult basic education and literacy curriculum; therefore, they will occur concurrently with adult basic and literacy skills instruction. Per grant assurances, teachers will integrate technology use in their lesson plans and all students will have access to and use computers and technology to enhance their learning and digital literacy skills. Each program will also be required to have a Career Service Provider to assist students in transitioning into the workforce and/or postsecondary education or training (State Requirement).

5a. Scope: All providers will offer Workforce Preparation Activities.

5b. Organization: The organization of workforce preparation activities may vary according to the populations served and resources available, but all programs will follow the state's *Adult Education Policies, the Assessment Policy and Distance Learning Guidelines*, which outlines enrollment, orientation, assessment, instruction, and test taking.

6. Workplace Adult Education and Literacy Activities include instruction at a workplace or an off-site location that is designed to improve the productivity of the workforce. Instruction will include contextualized literacy, English language acquisition, and workforce preparation at Educational Functioning Levels appropriate to learners. Successful workplace literacy activities involve strong partnerships with employers or employee organizations in the design and delivery of the instructional program based on workplace needs.

6a. Scope: Local providers may offer Workplace Adult Education and Literacy Activities in partnership with employers or employee organizations. The scope of Workplace Adult Education and Literacy Activities will be determined by the interest of external partners.

6b. Organization: Workplace Adult Education and Literacy Activities will be organized at a workplace or an off-site location in collaboration between local providers and their partners, but will follow the state's *Adult Education Policies, the Assessment Policy and Distance Learning Guidelines*, which outlines enrollment, orientation, assessment, instruction, and test taking.

7. Integrated education and training (IET) activities is a service approach that provides adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement.

7a. Scope: Current local providers must align their IET program(s) with the local workforce development board plan or based on the needs of local employers.

7b. Organization: Integrated Education and Training Activities will follow the state's *Adult Education Policies, the Assessment Policy, and Distance Learning Guidelines*, which outline enrollment, orientation, assessment, instruction, and test taking. . Programs shall provide expanded transition services including Career Service Providers to assist with this process.

8. Financial Literacy Activities include instruction that entails the knowledge of properly making decisions pertaining to certain personal finance areas like real estate, insurance, investing, saving, tax planning, and retirement. Financial literacy will be integrated into the curriculum to assist learners in financial matters to confidently take effective action that best fulfills personal, family, and global community goals. (State Requirement)

8a. Scope: All providers will offer financial literacy activities.

8b. Organization: The organization of workforce preparation activities may vary according to the populations served and resources available, but all programs will follow the state's *Adult Education Policies, the Assessment Policy and Distance Learning Guidelines*, which outlines enrollment, orientation, assessment, instruction, and test taking.

Due to WIOA standards, the Office of Adult Education continues to encourage Adult Education programs in Arkansas to develop career pathways with business and industry in each local program area. These partnerships will address the needs of both business/industry and ABE and ESL students. Local Adult Education programs and Literacy Councils have established local boards that include representatives from business and industry.

Each adult education and literacy provider is required to have at least one trained Career Service Provider (CSP). At each local program, a CSP is either on staff or available to visit with students to reinforce the career-focused skills and activities being taught at the centers. These facilitators use career assessment results and career plans with short-term and long-term goals to assist adult learners in transitioning to the workforce or postsecondary education or training programs. Career Service Providers are trained to study each local job market and communicate high-demand employment options to students as they choose a career pathway. Programs also invite representatives from business and industry to present to students, conduct mock and actual interviews onsite, and assist with students' transitions into the workforce. Students who have a desire to study specific trades that offer apprenticeships receive relevant training in these occupational clusters that are vital to each local community. This makes the relationship between Adult Education and the workforce much more valuable because career pathway

initiatives are woven into all aspects of our educational services and target fields that align with local industry needs.

In addition to the RFP application, eligible providers will have a rubric that shows how applications will be evaluated. The proposal process is below.

1. Proposals were due to the Office of Adult Education by 5:00 p.m. on March 1, 2024. Written proposals were pre-screened to verify the inclusion of all required components in the order specified in the RFP. Proposals not meeting all pre-screen requirements were not read. Applications that did not illustrate demonstrated effectiveness were not considered. Applicants not meeting the pre-screening requirement were notified, along with all declined applicants.
2. Only applications from eligible providers of demonstrated effectiveness were forwarded for review, scoring, and consideration for funding.
3. Written proposals were submitted to the Local Board for review by March 4, 2024. The Local Board reviewed each application in its respective area and provided feedback to the state on its alignment with the local plan by March 11, 2024.
4. A review panel established by the Office of Adult Education evaluated the written proposals. The panel was composed of individuals with expertise in adult education and literacy, WIOA partner agency representatives, and Office of Adult Education personnel. Reviewers were trained and rated proposals.
5. The Office of Adult Education considered the results of the local board's review for alignment with the strategies and goals of the local plan and the extent to which the application addresses the required considerations in its scoring.
6. Declined applicants were notified by March 14, 2024, at 12:00 p.m., and had an opportunity to submit an appeal by March 21, 2024, at 12:00 p.m.
7. If an applicant's proposal is not approved, the applicant may send a Letter of Appeal to the Director for Office of Adult Education by March 21, 2024, by 12:00 p.m. The letter must provide a thorough justification for the appeal. The Director of the Office of Adult Education and the state leadership team will make the final determination regarding the appeal. A response will be e-mailed to the applicant within five calendar days of receiving the appeal letter. All appeal decisions will be final. No Letter of Appeal was sent to the state office. The Office of Adult Education did not receive any letters of appeal.
8. Awarded applicants may be provisionally awarded funds for a maximum of four (4) years. Provisional grantees will be reviewed six months and 12 months post-award. Based on the findings, the grantee may continue with a provisional award and receive guidance from the state office to improve program performance. Future funding may be affected if the program has not achieved satisfactory performance.
9. The review panel recommended proposals to receive awards and funding levels. Thirty-four providers were awarded.

**C. CORRECTIONS EDUCATION AND OTHER EDUCATION OF INSTITUTIONALIZED
INDIVIDUALS (WIOA section 102(b)(2)(D)(ii)(II)(bb))**

Describe how the eligible agency will, using the considerations specified in section 231(e) of WIOA and in accordance with 34 CFR 463 subpart C, fund eligible providers to establish or operate programs that provide any of the following correctional educational programs identified in section 225 of WIOA:

- **Adult education and literacy activities;**
- **Special education, as determined by the eligible agency;**
- **Secondary school credit;**
- **Integrated education and training;**
- **Career pathways;**
- **Concurrent enrollment;**
- **Peer tutoring; and**
- **Transition to re-entry initiatives and other post release services with the goal of reducing recidivism.**

Title II Response:

Funds for eligible providers will be distributed on a competitive, direct, and equitable basis through the Request for Proposal (RFP) process, as described under Section 225 of WIOA for corrections education and Title II Subtitle C. The same grant announcement, application, evaluation, and process will be used for all proposals. The Office of Adult Education shall not use less than 82.5 percent of the grant funds to award grants and contracts under section 231 and to carry out section 225, of which not more than 20 percent of such amount shall be available to carry out section 225.

Funds available under section 225 (a) (1) of the WIOA will be a multi-year grant cycle and awarded based on how applicants address how they have served or plan to serve those in institutional settings by providing Adult Education and Literacy Activities, working with Re-entry Populations, and offering short-term credentials and certifications through Integrated education and training (IET) or apprenticeships. Each eligible agency using funds provided under correctional education must prioritize serving those likely to leave the correctional institution within five years of participating in the program. The allocation of available funds was based on the availability of funds, each eligible provider's enrollment, performance, and demonstrated effectiveness. Fifteen adult education providers were awarded Section 225 funds for the 2024-2025 Program Year.

All adult education providers must have a trained ADA Coordinator who specializes in screening individuals for disabilities and providing the appropriate referral and follow-up (State Requirement). As determined through the intake process, special education will provide students identified as having a disability with appropriate and effective instructional and testing accommodations. Peer tutoring, where students work in pairs or on projects or assignment-based instruction to help one another learn the material or practice an academic task, may also be an activity where providers can utilize Section 225 (a) (1) funds.

As mentioned, providers serving individuals in a correctional facility must offer adult education and literacy activities leading to a high school equivalency diploma, as well as transition to re-entry initiatives and other post-release services, to reduce recidivism. These services enhance a

student's ability to earn a secondary school diploma or equivalent, transition to postsecondary education and training, and secure employment, which includes instruction and education services below the postsecondary level in reading, writing, speaking English, and problem-solving. Those adult education and literacy activities will align with state standards in curriculum, state-approved programs, teaching practices, and adaptive career planning. This includes individuals seeking to enter or retain employment or receive specialized training after acquiring basic skills through Arkansas Adult Education.

In addition, the Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy (WAGE™), a job readiness program for unemployed and underemployed adults, which incorporates financial literacy, digital literacy, workforce preparation, and Career Pathways, shall be integrated into the curriculum (State Requirement).

Providers who receive correctional education funding are expected to offer integrated education and training and develop career pathways and apprenticeship opportunities where safe and applicable in the correctional environment (State Requirement). Programs are encouraged to use guidance and supportive services where possible and to provide education and training through cooperative efforts with providers in correctional settings.

A correctional institution includes any prison, jail, reformatory, work farm, detention center, halfway house, community-based rehabilitation center, or other similar institution designed for the confinement or rehabilitation of criminal offenders. A criminal offender is any individual who is charged with or convicted of any criminal offense.

In addition to any reports required by the Office of Adult Education, each eligible correctional institution receiving funds under this section shall prepare and submit a progress report annually. Reports of progress shall include, but not be limited to, activities carried out under this section, the relative rate of recidivism, enrollment, educational gains and/or High School Equivalency outcomes, employment (sustainable wage), and employment retention (length of employment).

D. INTEGRATED ENGLISH LITERACY AND CIVICS EDUCATION PROGRAM (WIOA section 102(b)(2)(D)(ii)(II)(cc))

Describe how the eligible agency will, using the considerations specified in section 231(e) of WIOA and in accordance with 34 CFR 463 subpart C, fund eligible providers to establish or operate Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) programs under section 243 of WIOA. Describe how adult English language learners, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries, are served in IELCE programs.

Title II Response:

The Office of Adult Education operates Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) under Section 243 to provide educational services to adult English language learners (ELLs), including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries to acquire English language skills necessary to function effectively as parents, workers, and citizens. IELCE program providers are established through an open and competitive process that is direct and equitable. The Office of Adult Education held a competition in February 2024 for a four-year

grant from July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2028, to fund IELCE programs as an optional grant. Eleven (11) local providers were awarded with Section 243 funding. The Office of Adult Education will conduct its next Request for Proposal (RFP) in the 2027-2028 program year at the latest. However, during this time, the number of awardees will be reduced to 4-6 programs due to a lack of adequate funding.

Several local adult education providers have collaborated with Arkansas United Community Coalition, an immigrant advocacy group, to provide information and resources to those entering the state. These partnerships have been helpful by making clients of Arkansas United aware of adult education services and by assisting students, including those with professional credentials in their native countries, understand their options through the legal and other services provided by Arkansas United and their other partners.

State staff have participated in webinars by Enhancing Access for Refugees and New Americans to learn how to better serve English language learners who are professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries. One of the goals of this project is to apply an immigrant integration and inclusion lens to support learners' linguistic, economic, and civic integration needs. Pillars of immigrant integration and inclusion include civic integration, linguistic integration, and economic integration. Adult education providers can play a key role in civic integration by assisting or referring participants to agencies that can verify foreign credentials, assist with government documentation attainment, and navigate community services. In terms of linguistic integration, adult education providers can integrate multilingual strategies that assist immigrants and English language learners in improving their English and math proficiency, supporting the educational and skill achievement of parents and family members, and assisting adults to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills for employment and economic self-sufficiency. In terms of economic integration, providers can integrate workers' rights and responsibilities, workplace digital competencies, and career exploration, into the curriculum.

Local programs awarded Section 243 funds are required to offer at least one IET aligned with the needs identified by the local workforce development boards or based on the needs of local employers, aligning with the workforce strategy Pillar I: Industry-Driven Strategies and Pillar II: Worker Mobility. Activities such as reading classes, focused on government and the United States Constitution, provide contextualized instruction opportunities designed to teach civic principles while supporting language acquisition, qualifications of U.S. citizenship, and the steps required to achieve citizenship, as well as the rights and responsibilities of American citizens.

Participants are assessed to determine their level of proficiency in the English language, as well as their academic and career aptitudes and interests. Based on the results of assessments, students are assisted with English language instruction, workforce training, civics education, workforce preparation, financial literacy, and digital literacy. Students have participated in field trips and workshops on topics such as home ownership, utilizing the library, including completing the process of obtaining a library card, and learning of available resources there.

Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will be offered in combination with integrated education and training activities found in 34 CFR section 463.36.

Title II Response:

Providers who receive Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education must offer integrated education and training (IET) to English language learners. Adult education providers must offer students integrated education and training (IET) programs. IET is a service approach that provides adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement. An IET program must include three components: adult education and literacy activities, workforce preparation activities, and workforce training.

In addition, as part of a career pathway, the design of an IET program should support the local and state workforce development board plans as required under WIOA. Adult education providers must offer Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy (WAGE™), a job readiness program for unemployed and underemployed adults, trademarked by the Office of Adult Education, to English language learners. The WAGE™ program is designed to provide workforce preparation and training for an in-demand occupation.

A career coach assists English language learners with career exploration and identifying a career pathway. Career coaches, through the National Career Development Association (NCDA) Career Service Provider course are trained in helping skills, labor market information, career assessment, employability skills, and program management to name a few. Career coaches have been instrumental in helping individuals with job search skills, resumes, mock interviews, identifying a career pathway, and enrolling in postsecondary education and training programs. In addition, career coaches help eligible individuals reduce barriers by providing supportive services such as childcare, assistance with transportation, and tuition and supplies.

Statewide academic online software programs such as English in Action and Burlington English are supplemented to reinforce teacher-led instruction. Burlington's blended curriculum promotes academic preparation, civics knowledge, career readiness, and technology integration at all levels and areas of instruction. Burlington English has been used to develop a WAGE™ curriculum specifically for English language learners that can be used to develop IETs for use in IELCE programs. The IET/IELCE component of Burlington helps to prepare English language learners for a targeted career course of study. Learners are provided contextualized language, communication, and employability skills needed to help learners attain, succeed in, or transition to a new career. Burlington English includes a workforce component that makes it especially helpful in preparing students for employment. These resources can be used onsite and at home. Laptop checkout is made available to students who may not have a computer at home, providing continued access to these resources.

English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors have been trained on career pathways and career clusters to ensure that adult learners receive information on the employment options available and that career pathways are integrated into lessons. The Office of Adult Education and the Arkansas Adult Learning Resource Center provide training on various methods of team teaching. The "IET-Team Teaching Models" training provides instructors an explanation and demonstration of team-teaching methods. Implementing this training, vocational and English language instructors work together to plan and deliver instruction.

Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will be designed to prepare adults who are English language learners for, and place such adults in, unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency.

Title II Response:

Students served with 243 funds are included in the state WAGE™ program, the workforce development arm of the Office of Adult Education. The WAGE™ program prepares students with basic skills, workforce preparation, and industry-recognized certificates, and is the workforce development arm of the Office of Adult Education. A specific WAGE™ curriculum was developed for use with students in IELCE and other programs for English language learners. It uses the blended curriculum of Burlington English to ensure that students build their language skills while preparing for the workforce. Students can earn a WAGE™ Level I, followed by a WAGE™ Level II certificate, through which students receive the skills needed to obtain and thrive in a new career. As a part of earning a WAGE™ Level I certificate, students work with a trained Career Service Provider to identify their career interests and aptitudes, and prepare for job search as they receive practical, hands-on training on topics such as resume writing and interviewing. The Office of Adult Education now provides opportunities for students to earn industry-recognized certificates in any of the 16 career pathways clusters through the WAGE™ program.

IELCE programs actively and specifically engage students by hosting guest speakers from and organizing field trips to local agencies and businesses as well as guiding students through language, civic, and employment education. Students also attend job fairs and participate in mock and actual interviews with representatives of local businesses. Career Service Providers also teach skills needed to maintain employment once hired, such as timeliness, collecting and organizing information, and teamwork. Through the WAGE™ program, students learn these and other workforce preparation skills, language instruction, and learn entry-level skills for their identified field of interest.

In WAGE™ Level II, students continue studies in their chosen field, earning industry-specific credentials to better prepare them for employment. Language instruction continues in support of student success and workforce preparation skills are more industry specific. Programs work with partner agencies such as Arkansas Rehabilitation Services and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) to fund the training and credentialing for eligible students. Students that are not eligible for assistance provided by other agencies may have these costs covered by available state funds. Local programs have had some frustration in identifying credentials for desired pathways of students who are unable to provide a social security number.

Requirements of a social security number to take licensing examinations or to be employed in some roles have creating some roadblocks for students. The Office of Adult Education and local programs are currently researching options to provide a clear path for students in this situation.

A statewide need for trained healthcare workers and clear career pathways have made healthcare one of the most popular career clusters in the state. Several adult education programs offer Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) training as a part of their IET offerings. Additionally, Pharmacy Technician, offered digitally through Aztec, and Phlebotomy are becoming increasingly popular offerings in the state.

Local programs partner with area businesses and industry to identify IETs that will provide employment opportunities with a living wage or provide stackable credentials leading to improved employment and wage outcomes for students. To date, programs have had students prepare for careers in hospitality, health sciences, retail sales, and construction.

Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will be designed to integrate with the local workforce development system and its functions to carry out the activities of the program.

Title II Response:

Adult Education services are provided in each of the 75 counties of the state. Adult Education programs operate in all comprehensive one-stop locations and in multiple affiliate sites.

Adult Education programs hold job fairs and an annual Open House, with participation from partner agencies. The Division of Workforce Services offers Mobile Workforce Centers, RVs and trailers equipped with computer stations with internet access, printers, copiers and manned by trained staff that are available to travel to locations throughout the state, assisting citizens with job search and resume creation. These Mobile Workforce Centers have been included in Open House and job fair events held at local adult education programs and have been a valuable resource for assisting individuals immediately.

Communication with students who have low levels of English language proficiency is addressed through several means. In workforce centers for which ten percent of population in the targeted service area speak a certain language, it is required that applications, grievance procedures, and any documents requiring a participant's signature are provided in that language. Workforce centers are also encouraged to provide other information in commonly spoken languages locally. Local adult education programs provide marketing materials in the One-Stop locations and in the communities in the most common languages spoken locally other than English. Additionally, marketing and other program materials are developed in language not to exceed the eighth-grade level.

The Office of Adult Education provides both an English and Spanish version of the Intake form, as Spanish is the most common first language in the state. Documents are translated to other languages as needed in areas where there are significant numbers of people who speak other languages such as Marshallese, Vietnamese, etc. Software such as Google Translate, Microsoft Translator, and iTranslate are used to communicate with those who speak other languages to identify needs that may be addressed by participation in adult education, partner agencies, or other area resources. Several programs have staff members who can speak common languages other than English and the Office of Adult Education employs two staff members who speak fluent Spanish and have assisted in some cases.

Some IELCE participants can receive the benefit of having training costs covered by Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or Arkansas Rehabilitation Services. Students seeking immediate employment are also led to the Division of Workforce Services for assistance with job search. The state's implementation of Civiform, Arkansas's integrated service delivery system, will provide students with automatic referrals to WIOA partners that can assist them with their various barriers. Civiform provides the ability for applicants to use the online form in English or Spanish, enhancing ease of use.

E. STATE LEADERSHIP (WIOA section 102(b)(2)(D)(ii)(III))

1. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE THE FUNDS TO CARRY OUT THE REQUIRED STATE LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES UNDER SECTION 223 OF WIOA

Title II Response:

The Office of Adult Education will use no more than 12.5% of State Basic federal funds grant for the following adult education and literacy activities to develop or enhance the adult education system of the state:

(A) The alignment of adult education and literacy activities with other one-stop partners to implement the strategies in the Unified or Combined State Plan as described in section 223(1)(a).

Since Fall 2015, a WIOA Executive Committee comprised of key core partners that include representatives from Titles I and III (Division of Workforce Services), Title II (Office of Adult Education), Title IV (Arkansas Rehabilitation Services and Division of Services for the Blind) meet to discuss strategies in getting those with barriers to employment into the workforce and to meet employers needs in the state. In addition, representatives from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Employment and Training programs under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP E&T), Trade Adjustment Assistance for Workers, and Unemployment Insurance also participate in the WIOA Executive Committee Meetings. The collaborative relationships are aligned with Pillar III: Integrated Systems in which duplicative services are reduced and a more streamlined, coordinated approach is delivered to participants.

Ensuring that adult education and literacy activities are aligned with core programs and One-Stop Partners are a requirement of the Request for Proposal application process for Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) funds. Local workforce development boards are allowed to review and comment on the RFP application of each eligible adult education applicant. One of the considerations is how the eligible provider demonstrates alignment between proposed activities and services to the one-stop partners. This includes how the applicant plans to align with the LWDB regarding employment, training, education, and supportive services that adult education learners need. In addition, the eligible adult education application must include the applicant's proposed activities, services, and the regional needs identified in the LWDB proposed local plan, including concurrent enrollment.

At the local level, an adult education provider serves on the local workforce development board as a representative of other adult providers in the region. In addition, adult education providers are located within most comprehensive One-Stop Centers when space is available and provide access to services at affiliate sites. For example, the UA Morrilton Adult Education program has a staff member who is physically present at the One-Stop Center in Conway, Arkansas. The staff member is appropriately trained to provide information to customers about the programs, services, and activities available through adult education. In areas of the state in which staff or space is limited, a direct link such as a telephone is provided in which customers can access services and information in real-time.

Another way in which adult education providers align services is through its integrated education and training programs (IET). IET is a service approach that provides adult education

and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement. An IET program must include three components: adult education and literacy activities, workforce preparation activities, and workforce training. In addition, as part of a career pathway, the design of an IET program should support the local and state workforce development board plans as required under WIOA.

Adult education providers work closely with community colleges and other training providers to offer the training component of the IET. Community colleges serve as the fiduciary agency for 22 of the 34 adult education and literacy providers. Adult education providers rely heavily on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) and other educational entities for the training component as many adult education providers provide the workforce preparation and basic skills component of the IET. In addition, adult learners are connected to programs such as TANF, WIOA, and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services to help pay tuition costs, as Title II funds cannot pay tuition on learners' behalf. This braided funding approach allows programs to maximize the services and allows adults to be co-enrolled in multiple programs.

Adult education also provides National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) testing for Title I and Title III participants. The Arkansas Career Readiness Certificate involves collaboration between Adult Education, the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, and Arkansas Workforce Centers. Adult education programs provide basic skills improvement through regular adult education services when test takers fail the CRC twice. In addition, some providers serve as proctors and test administrators of the NCRC. In recent years, this initiative has begun offering the Platinum CRC, which requires higher skill levels to earn, creating a greater need for Adult Education services. In summary, the Office of Adult Education has worked in close collaboration with its partners to ensure success in implementation of the State Plan and thereby meeting the needs of Arkansans.

(B) Establishment or operation of a high-quality professional development program as described in section 223(1)(b).

The Office of Adult Education contracts a portion of its Leadership Funds for professional development services to the Southeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative, Arkansas Adult Learning Resource Center (AALRC). With input from the state, the AALRC is responsible for facilitating professional development training to adult education providers, especially teachers, across the state. One area of trainings that the state has focused on is Career Pathways. Since 2021, over 144 professional development hours were provided in related topics such as Career Pathways, Contextualized Learning, and Integrated Education and Training (IET). The AALRC is responsible for identifying, evaluating, and disseminating materials and information to adult education and literacy programs. The Office of Adult Education and AALRC provide information through email, newsletters, and discussion lists and through Zoom webinars.

The AALRC coordinates and presents in-depth professional development training that coincides with the goals and vision of the Office of Adult Education and aligns with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the Title II AEFLA program. Throughout the year, the AALRC and the Office of Adult Education assess the needs of local programs areas through evaluations/surveys, meetings, and general discussions or requests by phone and email and provide any new software, materials, or resources necessary to accommodate program needs for continued progress.

The Office of Adult Education hosts the Fall and Spring Administrators' Meetings through the AALRC annually. Some of the topics of the Fall meeting focused on programs being student-focused, contextualized learning, training on Integrated Education and Training, customer service training, and a discussion of using data to develop recruitment and retention plans. The Spring meeting highlighted best practices, student and teacher recruitment, motivation, and retention. The meeting also focused on the leadership development of directors and included a SWOT Analysis and components of an effective program self-study. Additionally, the Office of Adult Education recognizes providers for achievements such as the highest measurable skill gains, credential attainments, and retention rate of all programs in the state. Programs who showed the greatest improvement in these areas are also acknowledged during this time.

Recognizing the lasting and profound impact that COVID-19 made on society, the AALRC continues to incorporate training on mental health and wellness, including the importance of self-care. Although the number of in-person training increased this year, the Office of Adult Education and the AALRC recognized that virtual or distance learning would continue to be an essential tool for educating students and staff; as such, efforts have continued to find ways to accommodate program needs in the areas of distance learning and technology. The AALRC's plan to offer more online training has included additional self-paced course offerings added to the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) online portal for programs. The AALRC also hosts a YouTube Channel that houses recorded training on using specific software applications and other relevant training beneficial to staff. Providing easy access to these workshops allows users to review and refresh their learning at their convenience. Other online professional development forums are maintained through Canvas and LINCS as well.

Past participation in initiatives such as the Digital Resilience in the American Workforce (DRAW), the IET Advanced Basic Bootcamp Training Series, and Teaching Skills that Matter (TSTM) have provided opportunities for teacher skills development that continue to serve the state. Improvements and expansion of the revamped Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy (WAGE™) program continued. The WAGE™ program emphasizes basic skills, workforce preparation, and industry-recognized certificates to make it a statewide model for Integrated Education and Training (IET). Training was offered on integrating career pathways into the curriculum. The Office of Adult Education now provides opportunities for students to earn industry-recognized certificates in any of the 16 career pathways clusters through the WAGE™ program. The Office of Adult Education works with local providers to place particular emphasis on developing complete career pathways programs that provide students the opportunity to earn certificates in Workforce Preparation, Hospitality and Tourism, Health Science, Business Management, Education and Training, and Manufacturing to meet the needs identified by regional workforce development boards. The Office of Adult Education supports completion of these credentials by offering scholarships to students that cover course and/or material costs.

In 2025, the AALRC implemented Lunch and Learn sessions, which allow those with expertise and specialized skills in particular areas to share with others. Topics provided or planned to date include Basic Math Principles and Strategies, Tackling Quadratic Equations with the TI-nspire

30XS, Intermediate Math Principles and Strategies, and Navigating the Student Accommodation Process. Some of these one-hour sessions will be expanded into half-day or day-long trainings for increased impact

The AALRC utilizes the online ESC Works system to track the professional development activities of faculty and staff in Arkansas. Participants can manage their transcripts of courses completed through the AALRC and from outside sources (i.e., state and national conferences, LINCS, etc.) in ESC Works.

(C) Provision of technical assistance to funded eligible providers as described in section 223(1)(c).

The Adult Education staff and the AALRC provide intense technical assistance to eligible providers. Some areas in which technical assistance was provided include:

- Technical training on the agency's data management system, provided by the Office of Adult Education staff.
- To improve data entry, short webinars were developed and delivered throughout the year to focus on specific areas of need as identified by questions received and issues identified through data reviews.
- Technical support provided by the AALRC's Information Technology Specialist related to software and hardware issues and questions.

The Office of Adult Education will continue to offer technical assistance to eligible providers. Many program directors and teachers have registered with the Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS), which offers a plethora of resources, professional development, and an opportunity to connect with other practitioners. If the AALRC or state staff is unable to offer training or a training has passed, LINCS offers multiple training topics such as Integrated Education and Training, Career Pathways, English as a Second Language, Distance Learning, and content areas such as reading, math, and science. LINCS allow individuals to get up to speed quickly in During administrators' meetings and through the professional development resource center, AALRC, trainings by experts in the field of English as a Second Language, Learning Disabilities, Math, Literacy, Distance Education, and much more continue to be offered. These offerings have become even more important during times when onsite trainings were limited due to the pandemic.

Mandatory Administrators' Meetings are held semi-annually during which policies and procedures are discussed and information is disseminated. During the administrators' meetings, providers also share best practices with one another as well as gain additional professional development training from staff or guest speakers. Additionally, state-level partners share pertinent information with local directors to assist with local collaboration. For safety reasons, the most recent meetings were held virtually.

In 2025-2026, the Office of Adult Education is conducting onsite program visits in which a team of state staff members provide technical assistance to each of the programs in order to address issues with the entire program staff. General topics include SWOT Analysis, State Workforce Goals, Student Barriers, NRS Tables, Manual Outcomes, GED®, WAGE™, Credential Attainment, Distance Learning, and Funding. Additional topics and areas of emphasis are determined during pre-visit meetings with local directors.

The Office of Adult Education staff provides technical training on the state's data management information system (LACES). The LACES trainings have been customized to fit the type of user utilizing the system. LACES Data Entry covers the basics of entering student information, creating classes, enrolling students in classes, entering assessments, entering attendance hours, and other basic data entry topics. LACES 101 highlights the link between data and program performance and funding, running federal tables, ensuring quality data, basic data searches and reports. LACES for Directors focuses on data dives to analyze student enrollment and performance, program and class level data analysis and creating data driven queries. LACES for Instructors focuses on how instructors, specifically, can use data to track student progress as they implement instructional methods and curriculum.

Training for new local program directors is provided through a one-on-one session within a month of hire, and an annual New Administrators' Training. The purpose of these trainings is to familiarize new program leadership of the responsibilities of their role, and the federal and state laws and policies that guide the services provided and the methods available to programs to meet the needs of participants.

The Office of Adult Education provides over ten data management system trainings per year regionally, as well as during administrators' meetings and conferences. Staff also provides webinars and teleconference training to providers. All providers participate in at least two data management information systems trainings per year. Technical support is available for LACES via email or telephone and by request, face-to-face, and weekly LACES office hours are provided via Zoom.

(D) Monitoring and evaluation of the quality and improvement of adult education activities as described in section 223 (1)(d).

Mandatory Administrators' Meetings are held semiannually, during which policies and procedures are discussed, information is disseminated, and providers can gain additional professional development from state staff, guest speakers, and each other.

The Office of Adult Education monitors local programs through submitted quarterly reports, annual one-day site visits, and intensive three-day program reviews performed on each program every four years or as determined by their level of risk. The program review and site visit instruments were updated in 2023 for future years in order to emphasize topics such as collaboration with one-stop partners, student credential completions, and the integration of career pathways, workplace literacy, digital literacy, etc. across the curriculum. These updates will allow the Office of Adult Education to better evaluate local program's preparation to meet federal and state goals.

The Office of Adult Education also evaluates each program annually through an E&E (Effective and Efficient) calculation, currently based upon the programs' progress on the federally negotiated benchmarks in NRS Table 4. Programs not meeting E&E are provided with intense technical assistance to develop and implement a program improvement plan, with follow-up throughout the remainder of the program year. A new calculation for E&E was developed in 2022-23 based on measurable skill gains, second and fourth quarter employment, credential attainment, and second quarter median earnings developed during 2022-23. This new

calculation was shared with local program directors and was implemented in 2023-24 and will be used in future years.

Adult education state staff evaluates providers quarterly through the review of each program's quarterly report submission. In it, providers review and report progress on average attendance hours, educational functioning level (EFL) gains, number and percentage of students post-tested, changes in major demographics, GED® rates, etc. Quarterly reports also allow providers to review operational aspects of the program such as the percentage of funds expended, completion of required professional development, and completed personnel activity reports. Quarterly report reviews and technical assistance calls between state staff and programs evaluate and monitor the success and performance regularly.

The Office of Adult Education also performs an annual site visit for each adult education and literacy provider to ensure that state and federal laws and policies are followed, to review program performance, and to connect with Local Education Agency Administrators. Based upon the findings during the site visit, regional program advisors provide technical assistance to program directors and staff to ensure continuous improvement.

Additionally, each year 25% of the current 34 adult education and literacy providers receive a program review, which is a three-day intensive program monitoring and technical site visit by a team of program advisors in the state office. Each provider can expect to have a program review every four years provided there are no major risks or violations identified during an annual site visit, which would increase review frequency. Providers are assessed in areas including, but not limited to, Program Management and Reporting, Financials, Technology, and Collaboration. This program review process allows program advisors and the State Disabilities Project Manager to thoroughly assess program operations, observe classroom instruction, and review state and federal laws and policies. Once each program is reviewed, the Office of Adult Education requests a full financial audit review by the state agency's finance department.

The Office of Adult Education evaluates each program annually through an E&E (Effective and Efficient) calculation, currently based upon the programs' progress on the federally negotiated benchmarks in Table 4. Programs that do not meet the determined percentage of the benchmarks are provided additional technical assistance in order to prepare a performance improvement plan. Plan implementation is monitored throughout the year. Upon not meeting the requirements of E&E for three consecutive years, the Office of Adult Education makes a recommendation to the Arkansas Workforce Development Board as to whether the program should continue to be funded.

Lastly, mandatory Administrators' Meetings are held twice a year in which policies and procedures are discussed and information is disseminated. During the administrators' meeting, providers share best practices with one another as well as gain additional professional development training from staff or guest speakers.

2. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE THE FUNDS TO CARRY OUT PERMISSIBLE STATE LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES UNDER SECTION 223 OF WIOA, IF APPLICABLE

Title II Response:

Permissible activities from Section 223 (2) that the state will support will be used to expand the services of adult education in the state and may include the following from the law:

(2) The development and implementation of technology applications, translation technology, or distance education, including professional development to support the use of instructional technology and artificial intelligence. Adult education providers must integrate technology in the curriculum. The state has invested in the purchase of statewide academic and essential skills software that can be used to assess learners' digital literacy skills. In addition, the Office of Adult Education requires adult education instructors to attain six hours of technology professional development annually. The state also requires every full-time teacher to become Distance Learning Certified within two years. The course, Intro to Canvas and Growing with Canvas, train teachers on how to integrate technology into the curriculum. Classes are self-paced although the state offers scheduled face-to-face training for those instructors who need more hands-on training. This approach is aligned to Pillar V: Flexibility and Innovation in which workforce innovation is built to match the speed of AI-driven economic transformation.

(4) Developing content and models for integrated education and training and career pathways. Over the past five years, the state continues to offer professional development and technical assistance training in integrated education and training and career pathways. This past year, one of the trainings hosted included "IET-Team Teaching Models." Some instructors were challenged by the concept of how to contextualize the instruction and how to work directly with the subject matter expert in devising a curriculum and team teaching. Most, if not all, participants had a better understanding of the role of the ABE instructor as equal partner in the IET process. ABE instructors may offer basic skills support to learners outside of class to help them master challenging subject matter content.

(6) The development and implementation of a system to assist in the transition from adult education to postsecondary education, including linkages with postsecondary educational institutions or institutions of higher education. The Office of Adult Education has two Career Coaches who are responsible for teaching the Career Service Provider Course. The Career Service Provider curriculum is owned and designed by the National Career Development Association. Every adult education provider is required to have a Career Coach on staff and go through the Career Service Provider course. Within the course topics such as Helping Skills, Labor Market Information and Resources, Career Assessment, Career Development Models, Employability Skills, and more are integrated into the curriculum. The Career Coach is also trained in job search skills, resumes, mock interviews, and helping individuals to transition to post-secondary education or training. The state office has also created a Bridge Transition course in the state's learning management system, Canvas, in which Career Coaches can access PowerPoints, templates, and other resources vital to helping individuals transition out of adult education and into the workforce.

(8) Activities to promote workplace adult education and literacy activities. One of the services Adult Education provides to employers is workplace classes. Workplace classes include instruction at a workplace, or an off-site location designed to improve the workforce's productivity for a company. Instruction includes contextualized literacy, writing, math, English language acquisition, and workforce preparation at Educational Functioning Levels appropriate to learners. Adult education providers have also provided computer skill-building for use on the job, specialized vocabulary relevant to the employer or industry, and basic on-the-job

conduct such as being on time, attendance, and relations with peers and supervisors. The employer is a vital partner who helps guide and design the curriculum to meet the organization's needs. In addition, adult education providers also conduct literacy task analysis (LTA) on behalf of employers through the Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy (WAGE™) program. A literacy task analysis is a method of obtaining detailed information about the specific components of a job that require literacy skills such as reading, writing, computation, communication, creative thinking, problem-solving, personal management, and teamwork skills. A trained WAGE™ Coordinator consults with a manager and works with a group of employees to complete the LTA and gain an understanding of the abilities, skills, and knowledge of a specific job. The experienced employees serve as the subject matter experts who define the tasks and skills needed to perform a job successfully. Professional development activities on how to work with employers in developing workplace classes and conducting LTAs are important training mechanisms in the effectiveness in serving employers.

(9) Identifying the curriculum frameworks and aligning rigorous content standards. Since the adoption of the College and Career Readiness Standards, the state professional development has focused very heavily on training teachers on the new standards and how that information translates into the classroom. Some of the professional development trainings included Reading and Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, Science and High School Equivalency Guide for Educators. The state also incorporated Test Anxiety and Math Anxiety to better prepare learners in test taking strategies. Professional development training is also provided to English as a Second Language teachers to help English Language Learners (ELLs) progress within ESL levels to ABE levels. Civics education, workforce preparation and training are also integrated into the professional development trainings with instructors. Lastly, to help practitioners implement integrated education and training and connect with business and industry, this past year, the state focused on helping programs identify occupational and industry skills standards. Using the Competency Model Clearinghouse as the foundation, providers are able to develop competencies needed for current or future employees and design the curriculum accordingly.

(10) Developing and piloting strategies for improving teacher quality and retention. The Professional Development Committee has created a New Teacher Orientation course in Canvas, the state's Learning Management System, for new teachers to complete. The New Teacher Orientation (NTO) is designed to provide an overview of adult education in Arkansas. This course was adapted from the New Teacher Orientation Course created by the Central Illinois Adult Education Service Center.

Objectives of the course include understanding the structure, key elements, and priorities of adult education in Arkansas, an overview of the College and Career Readiness Standards, important components for effective instruction, and accessing important topics such as Professional Development requirements and registration, Adult Education Licensure Requirements, and teacher resources. In addition, adult education programs are required to assign new teachers mentors to support the instructor's professional growth and psychosocial development in adult education.

F. ASSESSING QUALITY (WIOA section 102(b)(2)(D)(ii)(V))

Describe how the eligible agency will assess the quality of providers of adult education and literacy activities under title II. Describe how the eligible agency will take actions to improve such quality, including providing the activities described in section

223(a)(1)(B) of WIOA. Describe how the eligible agency will use evaluations, data analysis, program monitoring, or other methods to improve the quality of adult education activities in the State.

Title II Response:

The Office of Adult Education analytically assesses program staff and performance data in conjunction with surveys and responses to ongoing planned instruction to improve essential components related to adults in reading, language, and math. The state's performance review process is aligned with Pillar IV: Accountability, which ensures that federally funded programs deliver measurable results. Using annual performance trends, the Office of Adult Education reviews the performance data in LACES of individual EFL levels associated with reading, language, and math scores of adults to measure the results. The performance results are measured with annual negotiated benchmarks and compared to nationwide testing results and performance levels of top-performing states. Data is gathered and maintained on individual providers so that technical assistance can be provided to those with below-average performance, and high-performing programs can be identified for sharing processes and innovations that contribute to their success.

Outside the capacity of participants to attend and make gains, individual providers and instructors have an influence on the participant access to services. The Office of Adult Education has identified components of education and literacy activities associated with availability and customer service levels as having an influence on the participant's attainability scope and retention. Arkansas Office of Adult Education reviewed the availability and hours of operation, scheduling and available courses, and enrollment peaks of participants throughout the year and on a daily schedule at each provider. Providers were made aware of the need to increase availability on nights and weekends with core subjects and low-attendance class schedules to increase opportunities for participants.

Additionally, multiple training sessions were held to share best practices in communication and follow-up methods with participants to improve customer service. Strategies were also identified in subject-specific lesson planning to focus instruction on key components in subject areas. A combination of methods is used to assess the effectiveness of professional development training to support local programs and instructors. Classroom observations, student educational gains, focus groups, and overall self-reporting tools are used to determine professional development effectiveness. Data from the adult education management information system are utilized to evaluate and determine if and how the professional development activities impact student learning outcomes.

In 2024-2025, The Office of Adult Education began using Technical Assistance Compliance (TAC) Reports in order to more effectively assist programs with deficiencies. Initial implementation of TAC reports, deficiencies are identified, such as not meeting minimum post-test, enrollment, or Effective and Efficient (E&E) rates, or failing to provide training opportunities as identified in the 2024-2027 RFP. Some additional measures were determined for those below the average program performance. For programs that received an initial TAC report, state staff meets with the program director regularly throughout the year, until any identified deficiencies are resolved. State staff generates progress reports based on each meeting and shares them with the program director. The Office of Adult Education monitors the

required training of local provider staff through annual site visits, program reviews, and desk audits, using data in LACES, the state's data management system. Site visits and program reviews address questions of staff training and staff performance. Staff needs are identified through local director requests, conference and training surveys, state staff assessments of performance, and professional development records of instructors at local agencies. The Office of Adult Education reviews local performance data, monitors evaluations, surveys, and requests to determine how to broadcast and distribute training needed to meet adult learners' needs and address any instruction deficiencies. Communicating the needs of professional development and training is conveyed through local advisory boards, senior management meetings, focus groups, and by analyzing performance data.

Arkansas has its own professional development resource center, The Arkansas Adult Learning Resource Center (AALRC), which coordinates the Office of Adult Education's professional development programs. The AALRC is funded through the Southeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative by the Arkansas Workforce Connections, Office of Adult Education (AWC/OAE). It was established in 1990 to provide a source for identifying, evaluating, and disseminating materials and information to adult education/literacy programs. The AALRC is located in Little Rock, Arkansas, and has seven full-time employees, which include a Director, Professional Development Coordinator, Information Technology Specialist, Disabilities Project Manager, Media Coordinator, Secretary, and Administrative Assistant. State funds support employee salaries, while federal funds are used for the fulfillment of our mission.

Except in specific circumstances approved by the Office of Adult Education, teachers must hold an Arkansas teacher license in order to teach adult education classes in Arkansas. Teachers must participate in at least 36 hours of professional development annually in order to maintain the license. In addition, Arkansas requires adult education directors, full-time instructors, and counselors to be certified in adult education within three years of initial full-time employment. The AALRC supports this effort by providing tuition reimbursement for those completing this requirement. The AALRC supports the Office of Adult Education by supporting statewide program administrators' meetings, numerous committee meetings, publishing a directory of literacy services, and maintaining a website (<http://www.aalrc.org>).

The Office of Adult Education has adopted the College and Career Readiness (CCR) Standards set forth by the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education. State staff, teachers, and directors from the field examined each CCR standard to align materials used in the field. Subject-focused trainings are provided to assist teachers statewide in delivering high-quality instruction based on the CCR Standards.

During the 2017 legislative session, the Arkansas General Assembly passed Act 1061 (the Right to Read Act). Beginning with the 2021-2022 school year, all kindergarten through sixth-grade teachers and kindergarten through 12th-grade special education teachers must show proficiency in scientific reading instruction (evidence-based practices that teach a student how to learn to read). All other teachers must demonstrate an awareness. In addition to Act 1063, Act 416 of 2017 requires education preparation programs to teach scientific reading instruction. Since adult education teachers must have a current Arkansas teacher's license, they will also have to meet the Department of Education requirements to maintain their license. The AALRC also offers professional development training in other content areas, such as math, science, and social studies.

The AALRC supports practitioners and trainers through professional development opportunities at state and national conferences. Those include the Arkansas Association for Continuing and Adult Education & Adult Literacy Alliance (AACAE/ALA) Conference, Learning Disabilities Association (LDA), Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE) Conference, Hot Springs Institute for Technology, and California State University Northridge (CSUN) Assistive Technology Conference. The AALRC also supports local programs by maintaining a current library of materials, providing research support/information, purchasing/distributing software and materials, and upgrading/redistribution of equipment.

The AALRC uses a variety of methods to ensure that local program directors and staff are aware of professional development activities. An email is sent to the program directors explaining each training event, and event information is included on the AALRC website (www.aalrc.org) under the professional development heading. Information regarding training activities is also included in the AALRC newsletter, which is published quarterly. The newsletters are available on the website and mailed to each local program. For those attending training sessions, the AALRC pays travel expenses according to the state travel guidelines for those participants paid with adult education funds.

The AALRC uses a system called ESC Works to track activities and participants. Educators in the State of Arkansas must register for and track professional development events with this online system. Participants are able to manage their own transcripts in the system to add professional development attended outside of the AALRC (i.e., state conference or national conference). Arkansas Adult Education has begun to require providers to list the certificates, credentials, and professional development training of staff for each provider in LACES. Local providers and state staff can monitor staff training and licensing using the LACES data management software.

To assess the quality of its professional development programs, the AALRC uses Guskey's model for the Five Critical Levels of Professional Development Evaluation. Evaluations are aggregated and evaluated to determine the quality of training, and adjustments are made according to the results to improve the effectiveness of the professional development provided by the state through the AALRC and the impact on student learning outcomes.

The Arkansas Adult Education Assessment Policy provides the requirements and guidance for local program data entry and management. It directs programs on NRS requirements and state requirements related to use of LACES, the state's data management system, providing details such as the requirement for all participant data for the previous month being entered and verified by the 10th of the month.

This includes student participation and attendance, pre-test and post-test scores. Students with both a pretest and post-test will be recorded in NRS Table 4B, which is a required federal table. In addition, all assessment scores in the system should be dated on the exact date the test was given. Test documentation must be available in the students' files and is subject to monitoring during site visits and program reviews.

Each program is required to maintain and follow a written policy and procedure for data entry that includes checks and balances for data collection steps, personnel responsible for entering data, and personnel who check and verify data that aligns with the state's assessment policy. Adhering to a written policy that aligns with the state's assessment policy is expected and

monitored for all adult education providers, regardless of location. Verification of data is checked through desk audits, quarterly reports, and on-site visits by state program advisors.

According to Assurance 13 of the Office of Adult Education Assurances, which is signed at the time of the adult education grant award, all programs that receive adult education funds agree to submit student data according to schedules set by the Office of Adult Education. If programs are missing data in LACES or have data with errors or deviations, they will be notified by a program advisor and will be required to correct the problem within one month. According to Assurance 33, the Office of Adult Education may reduce funding or terminate agreements in part or whole if it has been determined that a program has failed to comply with the assurances.

The Office of Adult Education staff reviews and analyzes data in LACES regularly throughout each year to monitor change, assess trends, and address anomalies and factors of performance. Adult Education monthly reports, administrator meetings, advisory board meetings, WIOA monthly meetings, Senior Management meetings, desk audits, LACES pieces of training, and other associated projects all encompass sharing regularly monitored and analyzed data with the field. As data is monitored and analyzed, the Office of Adult Education reviews best practices and ways to address improving aspects of performance and improve the quality of adult education activities in the state whether through training, site visits, desk audits, or other assistive strategies.

When the Office of Adult Education analyzes and identifies sub-performing data, meetings are held to address ways to improve performance and offer technical assistance. The Adult Education staff addresses key indicators of data affected and attends to strategies local providers can manage to improve areas of performance that were identified and addressed. Utilizing a team approach of state program advisors, regular meetings are scheduled with local providers where issues are addressed. Goals are set to correct and enhance the delivery of adult education services to participants. Adult Education staff continue to meet regularly with local providers until goals are satisfied and aligned to improve the quality of adult education activities in the state.

When common data trends are identified, the Office of Adult Education prepares technical assistance strategies to address those trends. Utilizing webinars and Zoom training, issues can be addressed quickly, while Administrators' meetings and other conference dates are used to develop specific pieces of training to address issues. For example, when data verifications revealed that credentials were not being entered correctly, a webinar was developed and delivered to provide training. Regional LACES trainings are also held throughout the year to address local and regional providers. These regional pieces of training target a myriad of well-developed LACES training while including site-specific and regional-specific strategies for improvement.

The Office of Adult Education uses annual site-visits monitoring reports to assess and assist local programs with key areas of program performance. Each area of compliance on the site visit form is aligned to assist local providers in meeting the 13 Adult Education Assurances. Areas of compliance include; reviewing student data kept on file that match data in LACES; the number and percentage of missing Social Security Numbers; manual outcomes completed, valid IET, compliance with the Assessment Policy, Advisory Board compliance, managed enrolled classes being offered; the usage of technology and software; providing evidence of preparing students for the workforce, the analysis of GED® completions, WAGE™ certificates, and credentials;

recruitment and retention efforts; post-test rates; and among other compliance issues, how programs are working with WIOA partners.

The Office of Adult Education addresses the site visit forms annually after the site visit season and reviews common findings, issues, and areas for improvement. These site visit forms are adapted to curb trends and address key indicators of a healthy well-run program while addressing non-compliance issues across the state. State staff review economic trends, possible legislation, business and industry needs, and local and regional workforce development needs to help programs establish valid IET programs leading to certifications and credentials. The Office of Adult Education continues to strive to improve opportunities and quality of adult education activities in the state.

ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAM CERTIFICATIONS AND ASSURANCES

Title II Response:

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The plan is submitted by the State agency that is eligible to submit the plan;	Yes
2. The State agency has authority under State law to perform the functions of the State under the program;	Yes
3. The State legally may carry out each provision of the plan;	Yes
4. All provisions of the plan are consistent with State law;	Yes
5. A State officer, specified by title in the certification, has authority under State law to receive, hold, and disburse Federal funds made available under the plan;	Yes
6. The State officer who is submitting the plan, specified by the title in the certification, has authority to submit the plan;	Yes
7. The agency that is submitting the plan has adopted or otherwise formally approved the plan; and	Yes
8. The plan is the basis for State operation and administration of the program;	Yes

ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAM ASSURANCES

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The eligible agency will expend funds appropriated to carry out title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) only in a manner consistent with fiscal requirements under section 241(a) of WIOA (regarding the supplement-not-supplant requirement);	Yes
2. The eligible agency will ensure that there is at least one eligible provider serving each local area, as defined in section 3(32) of WIOA;	Yes
3. The eligible agency will not use any funds made available under title II of WIOA for the purpose of supporting or providing programs, services, or activities for individuals who are not "eligible individuals" within the meaning of section 203(4) of WIOA, unless it is providing programs, services or activities related to family literacy activities, as defined in section 203(9) of WIOA;	Yes
4. Using funds made available under title II of WIOA to carry out a program for criminal offenders within a correctional institution, the eligible agency will give priority to serving individuals who are likely to leave the correctional institution within five years of participation in the program.	Yes
5. The eligible agency agrees that in expending funds made available under Title II of WIOA, the eligible agency will comply with sections 8301 through 8303 of the Buy American Act (41 U.S.C. 8301-8303).	Yes

Authorizing or Certifying Representative

APPLICANT'S ORGANIZATION	Enter information in this column
Applicant's Organization	Division of Workforce Services, Office of Adult Education

APPLICANT'S ORGANIZATION	Enter information in this column
PRINTED NAME AND TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE	Enter information in this column
First Name	Trenia
Last Name	Miles
Title	Director
Email	trenia.miles@arkansas.gov

SECTION 427 OF THE GENERAL EDUCATION PROVISIONS ACT (GEPA)

1. DESCRIBE HOW YOUR ENTITY'S EXISTING MISSION, POLICIES, OR COMMITMENTS ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO, AND EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION IN, THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY.

Title II Response:

The Office of Adult Education's mission is to ensure that all adults have equitable access to and participation in adult education services. Our mission states:

- All adults have the right to an education that enhances their ability to affect positive life changes.
- All adults have the right to obtain the life skills needed to become self-sufficient, actively participating members of society.
- All adults have the right to complete their education through the high school level.

The Office of Adult Education of the Arkansas Workforce Connections (AWC_OAE) will ensure equitable access and participation in the federally funded Title II programs and meet the requirements of Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA). Through the Arkansas Adult Learning Resource Center (AALRC), adult education's professional development vendor, will provide training on and access to tools that address education barriers, including gender, race, national origin, color, disability, or age. These trainings focus on particular issues and topics related to each barrier. For example, AALRC has and will continue to provide training on Learning Disabilities that includes assessment tools, accommodations, and instructional materials; Other areas include various topics, such as age, socio-economic status, gender, and working with others; training on recruiting, retaining, and instructing English Language Learners. Each adult education provider is required to have an ADA Coordinator on staff to assist students with any disability need they may have. Programs are allowed to check out resources such as reader pens, text-to-speech software, devices to remove background noise, page magnifiers, etc., to meet the needs of students, staff, and employees with disabilities.

2. BASED ON YOUR PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY, WHAT BARRIERS MAY IMPEDE EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, OR OTHER BENEFICIARIES?

Title II Response:

Barriers that may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or beneficiaries include transportation, childcare, and lack of living in rural parts of the state, lack of financial resources. The individuals in adult education tend to be marginalized and have less access to resources such as transportation, computers, housing, the internet, etc. In rural areas of the state, the internet is a challenge for many, from accessibility to affordability. In addition, for participants already struggling financially, paying for internet service is more like a luxury than a need. We have attempted to mitigate this process by ensuring that every provider has a staff member certified in distance learning and by allowing students to check out Chromebooks, laptops, and Mi-Fi cards. For students who lack transportation and childcare, staff are trained to connect individuals with the Department of Human Services for assistance and support along with other WIOA core programs. Each provider is required to have an American Disability Act Coordinator who screens individuals for disabilities as well as provide supportive academic services to them.

3. BASED ON THE BARRIERS IDENTIFIED, WHAT STEPS WILL YOU TAKE TO ADDRESS SUCH BARRIERS TO EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY?

Title II Response:

The Office of Adult Education is committed to implementing strategies to ensure equitable access and program participation. The following steps will be or have been implemented as necessary to reduce access barriers and maximize participation.

1. Work with the professional development center ADA Coordinator to identify the unique needs of program participants, including, but not limited to, access requirements—such as wheelchair access, signers, and interpreters as needed.
2. Develop and implement a plan to address participants' identified special access needs before events: conferences, seminars, workshops, focus groups, regional trainings, etc. All program-related events will be held in ADA-accessible facilities.
3. Offer culturally sensitive and ADA training for program staff, faculty, and employees.
4. Post information curriculum, materials, and schedules of events on the internet, which enables equitable access by participants and enables assistive computer devices to interpret the materials.
5. Continue monitoring program effectiveness to ensure the proposed strategies are met, target audience(s) are reached, and goals and objectives are achieved.
6. Partner and connect adult learners to state agency and community resources that can help provide supportive services that will eliminate and reduce barriers that impede progress of learners.

In addition, before grant funds are awarded, each Local Education Agency must ensure equitable access and participation in Adult Education activities to be conducted with federal adult education assistance by addressing the access needs of students, teachers, and other program beneficiaries to overcome barriers to equitable participation, including barriers based on gender, race, color, national origin, disability, and age.

4. WHAT IS YOUR TIMELINE, INCLUDING TARGETED MILESTONES, FOR ADDRESSING THESE IDENTIFIED BARRIERS?

Title II Response:

Arkansas currently addresses these barriers. Since 2017, we have been a third-party provider for the SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) program Through SNAP E&T , we have been able to get adult learners eligible for services. These supportive services have reduced barriers for some students, significantly. As mentioned earlier, the Office of Adult Education continues to monitor adult education providers for program effectiveness to ensure that the proposed strategies are met, target audience(s) are being reached, and goals and objectives are achieved. We also review the Statewide Performance Report (SPR) and share the results with the field. Areas for improvement are reviewed and targeted to ensure those with barriers to employment are seeing success as other learners.

ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Title II Response:

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	49.0%	47.5%	50.0%	48.5%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	49.0%	48.5%	50.0%	49.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$5,500	\$5,200	\$5,600	\$5,300
Credential Attainment Rate	43.0%	41.5%	44.0%	42.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	60.0%	59.9%	61.0%	60.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

**PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION
(COMBINED OR GENERAL)**

A. STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL.

1. ALL VR AGENCIES, EXCEPT FOR THOSE THAT HAVE AN INDEPENDENT CONSUMER-CONTROLLED COMMISSION, MUST HAVE A STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (COUNCIL OR SRC) THAT MEETS THE CRITERIA IN SECTION 105 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT. THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPLICABLE, HAS:

Title IV ARS Response:

(B) has established a State Rehabilitation Council

2. IN ACCORDANCE WITH ASSURANCE (A)(1)(B), IF SELECTED, PLEASE PROVIDE INFORMATION ON THE CURRENT COMPOSITION OF THE COUNCIL BY REPRESENTATIVE TYPE, INCLUDING THE TERM NUMBER OF THE REPRESENTATIVE, AS APPLICABLE, AND ANY VACANCIES, AS WELL AS THE BEGINNING DATES OF EACH REPRESENTATIVE'S TERM.

TITLE IV ARS RESPONSE:

Council Representative	Current Term Number/Vacant	Beginning Date of Term Mo./Yr.
Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)	Vacant	
Parent Training and Information Center	Vacant	
Client Assistance Program	Vacant	
Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor (Ex Officio if Employed by the VR Agency)	Vacant	
Community Rehabilitation Program Service Provider	Vacant	
Business, Industry, and Labor	1	2/26
Business, Industry, and Labor	Vacant	
Business, Industry, and Labor	Vacant	

Council Representative	Current Term Number/Vacant	Beginning Date of Term Mo./Yr.
Business, Industry, and Labor	Vacant	
Disability Advocacy Groups	1	2/26
	1	2/27
Current or Former Applicants for, or Recipients of, VR services	Vacant	
Section 121 Project Directors in the State (as applicable)	NA	
State Educational Agency Responsible for Students with Disabilities Eligible to Receive Services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	1	2/27
State Workforce Development Board	1	2/27
VR Agency Director (Ex Officio)	Commissioner	Awaiting reappointment

3. IF THE SRC IS NOT MEETING THE COMPOSITION REQUIREMENTS IN SECTION 105(B) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT AND/OR IS NOT MEETING QUARTERLY AS REQUIRED IN SECTION 105(F) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, PROVIDE THE STEPS THAT THE VR AGENCY IS TAKING TO ENSURE IT MEETS THOSE REQUIREMENTS.

Title IV ARS Response:

The SRC met quarterly as required and minutes are available for review. In addition, the SRC held special meetings on February 20, 2025, and March 4, 2025, to discuss combining Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) and the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) into one agency.

Securing Governor appointments/reappointments remains a major issue for the SRC. At present the Council continues to function outside federal requirements with only four members. Efforts to secure needed appointments/reappointments by both SRC members and ARS have failed and if this continues the SRC will have only three members in February 2026. ARS and the SRC have requested assistance from both the Director of Workforce Connections (its DSA) and the Office of the Secretary of the Arkansas Department of Commerce within which the agency resides.

4. IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS IN SECTION 101(A)(21)(A)(II)(III) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, INCLUDE A SUMMARY OF THE COUNCIL'S INPUT (INCLUDING HOW IT WAS OBTAINED) INTO THE STATE PLAN AND ANY STATE PLAN REVISIONS, INCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COUNCIL'S ANNUAL REPORTS, THE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER SATISFACTION AND OTHER COUNCIL REPORTS.

Title IV ARS Response:

While the SRC remains out of compliance with federal requirements, existing members continue to show due diligence in performing Council functions. During this reporting period the Council:

- Provided input regarding the Corrective Action Plan associated with RSA's monitoring of ARS.
- Participated in discussions associated with the combining of ARS and the DSB into a combined agency.
- Provided input regarding the selection of a vendor to complete the next CSNA and received updates regarding the progress of the CSNA's completion.
- Reviewed the results of the piloted client satisfaction survey.
- Reviewed the organizational structure of ARS's reorganization.

5. PROVIDE THE VR AGENCY'S RESPONSE TO THE COUNCIL'S INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS, INCLUDING AN EXPLANATION FOR THE REJECTION OF ANY INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

ARS did not reject any input or recommendations from the SRC.

B. COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT (CSNA).

1. THE VR SERVICES NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES RESIDING WITHIN THE STATE, INCLUDING:

A. INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES AND THEIR NEED FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT;

Title IV ARS Response:

In 2024, ARS, in agreement with the State Rehabilitation Council, contracted the University of Arkansas at Little Rock to conduct the most recent Arkansas Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. A mixed method approach was utilized to collect relevant and applicable data including surveys, questionnaires, focus groups, and telephone and face-to-face interviews of ARS' current and previously served clients, ARS staff including senior leadership, vendors, business partners, and other relevant stakeholders.

Key Findings:

In the staff survey, ARS employees indicated that the most underserved populations in the state are individuals with the most significant disabilities, and individuals who need long-term supports and extended services to achieve and maintain employment. These are the very individuals who need Pre-ETS and Supported Employment services. It appears that the system is failing these individuals.

If ARS is to successfully meet the needs of individuals who have significant disabilities throughout the state, the network of CRPs will be critical partners. It is imperative that the agency work to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and support within the CRP network. The evaluators feel that the community partners, especially the CRPs, are underfunded in virtually every program that they're asked to provide for ARS clients. It is also true that ARS does not have an acceptable method of evaluating the quality of services provided by community partners.

Services for individuals with the most significant disabilities, additional transition services, and expanded supported employment services were all cited as needs for significant attention by ARS leadership. These services, along with expanded outreach and service provision in geographically underserved areas in the state, specifically, the counties in the Delta region, should be considered as priorities.

Training in general was regularly mentioned as a need. Some focus group participants were specific about types of training that are lacking. Counselors asked for additional training in dealing with individuals with serious mental health issues, and for those individuals who have autism.

Recommendations:

- ARS should create and offer targeted and affordable training programs to CRP staff in their local communities to improve quantity and quality of services to individuals served by CRP programs.
- ARS should continue to work across departments and agencies to increase funding and the provision of supported employment services for individuals with the most significant disabilities.

.B. INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO ARE MINORITIES AND INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR PROGRAM;

Key Findings:

There are unmet needs in the state that were documented in the focus groups and surveys conducted as part of this study. The needs of minority populations were cited in more than one focus group. Specifically, the lack of translators for Hispanic/Latino consumers was mentioned by a number of participants. Some geographic areas were also held up as being underserved. The counties that make up the Delta region and the Southeast quadrant of the state as well as some counties in Northeast Arkansas were thought to need additional support.

Services for individuals with the most significant disabilities, additional transition services, and expanded supported employment services were all cited as needs for significant attention by ARS leadership. These services, along with expanded outreach and service provision in geographically underserved areas in the state, specifically, the counties in the Delta region, should be considered as priorities.

Arkansas' Centers for Independent Living (CILs) are philosophically sound, and very mission focused. CILs are located in Fayetteville (Sources), Little Rock (Mainstream Living), Pine Bluff

(Disability Resource and Advocacy Center), and Hot Springs (Sails). Each of the four centers is committed to the concept of CILs being designed and operated by people with disabilities. The existing CILs have service areas that, in total, fully cover only 25 of 75 counties in Arkansas. This is a deficiency that has existed in Arkansas for over 25 years, and although the existing CILs work hard to provide outreach and to serve those individuals from outlying areas who are most in need, it is a glaring concern.

Findings indicate there is little if any intentional integration between the CILs and the VR system. Most counselors and ARS staff are almost totally unaware of the work that the CILs do.

Recommendations:

- CIL leadership, working alongside ARS leadership, must advocate for an additional CIL in the state to meet the mission and mandate of providing CIL services to all areas of the state. The Independent Living philosophy postulates that people with disabilities are the best experts on their needs, and therefore they must take the initiative, individually and collectively, in designing and promoting better solutions and must organize themselves to work together for those solutions. To fully live in this philosophy, Arkansas' CILs must work closer together to advocate for expanded IL services in Arkansas.
- ARS leadership must work to expand the availability of qualified interpreters for clients and potential clients who require translation. In too many cases, individuals are sent home because no interpreter is available, and in some cases, applicants are asked to locate their own interpreter and make a second appointment. This is not acceptable, and ARS should immediately initiate steps to resolve the issue
- ARS should enlist the WIPA program to provide benefits counseling to all VR clients. This would help to ameliorate family fears connected to the loss of benefits.
- ARS should work cooperatively with CRPs to expand outreach to underserved populations in the state. In some regions of the state, distrust of government agencies was noted, and the phrase, "I'm from the government and I'm here to help you" was mentioned more than once as the basis for lack of trust and participation.

C. INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES SERVED THROUGH OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM; AND

Key Findings:

The concept of no wrong door is clearly a work in progress. Focus group participants were generally of the opinion that, at the leadership level, significant strides have been made in terms of creating collaboration and cooperation, but in too many cases, this feeling of partnership does not filter down to the field staff.

The most frequently stated concern with the Workforce/ARS partnership revolves around the "no wrong door" concept and the fact that the two agencies have not developed a common intake system. ARS seems to embrace the concept of a "one-stop-shop" and "no wrong door"

principle, but there were serious concerns expressed about the lack of cooperation with intake and service data. If an individual applies for services at a Workforce office and is determined to have a disability and is transferred to the ARS counselor in the office, the counselor must initiate a new application despite duplicative information. ARS IT staff are keenly aware of this problem and continue to work for a better system.

Recommendations:

- ARS leadership must continue to provide strong leadership in the ongoing efforts to realize the long-term goal of creating a “no wrong door” system for individuals who use the array of Workforce services.
- ARS leadership should continue to champion the concept of a common intake system for individuals seeking services.
- ARS leadership should continue to work toward shared data resources and integrated systems across WIOA services to enhance data quality, sharing, and analysis for informed decision-making, program improvement, collaboration, and service delivery.

D. YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR NEED FOR PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES. INCLUDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES FOR TRANSITION CAREER SERVICES AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH SUCH SERVICES ARE COORDINATED WITH TRANSITION SERVICES PROVIDED UNDER IDEA.

Key Findings:

The key to providing adequate services for job seekers is a cooperative relationship between the individual, the community vendor, and the ARS counselor. Participants in the partners focus group expressed mixed opinions about the quality and success of those partnerships. Participants expressed frustration with both the state Pre-ETS and Supported Employment programs.

Recommendations:

- ARS should expand School to Work (SWT), Pre-ETS, and work-based learning offerings for students that are designed to impact students with disabilities at an earlier age, and which will lead to better coordination, enhanced communication, stronger collaboration, and increased successful post-school outcomes. Research indicates that work-based learning provides a context for professional development, allowing students to develop cognitive and soft skills while also connecting classroom learning to future careers. These valuable programs provide another opportunity for CRPs to expand their reach into more viable programs. It seems likely the need for these services will continue to grow. The challenge for ARS is to find ways to expand the footprint of these valuable services, and the network of CRPs is a viable and timely source to assist in this effort.

- ARS should expand efforts to enroll Pre-ETS students as VR clients prior to high school graduation. While this is a valid recommendation, it should be noted that this is a major change in direction for RSA. The Pre-ETS program was designed for students who didn't receive any other VR services, and the two programs had to be kept separate.
- ARS should review and modify Pre-ETS protocols to better meet the needs of students. The guidelines for Pre-ETS program development should be studied and modified for maximum efficiency. The purpose of the Pre-ETS program is to provide work experience, and research validates the importance of Work-Based Learning. The evaluators recommend that ARS work with community partners and the public schools to improve and expand those services.

2. IDENTIFY THE NEED TO ESTABLISH, DEVELOP, OR IMPROVE COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE.

Key Findings:

If ARS is to successfully meet the needs of individuals who have significant disabilities throughout the state, the network of CRPs will be critical partners. It is imperative that the agency work to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and support within the CRP network. The evaluators feel that the community partners, especially the CRPs, are underfunded in virtually every program that they're asked to provide for ARS clients. It is also true that ARS does not have an acceptable method of evaluating the quality of services provided by community partners.

Recommendations:

- ARS should create and offer targeted and affordable training programs to CRP staff in their local communities to improve quantity and quality of services to individuals served by CRP programs.

C. GOALS, PRIORITIES, AND STRATEGIES

1. DESCRIBE HOW THE SRC AND THE VR AGENCY JOINTLY DEVELOPED AND AGREED TO THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES AND ANY REVISIONS; AND

Title IV ARS Response:

ARS and the SRC are in the process of reviewing findings of the most recently completed triennial comprehensive statewide needs assessment to determine if goals, priorities, and strategies should be adjusted. ARS discovered discrepancies in its 2024 performance measures and continues to work with Alliance, the developer of ARS's new AWARE case management system, and RSA to secure accurate numbers regarding its performance.

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) and the Division for Services for the Blind (DSB) anticipate that in calendar year 2027 legislation will be passed by the Arkansas Legislature and signed by the Governor to combine ARS and DSB into one general vocational rehabilitation

agency. This is consistent with Pillar III: Integrated Systems of the America's Talent Strategy: Building the Workforce for the Golden Age. The goal of this effort is to address the fragmentation of duplicative programs by centralizing administration and program governance resulting in a more streamlined and coordinated system of workforce services for individuals with disabilities within the Department of Commerce. ARS and DSB understand that when this occurs a new comprehensive statewide needs assessment that reflects the needs of individuals with disabilities served by both agencies will be required as well as the development of a combined state plan. ARS and DSB understand that to assure compliance with federal requirements they will need to maintain regular contact with the state's liaison and other involved Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) staff throughout the planning and implementation of this project.

ARS advances the goals of the America's Talent Strategy by developing, connecting, and sustaining a skilled workforce that includes individuals with disabilities, thereby strengthening both individual opportunity and regional economic vitality. Our goals, priorities, and strategies directly align with the five America's Talent Strategy pillars.

2. IDENTIFY MEASURABLE GOALS AND PRIORITIES IN CARRYING OUT THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS AND THE BASIS FOR SELECTING THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES (E.G., CSNA, PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES, SRC RECOMMENDATIONS, MONITORING, OTHER INFORMATION). AS REQUIRED IN SECTION 101(A)(15)(D), (18), AND (23), DESCRIBE UNDER EACH GOAL OR PRIORITY, THE STRATEGIES OR METHODS USED TO ACHIEVE THE GOAL OR PRIORITY, INCLUDING AS APPLICABLE, DESCRIPTION OF STRATEGIES OR METHODS THAT—

A. SUPPORT INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES;

B. OVERCOME BARRIERS TO ACCESSING VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;

C. IMPROVE AND EXPAND VR SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THE COORDINATION OF SERVICES DESIGNED TO FACILITATE THE TRANSITION OF SUCH STUDENTS FROM SCHOOL TO POSTSECONDARY LIFE (INCLUDING THE RECEIPT OF VR SERVICES, POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES); AND

D. IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS IN ASSISTING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES TO ACHIEVE QUALITY EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES.

Title IV ARS Response:

Goal 1: ARS will meet State and Federal accountability and performance requirements. This goal aligns with Pillar IV: Accountability of the America's Talent Strategy.

- Priority 1: ARS will meet and monitor established performance accountability measures on a quarterly basis to determine progress in meeting federal/state requirements.
 - Strategy 1: Utilize the new Quality Assurance review tool and corrective action process to ensure case management quality and compliance with federal standards, and to address and remedy violations to federal/state requirements in a timely manner.

- Priority 2: ARS will provide career counseling to 14(c) program participants to meet Section 511 requirements.
 - Strategy 1: Track annually the number of individuals receiving career counseling.
 - Strategy 2: Utilize counselors to meet with individuals at the 14(c) to complete the application process within a month of receipt of referrals from career counseling.
 - Strategy 3: Track competitive integrated employment (26 closures) outcomes data annually from career counseling referrals.
 - Strategy 4: Collaborate with the Helen Keller National Center to assure clients who are deaf-blind receive the employment supports needed by 2027.
- Priority 3: ARS will implement additional strategies focused on RSA identified areas of weakness to strengthen data verification requirements.
 - Strategy 1: Assess randomly selected cases at various stages in the VR process to identify areas of non-compliance to detect and incorporate the necessary instruction, training, guidance, etc. with the intent to strengthen data verification requirements.
- Priority 4: ARS will ensure current ARS policy aligns with Federal Requirements.
 - Strategy 1: Review and modify the current ARS policy to ensure it aligns with Federal requirements by October 1, 2024.
 - Strategy 2: After the initial policy modification, periodically assess and identify, and address in a timely manner areas of weakness, imprecision, and lack of compliance with Federal requirements.
- **Goal 2: ARS will reserve and use a portion of its funds for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of vocational rehabilitation services. This goal, specifically Strategy 2 aligns with Pillar V: Flexibility & Innovation of America's Talent Strategy.** Priority 1: ARS will develop and implement a comprehensive marketing plan.
 - Strategy 1: Inform potential clients, including those who are unserved or underserved, about the services available through ARS.
 - Strategy 2: Leverage existing partnerships and develop new ones with WIOA partners, employers, secondary/postsecondary educators, and other organizations that provide services to individuals with disabilities to inform them of the different services and programs available through ARS' Field Services, Access and Accommodations, Arkansas Career Development Center, and the Business Engagement Unit.
 - Strategy 3: Utilize innovation and expansion dollars to support the Arkansas State Rehabilitation Counsel and the Arkansas Independent Living Council.

Goal 3: ARS will provide pre-employment transition and transition services to students with disabilities as outlined in WIOA. Priority 4 and 5 of this goal specifically align with Pillar I: Industry-Driven Strategies of America's Talent Strategy.

- Priority 1: ARS will continue to expand Pre-ETS services through initiating engagement of students prior to the age of 16.
 - Strategy 1: Provide Pre-ETS services to students with disabilities starting at age 14 and begin the VR process as early as the VR need is identified.
 - Strategy 2: Work with human resources to review vacant positions for reclassification to transition counselors to assist with bridging the gap between Pre-ETS to VR.
- Priority 2: ARS will transition at least 15% of the students served to VR.
 - Strategy 1: Introduce students with disabilities to VR services starting at age 14 and begin the VR process at the onset of the students' junior year in high school.
 - Strategy 2: Work with human resources to review vacant positions for reclassification to transition counselors to assist with bridging the gap between Pre-ETS to VR.
- Priority 3: ARS will expand Pre-ETS, utilizing data, to unserved/underserved populations across the state.
 - Strategy 1: Continue to partner with vendors and schools in all regions to provide Pre-ETS services to unserved/underserved areas.
 - Strategy 2: Continue to partner with Arkansas Transition Services (ATS) to launch exploration programs for students starting at age 14 and provide Work-Based Learning experiences in partnership with local community colleges and employers.
- Priority 4: ARS will increase the number of students engaged in Work-Based Learning, Pre-apprenticeships, and On-the-Job trainings by 15%.
 - Strategy 1: Continue to work with vendors and schools to provide Work-Based Learning, Pre-Apprenticeships, and On-the-Job trainings through informed choice and partnerships with CTE, ATS, and employers.
 - Strategy 2: Engage a minimum of five seniors per year in OJT and Apprenticeship opportunities.
- Priority 5: ARS will increase the number of Transition students that enter employment by having students work-ready upon completion of high school and/or postsecondary training by a target goal of 50% of the total students served and exiting high school.
 - Strategy 1: Work with schools, vendors, and the business engagement team to create and provide more work-based learning activities for students beginning

as early as age 14, along with engaging students in more CTE opportunities while in high school to assist with vocational goal setting after exit from high school.

- **Goal 4: ARS will increase competitive integrated employment for Arkansans with disabilities. Evidence of Pillars 1: Industry-Driven Strategies, 2: Worker Mobility, 3: Integrated Systems, and 5: Flexibility and Innovation of America's Talent Strategy are found in this goal.** Priority 1: ARS and DSB will become a combined agency.
 - Strategy 1: Secure support from the Governor's office and State Legislature.
 - Strategy 2: Work with RSA to facilitate the reorganization of the state VR program.
- Priority 2: ARS will increase the utilization of apprenticeships and on-the-job trainings by 10%.
 - Strategy 1: ARS, working with the State Office of Apprenticeship, will identify employers who want to participate in apprenticeships and on-the-job trainings and update field services regional area managers during monthly meetings.
 - Strategy 2: ARS counselors will place a minimum of ten individuals with disabilities per year into an OJT or apprenticeship program.
 - Strategy 3: Continue to work with WIOA partners including local boards, Office of Skill Development, and businesses that provide apprenticeships to identify potential apprenticeship opportunities and individuals for service.
 - Strategy 4: ARS will increase knowledge of WBL and OJTs to unserved/underserved populations within the Pre-ETS and STAR programs by 15% through presentations at local regional schools.
 - Strategy 5: ARS will increase job placement of clients 10% annually per year in respective regions of the state.
- Priority 3: ARS will increase referrals by 10% through collaborative partnerships with WIOA partners.
 - Strategy 1: Continue to work with WIOA partners to implement a common intake process to help identify potential referrals.
 - Strategy 2: Increase the use of the short referral form to initiate services and decrease attrition.
 - Strategy 3: Adopt the rapid engagement method to move individuals through the VR process in an expediated manner through increased client engagement.

- Priority 4: ARS will increase referrals from existing businesses by 15% and new businesses by 10% annually.
 - Strategy 1: Collaborate with Chambers of Commerce, WIOA partners, Arkansas Industry Connect, businesses, and community partners on the AT@Work, and Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work services.
 - Strategy 2: Business Engagement will develop a Business Survey to be completed by 10% of the business customers to ensure satisfaction of services.
 - Strategy 3: Utilize the Disability Etiquette Trainings and present, at minimum, one business training event per quarter.
 - Strategy 4: Provide one training per month to local field offices on the expectations of an in-demand business per that region of the state.
 - Strategy 5: ARS Business Engagement will collaborate with Employment & Training by utilizing Arkansas Job Links by increasing employer information by 25% annually.
- Priority 5: ARS will increase utilization of VR funds to 90% or higher of the authorized funding.
 - Strategy 1: Work with an outsource entity to assist with research of similar VR programs and rate setting.
 - Strategy 2: Utilize technical assistance to provide training to staff regarding fiscal spending and period of performance.
 - Strategy 3: Revise the current budget allotment structure to remove budget constraints.
- Priority 6: ARS will increase services provided to employers by increasing referrals to the Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work (SAW/RTW) programs by 10% with the goal of retaining employees with disabilities on the job.
 - Strategy 1: Utilize the SAW/RTW program to participate in, at minimum, one public marketing event per quarter.
 - Strategy 2: Increase services provided to employers by increasing referrals to the Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work (SAW/RTW) programs.
 - Strategy 3: Utilize the SAW/RTW program to provide semi-annual trainings to field staff across the state on how to incorporate the SAW/RTW program into their current caseloads.
- Priority 7: ARS will provide training to field service staff on the appropriateness and implementation of assistive technology and services throughout the rehabilitation process.
 - Strategy 1: Utilize program data to provide to field offices who do not routinely make referrals at AT@Work.

- Strategy 2: Utilize Access and Accommodation staff to present content with regards to the identification and implementation of accommodations at minimum one event widely attended by field services staff.
- Strategy 3: Utilize ICAN and AFP staff to provide updates on services quarterly to field services district managers during their monthly meetings.
- Priority 8: ARS will increase services provided to unserved/underserved populations by 15%. Services include transportation, access to technology, and expanding business and services provider network to bridge gaps.
 - Strategy 1: Continue to work with WIOA partners to implement a common intake process to help identify potential referrals.
 - Strategy 2: Develop new itinerary points and outreach activities to increase awareness with unserved/underserved populations.
 - Strategy 3: Utilize the 2022 CSNA as a baseline for unserved/underserved populations.
 - Strategy 4: Increase the use of the short referral form to initiate services and decrease attrition.
- Priority 9: ARS counselors will maintain at least a 90% rate for IPE development.
 - Strategy 1: Increase the use of the short referral form to initiate services.
 - Strategy 2: Adopt the rapid engagement method to move individuals through the VR process in an expedited manner through increased client engagement.
 - Strategy 3: Monitor percentage rates quarterly and continue to provide weekly updates on action alert items.

Goal 5: ARS will increase successful employment outcomes utilizing Community Rehabilitation Program and Supported Employment vendors. This goal incorporates Pillar IV: Accountability and Pillar V: Flexibility and Innovation of America's Talent Strategy.

- Priority 1: ARS will reach the national average for supported employment closures by PY2027.
 - Strategy 1: Reduce time from vendor referral to IPE development and service initiation to 60 days or less by PY2025.
 - Strategy 2: Revise Supported Employment Services policy and procedures based on direction from the Rehabilitation Services Administration monitoring plan by 2026.
 - Strategy 3: Convene CRPs to participate in identifying, sharing, and promoting supported employment services and the development of a methodology to determine reasonable and effective rates based on direction from the Rehabilitation Services Administration monitoring plan by PY2026.

- Strategy 4: Collaborate with CRPs on contract changes that incent/reward higher quality outcomes based on established outcome measures by PY2027.
- Strategy 5: Host a Supported Employment training opportunity for ARS staff, CRPs, individuals, and families annually by PY2027.
- Strategy 6: Research digital technology innovations for supported employment and accessibility supports to pilot by PY2027.
- Strategy 7: Provide region-based training opportunities specific to the new Extended Services policy for ARS staff, CRPs, individuals, families, and other stakeholders once the new policy has been promulgated.
- Strategy 8: Provide education opportunities on the availability, utilization, and funding of Youth Extended Services by PY2026.
- Strategy 9: Meet with non-VR funding entities to leverage resources and assure the Extended Services funding available meets the prevailing wage or higher by PY2025.
- Strategy 10: Produce information on Extended Services and funding sources for youth, individuals, families, and providers including but not limited to Ticket to Work-Employment Network partnerships, natural supports, and Social Security Work Incentives by PY2026.
- Strategy 11: Request technical assistance support from the Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management (VRTAC) on supported employment and extended services.
- Priority 2: ACDC will increase its number of competitive integrated employment outcomes by 10%.
 - Strategy 1: Increase the number of distance learning options by two per year to increase accessibility of training statewide.
 - Strategy 2: Expand public outreach to increase knowledge of ACDC services.
 - Strategy 3: Continue to participate in apprenticeship/pre-apprenticeship committees and network with the entities that develop and provide apprenticeships.
 - Strategy 4: Initiate conversations regarding disabilities and ACDC services to a minimum of three schools with alternative programs per year.

D. EVALUATION AND REPORTS OF PROGRESS: VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT GOALS

For the most recently completed program year, provide an evaluation and report of progress for the goals or priorities, including progress on the strategies under each goal or priority, applicable to that program year. Sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to describe—

1. PROGRESS IN ACHIEVING THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED FOR THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS;

Title IV ARS Response:

Goal 1: ARS will meet performance accountability measures.

- Priority 1: ARS will meet and monitor established performance accountability measures on a quarterly basis to determine progress in meeting federal/state requirements.
 - Strategy 1: Utilize the new Quality Assurance review tool and corrective action process to ensure case management quality and compliance with federal standards, and to address and remedy violations to federal/state requirements in a timely manner.

The Quality Assurance team (QA) utilizes the review tool created with RSA assistance for reviewing cases on a quarterly basis. Upon reviewing cases, if compliance issues are identified, this information is sent to the Regional Area Managers (RAMs). Once the RAMs have reviewed the compliance issues, they send the corrective actions out to the counselors to acknowledge the compliance issue or issues and correct them if they are able to do so. The counselors have a thirty-day timeframe to complete the corrective actions before QA starts the follow-up process. QA sends out the follow-ups for any corrective actions that are not completed within the thirty-day timeframe allowed for them to correct the compliance issues. Counselors then have fifteen days to complete the follow-ups. After fifteen days, if the follow-ups are not completed QA makes a case note in the casefile.

QA developed a QA Review Tool in AWARE, which will make the review process more efficient and timelier. Staff will be provided with training once the new tool is ready to be utilized.

- Priority 2: ARS will provide career counseling to 14(c) program participants to meet Section 511 requirements.
 - Strategy 1: Track annually the number of individuals receiving career counseling.

ARS partners with the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville WIOA Career Counseling Information and Referral Service to provide career counseling across the state for individuals with disabilities who have requested VR services.

During PY 2024, 2,012 clients were served and 352 were referred to ARS.

- Strategy 2: Utilize counselors to meet with individuals at the 14(c) to complete the application process within a month of receipt of referrals from career counseling.

ARS VR Counselors receive the tracking tool from WIOA Career Counseling Information and Referral Service and contact the referrals across the state. Additionally, referrals are scheduled appointments in person at the 14(c) or local field office, virtually, or by phone.

- Strategy 3: Track competitive integrated employment (26 closures) outcomes data annually from career counseling referrals.

During PY 2024, ARS obtained successful employment for 34 individuals who were 14(c) participants.

- Strategy 4: Collaborate with the Helen Keller National Center to assure clients who are deaf-blind receive the employment supports needed by 2027.

An assigned ARS liaison works with the Helen Keller National Center for referrals to serve individuals who are deaf-blind.

- Priority 3: ARS will implement additional strategies focused on RSA identified areas of weakness to strengthen data verification requirements.

- Strategy 1: Assess randomly selected cases at various stages in the VR process to identify areas of non-compliance to detect and incorporate the necessary instruction, training, guidance, etc. with the intent to strengthen data verification requirements.

Areas of noncompliance identified using the QA Review Tool are addressed through instruction, training, and guidance using our training platform, YesLMS. Our new case management system, AWARE, also enables staff to be more efficient in tracking data through use of new tools such as “dashlets” and interface data tracking capabilities.

- Priority 4: ARS will ensure current ARS policy aligns with Federal Requirements.

- Strategy 1: Review and modify the current ARS policy to ensure it aligns with Federal requirements by October 1, 2024.
- Strategy 2: After the initial policy modification, periodically assess and identify, and address in a timely manner areas of weakness, imprecision, and lack of compliance with Federal requirements.

As directives are established, QA ensures compliance. Areas of noncompliance are addressed and training provided, if needed. In the future, QA works to review and modify the current ARS policy to align with the Federal requirements. The QA team reviews the federal regulations and adapts the ARS policy on a quarterly basis or when RSA issues a new policy circular.

Goal 2: ARS will reserve and use a portion of its funds for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of vocational rehabilitation services.

- Priority 1: ARS will develop and implement a comprehensive marketing plan.
 - Strategy 1: Inform potential clients, including those who are unserved or underserved about the services available through ARS.

- Strategy 2: Leverage existing partnerships and develop new ones with WIOA partners, employers, secondary/postsecondary educators, and other organizations that provide services to individuals with disabilities to inform them of the different services and programs available through ARS' Field Services, Access and Accommodations, Arkansas Career Development Center, and the Business Engagement Unit.
- Strategy 3: Utilize innovation and expansion dollars to support the Arkansas State Rehabilitation Counsel and the Arkansas Independent Living Council.

ARS continues to utilize I&E funds to support the SRC and to ensure the Arkansas Independent Living Council is adequately funded.

Goal 3: ARS will provide pre-employment transition and transition services to students with disabilities as outlined in WIOA.

- Priority 1: ARS will continue to expand Pre-ETS services through initiating engagement of students prior to the age of 16.

- Strategy 1: Provide Pre-ETS services to students with disabilities starting at age 14 and begin the VR process as early as the VR need is identified.

Updated state plan and policy to initiate services for students with disabilities beginning at age 14. Schools served PY2024: 178, WOLF (Workplace Opportunities Leading to Future Employment) total number of programs: 58 schools, WIN (Working for Independence Now) total number of programs: 21 schools, STAR (Seamless Transition in Arkansas) total number of programs: 14 schools, Vendors: 85 schools. Total number of students served: 1,500.

The Juvenile Justice Program (JJP) provides services to five facilities across the state. ARS is in the process of modifying and expanding services to youth in the juvenile justice system. Student tours to Arkansas Career Development Center (ACDC) - (43 students); ACDC staff outreach activities (15 events); and ACDC partners with over 20 schools and several youth facilities.

- Strategy 2: Work with human resources to review vacant positions for reclassification to transition counselors to assist with bridging the gap between Pre-ETS to VR.

ARS worked with Human Resources and recently received a pay plan increase, updated functional job descriptions for Pre-ETS and transition counselors, and reclassified vacant positions.

- Priority 2: ARS will transition at least 15% of the students served to VR.
 - Strategy 1: Introduce students with disabilities to VR services starting at age 14 and begin the VR process at the onset of the students' junior year in high school.
 - Strategy 2: Work with human resources to review vacant positions for reclassification to transition counselors to assist with bridging the gap between Pre-ETS to VR.
- Priority 3: ARS will expand Pre-ETS, utilizing data, to unserved/underserved populations across the state.

- Strategy 1: Continue to partner with vendors and schools in all regions to provide Pre-ETS services to unserved/underserved areas.

The STAR (Seamless Transition in Arkansas) project was developed in partnership with the Arkansas Department of Education, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, Arkansas Centers for Independent Living and the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, with support from school districts, including Magnolia, Lakeside and Lake Hamilton, as well as Workforce, Partners for Inclusive Communities (UCEDD), NTACT:C and regional community colleges. The team received a \$9.9 million grant to help improve the economic self-sufficiency of Arkansas' 14- to 18-year-old students with disabilities. STAR will facilitate Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) for 600 youth with disabilities in some of the most under-resourced areas of the state. The STAR project leverages these strengths through an innovative collaboration model aimed at targeting support in the state's high-need regions to:

- Increase youth career and college preparation and experience opportunities through the development of additional pre-employment transition service providers and enhanced engagement of the state's Centers for Independent Living (CILs);
 - Increase the knowledge and skills of youth, families, providers and other community partners through web-based and in-person learning modules aligned with post-school outcome predictors and scaling up efforts for community-level resource mapping; and
 - Establish and implement an innovative, integrated collaboration model through training of Transition Navigators and empowerment of youth leaders co-leading community-led Career Councils, and use of the ECHO Model and supports to provide case-based, ongoing, interagency professional development to partners across the state.
- Strategy 2: Continue to partner with Arkansas Transition Services (ATS) to launch exploration programs for students starting at age 14 and provide Work-Based Learning experiences in partnership with local community colleges and employers.

In 2024, ARS partnered with Career Technical Education, Arkansas Transition Services and local community colleges to initiate a CTE Summer camp for students with disabilities beginning at age 14. The purpose of this camp is to allow students an exposure opportunity to career pathways, and initiate engagement in pre-employment and VR services. This camp continues to expand statewide.

- Priority 4: ARS will increase the number of students engaged in Work-Based Learning, Pre-apprenticeships, and On-the-Job trainings by 15%.
- Strategy 1: Continue to work with vendors and schools to provide Work-Based Learning, Pre-Apprenticeships, and On-the-Job trainings through informed choice and partnerships with CTE, ATS, and employers.

The total number of work-based learning hours provided during PY2024 was 73,435.83. Field and Business Engagement are continuing to work towards developing OJT and apprenticeship opportunities.

- Strategy 2: Engage a minimum of five seniors per year in OJT and Apprenticeship opportunities.
- Priority 5: ARS will increase the number of Transition students that enter employment by having students work-ready upon completion of high school and/or postsecondary training by a target goal of 50% of the total students served and exiting high school.
 - Strategy 1: Work with schools, vendors, and the business engagement team to create and provide more work-based learning activities for students beginning as early as age 14, along with engaging students in more CTE opportunities while in high school to assist with vocational goal setting after exit from high school.

Goal 4: ARS will increase competitive integrated employment for Arkansans with disabilities.

- Priority 1: ARS will increase the utilization of apprenticeships and on-the-job trainings by 10%.
 - Strategy 1: Continue to strengthen collaboration efforts with the ARS Business Engagement team to identify potential employers.

ARS Business Engagement Unit attended regular monthly check-ins with ARS Field service counselors to assist them with current potential employers for the eligible ARS clients. Thirty-four percent of Business Engagement outreach to employers was around client employment needs. We are in the process of establishing a systematic process to share employer leads through AWARE so Field Services instantly recognizes the employers we have identified as good matches for our participants.

- Strategy 2: Work with the Business Engagement team to place a minimum of ten individuals with disabilities per year into an OJT or apprenticeship program.

The BEU received one referral from field services for an OJT. This client referral was hired successfully with Cintas after an On-the-job training experience. The BEU has changed to a more placement-focused approach, which will increase the number of referrals.

- Strategy 3: Continue to work with WIOA partners including local boards, Office of Skill Development, Arkansas Apprenticeship Coalition, and businesses that provide apprenticeships to identify potential apprenticeship opportunities and individuals for service.

The BEU participates in regional planning and development districts with WIOA partners to identify underserved and unserved populations and where service gaps are occurring. In PY2024, the BEU attended monthly and quarterly employer/business service roundtables with the regional workforce boards and regional chamber of commerce's. On a monthly basis in PY2024, we collaborated with Arkansas Office of Skills Development on apprenticeship expansion initiatives in advanced manufacturing and other high demand apprenticeship opportunities.

- Priority 2: ARS will increase referrals by 10% through collaborative partnerships with WIOA partners.

- Strategy 1: Continue to work with WIOA partners to implement a common intake process to help identify potential referrals.

ARS worked with the Core Partners to review and align intake questions related to disability, employment barriers, and support needs, and to ensure VR indicators were incorporated into the common intake framework used across the workforce locations.

- Strategy 2: Increase the use of the short referral form to initiate services and decrease attrition.

ARS updated the Short Referral Form using a QR code, providing direct on-line access, to expedite client engagement and reduce barriers to VR services. Prompt follow-up and electronic workflows allow counselors to quickly connect individuals to VR services, apprenticeships and on-the-job training opportunities, providing business and industry partners with faster access to qualified clients.

- Strategy 3: Adopt the rapid engagement method to move individuals through the VR process in an expediated manner through increased client engagement.

ARS has adopted the “VR Now!” motto to emphasize rapid engagement by increasing client contacts and using data tools to identify individuals ready for work-based learning. ARS collaborates with businesses and industry partners to create apprenticeship and on-the-job training opportunities, providing clients with hands-on experience. These strategies accelerate engagement, build skills, and support timely employment outcomes.

- Priority 3: ARS’ Business Engagement Unit will increase referrals from businesses by 10% annually

- Strategy 1: Collaborate with Chambers of Commerce, WIOA partners, businesses, and community partners about Work-Based-Learning, On-the-Job-Trainings (OJT), AT@Work and Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work, and Disability Etiquette training by providing access to the Business Engagement Short Form Referral.

In PY2024, Business Engagement led an initiative with Cass Job Corps Civilian Conservation Center to help with job placement. Our BEU, along with Access and Accommodations identified 86 potential ARS clients who filled out the ARS short referral form online. The BEU held a meeting at Cass with all WIOA partners present. The outcome of this initiative was ten work-based learning experiences through the Western Arkansas Planning & Development District. Fifty-seven percent of the BEU outreach in PY2024 were services that ARS provides to businesses at no cost. Eight percent of our outreach included Disability Etiquette Trainings to employers.

- Strategy 2: Collaborate with Chambers of Commerce, WIOA partners, and community leaders to identify skills development training and/or employment referral opportunities for clients that are referred to the BEU from Field Services counselors.

The BEU identified joint funding opportunities for innovative programs, such as WAGE™ and Job Readiness with Adult Education and developed cross-training for our staff to better understand each of the WIOA partner services.

- Priority 4: ARS will increase utilization of VR funds to 90% or higher of the authorized funding.

- Strategy 1: Work with an outsource entity to assist with research of similar VR programs and rate setting.

ARS is collaborating with Vaybrant Consulting Group and DNA Consulting Group to develop a framework for reviewing and improving VR program service delivery and rate setting. These groups provide research and technical assistance to support the final product. ARS met the 90% goal utilizing VR authorized funds.

- Strategy 2: Utilize technical assistance to provide training to staff regarding fiscal spending and period of performance.

ARS utilized targeted technical assistance through Vaybrant to provide comprehensive training and ongoing guidance to staff regarding fiscal spending and period of performance (POP) management. ARS also conducted in-person sessions, offering practical examples and scenarios to help staff align spending with program objectives and meet POP requirements.

- Strategy 3: Revise the current budget allotment structure to remove budget constraints.

ARS has revised the budget allotment structure from regional to state-wide, allowing funds to be allocated where they are most needed. This flexibility supports timely service delivery, and rapid engagement.

- Priority 5: ARS will increase services provided to employers by increasing referrals to the Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work (SAW/RTW) programs by 10% with the goal of retaining employees with disabilities on the job.

- Strategy 1: Utilize the SAW/RTW program to participate in, at minimum, one public marketing event per quarter.

Information about the SAW/RTW program was shared with the Association of Government Accountants, attendees at the Arkansas Workers' Compensation Educational Conference, ARS Business Engagement Representatives, and attendees at the Rehabilitation Counselors and Professionals' Association of Arkansas conference.

- Strategy 2: Increase services provided to employers by increasing referrals to the Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work (SAW/RTW) programs.

The SAW/RTW program added a full-time vocational counselor dedicated to streamlining the accommodation process, ensuring services are provided expediently to promote return-to-work or job retention. In PY24, the program recorded 18 SAW/RTW closures and 11 additional VR assists, with SAW/RTW staff providing direct support to employers of clients participating in traditional VR services.

- Strategy 3: Utilize the SAW/RTW program to provide semi-annual trainings to field staff across the state on how to incorporate the SAW/RTW program into their current caseloads.

SAW/RTW staff presented at the Rehabilitation Counselors and Professionals' Association of Arkansas conference and regularly interfaced with counselors to assist with the employer component of the VR process, as demonstrated by 11 formal assists during PY24.

- Priority 6: ARS will provide training to field service staff on the appropriateness and implementation of assistive technology and services throughout the rehabilitation process.

- Strategy 1: Utilize AT@Work to provide one training per year to each field services region.

AT@Work provided training to Region 6, presented at the National Disability Employment Awareness Month event in the Little Rock Field Office, and hosted occupational therapy students from the University of Arkansas, Baptist Health, and University of Central Arkansas for hands-on training at the ICAN facility in Little Rock.

- Strategy 2: Utilize Access and Accommodation staff to present content with regards to the identification and implementation of accommodations at minimum one event widely attended by field services staff.

Access and Accommodation staff presented to the Public Employee Claims Division, to attendees of the Rehabilitation Counselors and Professionals' Association of Arkansas conference, and to ARS staff at the All-Agency Training.

- Strategy 3: Utilize ICAN and AFP staff to provide updates on services quarterly to field services district managers during their monthly meetings.

Ongoing quarterly updates have ensured district managers remain informed about assistive technology and financing options available through ICAN and AFP.

- Priority 7: ARS will increase services provided to unserved/underserved populations by 15%. Services include transportation, access to technology, and expanding business and services provider network to bridge gaps.

- Strategy 1: Continue to work with WIOA partners to implement a common intake process to help identify potential referrals.

ARS worked with Core Partners to review and align intake questions related to disability, employment barriers and support needs, and to ensure VR indicators were incorporated into the common intake framework used across workforce locations. As a result of this process the core partners referred 550 participants.

- Strategy 2: Develop new itinerary points and outreach activities to increase awareness with unserved/underserved populations.

ARS developed new itinerary points across disability-specific organizations, reentry programs, and culturally diverse community groups, including: Strengthening the partnership with the AR School for the Deaf and Blind by increasing the number of counselors assigned to the school, implementing a permanent itinerary point on campus at the University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff, and developing materials specific to Spanish-speaking clients to have access to ARS materials.

- Strategy 3: Utilize the 2022 CSNA as a baseline for unserved/underserved populations

ARS has expanded funding for individuals in rural and high-poverty areas to support critical needs, including transportation and services for co-occurring conditions such as mental health disabilities. Staff receive specialized training through YesLMS to ensure they are equipped to address these barriers and effectively support clients' vocational goals.

- Strategy 4: Increase the use of the short referral form to initiate services and decrease attrition.

ARS increased the use of the Short Referral Form by training partners and staff, integrating the form into electronic workflows, and ensuring counselors contact individuals promptly after submission. These strategies allowed for earlier engagement, minimized delays, and reduced attrition, helping more individuals successfully enter and move through the VR process.

- Strategy 5: Adopt the rapid engagement method to move individuals through the VR process in an expedited manner through increased client engagement.

ARS has adopted the “VR Now!” motto to place specific focus on rapid engagement. ARS has adopted best practices, including increasing the number of contacts for clients in various stages. Timeframes are as follows: Three (3) days to contact a client after referral to set an appointment is the new standard for ARS; bi-weekly during the eligibility determination time frame; monthly, after eligibility has been determined; and every quarter during service provision/plan development (4-yearly). Counseling must be documented after services have been initiated at least once a year.

- Priority 8: ARS counselors will maintain at least a 90% rate for IPE development.

- Strategy 1: Increase the use of the short referral form to initiate services.

ARS strengthened referral processes with Workforce Centers, schools, community rehabilitation programs, behavioral health providers, and other vendors by training on when and how to use the Short Referral Form.

ARS trained VR counselors and support staff on when the Short Referral Form is appropriate, and how to quickly move a referral into application status to ensure that referrals are logged the same day to protect the date of application. This has led to more consistent use statewide and fewer delays in opening cases.

- Strategy 2: Adopt the rapid engagement method to move individuals through the VR process in an expedited manner through increased client engagement.

ARS has adopted the “VR Now!” motto to place specific focus on rapid engagement. ARS has adopted best practices, including increasing the number of contacts for clients in various stages. Timeframes are as follows: Three (3) days to contact a client after referral to set an appointment is the new standard for ARS; bi-weekly during the eligibility determination time frame; monthly, after eligibility has been determined; and every quarter during service provision/plan development (4-yearly). Counseling must be documented after services have been initiated at least once a year.

- Strategy 3: Monitor percentage rates quarterly and continue to provide weekly updates on action alert items.

ARS uses AWARE data tools to monitor and improve eligibility determination and IPE development timeliness. Dashlets give staff real-time visibility and make eligibility and IPE deadlines hard to miss, increasing compliance. RAMs send weekly email or dashboard updates that highlight regional percentages. The AWARE administrator provides monthly high-level reports showing statewide eligibility determination and statewide IPE completion percentages.

Goal 5: ARS will increase successful employment outcomes utilizing Community Rehabilitation Program and Supported Employment vendors.

See Section e. Supported Employment Services, Distribution of Title VI Funds, and Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services for updates on SE goals.

- Priority 2: ACDC will increase its number of competitive integrated employment outcomes by 10%.
 - Strategy 1: Increase the number of distance learning options by two per year to increase accessibility of training statewide.
 - Strategy 2: Expand public outreach to increase knowledge of ACDC services.

With the recent alignment of ACDC under Field Services, we are continuing to work towards developing innovative public outreach activities.

- Strategy 3: Continue to participate in apprenticeship/pre-apprenticeship committees and network with the entities that develop and provide apprenticeships.

The agency participates with community partners, through a monthly “Apprenticeship Expansion” meeting to collaborate on apprenticeship opportunities. The agency is working to increase the knowledge of apprenticeships with our WIOA partners.

Strategy 4: Initiate conversations regarding disabilities and ACDC services to a minimum of three schools with alternative programs per year.

ACDC initiated conversations with alternative classroom teachers and students in PY 2024 at three schools with alternative programs.

2. PERFORMANCE ON THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY INDICATORS UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA FOR THE MOST RECENTLY COMPLETED PROGRAM YEAR, REFLECTING ACTUAL AND NEGOTIATED LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE. EXPLAIN ANY DISCREPANCIES IN THE ACTUAL AND NEGOTIATED LEVELS; AND

Title IV ARS Response:

ARS achieved the following levels on the performance measures as reported on the PY2024 ETA-9169. ARS focused on quality employment outcomes in order to meet this requirement. ARS has discovered discrepancies in its 2024 performance measures and is working with Alliance and RSA to secure accurate performance numbers.

	Negotiated	Actual
Employment Rate Second Quarter After Exit	64%	50%

	Negotiated	Actual
Employment Rate Fourth Quarter After Exit	53%	46.2%
Median Earnings	\$6,800	\$6,127
Credential Rate	36.5%	0%
Measurable Skills Gain	58.5%	47%

3. THE USE OF FUNDS RESERVED FOR INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES (SECTIONS 101(A)(18) AND 101(A)(23) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT) (E.G., SRC, SILC).

Title IV ARS Response:

During PY2024, ARS utilized I&E dollars to support the State Rehabilitation Council, the State Independent Living Council, and to support marketing activities targeting potential Pre-ETS students as well as unserved/underserved populations. Marketing activities included radio and television broadcasting, bus advertising, and social media posting.

E. SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, DISTRIBUTION OF TITLE VI FUNDS, AND ARRANGEMENTS AND COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES.

1. ACCEPTANCE OF TITLE VI FUNDS:

Title IV ARS Response:

(A) VR agency requests to receive title VI funds.

2. IF THE VR AGENCY HAS ELECTED TO RECEIVE TITLE VI FUNDS, SECTION 606(B)(3) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT REQUIRES VR AGENCIES TO INCLUDE SPECIFIC GOALS AND PRIORITIES WITH RESPECT TO THE DISTRIBUTION OF TITLE VI FUNDS RECEIVED UNDER SECTION 603 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES. DESCRIBE THE USE OF TITLE VI FUNDS AND HOW THEY WILL BE USED IN MEETING THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES OF THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM.

Title IV ARS Response:

ARS addressed the SE program with Goal 5: ARS will increase successful employment outcomes utilizing Community Rehabilitation Program and Supported Employment vendors.

- Priority 1: ARS will reach the national average for supported employment closures by PY2027.
 - Strategy 1: Reduce time from vendor referral to IPE development and service initiation to 60 days or less by PY2025.

ARS implemented the VR Now! process to ensure timely services without losing quality.

- Strategy 2: Revise Supported Employment Services policy and procedures based on direction from the Rehabilitation Services Administration monitoring plan by 2026.

The policy was revised and approved in the Corrective Action Plan.

- Strategy 3: Convene CRPs to participate in identifying, sharing, and promoting supported employment services and the development of a methodology to determine reasonable and effective rates based on direction from the Rehabilitation Services Administration monitoring plan by PY2026.
- Strategy 4: Collaborate with CRPs on contract changes that incentivize/reward higher quality outcomes based on established outcome measures by PY2027.

The agency is revising its contract development and monitoring process.

- Strategy 5: Host a Supported Employment training opportunity for ARS staff, CRPs, individuals, and families annually by PY2027.
- Strategy 6: Research digital technology innovations for supported employment and accessibility supports to pilot by PY2027.

ARS utilizes VRTAC-QE, YesLMS, Helen Keller National Center, and other training resources to increase knowledge and awareness of accessibility supports, creating accessible documents, using technology and AI as helpful tools, and sharing this information with VR counselors, clients, CRPs, and vendors. ARS is also researching ways to pilot AI language translation earbuds to increase communication for clients needing supported employment who don't speak fluent English.

3. SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES MAY BE PROVIDED WITH TITLE 1 OR TITLE VI FUNDS FOLLOWING PLACEMENT OF INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES IN EMPLOYMENT. IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 101(A)(22) AND SECTION 606(B)(3) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, DESCRIBE THE QUALITY, SCOPE, AND EXTENT OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED TO INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES; AND THE TIMING OF TRANSITION TO EXTENDED SERVICES.

Title IV ARS Response:

Quality

ARS refers individuals for Supported Employment services to one of 65 certified CRPs. Supported Employment services are provided to individuals with a most significant disability, including youth with a most significant disability. The services are individualized and customized, consistent with the unique preferences, interests, needs, supports (PINS), and informed choice by the individual. Supported Employment processes assist job seekers with job development, job placement, stabilization on the job, transition to Extended Services for 90 days or more to successful employment. Extended services are funded by other entities or by ARS for a youth under 25 up to four years.

Scope of Services

ARS determines eligibility for SE services then develops a SE IPE with the milestones. ARS refers the client to the CRP services set out in the plan. CRPs provide the SE services toward competitive integrated employment. The CRPs are funded based on Milestone outcomes listed below.

Milestone 1 – Referral/Job Development (VR funded): A CRP meets with the client and the jointly agree to work together. The CRP accepts the referral by sending a Referral Acceptance Memo to ARS. During this service, the CRP provides career readiness activities (seeking employment, filling out applications, and interviewing skills, etc.) and assistance in the development, creation, or identification of paid competitive integrated work in a community business or self-employment setting.

Milestone 2– Job Placement (VR funded): CRPs assist an individual in obtaining a job in a competitive integrated setting based on his/her interests, abilities, needs, and informed choice. The individual is placed in a competitive integrated employment setting with supports for a period of time needed and is compensated commensurate with others in the same position at minimum wage or above.

Milestone 3 – Stabilization (SE/VR funded): This service time frame assures an individual has learned their essential job functions with supports to meet the demands of the competitive integrated work setting in assurance of long-term job success. The individual works successfully for the minimum number of hours per week that the individual has agreed upon in the IPE or amendments. ARS assures the transition to Extended Services for 90 days or more.

Extended services begin after supported employment services are completed and when the individual is stable on the job. ARS works with the client and others to identify the funding source. ARS may be the extended services provider to a youth with a most significant disability until the youth reaches age 25 or has received four years of extended services. Once ARS can no longer provide extended services directly to a youth with a most significant disability, ARS will seek funding from another service provider to continue the services.

The counselor and the client jointly determine the need for Extended Services and the appropriate funding stream at the original IPE development. The individual will complete the vocational rehabilitation funded supported employment services when placed in employment. The transition to the extended services occurs after the individual has become stable in the work setting meeting the essential job functions for the hours stated in the original IPE and/or amendments. After the transition to extended services, the individual must maintain employment for 90 days or more before the individual's case is a successful closure.

ARS Youth Extended Services policy allows ARS to fund support services for up to four years or until the youth reaches age 25 if funding is not available through another source. ARS will fund Youth Extended Services through Individualized Job Coaching Services on an as needed basis after job placement. The Extended Services supports youth to ensure on-going stability, job longevity and includes onsite visits twice a month with the individual and the employer. Once the individual reaches the age of 25, ARS must assure extended service funding resources or natural supports are available through another source.

Youth receiving extended services funded by ARS will remain in stabilization status until the service is no longer needed and the youth is considered successfully employed or until four years of this service expires or the youth reaches the age of 25.

Once the case is closed successful (status 26), and support services are still needed, this service is transitioned to the entity responsible for funding, which may include payment through the individual's Home and Community Based services waiver plan for employment funded by the Provider-led Arkansas Shared Savings Entity (PASSE), the provider in kind donation, SSA Work Incentive Programs, Employment Networks, or other identified supports.

4. SECTIONS 101(A)(22) AND 606(B)(4) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT REQUIRE THE VR AGENCY TO DESCRIBE EFFORTS TO IDENTIFY AND ARRANGE, INCLUDING ENTERING INTO COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS, WITH OTHER STATE AGENCIES AND OTHER APPROPRIATE ENTITIES IN ORDER TO PROVIDE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES. THE DESCRIPTION MUST INCLUDE EXTENDED SERVICES, AS APPLICABLE, TO INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THE PROVISION OF EXTENDED SERVICES TO YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH 34 C.F.R. § 363.4(A) AND 34 C.F.R. § 361.5(C)(19)(V).

Title IV ARS Response:

The provision of SE services including extended services is addressed in the MOU and the SE provider contract.

The MOU is a cooperative agreement to foster coordination between partners, which includes ARS, DSB, and Arkansas Department of Human Services – Division of Developmental Disabilities Services, Division of Adult, Aging, and Behavioral Health Services, and the Division of Medical Services to ensure competitive integrated employment is the preferred option for individuals with significant disabilities, who are eligible for more than one publicly-funded program administered by the parties.

The SE Provider contract outlines effective dates, program operational standards, referral requirement, vendor responsibilities, reporting requirements, monitoring and evaluation, and service definitions.

F. ANNUAL ESTIMATES

Sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act require all VR agencies to annually conduct a full assessment of their resources and ability to serve all eligible individuals before the start of the Federal fiscal year. In accordance with 34 CFR § 361.29(b), annual estimates must include the following projections:

1. ESTIMATES FOR NEXT FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR—

A. VR PROGRAM; AND

Title IV ARS Response:

Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under VR Program	Costs of Services using Title I Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
NA	10,444	10,000	\$32 Million	NA

B. SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM.**Title IV ARS Response:**

Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under Supported Employment Program	Costs of Services using Title I and Title VI Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
NA	528	453	\$1,425,000	NA

G. ORDER OF SELECTION

1. PURSUANT TO SECTION 101(A)(5) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, THIS DESCRIPTION MUST BE AMENDED WHEN THE VR AGENCY DETERMINES, BASED ON THE ANNUAL ESTIMATES DESCRIBED IN DESCRIPTION (F), THAT VR SERVICES CANNOT BE PROVIDED TO ALL ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE STATE WHO APPLY FOR AND ARE DETERMINED ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES.

Title IV ARS Response:

The VR agency is not implementing an order of selection, and all eligible individuals will be served.

2. FOR VR AGENCIES THAT HAVE DEFINED PRIORITY CATEGORIES DESCRIBE—**A. THE JUSTIFICATION FOR THE ORDER****Title IV ARS Response:**

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services is not under an Order of Selection.

B. THE ORDER (PRIORITY CATEGORIES) TO BE FOLLOWED IN SELECTING ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS TO BE PROVIDED VR SERVICES ENSURING THAT INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES ARE SELECTED FOR SERVICES BEFORE ALL OTHER INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES; AND

Title IV ARS Response:

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services is not under an Order of Selection.

C. THE VR AGENCY'S GOALS FOR SERVING INDIVIDUALS IN EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY, INCLUDING HOW THE AGENCY WILL ASSIST ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS ASSIGNED TO CLOSED PRIORITY CATEGORIES WITH INFORMATION AND REFERRAL, THE METHOD IN WHICH THE VR AGENCY WILL MANAGE WAITING LISTS, AND THE PROJECTED TIMELINES FOR OPENING PRIORITY CATEGORIES. NOTE: PRIORITY CATEGORIES ARE CONSIDERED OPEN WHEN ALL INDIVIDUALS IN THE PRIORITY CATEGORY MAY BE SERVED.

Title IV ARS Response:

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services is not under an Order of Selection.

3. HAS THE VR AGENCY ELECTED TO SERVE ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS OUTSIDE OF THE ORDER OF SELECTION WHO REQUIRE SPECIFIC SERVICES OR EQUIPMENT TO MAINTAIN EMPLOYMENT?

Title IV ARS Response:

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services is not under an Order of Selection.

H. WAIVER OF STATEWIDENESS.

The State plan shall be in effect in all political subdivisions of the State, however, the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (Commissioner) may waive compliance with this requirement in accordance with section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act and the implementing regulations in 34 CFR 361.26. If the VR agency is requesting a waiver of statewideness or has a previously approved waiver of statewideness, describe the types of services and the local entities providing such services under the waiver of statewideness and how the agency has complied with the requirements in 34 CFR 361.26. If the VR agency is not requesting or does not have an approved waiver of statewideness, please indicate "not applicable."

Title IV ARS Response:

Not applicable.

I. COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT.

In accordance with the requirements in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act, the VR agency must develop and maintain annually a description (consistent with the purposes of the Rehabilitation Act) of the VR agency's comprehensive system of

personnel development, which shall include a description of the procedures and activities the VR agency will undertake to ensure it has an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professionals and paraprofessionals that provides the following:
1. ANALYSIS OF CURRENT PERSONNEL AND PROJECTED PERSONNEL NEEDS INCLUDING—

A. THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL CURRENTLY NEEDED BY THE VR AGENCY TO PROVIDE VR SERVICES, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY; AND

B. THE NUMBER AND TYPE OF PERSONNEL THAT ARE EMPLOYED BY THE VR AGENCY IN THE PROVISION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES, INCLUDING RATIOS OF QUALIFIED VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNSELORS TO CLIENTS;

C. PROJECTIONS OF THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY, WHO WILL BE NEEDED BY THE VR AGENCY TO PROVIDE VR SERVICES IN 5 YEARS BASED ON PROJECTIONS OF THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS TO BE SERVED, INCLUDING INDIVIDUALS WITH SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL EXPECTED TO RETIRE OR LEAVE THE FIELD, AND OTHER RELEVANT FACTORS.

Title IV ARS Response:

Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed	No. of Personnel Currently Needed	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years
Access and Accommodation	Total - 35 Administration (1) Evaluation (11) Counselors (7) Admin. Support (6) Extra Help (1) Vacant (9)	Total - 31 Administration (1) Evaluation (12) Counselors (9) Admin. Support (7) Extra Help (2)	Total - 31 Administration (1) Evaluation (12) Counselors (9) Admin. Support (7) Extra Help (2)
ACDC	Total - 28 Administration (1) Counseling (2) Training (2) Evaluation (0)	Total - 12 Administration (1) Counseling (3) Training (2) Evaluation (0)	Total - 12 Administration (1) Counseling (3) Training (2) Evaluation (0)

Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed	No. of Personnel Currently Needed	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years
	Other (2) Admin. Support (2) Vacant (19)	Other (4) Admin. Support (2)	Other (4) Admin. Support (2)
Field Services	Total – 219 Administration (4) Managers (15) Counselors (77) Interpreters (1) Evaluation (0) Admin. Support (73) Extra Help (2) Vacant (47)	Total – 212 Administration (6) Managers (15) Counselors (97) Interpreters (1) Evaluation (1) Admin. Support (82) Extra Help (10)	Total – 212 Administration (6) Managers (15) Counselors (97) Interpreters (1) Evaluation (1) Admin. Support (82) Extra Help (10)
Central Office	Total – 48 Commissioner's Office (2) BERs (6) PPD&E (6) IT (2) direct cost Finance (1) direct cost Admin. Support (2) Extra Help (2) one is a	Total – 33 Commissioner's Office (3) BERs (11) PPD&E (9) IT (2) direct cost Finance (1) direct cost Admin. Support (4) Extra Help (4) one is a	Total – 33 Commissioner's Office (2) BERs (11) PPD&E (9) IT (2) direct cost Finance (1) direct cost Admin. Support (4)

Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed	No. of Personnel Currently Needed	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years
	direct cost fiscal extra help Vacant (27)	direct cost fiscal extra help	Extra Help (4) one is a direct cost fiscal extra help

D. RATIO OF QUALIFIED VR COUNSELORS TO CLIENTS:

Title IV ARS Response:

1 to 211

E. PROJECTED NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS TO BE SERVED IN 5 YEARS:

Title IV ARS Response:

This program will need to grow by approximately 25% each year to increase participation from 16,252 to 21,000 over the next five years.

2. DATA AND INFORMATION ON PERSONNEL PREPARATION AND DEVELOPMENT, RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION, AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING:

A. A LIST OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE STATE THAT ARE PREPARING VR PROFESSIONALS, BY TYPE OF PROGRAM; THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED AT EACH OF THOSE INSTITUTIONS, BROKEN DOWN BY TYPE OF PROGRAM; AND THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO GRADUATED DURING THE PRIOR YEAR FROM EACH OF THOSE INSTITUTIONS WITH CERTIFICATION OR LICENSURE, OR WITH THE CREDENTIALS FOR CERTIFICATION OR LICENSURE, BROKEN DOWN BY THE PERSONNEL CATEGORY FOR WHICH THEY HAVE RECEIVED, OR HAVE THE CREDENTIALS TO RECEIVE, CERTIFICATION OR LICENSURE.

Title IV ARS Response:

Institute of Higher Education	Type of Program	No. of Students Enrolled	No. of Prior Year Graduates
University of Arkansas - Fayetteville	MRC	18 (FT); 0 (PT)	10
University of Arkansas - Little Rock	MRC		

Institute of Higher Education	Type of Program	No. of Students Enrolled	No. of Prior Year Graduates

B. THE VR AGENCY'S PLAN FOR RECRUITMENT, PREPARATION AND RETENTION OF QUALIFIED PERSONNEL, WHICH ADDRESSES THE CURRENT AND PROJECTED NEEDS FOR QUALIFIED PERSONNEL; AND THE COORDINATION AND FACILITATION OF EFFORTS BETWEEN THE VR AGENCY AND INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS TO RECRUIT, PREPARE, AND RETAIN PERSONNEL WHO ARE QUALIFIED, INCLUDING PERSONNEL FROM MINORITY BACKGROUNDS AND PERSONNEL WHO ARE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

Title IV ARS Response:

ARS focuses on the successful recruitment, preparation, and retention of qualified personnel, and maintains a working relationship with colleges, universities, and higher education programs within the state. ARS provides information about agency benefits such as tuition assistance and loan forgiveness to partner universities that have vocational rehabilitation programs.

ARS provides opportunities for students with an appropriate VR background preparing for a career in the field of vocational rehabilitation. Practicum and Internships are available statewide.

ARS offers a structured class and compensation grid that provides clear opportunities for professional growth through a defined career ladder.

ARS maintains staff liaisons with the university programs at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, the University of Arkansas-Little Rock, the University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff, and Arkansas Tech University, and meets quarterly with the universities to provide vocational rehabilitation field updates, and to give practitioner input to be more inclusive of State VR counselor roles.

The agency actively recruits minorities and students with disabilities and encourages students to join professional rehabilitation organizations such as the National Rehabilitation Association and the National Association of Multicultural Rehabilitation Concerns, American Rehabilitation Counseling Association (ARCA), and the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE). These rehabilitation professional organizations provide scholarship opportunities to individuals, including minorities, who major in the field of rehabilitation.

ARS partners in job fairs, maintains a positive relationship with the community and its representatives, and utilizes online recruitment efforts.

C. DESCRIPTION OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND ACTIVITIES THAT ENSURE ALL PERSONNEL EMPLOYED BY THE VR AGENCY RECEIVE APPROPRIATE AND ADEQUATE TRAINING AND CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS:

I. PARTICULARLY WITH RESPECT TO ASSESSMENT, VOCATIONAL COUNSELING, JOB PLACEMENT, AND REHABILITATION TECHNOLOGY, INCLUDING TRAINING IMPLEMENTED IN COORDINATION WITH ENTITIES CARRYING OUT STATE PROGRAMS UNDER SECTION 4 OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998; AND

II. PROCEDURES FOR THE ACQUISITION AND DISSEMINATION OF SIGNIFICANT KNOWLEDGE FROM RESEARCH AND OTHER SOURCES TO VR AGENCY PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS AND FOR PROVIDING TRAINING REGARDING THE AMENDMENTS TO THE REHABILITATION ACT MADE BY THE WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT.

Title IV ARS Response:

ARS utilizes YesLMS, its centralized Learning Management System, to provide comprehensive training and continuing education for all agency staff, including professionals and paraprofessionals. Training covers core VR functions, including assessment, disability awareness, soft skills, rehabilitation technology, career development, case management, fiscal management, and aspects of disability.

Staff are provided training opportunities through the ARS statewide training, Administrative Assistants Training Conference, online training, and webinars. Training is also available through the Office of Personnel Management, the University of Arkansas CURRENTS program, CRC training, certification, and training provided internally by the agency in case management and policy and procedures compliance.

Access and Accommodations works with counselors in collaboration with ICAN and community partners to provide training about assistive technology and related programs and services available to clients to assist in the home, at work, or in school.

Training and alliances with local and national organizations are used for the acquisition of significant knowledge. Information gained through training and development is shared at all levels of leadership and staffing through various platforms, including department meetings, annual managers meetings, email communications, and site visits. Policy updates, federal mandates, training information, targeted informational tops, and other significant information are shared through "BLAST" announcements, newsletters, and weekly communication within the agency from the Commissioner. This dissemination of information addresses the important changes in the agency, upcoming events, and staff milestones and birthdays. The Commissioner also ensures the staff is provided CSAVR updates.

3. DESCRIPTION OF VR AGENCY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF PERSONNEL STANDARDS CONSISTENT WITH SECTION 101(A)(7)(B) TO ENSURE THAT VR AGENCY PROFESSIONAL AND PARAPROFESSIONAL PERSONNEL ARE ADEQUATELY TRAINED AND PREPARED, INCLUDING—

A. STANDARDS THAT ARE CONSISTENT WITH ANY NATIONAL OR STATE-APPROVED OR -RECOGNIZED CERTIFICATION, LICENSING, REGISTRATION, OR OTHER COMPARABLE REQUIREMENTS THAT APPLY TO THE PROFESSION OR DISCIPLINE IN WHICH SUCH PERSONNEL ARE PROVIDING VR SERVICES; AND

B. THE ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENTS, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 101(A)(7)(B)(II) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, TO ENSURE THAT THE PERSONNEL HAVE A 21ST CENTURY UNDERSTANDING OF THE EVOLVING LABOR FORCE AND THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

Title IV ARS Response:

The State of Arkansas has minimum standards for the vocational rehabilitation counselor position. ARS has a goal for all rehabilitation counseling positions to meet the master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling with Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) standard. The agency seeks to hire MRC/CRC counselors as a priority. In situations where the agency is unable to recruit and hire an MRC/CRC, ARS has a minimum hiring standard of a master's degree in a field of study related to vocational rehabilitation counseling or a baccalaureate degree in a field of study reasonably related to vocational rehabilitation plus a minimum of two years of demonstrated work or service experience in a vocational rehabilitation setting. Individuals employed as counselors who have not achieved the MRC/CRC designation or standard receive ongoing training to prepare for the CRC and/or MRC.

ARS provides staff training, especially to those providing direct services to clients. Professional qualifications for counselors are monitored to ensure current certification and to track educational progress for those achieving certification. Counselors access continuing education hours and CRC credits through the cloud-based learning management system.

The Deputy Chief of Field Services reviews curriculum for rehabilitation counseling higher education programs and provides input on current educational needs for incoming counselors. The ARS Commissioner is a member of the WIOA Board, the Chief of Field Services is a member of the executive WIOA Committee, and rehab area managers are members of the local workforce boards. These individuals provide updates on labor force initiatives at both the state and local levels to agency personnel. They also have the responsibility of educating other board members about the needs of individuals with disabilities.

4. METHOD(S) THE VR AGENCY USES TO ENSURE THAT PERSONNEL ARE ABLE TO COMMUNICATE IN APPROPRIATE MODES OF COMMUNICATION WITH OR IN THE NATIVE LANGUAGE OF APPLICANTS OR ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE LIMITED ENGLISH SPEAKING ABILITY.

Title IV ARS Response:

ARS provides access and contracts as needed to employ personnel or obtain outside sources who communicate in the native languages of applicants and clients with limited English-speaking ability. ARS also provides special communication modes such as interpreters, captioned videos, specialized telecommunication services, and materials for individuals who are deaf and deaf-blind, as well as other specialized media systems for individuals with disabilities. Interpreters are provided for the deaf and hard of hearing. Sign language skills are included as a minimum qualification for positions providing services to persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

5. AS APPROPRIATE, DESCRIBE THE PROCEDURES AND ACTIVITIES TO COORDINATE THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

WITH PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT UNDER THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT.

Title IV ARS Response:

ARS staff participates in state, regional, and national transition meetings and conferences. ARS Field Program staff attends the annual National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) Conference. In addition, they help plan, coordinate, and facilitate the bi-annual State Transition Summit, and help lead the planning and coordination of local transition fairs and parent's nights with assistance from rehab area managers and local VR counselors. Counselors receive educational information and training on providing transition services to students with disabilities through the learning management system.

J. COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS.

1. DESCRIBE PLANS, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES FOR COORDINATION BETWEEN THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND EDUCATION OFFICIALS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PUBLIC EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, THAT ARE DESIGNED TO FACILITATE THE TRANSITION OF THE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM THE RECEIPT OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES IN SCHOOL TO THE RECEIPT OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES.

Title IV ARS Response:

A pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) counselor is assigned to the high schools in each county. Counselors provide direct services to students in the school setting under the core service categories for Pre-ETS. They also provide counseling and guidance and assist with transitioning potentially eligible students to VR services prior to exiting secondary education.

ARS partners with private vendors to provide Pre-ETS services to schools. Vendors submit an application to provide services. The application is reviewed by the Pre-ETS leadership team. If approved, an agreement to operate within the school system is developed and approved by the vendor, school, and the local Pre-ETS counselor. Vendors are required to submit monthly progress reports documenting students' progress, attendance, and services (activities) provided. Vendors are monitored up to twice per year to review curriculum and quality of services.

ARS partners with school systems to provide Pre-ETS school-based programs such as Work-based Learning Opportunities Leading to Future Employment (WOLF) and Working for Independence Now (WIN!). School systems complete proposals to provide services, which delineate Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and WIOA responsibilities. The partnership includes measurable criteria, a reporting structure, and a monitoring guideline.

- ARS is responsible for transition planning and vocational rehabilitation services for eligible and potentially eligible youth and Pre-ETS counselors make every effort to develop and maintain cooperative working relationships with state and local secondary education staff, post-secondary education staff, workforce development partners (e.g., Workforce Development Centers), and other vocational service providers to coordinate pre-employment transition services.
- Provides outreach and coordination activities that include, but are not limited to:

- Participating in Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings for eligible, not yet eligible, and potentially eligible students. Staff participate in person or by teleconference, when invited and available.
 - Attending person-centered planning meetings for students (i.e., Wraparound).
 - Encouraging referral sources to refer students with disabilities in secondary education at least two years prior to high school exit or earlier as outlined in the ARS Pre-ETS Policy Manual.
 - Assigning counselors as liaisons and points of contact for each public high school in Arkansas.
 - Providing accurate information to referral sources, students, and families regarding the referral and application process for vocational rehabilitation services and for Pre-ETS.
 - Attending local career fairs.
 - Working with other WIOA programs and employers to develop work-based learning experiences for students with disabilities.
- School officials are responsible for providing a free and appropriate public education to include transition services required under IDEA.

Referral Process for Pre-ETS:

Pre-ETS counselors directly assigned to the school provide Pre-ETS referral packets to all students and schools. Students who are interested in services complete the referral packet with their parent/guardian with assistance from the Pre-ETS counselor. The Referral packet includes:

- Pre-ETS Program Participation & Referral Form
- Benefits Planning Consent Form (if applicable)
- Social Security Administration 3288 Consent Form (if applicable)

Procedures for Timely Development and Approval of Individualized Plans for Employment for Transition Students

The Pre-Employment Transition counselor attends the potentially eligible student's IEP meeting. During this meeting, the counselor explains how the student can benefit from VR services, the VR process, and documentation required for the student to apply for VR services.

The Pre-Employment Transition counselor facilitates a referral to the vocational rehabilitation counselor for transitioning from Pre-ETS to general VR.

Age for Pre-Employment Transition Services

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services has agreed to begin Pre-Employment Transition Services as early as age 14 through age 21.

2. DESCRIBE THE CURRENT STATUS AND SCOPE OF THE FORMAL INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE VR AGENCY AND THE STATE EDUCATIONAL AGENCY. CONSISTENT WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE FORMAL INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT PURSUANT TO 34 C.F.R. § 361.22(B), PROVIDE, AT A MINIMUM, THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION ABOUT THE AGREEMENT:

A. CONSULTATION AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, WHICH MAY BE PROVIDED USING ALTERNATIVE MEANS FOR MEETING PARTICIPATION (SUCH AS VIDEO CONFERENCES AND CONFERENCE CALLS), TO ASSIST EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES IN PLANNING FOR THE TRANSITION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM SCHOOL TO POST-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES AND OTHER VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES;

B. TRANSITION PLANNING BY PERSONNEL OF THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND EDUCATIONAL AGENCY PERSONNEL FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES THAT FACILITATES THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THEIR INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS (IEPS) UNDER SECTION 614(D) OF THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT;

C. THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES, INCLUDING FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES, OF EACH AGENCY, INCLUDING PROVISIONS FOR DETERMINING STATE LEAD AGENCIES AND QUALIFIED PERSONNEL RESPONSIBLE FOR TRANSITION SERVICES AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES;

D. PROCEDURES FOR OUTREACH TO AND IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WHO NEED TRANSITION SERVICES AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES. OUTREACH TO THESE STUDENTS SHOULD OCCUR AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE DURING THE TRANSITION PLANNING PROCESS AND MUST INCLUDE, AT A MINIMUM, A DESCRIPTION OF THE PURPOSE OF THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM, ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS, APPLICATION PROCEDURES, AND SCOPE OF SERVICES THAT MAY BE PROVIDED TO ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS;

E. COORDINATION NECESSARY TO SATISFY DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS SET FORTH IN 34 C.F.R. PART 397 REGARDING STUDENTS AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES WHO ARE SEEKING SUBMINIMUM WAGE EMPLOYMENT; AND

F. ASSURANCE THAT, IN ACCORDANCE WITH 34 C.F.R. § 397.31, NEITHER THE SEA NOR THE LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCY WILL ENTER INTO A CONTRACT OR OTHER ARRANGEMENT WITH AN ENTITY, AS DEFINED IN 34 C.F.R. § 397.5(D), FOR THE PURPOSE OF OPERATING A PROGRAM UNDER WHICH YOUTH WITH A DISABILITY IS ENGAGED IN WORK COMPENSATED AT A SUBMINIMUM WAGE.

Title IV ARS Response:

ARS has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education for students in public schools. The parties agree to participate in technical assistance and in-service training to assist educational agencies in planning and coordinating services to ensure eligible individuals receive timely and appropriate supports and services. ARS Transition policy requires counselors to engage school personnel to generate student referrals and to develop an IPE for each student

determined eligible. ADE is financially responsible for the delivery and coordination of secondary education as set forth through IDEA. ARS is responsible for coordinating Pre-ETS services, initiating the VR application process, determining eligibility, and providing vocational rehabilitation services for individuals determined eligible for general VR services. The Memorandum of Understanding between the agencies was signed by the Department of Education, Special Education Unit on 12/13/17, by the ARS Commissioner on 1/11/18, and the Division of Services for the Blind on 1/30/18, effective 1/30/18 when the last party signed.

Consultation and Technical Assistance

To improve the transition of students with disabilities from school to postsecondary education and employment, ARS and DSB support the following transition services to vocational rehabilitation personnel, the Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education, and the local education agencies by:

- Providing instruction to vocational rehabilitation counselors, school transition personnel, and other persons supporting students with disabilities through group conferences, instructional materials and guidelines, reporting forms, webinar training, and telephone/email communications.
- Coordinating public speaking and training activities on transition services provided by local education agencies under IDEA.
- Developing model transition demonstration projects and establishing or supporting partnerships involving the local education agencies to achieve the goals of improved transition outcomes.
- Expanding Pre-ETS in schools throughout the State and at the Arkansas Career Development Center (ACDC). ACDC provides training and services to support VR clients and/or students with disabilities to successfully reach the milestones of their individual plans for employment.

ARS, LEAs, ADE, and VR service providers receive technical assistance and professional development from the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: the Collaborative (NTACT: the Collaborative) on topics like implementing evidence-based practices and preparing graduates for success in postsecondary education and employment.

ARS provides eligibility determination according to ARS policy, and consultation and technical assistance to educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including VR services when requested and appropriate. ARS counselors meet with special education teachers during the school year and provide information to schools about VR services, and ensure schools have appropriate forms and information for students to apply for services. ARS works with schools to assist the student with significant disabilities in identifying, selecting, and pursuing appropriate career objectives.

Partner high schools agree to work cooperatively with ARS to provide appropriate transition services to students to equip them for entry into the workforce, postsecondary education or training, and independent living. Schools carry out all required transition planning provisions mandated by the IDEA and state regulations, conduct regular staff development training regarding transition requirements and include ARS counselors in the training when

appropriate, provide referrals to counselors, provide private space for counselors to meet with students, include counselors in students' IEP meetings with authorization by parents or guardians and student knowledge, communicate regularly with counselors, and provide copies of school records.

ARS provides accommodations as needed to aid in successful completion of the vocational education program for VR eligible youth in accordance with their respective IPEs unless these accommodations are the responsibility of the LEA pursuant to Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) regulations. ARS provides technical assistance to local education agencies to ensure all youth and students with disabilities have equal educational opportunities to participate in programs, activities, and job opportunities, and to analyze, identify, and change policies and activities that impede the achievement of equal opportunities for all individuals.

The Interagency Agreement between the Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education Unit – Arkansas Transition Services, Division of Career and Technical Education, and ARS defines each party's responsibilities to ensure FAPE for eligible students, ages 16-21, and younger when appropriate, which are identified as having a disability in accordance with IDEA.

Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education, ARS, and DSB jointly agree to the following:

- The Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education is the agency responsible for ensuring that FAPE is made available to eligible students pursuant to IDEA (20 U.S.C. § 1412(a)(1).
- School districts have the primary planning, programmatic, and financial responsibilities for the provision of education transition services and related services for students as a component of FAPE and these services are provided to eligible students with disabilities, ages 16 to 21, and younger when determined appropriate through the implementation of the IEP. The parties acknowledge Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education has general supervisory responsibility over the educational program of any public agency providing FAPE to individuals with disabilities, ages birth to 21, as defined in state and federal statutes.

The distinction between transition and related services that are the planning, programmatic, and financial responsibility of the school district is determined based on a delineation of the customary services the school provides under IDEA Part B. These distinctions describe the activities, supports, and funding ARS provides to support Pre-ETS in partner school settings or during the school day.

ARS is financially responsible for providing Pre-ETS to students who meet the definition of students with a disability as defined by WIOA. ARS works cooperatively to ensure individuals with disabilities have access to the training and necessary supports to transition successfully from secondary school to postsecondary activities, including but not limited to vocational training and employment, and completing an IPE before leaving the school setting. ARS agrees the student and/or designated party has informed choice in the development of the IPE.

ARS counselors attend IEP and transition planning meetings, career fairs, back to school nights, group orientations, and transition fairs, and make presentations to schools and families

throughout the year with partner agencies like Arkansas Transition Services, Department of Youth Services, Department of Human Services, Adult Education, Workforce Services, and the Division of Services for the Blind. ARS collaborates with partner agencies through shared recruiting and the application processes for special programs outreach. These outreach efforts provide creative programs like the Youth Leadership Forum, the Transition Employment Program, and the Work-based Learning Opportunities Leading to Future Employment to identify students and get them interested in work and in participating in the full array of transition services. ARS goes directly to educational settings in Department of Youth Services facilities, where youth who are at-risk are identified and provided Pre-ETS and are given an opportunity to apply for full vocational rehabilitation services. ARS provides brochures and introductory meetings to explain available services for youth seeking competitive-integrated employment outcomes.

Transition stakeholders and partners participate in NTACT: the Collaborative's sponsored capacity building activities, such as *The Capacity Building Institute* and related regional and/or national meetings. Arkansas utilizes a state implementation team to support personnel development opportunities for Arkansas educators and service providers. The implementation team participates in data review, problem solving, and strategic planning that informs personnel development opportunities.

Number of Potentially Eligible in the State

Each school year, ARS requests data from the Arkansas Office of Information Technology that provides a total count of students, aged 16-21, on Individual Education Plans and on 504 plans within the Arkansas public school system.

Set-aside Process for Authorized Activities

Each state fiscal year, ARS utilizes the technical assistance centers' guidance formulas for determining the total amount of funds that can be expended on authorized activities. First, the total number of students with disabilities in the state which includes those students eligible for the VR program as well as those "potentially eligible" students with disabilities is determined using data collected from the Arkansas Department of Education Statewide Information System. Next, ARS determines the number of students with disabilities that need pre-employment transition services (required and coordinated activities) and subtracts the percentage of those who are not receiving services. ARS then finds the cost per student on coordination and core services using expenditures from the prior fiscal year. Funds used on auxiliary aids and services (34 CFR 361.65(a)(3)(i)) needed by a student with a disability to access pre-employment transition services are applied to the cost per student for coordination and core services. The cost of the following services used to support eligible students to receive core Pre-ETS services are also factored into the cost per student: transportation, assessment, maintenance, PCA services, rehabilitation technology, family services, and coaches for work-based learning. Next, ARS multiplies the cost per student by the total number of potentially eligible individuals. This amount is subtracted from the funds reserved from the VR grant for the provision of Pre-ETS. If the result is negative, ARS focuses on core and coordination activities, without expanding to authorized activities. If the amount is positive, then ARS moves to authorized activities. In all events, ARS ensures the state-wideness of the program in the provision of required activities, provides core services directly from counselors assigned to the public high schools in each

school district to provide direct services, and provides fee-for-service vendors throughout the state to offer core services.

Pre-ETS Students and Section 511

1. ARS has developed a subminimum wage flow process and forms located on the ARS shared drive. If a youth with a disability is seeking subminimum wage and has completed secondary education and is 24 years old or younger, he/she cannot start working for less than minimum wage until he/she has had the opportunity to:
 - A. Receive Pre-employment transition services under WIOA, or
 - B. Transition services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA)
 - C. Applied for ARS services, in accordance with 34 CFR 361.41(b), and determined—
 - i. Ineligible for vocational rehabilitation services in accordance with 34 CFR 361.43;
 - ii. Eligible for vocational rehabilitation services, in accordance with 34 CFR 361.42; and
 - a. The youth with a disability had an approved individualized plan for employment, in accordance with 34 CFR 361.46; and
 - b. The youth with a disability was unable to achieve the employment outcome specified in the individualized plan for employment, as described in 34 CFR 361.5(c)(15) and 361.46, despite working toward the employment outcome with reasonable accommodations and appropriate supports and services, including supported employment services and customized employment services, for a reasonable period of time; and
 - c. The youth with a disability's case record, which meets all of the requirements of 34 CFR 361.47, is closed.
2. ARS has a contract in place to ensure that youth with disabilities receive career counseling, and information and referrals supports designed to enable the individual to explore, discover, experience, and attain competitive integrated employment.

Section 511 Documentation and Assurances

Once ARS determines a student cannot benefit from services leading to competitive integrated employment in the community, the following is provided to the student before he/she leaves the school setting:

1. Documentation of the completion of appropriate pre-employment transition services and/or transition services (ARS Transition Form 511/SMW-1).
2. Documentation from the appropriate school personnel responsible for the provision of transition services to the VR counselor of the receipt of transition services under IDEA. This documentation must be provided to the VR counselor when a case is opened and may include a copy of the IEP and progress reports on transition services received.
3. Documentation of the application of VR services with the result that the student was either determined ineligible for VR services or determined eligible and had an approved

individualized plan for employment but was unable to receive the employment outcome and the case was closed.

4. Documentation from VR of receipt of career counseling and information and referral to other federal and/or state programs. This is completed using ARS Transition Section 511 SMW-2 form Career Counseling, Information and Referral, Student/Youth Services.
5. Documentation of the refusal of services; ARS Transition Section 511 SMW-3 form completed for those students, parents, and guardians that refuse services.

The following assurances are in effect:

1. The SEA nor the LEA will enter into an arrangement with an entity holding a special wage certificate under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act for the purposes of operating a program in which students or youth with disabilities are paid subminimum wage.
2. Before a 14(c) entity may begin compensating a youth with a disability at subminimum wage, the youth must complete Pre-Employment Transition Services through VR or the youth must present documentation showing completion of transition services under IDEA from the school system.
3. The LEA will refer a student with a disability known to be seeking subminimum wage employment to the VR program prior to referring that student to a subminimum wage program.

K. COORDINATION WITH EMPLOYERS

In accordance with the requirements in section 101(a)(11)(E) of the Rehabilitation Act, describe how the VR agency will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of VR services; and transition services for youth and students with disabilities, including pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities.

Title IV ARS Response:

ARS builds relationships with industry leaders through Chambers of Commerce, local Workforce Development Boards, personal business visits, career expos, and/or job fairs to identify and provide solutions to assist businesses in overcoming the challenges of recruiting, retaining, and developing talent, and provides disability awareness and sensitivity training. ARS provides counselors with information about labor market, job vacancies, skills necessary to obtain jobs in high demand occupations, and earning potential and advancement opportunities in various occupations to increase opportunities for achieving competitive integrated employment.

ARS markets to businesses and community members to increase awareness of ARS services to businesses, people with disabilities, and community partners.

The AT@Work and Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work programs are designed to assist ARS clients and referring vocational rehabilitation counselors in selecting and obtaining the appropriate assistive technology to facilitate the achievement of the clients' established vocational goals and attain successful, competitive integrated employment outcomes. Services through the AT@Work program include assistive technology and accommodation evaluation and

assessment, assistive technology device selection and procurement, training and technical assistance, and occupational abilities assessments. These services are primarily directed as it relates to education, school, training programs, vocational and technical education programs, and job retention efforts. AT@Work is a statewide program staffed by occupational therapists and an accommodations specialist.

The SAW/RTW program is designed to provide support to employers and employees when an employee is experiencing an injury or illness that results in a disabling condition, inhibiting the employee from remaining at work or returning to work as soon as it is safe and medically feasible. Program staff include a SAW/RTW coordinator and an administrative assistant. They can also recruit the assistance of evaluation staff located in the AT@Work program.

SAW/RTW provides access to professionals who have expertise in the areas of: vocational counseling to assist an employee in the process of adjusting to a disability and the importance of remaining positive as it relates to stay-at-work/return-to-work efforts; specialized vocational assessments that help identify an employee's vocational strengths and weaknesses as it relates to successful job performance; job site assessment to determine how an employee's presenting disability interferes with task performance and with the identification of potential modifications to the work environment; job analysis to identify the specific functions of a job and the mental and/or physical requirements needed for successful job performance; and individualized employee training regarding the correct use of any new technology or equipment introduced to assist in work performance. Staff can also provide general ergonomic assessments and training targeted toward employees in jobs that may present the likelihood of occurrence of injury or illness that leads to disability.

The SAW/RTW coordinator works with the employee and the employer to develop a SAW/RTW plan that, if required, addresses the need for accommodation in the workplace; identifies successful performance indicators with employer assistance; outlines the process to return or maintain the employee's employment; or after investigation may determine potential assignments for transitional employment.

ARS provides and/or procures transition services including Pre-ETS for students and youth with disabilities through community rehabilitation programs and local education agencies that place students into paid work experiences with employers throughout the state depending on the vocational interests of the student or youth. Pre-ETS counselors, vendors, and school-based providers, facilitate opportunities in group settings and individually with job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, and workplace readiness training. Employers are contracted to provide on-the-job training experiences, job placement, supported employment, and customized employment opportunities. ARS provides assistive technology assessments and training to assist students transitioning from school to postsecondary training or to work.

L. INTERAGENCY COOPERATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES

In accordance with the requirements in section 101(a)(11)(C) and (K), describe interagency cooperation with and utilization of the services and facilities of agencies and programs that are not carrying out activities through the statewide workforce development system to develop opportunities for community-based employment in integrated settings, to the greatest extent practicable for the following:

**1. STATE PROGRAMS (DESIGNATE LEAD AGENCY(IES) AND IMPLEMENTING ENTITY(IES))
CARRIED OUT UNDER SECTION 4 OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998;**

Title IV ARS Response:

ARS is the lead agency for the Arkansas Assistive Technology (AT) program. AT initiatives supported through the Increasing Capabilities Access Network (ICAN) program include device demonstration, loan, and reutilization activities.

**2. PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT BY THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE;**

Title IV ARS Response:

ARS has no cooperative agreements with programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the United States Department of Agriculture. The ARS field program provides information and contact names to potential clients that may qualify for SNAP benefits. ARS field offices collaborate with local SNAP liaisons to provide updates to field staff on SNAP processes.

3. NON-EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES SERVING OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH;

Title IV ARS Response:

ARS maintains an active presence on numerous councils and committees, including:

- Arkansas Workforce Development Boards (state and local)
- Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities
- Behavioral Health Planning and Advisory Council
- The Arkansas Independent Living Council
- The Governor's Commission on People with Disabilities
- Arkansas Trauma Rehabilitation Program

4. STATE USE CONTRACTING PROGRAMS;

Title IV ARS Response:

ARS has no state-use contracting programs.

**5. STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR ADMINISTERING THE STATE MEDICAID PLAN
UNDER TITLE XIX OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT (42 U.S.C. 1396 ET SEQ.);**

Title IV ARS Response:

The Arkansas Department of Human Services operates the State Medicaid program. ARS, the State Medicaid program, and other agencies have in place a MOU that delineates roles and responsibilities related to referrals and sequential funding for combined waiver programs for individuals participating in employment related activities under WIOA.

**6. STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING SERVICES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES;**

Title IV ARS Response:

The Department of Human Services – Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS) is responsible for providing services to individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. ARS, DDS, and other agencies collaborate as members of the APSE Association and the Employment First Committee initiatives. ARS, DDS, and the other agencies have in place a MOU that delineates roles and responsibilities related to referrals and sequential funding for combined waiver programs for individuals participating in employment related activities under WIOA.

ARS determines eligibility for vocational rehabilitation. All parties may refer common customers for work incentives benefits counseling. ARS assures statewide coverage for the provision of ARS-funded VR, employment first, and supported employment services and programs. ARS funds services leading to competitive integrated employment for eligible individuals referred to ARS. ARS notifies the appropriate party representative who can arrange for long-term supports to maintain competitive integrated employment after ARS-funded job supports end. ARS assists DDS in planning, designing, and budgeting for new programs/services or modifications to existing programs.

7. STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES; AND

Title IV ARS Response:

The Department of Human Services – Division of Adult, Aging and Behavioral Health Services (DAABHS) is responsible for providing mental health services. ARS, DAABHS, and other agencies have in place a MOU that delineates roles and responsibilities related to sequential funding for combined waiver programs for individuals participating in employment related activities under WIOA. DAABHS offers very limited employment service opportunities. The funding source for Medicaid Waiver services is through the PASSEs.

ARS determines eligibility for vocational rehabilitation. All parties may refer common customers for work incentives benefits counseling. ARS assures statewide coverage for the provision of ARS-funded VR, employment first, and supported employment services and programs. ARS funds services leading to competitive integrated employment for eligible individuals referred to ARS. ARS notifies the appropriate party representative who can arrange for long-term supports to maintain competitive integrated employment after ARS-funded job supports end. ARS assists DAABHS in planning, designing, and budgeting for new programs/services or modifications to existing programs. ARS provides training and technical assistance to the PASSEs regarding supported employment services.

8. OTHER FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS OUTSIDE THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM.

Title IV ARS Response:

ARS collaborates and coordinates services with federal, state, and local agencies that contribute to the vocational rehabilitation and independent living of Arkansans with disabilities.

- Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education – Arkansas Transition Services - ARS provides Pre-ETS and Transition services, and technical assistance and consultation to ADE-SE personnel. ARS designates personnel as liaisons with LEAs and informs LEA personnel, students, and families about VR eligibility requirements, the application process, and the scope of services available to all eligible and potentially eligible individuals.
- Department of Human Services - Division of Adult, Aging and Behavioral Health Services, Working Disabled Medicaid Program, and Division of Developmental Disabilities Services.
- Community Rehabilitation Programs Developmental Disability Providers -ARS contracts with CRPs for job placement and supported employment services and offers yearly training on topics such as the discovery process.
- Supported Employment Vendors - ARS contracts with SE vendors to provide supported employment services and offers training topics such as the discovery process.
- Arkansas APSE - ARS is a member of Arkansas APSE and assumes an active role in the planning and execution of the Arkansas APSE conference held every other year.
- Social Security Administration Ticket to Work - ARS participates in the SSA Ticket to Work Program and engages with Employment Networks within Arkansas and across the United States.
- Arkansas Spinal Cord Commission - ARS sends and receives referrals for individuals that can potentially benefit from services provided by the Spinal Cord Commission.
- Centers for Independent Living - ARS is the DSE for the Arkansas Independent Living program and provides technical assistance to the CILs and SILC in the development of their state plan and in the completion of the annual report.

10. OTHER PRIVATE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS.

Title IV ARS Response:

- ACCESS Group, Inc. Project SEARCH® sites:
 1. UAMS -Little Rock
 2. ACH – Little Rock
 3. CHI St. Vincent – Hot Springs
 4. Mercy Hospital – Fort Smith
 5. St. Bernards Regional Medical Center – Jonesboro
 6. Ouachita County Medical Center – Camden
 7. UAPB – Pine Bluff
- Friendship Community Cares, Inc.
 1. Saint Mary’s Regional Medical Center – Russellville

2. Embassy Suites NW – Rogers

The ARS director of Transition Services is the statewide coordinator for Project SEARCH®. The coordinator recruits host businesses and markets the program. The coordinator and counselors connect participants to benefits counseling and other trainings. Counselors determine VR eligibility, participate in interviews and assessments of applicants, attend monthly steering committee meetings, and participate in employment planning meetings for each of their clients/participants.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION CERTIFICATIONS AND ASSURANCES

Title IV ARS Response:

The State Plan must include
1. Public Comment on Policies and Procedures: The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.
2. Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement: The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a Unified State plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140.
3. Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan: The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to:
3.a. the establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.b. either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.c. consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.d. the financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3).
3.e. as applicable, the local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.f. as applicable, the shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act.

The State Plan must include
3.g. statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.h. the requirements for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.i. all required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.j. the requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.k. the compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.l. the reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities as set forth in section 101(a)(18)(A).
3.m. the submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4. Administration of the Provision of VR Services: The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will:
4.a. comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(E) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.b. impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.c. provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services or, if implementing an order of selection, in accordance with criteria established by the State for the order of selection as set out in section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.d. determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.e. comply with the requirements for the development of an individualized plan for employment in accordance with section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.f. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act
4.g. provide vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the State, in accordance with section 101(a)(13) of the Rehabilitation Act.

The State Plan must include
4.h. comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by sections 101(a)(14) and 511 of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.i. meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act if the State elects to construct, under special circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs.
4.j. With respect to students with disabilities, the State,
4.j.i. has developed and will implement,
4.j.i.A. strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and
4.j.i.B. strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and
4.j.ii. has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15), 101(a)(25) and 113).
4.j.iii. shall reserve not less than 15 percent of the allocated funds for the provision of pre-employment transition services; such funds shall not be used to pay for the administrative costs of providing pre-employment transition services.
5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement to the State plan:
5.a. The designated State unit assures that it will include in the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan all information required by section 606 of the Rehabilitation Act.
5.b. The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act separately for individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act.
6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program (Title VI):
6.a. The designated State agency assures that it will expend no more than 2.5 percent of the State's allotment under title VI for administrative costs of carrying out this program; and, the designated State agency or agencies will provide, directly or indirectly through public or private entities, non-Federal contributions in an amount that is not less than 10 percent of the costs of carrying out supported employment services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved for such purpose under section 603(d) of the Rehabilitation Act, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(H) and (I) of the Rehabilitation Act.

The State Plan must include
6.b. The designated State agency assures that it will use funds made available under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act only to provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, who are eligible to receive such services; and, that such funds are used only to supplement and not supplant the funds provided under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, when providing supported employment services specified in the individualized plan for employment, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(A) and (D), of the Rehabilitation Act.
7. Provision of Supported Employment Services:
7.a. The designated State agency assures that it will provide supported employment services as defined in section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act.
7.b. The designated State agency assures that the comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act an individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(7)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act.

Do you attest that these assurances will be met?

Yes

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (COMBINED OR GENERAL) CERTIFICATIONS

1. THE CENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPROPRIATE,) IS AUTHORIZED TO SUBMIT THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973 (REHABILITATION ACT), AS AMENDED BY TITLE IV OF WIOA[1], AND ITS STATE PLAN SUPPLEMENT UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT;

ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPROPRIATE

Title IV ARS Response:

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services

2. IN THE EVENT THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY IS NOT PRIMARILY CONCERNED WITH VOCATIONAL AND OTHER REHABILITATION OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES, THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY MUST INCLUDE A DESIGNATED STATE UNIT FOR THE VR PROGRAM (SECTION 101(A)(2)(B)(II) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT). AS A CONDITION FOR THE RECEIPT OF FEDERAL FUNDS UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES, THE (DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WHEN THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY HAS A DESIGNATED STATE UNIT)[2] AGREES TO OPERATE AND IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE STATE VR SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN[3], THE REHABILITATION ACT, 34

CFR 361.13(B) AND (C), AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[4], POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED BY THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION. FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE TO STATES UNDER SECTION 111(A) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT ARE USED SOLELY FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN;

ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY

Title IV ARS Response:

Division of Workforce Services

3. AS A CONDITION FOR THE RECEIPT OF FEDERAL FUNDS UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY, OR THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WHEN THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY HAS A DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AGREES TO OPERATE AND IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE STATE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN[5], THE REHABILITATION ACT, AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[6], POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED BY THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION. FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER TITLE VI ARE USED SOLELY FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN;

4. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT OR, IF NOT APPLICABLE, THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY HAS THE AUTHORITY UNDER STATE LAW TO PERFORM THE FUNCTIONS OF THE STATE REGARDING THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT AND IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE VR PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH 34 CFR 361.13(B) AND (C);

5. THE STATE LEGALLY MAY CARRY OUT EACH PROVISION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT.

6. ALL PROVISIONS OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT ARE CONSISTENT WITH STATE LAW.

7. THE CENTER THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW) HAS THE AUTHORITY UNDER STATE LAW TO RECEIVE, HOLD, AND DISBURSE FEDERAL FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT;

ENTER THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW

Title IV ARS Response:

Joseph Baxter

8. THE CENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW) HAS THE AUTHORITY TO SUBMIT THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND THE SUPPLEMENT FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;

ENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW

Title IV ARS Response:

Commissioner, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services

9. THE AGENCY THAT SUBMITS THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT HAS ADOPTED OR OTHERWISE FORMALLY APPROVED THE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT.**FOOTNOTES****CERTIFICATION SIGNATURE****Title IV ARS Response:**

Signatory information	Enter Signatory information in this column
Name of Signatory	Joseph Baxter
Title of Signatory	Commissioner, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services
Date Signed	February 29, 2024

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**Title IV ARS Response:**

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	64.0%		65.0%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	63.0%		65.0%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$6,800		\$6,870	
Credential Attainment Rate	35.5%		36.0%	
Measurable Skill Gains	57.5%		58.0%	
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Statewide Measure		Statewide Measure	

1

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

**GEPA 427 FORM INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLICATION PACKAGE - VOCATIONAL
REHABILITATION**

**1. DESCRIBE HOW YOUR ENTITY'S EXISTING MISSION, POLICIES, OR COMMITMENTS
ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO, AND EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION IN, THE PROPOSED
PROJECT OR ACTIVITY.**

Title IV ARS Response:

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services' (ARS) mission is to prepare Arkansans with disabilities to work and lead productive and independent lives. ARS is governed by rules and regulations as outlined by the reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 included as part of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Enacting state legislation indicates the policy and scope of ARS shall be to provide increased employment of individuals with disabilities through the provision of individualized training, independent living services, educational and support services, and meaningful opportunities for employment in integrated work settings to maximize employment, economic self-sufficiency, independence, and integration into society. Pursuant to this, rehabilitation services shall be provided to individuals present within the state and the rehabilitation plan adopted shall be in effect in all political subdivisions of the state. Consistent with ARS policy, program eligibility requirements will be applied in compliance with Titles VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act, The Americans with Disabilities Act, and without regard to age, religion, disability, sex, race, color, or national origin. Eligibility requirements are applicable without regard to the particular service need or anticipated cost of services required by an applicant or the income level of an applicant or applicant's family. ARS does not impose a residence duration requirement.

**2. BASED ON YOUR PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY, WHAT BARRIERS MAY IMPEDE
EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, OR OTHER
BENEFICIARIES?**

Title IV ARS Response:

The most recent Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment identified barriers to populations ARS serves, specifically individuals with disabilities including those with significant disabilities and individuals with disabilities who are unserved or underserved. Barriers identified were specific to an individual or population but could also be common to other individuals or populations within the state. They include such things as lack of adequate transportation, lack of technology access, lack of or difficulty accessing programs, social biases, or communication/language barriers. ARS is also confronted with the barrier of adequate staffing as is common with a significant number of other state vocational rehabilitation programs. It includes both the hiring of qualified staff and staff retention.

**3. BASED ON THE BARRIERS IDENTIFIED, WHAT STEPS WILL YOU TAKE TO ADDRESS
SUCH BARRIERS TO EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN THE PROPOSED
PROJECT OR ACTIVITY?**

Title IV ARS Response:

While specific barriers might affect other populations, ARS can only address such barriers on an individual basis consistent with the implementation of an Individual Plan for Employment. Barriers faced by individuals not eligible for ARS services would require intervention by another program or through a local or state government initiative.

As to staffing, ARS understands that part of the issue is pay. It is anticipated that a labor market survey will be completed to determine adequate compensation. If the need for additional compensation is indicated, ARS will request assistance from the Office of Personnel Management to determine how to proceed with implementation. ARS also recognizes that making sure that staff are sufficiently trained to do their job well can be an issue. This will be addressed as part of the implementation of our new electronic case management system.

As part of counselor training the importance of identifying barriers to employment is, and will continue to be, a major emphasis, specifically as part of the IPE development process. Services identified on the IPE should include what a client needs to achieve their agreed upon vocational goal. Examples could include services that help address barriers such as a lack of adequate transportation, lack of technology access, communication/language barriers, and difficulty accessing other programs that support the achievement of the client's vocational goal.

4. WHAT IS YOUR TIMELINE, INCLUDING TARGETED MILESTONES, FOR ADDRESSING THESE IDENTIFIED BARRIERS?

Title IV ARS Response:

ARS will address barriers for individuals eligible for services throughout the life of the Individual Plan for Employment, which may continue beyond the new state plan time frame.

ARS is currently working to resolve the staffing issues; however, the labor market survey will be completed after July 1, 2024, and before the end of program year 2025. ARS will evaluate the staff training issues before the two-year state plan update, which will begin as soon as the new case management system is in place.

GEPA 427 FORM INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLICATION PACKAGE - SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

1. DESCRIBE HOW YOUR ENTITY'S EXISTING MISSION, POLICIES, OR COMMITMENTS ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO, AND EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION IN, THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY.

Title IV ARS Response:

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services' (ARS) mission is to prepare Arkansans with disabilities to work and lead productive and independent lives. ARS is governed by rules and regulations as outlined by the reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 included as part of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Enacting state legislation indicates the policy and scope of ARS shall be to provide increased employment of individuals with disabilities through the provision of individualized training, independent living services, educational and support services, and meaningful opportunities for employment in integrated work settings to maximize employment, economic self-sufficiency, independence, and integration into society. Pursuant to this, rehabilitation services shall be provided to citizens throughout the state and the rehabilitation plan adopted shall be in effect in all political subdivisions of the state. Consistent with ARS policy, program eligibility requirements will be applied in compliance with Titles VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act, The Americans with Disabilities Act, and without regard to age, religion, disability, sex, race, color, or national origin. Eligibility requirements are applicable without regard to the particular service need or anticipated cost of services required by an applicant or the income level of an applicant or applicant's family. ARS does not impose a residence duration requirement.

**2. BASED ON YOUR PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY, WHAT BARRIERS MAY IMPEDE
EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, OR OTHER
BENEFICIARIES?**

Title IV ARS Response:

The most recent Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment identified barriers to populations ARS serves, specifically individuals with disabilities including those with significant disabilities and individuals with disabilities who are unserved or underserved. Supported employment (SE) clients fall into the unserved or underserved category. Barriers for SE individuals include lack of SE providers, lack of adequate staffing regarding job coaches, and lack of adequate training of job coaches. Since Covid, the Section 511 participants who were enrolled in a program no longer attend or are not interested in working at this time. ARS recognizes that we lag regarding our percentage of SE closures.

**3. BASED ON THE BARRIERS IDENTIFIED, WHAT STEPS WILL YOU TAKE TO ADDRESS
SUCH BARRIERS TO EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN THE PROPOSED
PROJECT OR ACTIVITY?**

Title IV ARS Response:

ARS has set a goal to increase successful employment outcomes utilizing Community Rehabilitation Program and Supported Employment vendors. ARS has set a priority to reach the national average for supported employment closures by PY2027 and had identified eleven strategies to accomplish this goal.

As part of counselor training the importance of identifying barriers to employment is, and will continue to be, a major emphasis, specifically as part of the IPE development process. Services identified on the IPE should include what a client needs to achieve their agreed upon vocational goal. Examples could include services that help address barriers such as a lack of adequate transportation, lack of technology access, communication/language barriers, and difficulty accessing other programs that support the achievement of the client's vocational goal.

**4. WHAT IS YOUR TIMELINE, INCLUDING TARGETED MILESTONES, FOR ADDRESSING
THESE IDENTIFIED BARRIERS?**

Title IV ARS Response:

The timeline for strategy implementation is identified within goal five, priority one. Some of the key milestones include:

- By 2025, ARS plans to reduce time from vendor referral to IPE development and service initiation.
- By 2026, ARS will have revised policies and procedures and will have convened partners to identify, share, and promote SE services.
- By 2027, ARS will provide training opportunities to providers and staff and research digital technology innovations for supported employment and supports.

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (BLIND)

A. STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL.

1. ALL VR AGENCIES, EXCEPT FOR THOSE THAT HAVE AN INDEPENDENT CONSUMER-CONTROLLED COMMISSION, MUST HAVE A STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (COUNCIL OR SRC) THAT MEETS THE CRITERIA IN SECTION 105 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT. THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPLICABLE, HAS:

Title IV DSB Response:

(A) A SRC that meets the criteria in Section 10 5 of the Rehabilitation Act. Previous responses to this query inaccurately stated that DSB was an independent state commission. Now under new leadership, it is clear from state law that DSB is not an independent agency or commission, rather it is an agency under the authority of the Department of Commerce. Additionally, the membership requirements of the board as set out in state law align with the composition requirements of a SRC under Sec. 105. So, it has been concluded that DSB is a VR agency with a SRC.

2. IN ACCORDANCE WITH ASSURANCE (A)(1)(B), IF SELECTED, PLEASE PROVIDE INFORMATION ON THE CURRENT COMPOSITION OF THE COUNCIL BY REPRESENTATIVE TYPE, INCLUDING THE TERM NUMBER OF THE REPRESENTATIVE, AS APPLICABLE, AND ANY VACANCIES, AS WELL AS THE BEGINNING DATES OF EACH REPRESENTATIVE'S TERM..

Title IV DSB Response:

Please see the attached document titled ACA 25-11-205 – DSB Board for the Arkansas state law. The council/board shall be composed of seven (7) members appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate. Current members are listed below:

1. David Henry – American Federation of the Blind of Arkansas - Blind (term currently expired) 6.30.2021
2. Erika Evans – Blind (term currently expired) 6.30.2017
3. Keith Clark – Blind (term currently expired) 6.30.2015
4. Tiffany Moore – AR Assoc. for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind & Visually Impaired (term currently expired) 6.30.2021
5. Vacant
6. Vacant
7. Vacant

Council/Board ex-officio representation is as follows:

1. Eric Yarberry – President of World Services for the Blind
2. Nicole Walsh – Superintendent of the AR School for the Deaf and Blind
3. Kara Aaron – Blind Veterans Association.
4. Courtnei Felps – Ar Assoc. of Blind Business Managers
5. Vacant – AR Association for Education & Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired

3. IF THE SRC IS NOT MEETING THE COMPOSITION REQUIREMENTS IN SECTION 105(B) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT AND/OR IS NOT MEETING QUARTERLY AS REQUIRED IN SECTION 105(F) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, PROVIDE THE STEPS THAT THE VR AGENCY IS TAKING TO ENSURE IT MEETS THOSE REQUIREMENTS.

Title IV DSB Response:

THE DSB BOARD MEETS THE COMPOSITION REQUIREMENTS OF SEC. 105 AND MEETS QUARTERLY.

4. IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS IN SECTION 101(A)(21)(A)(II)(III) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, INCLUDE A SUMMARY OF THE COUNCIL'S INPUT (INCLUDING HOW IT WAS OBTAINED) INTO THE STATE PLAN AND ANY STATE PLAN REVISIONS, INCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COUNCIL'S ANNUAL REPORTS, THE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER SATISFACTION AND OTHER COUNCIL REPORTS.

Title IV DSB Response:

The DSB Board does not provide an annual report, but we have referenced the consumer satisfaction reports in multiple locations within the state plan. The board and the division have been informed of the planned changes and have held meetings over the past 12-14 months discussing the merger of the two VR agencies in Arkansas including conversations at the quarterly board meetings as well as special-called meetings.

5. PROVIDE THE VR AGENCY'S RESPONSE TO THE COUNCIL'S INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS, INCLUDING AN EXPLANATION FOR THE REJECTION OF ANY INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

Title IV DSB Response:

The DSB board votes on goals and strategies brought forth by the division and provides recommendations. Recently, the board made a recommendation to the Department of Commerce and the Governor's Office as it relates to the position of interim director. That recommendation was rejected as there was a need to bring in someone with significant VR and leadership experience to alter its course and improve the fiscal integrity of the division.

B. COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT (CSNA).

Section 101(a)(15), (17), and (23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to provide an assessment of:

1. THE VR SERVICES NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES RESIDING WITHIN THE STATE, INCLUDING:

A. INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES AND THEIR NEED FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT;

Title IV DSB Response:

In 2022, the UA Little Rock Survey Research Center conducted the Arkansas Division of Services for the Blind Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). A mixed method approach was utilized to collect relevant and applicable data for the comprehensive needs assessment. The UA Little Rock Survey Research Center distributed five surveys to different constituent groups which represented 164 total responses across the various internal and external stakeholders (DSB Staff survey, n=45; Business survey, n=1; & Partners survey, n=18; Open

Consumers (During Service), n= 63; Closed Consumers, n=37). In addition to the surveys, a series of face-to-face interviews and focus groups were conducted via zoom online technologies; phone interviews/ contacts; and typed responses from those unavailable to schedule for an interview or focus group. Focus groups were held for Field Counselors, Field Managers, Partners, and Board Directors, while interviews were held with all Senior Management members. Additionally, questionnaires were distributed to those populations for data collection purposes if they wanted to participate but were unable to join the scheduled focus groups. To conduct the internal and external environmental scan, researchers collected demographic and population characteristic estimates through publicly available datasets and analyzed Division of Services for the Blind administrative data.

Needs Assessment results suggest that community rehabilitation programs within the State need to establish, develop, and improve in efforts to provide job services and independent living skills. Consumers stated the need for trainers for skill development for job placement, mental health services, soft skills and job skills training, mobility and self-independence training. It is noted that consumers who are served by the VR program need effective job services such as workplace readiness skills, job placement, and on-the-job training. Additionally, it is stated that independent living skills may present a barrier in consumers obtaining effective job services. However, the surveys of partners and staff suggest that the limited availability of service providers may hinder effective rehabilitation for VR consumers.

These barriers would be even more challenging for an individual with most significant disabilities to overcome. DSB is working with the Technical Assistance Centers to develop guidelines and recruitment tools to grow the availability of service providers and better evaluate the quality of services provided by vendors. Supported Employment services have been difficult in the past for DSB to provide due to lack of understanding and vendor availability. Goal 1 under Supported Employment is focused on increasing vendors and availability of services in conjunction with increased training and guidance for staff on Supported Employment.

Update PY 26-27:

In 2023, the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) partnered with Qualtrics to modernize its Consumer Satisfaction Survey (CSS) process and address longstanding challenges with low response rates and limited accessibility. This collaboration has resulted in substantial improvements in survey participation, data quality, and operational efficiency. After implementing Qualtrics' digital survey platform supported by best-practice guidance from the company DSB achieved an 18% response rate for two

consecutive years. This rate significantly surpasses the validated industry benchmark of 10–12%, even though DSB offered no incentives to participants.

A major contributor to this success is the platform's enhanced accessibility features. Qualtrics enabled DSB to deploy surveys in consumers' native languages, including Spanish and Marshallese, reducing comprehension barriers and increasing confidence in responding. These languages represent substantial portions of Arkansas' population and were previously underserved in data-collection efforts.

The shift to a digital format also streamlined delivery and encouraged timely engagement. Surveys were sent via text message using a conversational, two-way system, and remained

active for 48 hours. Follow-up reminders were delivered electronically through email, further improving participation without compromising data integrity.

Overall, the adoption of Qualtrics has transformed DSB's survey process by expanding reach, improving accessibility, and dramatically increasing response rates. These advancements have strengthened the agency's ability to capture reliable consumer insights and better inform service improvements, eliminating many of the barriers that previously limited participation.

The Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) continues to provide essential and effective services to consumers statewide. Survey results collected through the updated Qualtrics platform demonstrate consistently positive feedback in several core service areas. Consumers report strong appreciation for counselor support, timeliness of service delivery, and the professionalism demonstrated by DSB staff. These findings affirm the agency's ongoing commitment to high-quality service and its positive impact on individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

Survey data identifies several challenges that warrant targeted attention. Respondents cited concerns related to staffing shortages, communication delays, and varying levels of technological proficiency across service areas. These issues, although not universal, are important to improving success at meeting consumer needs.

On April 19, 2024, DSB conducted a Supported Employment Vendor Training to identify additional vendors to provide Job Coaching, Job Placement, and extended supports to individuals with the Most Significant Disabilities. At that time 32 individuals representing a variety of vendors across the state attended the training. Several new vendors began working with DSB consumers to try and improve access to services and remove barriers. In July 2025, DSB counselors received training from Rehabilitation Instructors at World Services for the Blind on how to provide assessments on independent living skills and common techniques to share with consumers. DSB continues to work with staff to identify clients for Supported Employment services and work towards successful outcomes with vendors. DSB has increased in the number of individuals on Supported Employment IPEs who are moving towards successful job placement.

B. INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO ARE MINORITIES AND INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR PROGRAM;

Title IV DSB Response:

Underserved/ Unserved Populations:

Findings: The surveys, focus groups, and interviews noted participating respondents indicated the following populations were underserved for the state of Arkansas (Note: presented in no specific order and that listings are not mutually exclusive):

1. Racial and/or ethnic minorities
 - a. Black/African American
 - b. Native American & People Indigenous to the United States
 - c. Hispanic/LatinX
 - d. Marshallese population

2. Other Blind/Severely Visually Impaired Specific Disability Statuses
 - a. Hearing-Impaired
 - b. Deaf-Blind/Multiple disabilities
 - c. Individuals diagnosed with psychiatric/mental health disabilities
 - d. Individuals requiring long-term support/extended services
 - e. Individuals with most-significant disabilities
3. Underserved geographic areas (e.g., Rural areas; & Delta region/ Southern Arkansas)
4. Age-related
 - a. Youth & Pre-ETS
 - b. Older Individuals Who are Blind
5. Veterans

Potential Recommendations & Considerations

1. Constant and continuous engagement and communication with underserved/unserved populations.
2. Representative hiring may be an avenue to engage underserved populations. Specific attention should be paid to hiring blind or severely visually impaired individuals.
3. The Transition-aged youth and Pre-ETS disparity was often related to turnover among staff for the schools – primarily related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The issue of not having a person in place to coordinate between the students and DSB was seen as a barrier to accessing services. Additional administrative measures related to this issue may be needed.
4. Education of existence/services/marketing (particularly in rural areas) as an avenue to engage populations not currently engaged. Expanding the reach and awareness of DSB could include but is not limited to (1) expanding the social media presence and online informational materials; (2) updating information in the handouts and providing materials that are translated or focused for specific ethnic and racial minorities; and engaging at other less traditional venues for employment services (e.g., Marshallese festival, faith-based community events; etc.).
5. Assessment of the services which were deemed readily available across the geographic areas of the state to evaluate adequacy of services available to individuals across the wide range of disabilities/needs noted above.
6. Consumer barriers were noted as the biggest external perception as to why consumers were not having their needs met. Additional review and evaluation of external barriers may help address serving currently underserved populations.

C. INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES SERVED THROUGH OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM; AND

Title IV DSB Response:

Statewide transformation has created new and/or combined administrative pathways and current work practices requiring additional coordination with other state agencies. These cross-institutional administrative practices present unique issues with dual case classification at the consumer level. Additionally, the transformation included a consolidation and reorganization of physical office spaces which has resulted in a closer physical proximity between entities – this is not necessarily denoted as a positive or negative but denotes changes at the organizational level. Additionally, respondents noted that DSB leadership and administration and service delivery components were doing exemplary in this arena for navigating the transformation and coordination with parent- and sister-agencies. One noted area of concern was responses that the statewide transformation has resulted in some employee retention & turnover.

Potential Recommendations & Considerations

1. Universally implemented policy manual/process to determine primary versus secondary disabilities with other state agencies.
2. Way to improve referral service/phone directory
3. Improved communication between state agencies or a determination process establishment to coordinate agency processes (flowchart diagram/process flow map/decision tree)
4. Creation of a DWS-wide Organizational chart
5. Focus on building middle-management infrastructure as way to better connect field with administration.
6. Greater awareness of DSB within DWS
7. Improvements in computer/data sharing across agency entities

Update PY26-27: DSB participates in all WIOA partner meetings and presented to the leadership of Workforce Connections (formerly DWS) about the services and programs within the agency to enhance sharing

and understanding. DSB also presented at Adult Education's annual director's training and at Arkansas Rehab Services manager training.

D. YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR NEED FOR PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES. INCLUDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES FOR TRANSITION CAREER SERVICES AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH SUCH SERVICES ARE COORDINATED WITH TRANSITION SERVICES PROVIDED UNDER IDEA.

Title IV DSB Response:

The Needs Assessment results provided by UALR suggest that the length of time required for the program are typically or generally open longer which impacts the metrics and programmatic outcomes for DSB. DSB has updated job requirements that differentiates the metrics and outcomes for Pre-Employment Transition Services. A focus or emphasis on vocational training and more career counseling may serve as a complement or alternative to

existing focuses on professional training and college enrollment for consumers. The expansion of pre-employment transition services such as work-place readiness skills, work-based learning experiences, counseling on post-secondary enrollment opportunities, and career exploration were also identified as program needs.

While the Needs Assessment results provided due indicate that changes under WIOA have led to longer case times for consumers who participate in post-secondary education. DSB agrees that ensuring consumers are aware of the options available with vocational training is valuable in achieving the correct employment goal for each consumer, DSB will use the client's strengths, interests, and informed choice to develop the employment goal for each consumer. DSB continues to work to expand opportunities for Pre-ETS students as outlined in Goal 2.

DSB performance measures may be reduced in the short term due to a focus on post-secondary, as fewer cases may close rehabilitated. However, since the metrics are a percentage of those who exited, this impact should be minimized. In the long-term, DSB expects the consumers who have received quality training (Post-secondary or vocational) for an employment goal that meets their interests, strengths, and career goals will lead to higher indicators for the 2nd and 4th Quarter After Exit measures.

2. IDENTIFY THE NEED TO ESTABLISH, DEVELOP, OR IMPROVE COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE.

Title IV DSB Response:

Needs Assessment results suggest that community rehabilitation programs within the State need to establish, develop, and improve in efforts to provide job services and independent living skills. Consumers stated the need for trainers for skill development for job placement, mental health services, soft skills and job skills training, mobility and self-independence training. It is noted that consumers who are served by the VR program need effective job services such as workplace readiness skills, job placement, and on-the-job training. Additionally, it is stated that independent living skills may present a barrier in consumers obtaining effective job services. However, the surveys of partners and staff suggest that the limited availability of service providers may hinder effective rehabilitation for VR consumers.

Update PY 26-27: On April 19, 2024, DSB conducted a Supported Employment Vendor Training to identify additional vendors to provide Job Coaching, Job Placement, and extended supports to individuals with the Most Significant Disabilities. At that time 32 individuals representing a variety of vendors across the state attended the training. Several new vendors began working with DSB consumers to try and improve access to services and remove barriers. In July 2025, DSB counselors received training from Rehabilitation Instructors at World Services for the Blind on how to provide assessments on independent living skills and common techniques to share with consumers.

C. GOALS, PRIORITIES, AND STRATEGIES

Section 101(a)(15) and (23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to describe the goals and priorities of the State in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs. The goals and priorities are based on (1) the most recent CSNA, including any updates; (2) the State's performance under the performance accountability measures of Section 116 of WIOA; and (3) other available information on the operation and

effectiveness of the VR program, including any reports received from the SRC and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under Section 107 of the Rehabilitation Act. VR agencies must—

1. DESCRIBE HOW THE SRC AND THE VR AGENCY JOINTLY DEVELOPED AND AGREED TO THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES AND ANY REVISIONS; AND

Title IV DSB Response:

The DSB Board, an independent commission, approved the goals and priorities.

2. IDENTIFY MEASURABLE GOALS AND PRIORITIES IN CARRYING OUT THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS AND THE BASIS FOR SELECTING THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES (E.G., CSNA, PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES, SRC RECOMMENDATIONS, MONITORING, OTHER INFORMATION). AS REQUIRED IN SECTION 101(A)(15)(D), (18), AND (23), DESCRIBE UNDER EACH GOAL OR PRIORITY, THE STRATEGIES OR METHODS USED TO ACHIEVE THE GOAL OR PRIORITY, INCLUDING AS APPLICABLE, DESCRIPTION OF STRATEGIES OR METHODS THAT—

- A. SUPPORT INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES;
- B. OVERCOME BARRIERS TO ACCESSING VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;
- C. IMPROVE AND EXPAND VR SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THE COORDINATION OF SERVICES DESIGNED TO FACILITATE THE TRANSITION OF SUCH STUDENTS FROM SCHOOL TO POSTSECONDARY LIFE (INCLUDING THE RECEIPT OF VR SERVICES, POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES); AND
- D. IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS IN ASSISTING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES TO ACHIEVE QUALITY EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES.

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB developed the following goals, strategies, and performance measures for PY2024 and PY2025 based on the comprehensive statewide needs assessment, the agency's performance on WIOA performance measures, guidance from RSA, and recommendations from the DSB Board. The goals were approved by the DSB Board.

Goal 1: DSB will continue to improve outreach across the State of Arkansas including in underrepresented areas.

Update PY26-27: DSB and ARS regions will need to be realigned with the broader Arkansas Workforce Connections division to maximize efficiency and effectiveness across the entire workforce development ecosystem. This will require updates to program implementation, outreach efforts, and employer contacts in the newly aligned regional areas that will include all workforce development agencies within the umbrella of Arkansas Workforce Connections.

DSB will also review organizational charts to identify improvements to efficiency and effectiveness with a priority towards a regional management focus instead of a program specific focus as part of the realignment process.

1.VR Counselors will conduct at least two employer meetings per month to connect with businesses in their area and be aware of opportunities for their consumers.

Update PY 26-27:

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) and the Division for Services for the Blind (DSB) anticipate that in calendar year 2027 legislation will be passed by the Arkansas Legislature and signed by the Governor to combine ARS and DSB into one general vocational rehabilitation agency. ARS and DSB understand that when this occurs a new comprehensive statewide needs assessment that reflects the needs of individuals with disabilities served by both agencies will be required as well as the development of a combined state plan. ARS and DSB understand that to assure compliance with federal requirements they will need to maintain regular contact with the state's liaison and other involved Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) staff throughout the planning and implementation of this project.

DSB's counselors are required to conduct at least two employer meetings per month. DSB had difficulty tracking contacts during this time due to a vacancy in the Statistician position. However, DSB is working with the newly hired Statistician to implement regular follow-ups on this data to ensure accurate reporting of contacts. Counselors in Northwest Arkansas contacted 37 employers during Program Year 2024, with counselors in Northeast connecting with an additional 25 employers. Staff in Central and South Arkansas reported contacts with 10 employers each for the program year. During Program Year 2024, Central, South, and Northeast Arkansas had only one VR counselor covering the region for most of the year due to staff vacancies. The Transition team reported 169 contacts for the 7 counselors, meeting the goal of 2 per month per counselor. As a state, counselors averaged 15 contacts for the program year out of the 24 required.

2. DSB's Outreach Coordinator will attend events across the state to inform consumers and their communities about the services DSB will offer by 1) attending at least 3 events each month 2) attending events in every region of the state each quarter.

Update PY 26-27:

DSB's Outreach Manager attended events across the state to inform about DSB services. In Program Year 2024, the Outreach manager attended an average of 3 events per month and visited 3 out of 4 regions of the state for events. For PY 2025, the Outreach Manager has attended 19 events so far in 2 regions of the state. However, for PY 2025 Quarter 2 DSB staff were unable to travel due to budget concerns limiting access for the manager to travel and attend events outside their region. DSB will continue to work to identify or create opportunities for Outreach in all 4 regions of the state. DSB's Outreach Manager is working to develop connections with various communities statewide to expand opportunities to connect with potential consumers.

Additional DSB staff attended a variety of outreach events across the state, ensuring that every region had representation. Staff in South were able to participate in at least 10 events during Program Year 2024, while Field Services Staff also participated in additional events in Northwest, Central, and Northeast to assist in conducting outreach across the state.

3. DSB's Business Engagement Coordinator will participate in Job Fairs, Business Expos, and Chamber of Commerce Events to make connections with employers that lead to employment opportunities for consumers. This will include 1) maintaining membership with the State Chamber of Commerce 2) maintaining memberships with local Chambers of Commerce 3) connecting with at least 5 employers each month to discuss possible job openings and opportunities.

Update PY 26-27:

DSB's Business Engagement Coordinator attended an average of 5 events per month in Program Year 2024. In Program Year 2025, events were reduced due to restrictions on travel. However, the Business Engagement Coordinator was able to attend 13 events to connect with employers. In 2024, DSB was a member of 50 chambers of commerce. However, review of activity levels and impact for DSB consumers has resulted in a reduction of Chamber memberships. The Business Engagement Coordinator attempted connections with an average of 5 businesses per month during Program Year 2024. Business Engagement and the Office of Skills Development have monthly Zoom meetings to discuss opportunities for Apprenticeships. These meetings have resulted in connections with Cintas, and work towards an IT apprenticeship. The Business Engagement Coordinator will focus on areas designed by the Governor as "key industries" such as Aerospace and Defense, AgTech and Forestry, Firearms and Ammunition, Food and Beverage, Information Technology, Logistics and Distribution, Metals, and Professional Services.

Restructuring business engagement associated with the broader combining of agencies to be structured under the existing ARS business engagement framework which is focused more on job placement than actual proactive outreach to companies as that function is being handled by Arkansas Industry Connect and the Regional Outreach Managers.

Goal 2: Reducing the number of eligible consumers who exit without employment, and increasing the number of successful closures will aid DSB in achieving the performance metrics. Therefore, DSB will increase the number of Rehabilitated Closures for the agency working toward a target of 200 Rehabilitated Closures per program year.

Update PY 26-27: DSB increased to 155 successfully rehabilitated closures in Program Year 2024 from 115 in Program Year 2023. This is an increase of 40%. As of December 2025, DSB had 77 rehabilitated closures for Program Year 2025.

DSB will continue to review existing cases in the AWARE case management system to reflect caseload coverage to improve reporting, negotiated rates, and overall outcomes.

1. VR counselors will work to place consumers in careers that meet their goals by 1) moving consumers who are ready to look for work into Job Ready Status in AWARE to allow for support in Job Placement Activities 2) providing the Business Engagement Coordinator with a list of consumers and their skills who are Job Ready to allow for assistance in Job Placement.

Update PY 26-27: Due to vacancies in counselor positions and the Field Services Administrator position, DSB has not fully utilized the Job Ready feature of AWARE. However, DSB's Business Engagement Coordinator now attends the Field Services Regional Manager meetings to increase the flow of communication and provides a list of regional employers to staff in each

region. DSB's Field Services Administrator and Business Engagement Coordinator are working closely together to continue to improve this measure.

2. DSB will work with the Office of Skills Development to improve referrals to Apprenticeships, including working to build upon the Apprenticeship Pilot that began in PY2022.

Update PY 26-27: Business Engagement and the Office of Skills Development have monthly Zoom meetings to discuss opportunities for Apprenticeships. These meetings have resulted in connections with Cintas, and work towards an IT apprenticeship.

3. DSB's Business Engagement Coordinator will cultivate list of jobs and related skills available in each region, updated quarterly.

Update PY 26-27: DSB's Field Services Administrator is working with the Business Engagement Coordinator to continue to improve this list. However, currently regional staff receive a list of employers from directemployers.org curated to their region by the Business Engagement Coordinator.

Goal 3: DSB will increase the availability of Pre-ETS services and opportunities for Students with a Disability.

1. DSB will continue to partner with Children and Youth with Sensory Impairments (CAYSI) to identify students who will benefit from Pre-ETS.

Update PY26-27: DSB continues to work with CAYSI and other partners to support students. DSB's pilot with ARS on the Deafblind project has ended but DSB obtained several consumers who were eligible for services and continue to have dual cases with ARS and DSB. DSB continues to receive referrals from contacts with CAYSI, Hellen Keller National Center, and staff who participated in the pilot.

2. DSB will offer the annual Jump Start Camp both virtually and in person for students to gain valuable Work-Based Learning Experiences.

Update PY 26-27: DSB continues to offer Jump Start both virtually and in person each summer. In PY 2024, 18 students attended the in-person Jump Start program where they participated in a variety of Work Based Learning opportunities. The students were assessed and matched to work experiences according to their skills and preferences. Some of the work experiences included: IT Tech Lab, Therapeutic services, Baptist State Convention, Developmentally Disabled and Special Needs Services, Daycare, Instructional Resource Center, Schools, Speech and Language Therapy Office, Cafeteria, Investment Advisor Office, Hospital, Workforce Office, etc. The Jump Start Program also provided training in Workplace Readiness, where students learned about the following: attitude, communication (both listening and speaking skills), work ethic, teamwork, leadership qualities, time management, decision making, conflict resolution, critical thinking, networking, empathy, problem-solving, resume writing, how to dress in the workplace, Independent living skills to assist the students with being more independent in home, school and other environments, Self-Advocacy skills, where students learned about their rights and responsibilities and how to advocate for themselves, Job Exploration, where students explored careers in their areas of interest, and Students discussed job duties and found careers

that fit their areas of interest, and budgeting based on income by using material from the skills to pay the bills website and making a monthly budget for themselves.

3. DSB will work with partners and resources to continue to identify additional service opportunities and programs for Students, such as the College Experience Camp to increase opportunities.

Update PY 26-27: DSB has hosted an annual transition fair to provide resources and information to be sure students are informed and aware of training programs, college options, community rehabilitation programs, career options, etc. DSB has also hosted workplace readiness workshops for students to provide hands on activities and training to ensure students are prepared for the workplace in the areas of resume writing, applying for jobs, exploring career options, time management, organizational skills, how to dress in the workplace (depending on the type of job), hygiene and grooming, etc.

4. DSB's Transition Manager will meet quarterly with the state Educational Services for the Visually Impaired (ESVI) and Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ASBVI) to identify students, opportunities, and needs for Pre-ETS services.

Update PY 26-27: DSB has continued to partner with ESVI and ASBVI. Each agency has continued to share resources and information to benefit the students. DSB Pre-ETS counselors partner with ESVI consultants to be sure that blind and visually impaired students within all schools are receiving the necessary services and accommodations needed to be successful. DSB continues to receive referrals from both entities and refer out as needed.

Supported Employment Goal

Goal 1: Increase the number of successful rehabilitated closures of consumers receiving Supported Employment Services, including those for Youth with a Disability.

1. VR Counselors will receive training on DSB's Supported Employment Policy and procedures and identifying consumers who need SE services.

Update PY 26-27: DSB staff received training December 11-13, 2024 from the VRTAC-QE and Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) on Supported Employment and DSB's updated policy and procedures. Additionally, VCU led monthly Supported Employment Lunch and Learns on topics for DSB counselors and provided an opportunity for counselors to ask questions that had arisen for them during the process. Occasionally, Lunch and Learn trainings were available to vendors to provide shared information and created an opportunity to collaborate. DSB's Trainer has collected SE resources for staff and is designing a page on DSB's SharePoint site for those resources to reside.

2. DSB will develop vendor training and outreach to increase the number of available SE vendors working with the VRTAC-QE.

Update PY 26-27: On April 19, 2024, DSB conducted a Supported Employment Vendor Training to identify additional vendors to provide Job Coaching, Job Placement, and extended supports to individuals with the Most Significant Disabilities. At that time 32 individuals representing a variety of vendors across the state attended the training. Several new vendors began working with DSB consumers to try and improve access to services and remove barriers.

3. DSB will send staff to the annual APSE conferences to learn more about Supported Employment.

Update PY 26-27: In October 2024, DSB sent 7 staff to the annual Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) conference to learn more about Supported Employment.

D. EVALUATION AND REPORTS OF PROGRESS: VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT GOALS

For the most recently completed program year, provide an evaluation and report of progress for the goals or priorities, including progress on the strategies under each goal or priority, applicable to that program year. Sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to describe—

1. PROGRESS IN ACHIEVING THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED FOR THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS;

Title IV DSB Response

Goal 1: DSB will continue to improve outreach across the State of Arkansas including in underrepresented areas.

Workforce Connections has realigned business engagement to a team of regional business workforce consultants and regional outreach coordinators that meet with businesses on behalf of all WIOA partners. This will drastically increase the number of employers that the agency is meeting with and will provide greater access to in-demand jobs in high-need sectors within the state of Arkansas. For reference, counselors in Northwest Arkansas contacted 37 employers during Program Year 2024, with counselors in Northeast Arkansas connecting with an additional 25 employers. Staff in Central and South Arkansas reported contacts with 10 employers each for the program year. In the most recent year, our Existing Business Resource Division, newly renamed Arkansas Industry Connect, met with 300+ companies across the state of Arkansas. This removes the duplication of effort for counselors having a requirement to meet with employers and creates an environment where our team is working collaboratively to support one another and letting our counselors focus on case management and client services while AR Industry Connect speaks with companies and makes referrals to DSB.

Goal 2: Reducing the number of eligible consumers who exit without employment, and increasing the number of successful closures will aid DSB in achieving the performance metrics. Therefore, DSB will increase the number of Rehabilitated Closures for the agency working toward a target of 200 Rehabilitated Closures per program year.

1. Further realignment of the division will allow for a team of individuals to be “job placement” specialists once the consolidation of the two divisions takes place. These individuals, formerly titled the business engagement unit, were doing more job placement than business engagement. Due to the new structure of the division, these job placement specialists will focus on placing individuals into jobs leveraging the Arkansas LAUNCH database as well as Arkansas Job Link which currently functions as the state’s job board. This is a system that DSB nor ARS team members have had access to in prior years which provides real time job postings from

employers across the state. This will assist the job placement team in placing individuals into meaningful employment opportunities. DSB has not fully utilized the Job Ready feature of AWARE.

2. DSB will work with the Office of Skills Development to improve referrals to Apprenticeships, including working to build upon the Apprenticeship Pilot that began in PY2022.

Evaluation of Progress PY22-23: DSB has developed a relationship with the Office of Skills Development (OSD) and partnered with them in a pilot apprenticeship related to Information Technology skills and placement. Currently DSB has one consumer moving forward in the program and is working with OSD and their partners to continue to expand opportunities. In PY22, DSB had 148 rehabilitated closures compared to 145 in PY21.

Evaluation of Progress PY24-25: Business Engagement and the Office of Skills Development have monthly Zoom meetings to discuss opportunities for Apprenticeships. These meetings have resulted in connections with Cintas, and work towards an IT apprenticeship. Currently regional staff receive a list of employers from directemployers.org curated to their region by the Business Engagement Coordinator, and the Business Engagement Coordinator and Field Services Administrator are working to enhance and improve this resource for counselors. In Program Year 2023, DSB had 115 rehabilitated closures. However, DSB had an increase of 40% for Program Year 2024 for 155 rehabilitated closures.

Goal 3: DSB will increase the availability of Pre-ETS services and opportunities for Students with a Disability (SWD).

1. DSB will continue to partner with Children and Youth with Sensory Impairments (CAYSI) to identify students who will benefit from Pre-ETS.

2. DSB will offer the annual Jump Start Camp both virtually and in person for students to gain valuable Work-Based Learning Experiences.

3. DSB will work with partners and resources to continue to identify additional service opportunities and programs for Students, such as the College Experience Camp to increase opportunities.

4. DSB's Transition Manager will meet quarterly with the state ESVI and ASBVI to identify students, opportunities, and needs for Pre-ETS services.

Evaluation of Progress PY22-23: DSB has Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) in place with CAYSI and Helen Keller National Center to improve outreach and service availability to Students with a Disability (SWD). DSB offered the first College Experience Camp for SWD in July 2023 and is working with colleges to be able to expand this program to more locations and more students. All in person DSB summer camps were provided to VR eligible Students with a Disability, and DSB works with partners to ensure that a full experience is provided within the guidelines of allowable funding. DSB's Transition manager continues to meet regularly with ESVI and ASBVI staff.

Evaluation of Progress PY24-25: DSB continues to have Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) in place with CAYSI and Helen Keller National Center to improve outreach and service availability to Students with a Disability (SWD). Each agency has continued to share resources and information to benefit the students. DSB Pre-ETS counselors partner with ESVI consultants to be sure that blind and visually impaired students within all schools are receiving the necessary services and accommodations needed to be successful. DSB continues to receive referrals from both entities and refer out as needed.

DSB continues to offer Jump Start both virtually and in person each summer. In PY 2024, 18 students attended the in-person Jump Start program where they participated in a variety of Work Based Learning opportunities. The students were assessed and matched to work experiences according to their skills and preferences. Some of the work experiences included: IT Tech Lab, Therapeutic services, Baptist State Convention, Developmentally Disabled and Special Needs Services, Daycare, Instructional Resource Center, Schools, Speech and Language Therapy Office, Cafeteria, Investment Advisor Office, Hospital, Workforce Office, etc. The Jump Start Program also provided training in Workplace Readiness, where students learned about the following: attitude, communication (both listening and speaking skills), work ethic, teamwork, leadership qualities, time management, decision making, conflict resolution, critical thinking, networking, empathy, problem-solving, resume writing, how to dress in the workplace, Independent living skills to assist the students with being more independent in home, school and other environments, Self-Advocacy skills, where students learned about their rights and responsibilities and how to advocate for themselves, Job Exploration, where students explored careers in their areas of interest, and Students discussed job duties and found careers that fit their areas of interest, and budgeting based on income by using material from the skills to pay the bills website and making a monthly budget for themselves.

DSB has hosted an annual transition fair to provide resources and information to be sure students are informed and aware of training programs, college options, community rehabilitation programs, career options, etc. DSB has also hosted workplace readiness workshops for students to provide hands-on activities and training to ensure students are prepared for the workplace in the areas of resume writing, applying for jobs, exploring career options, time management, organizational skills, how to dress in the workplace (depending on the type of job), hygiene and grooming, etc.

Supported Employment Goal

Goal 1: Increase the number of successful rehabilitated closures of consumers receiving Supported Employment Services, including those for Youth with a Disability.

1. VR Counselors will receive training on DSB's Supported Employment Policy and procedures and identifying consumers who need SE services.
2. DSB will develop vendor training and outreach to increase the number of available SE vendors working with the VRTAC-QE.
3. DSB will send staff to the annual APSE conferences to learn more about Supported Employment.

Evaluation of Progress PY22-23: DSB worked with the Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Employment (VRTAC-QE) to improve the Supported Employment

program. DSB staff participated in full day training in December 2023 on updated Supported Employment Policy and practices. DSB and VRTAC-QE are developing a vendor training and outreach event to help identify additional vendors. DSB continues to participate in APSE and will send staff to the conferences.

Evaluation of Progress PY24-25: DSB staff received training December 11-13, 2024 from the VRTAC-QE and Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) on Supported Employment and DSB's updated policy and procedures. Additionally, VCU led monthly Supported Employment Lunch and Learns on topics for DSB counselors and provided an opportunity for counselors to ask questions that had arisen for them during the process. Occasionally, Lunch and Learn trainings were available to vendors to provide shared information and created an opportunity to collaborate. DSB's Trainer has collected SE resources for staff and is designing a page on DSB's SharePoint site for those resources to reside.

On April 19, 2024, DSB conducted a Supported Employment Vendor Training to identify additional vendors to provide Job Coaching, Job Placement, and extended supports to individuals with the Most Significant Disabilities. At that time 32 individuals representing a variety of vendors across the state attended the training. Several new vendors began working with DSB consumers to try and improve access to services and remove barriers.

In October 2024, DSB sent 7 staff to the annual Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) conference to learn more about Supported Employment.

2. PERFORMANCE ON THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY INDICATORS UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA FOR THE MOST RECENTLY COMPLETED PROGRAM YEAR, REFLECTING ACTUAL AND NEGOTIATED LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE. EXPLAIN ANY DISCREPANCIES IN THE ACTUAL AND NEGOTIATED LEVELS; AND

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB has worked with RSA, the Technical Assistance Centers, and DSB's case management system to improve the accuracy and quality of the data submitted to RSA. As part of this process, DSB has made changes to the case management system and is working with staff to ensure they understand how to correctly input all necessary elements for accurate reporting of performance measures. Since Arkansas is a state with 2 VR agencies, the actual performance levels for DSB and the state are different. DSB improved Credential Attainment rates from 0% in PY21 to 40% in PY22. As a state, Arkansas exceeded on all RSA performance assessments provided. DSB continues to work to enhance progress on all measures.

Evaluation PY24-25: DSB was able to bring the case management system into a version supported by Alliance. As part of this process, DSB worked with Alliance to ensure performance measures are tracked correctly. During PY2024, there were some issues due to adaptations and updates not being complete that impacted performance numbers. However, those have been adjusted in the most recent version of AWARE. Additionally, in PY2025 Quarter 1, DSB worked with staff to enter 47 Measurable Skill Gains (MSG) and review to ensure they were accurate. DSB's Trainer and Statistician are working to provide updated training for all Field Services Staff to assist with removing barriers on MSGs. DSB continues to exceed performance measures on Median Earnings. Both 2nd and 4th Quarter Exit wages continue to be a challenge due to limited access and lack of automated data. However, the hiring of DSB's statistician should assist with allowing additional focus on these measures data to improve reporting.

Goal 1: DSB will continue to improve outreach across the State of Arkansas including in underrepresented areas. This goal will help DSB grow in both applicants and employers who receive services from the agency. As employers become more familiar with DSB and educated on the opportunities to hire DSB consumers, DSB consumers will have more opportunity for successful employment in higher paying careers. Counselor meetings with employers will allow them to have meaningful and informative discussions with their consumers about employment opportunities in their region.

Goal 2: DSB will increase the number of Rehabilitated Closures for the agency working toward a target of 200 Rehabilitated Closures per program year. As DSB counselors work to identify consumers who are ready for employment and aid them in obtaining successful employment that leads to rehabilitated closures, these consumers are more likely to still be employed 2nd and 4th Quarter After Exit. Identifying consumer skills and interests early on and taking a team approach to job placement will assist consumers with finding the career that is right for them. Placing consumers in Job Ready Status in the system will allow for supervisors and business engagement staff to identify which employers should be targeted first as there are consumers ready to be hired.

Evaluation of PY24-25: In Program Year 2023, DSB had 115 successful closures. However, in Program Year 2024, DSB reported 155 successful closures, which is a growth of 40%. In Program Year 2025, DSB staff have closed 77 cases so far and continue to work towards successful outcomes for consumers. DSB's Business Engagement Coordinator and Outreach Manager continue to work with Field Services to improve access to consumers and employers.

Goal 3: DSB will increase the availability of Pre-ETS services and opportunities for Students with a Disability (SWD). By identifying students with a disability who will benefit from services earlier, they are more likely to have successful long-term outcomes, which will enhance performance measures. In addition, VR eligible students with a disability provide the agency opportunity to improve measurable skill gains and credentials, as they are participating in credential opportunities.

Evaluation of PY24-25: In Program Year 2023, DSB had 115 successful closures. However, in Program Year 2024, DSB reported 155 successful closures, which is a growth of 40%. In Program Year 2025, DSB staff have closed 77 cases so far and continue to work towards successful outcomes for consumers. DSB's Business Engagement Coordinator and Outreach Manager continue to work with Field Services to improve access to consumers and employers.

Supported Employment Goal 1: Increase the number of successful rehabilitated closures of consumers receiving Supported Employment Services, including those for Youth with a Disability. By improving the identification of consumers who will benefit from Supported Employment and working to support those consumers in the VR process to successful closures, DSB will have increased long-term outcomes. Developing vendors who can provide supports during and after VR closure is essential to the success of SE consumers in maintaining their employment.

Evaluation of PY24-25: DSB staff received training December 11-13, 2024 from the VRTAC-QE and Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) on Supported Employment and DSB's updated policy and procedures. Additionally, VCU led monthly Supported Employment Lunch and Learns on topics for DSB counselors and provided an opportunity for counselors to ask questions that

had arisen for them during the process. Occasionally, Lunch and Learn trainings were available to vendors to provide shared information and created an opportunity to collaborate. DSB's Trainer has collected SE resources for staff and is designing a page on DSB's SharePoint site for those resources to reside. On April 19, 2024, DSB conducted a Supported Employment Vendor Training to identify additional vendors to provide Job Coaching, Job Placement, and extended supports to individuals with the Most Significant Disabilities. At that time 32 individuals representing a variety of vendors across the state attended the training. Several new vendors began working with DSB consumers to try and improve access to services and remove barriers. In October 2024, DSB sent 7 staff to the annual Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) conference to learn more about Supported Employment.

DSB has not completed a successful closure in Supported Employment. However, DSB currently has 42 IPE's where consumers have been identified for Supported Employment and is working with counselors to progress those cases to a successful outcome.

Performance Measure	DSB Actual Rate	State Negotiated Rate	State Actual Rate	Performance Assessment
Measurable Skill Gains	19.0%	57.6%	57.5%	N/A
Employment Rate 2nd Quarter After Exit	44.8%	60.5%	63.5%	101.1%
Median Earnings	\$7,949	\$5,697	\$6,767	109.2%
Employment Rate 4th Quarter After Exit	35.1%	57.3%	61.7%	105.2%
Credential Attainment	40.0%	28.9%	35.5%	102.5%

Evaluation of PY24-25

Performance Measure	DSB Actual Rate	State Negotiated Rate	State Actual Rate	Performance Assessment
Measurable Skill Gains	2.1%	58.5%	43.8%	
Employment Rate 2nd Quarter After Exit	38.0%	64.0%	49.3%	
Median Earnings	\$8,423.64	\$6,800	\$7,114.91	

Performance Measure	DSB Actual Rate	State Negotiated Rate	State Actual Rate	Performance Assessment
Employment Rate 4th Quarter After Exit	16.1%	63.0%	44.7%	
Credential Attainment	10%	36.5%	22.4%	

3. THE USE OF FUNDS RESERVED FOR INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES (SECTIONS 101(A)(18) AND 101(A)(23) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT) (E.G., SRC, SILC).

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB used innovation and expansion funding to support the funding of our Statewide Independent Living Council. DSB will continue to provide funding to support technology updates within the NFB Newsline application provided to all Arkansans, including now being able to live stream the service.

Update PY26-27: DSB continues to use innovation and expansion funding to support the Statewide Independent Living Council and NFB Newsline application for Arkansans.

E. SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, DISTRIBUTION OF TITLE VI FUNDS, AND ARRANGEMENTS AND COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES.

1. ACCEPTANCE OF TITLE VI FUNDS:

Title IV DSB Response:

(A) VR agency requests to receive title VI funds.

2. IF THE VR AGENCY HAS ELECTED TO RECEIVE TITLE VI FUNDS, SECTION 606(B)(3) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT REQUIRES VR AGENCIES TO INCLUDE SPECIFIC GOALS AND PRIORITIES WITH RESPECT TO THE DISTRIBUTION OF TITLE VI FUNDS RECEIVED UNDER SECTION 603 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES. DESCRIBE THE USE OF TITLE VI FUNDS AND HOW THEY WILL BE USED IN MEETING THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES OF THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM.

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB's goal for the Supported Employment Program is to increase the number of successful rehabilitated closures of consumers receiving Supported Employment Services, including those for Youth with a Disability. To accomplish this goal, DSB will use the following strategies:

1) VR Counselors will receive training on DSB's Supported Employment Policy and procedures and identifying consumers who need SE services.

Update PY 26-27: DSB staff received training December 11-13, 2024 from the VRTAC-QE and Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) on Supported Employment and DSB's updated policy and procedures. Additionally, VCU led monthly Supported Employment Lunch and Learns on topics for DSB counselors and provided an opportunity for counselors to ask questions that had arisen for them during the process. Occasionally, Lunch and Learns were opened up to vendors as well to provide shared information and opportunity to collaborate. DSB's Trainer has collected SE resources for staff and is designing a page on DSB's SharePoint site for those resources to reside.

2) DSB will develop vendor training and outreach to increase the number of available SE vendors working with the VRTAC-QE.

Update PY 26-27: On April 19, 2024, DSB conducted a Supported Employment Vendor Training to identify additional vendors to provide Job Coaching, Job Placement, and extended supports to individuals with Most Significant Disabilities. At that time 32 individuals representing a variety of vendors across the state attended the training. Several new vendors began working with DSB consumers to try and improve access to services and remove barriers.

3) DSB will send staff to the annual APSE conferences to learn more about Supported Employment.

Update PY 26-27: In October 2024, DSB sent 7 staff to the annual APSE conference to learn more about Supported Employment.

DSB has worked directly with the VRTAC-QE to provide updated policy and procedures for staff and to begin development of a vendor training for SE services. This work is designed to increase both staff and vendor capacity to serve individuals with the most significant disabilities.

In addition, DSB will only use Title VI funds to pay for supported employment services after the individual is placed on the job (e.g., after the individual's employment start date). Prior to job placement (employment start date), DSB will pay for services identified on the IPE using Title I funds for both youth with most significant disabilities and adults with most significant disabilities. Title VI funds will not be used for services prior to job placement for any VR participants. DSB may use Title VI funds as needed to provide extended services to Youth with the Most Significant Disability for up to 48 months or until the youth reaches age 25.

3. SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES MAY BE PROVIDED WITH TITLE 1 OR TITLE VI FUNDS FOLLOWING PLACEMENT OF INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES IN EMPLOYMENT. IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 101(A)(22) AND SECTION 606(B)(3) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, DESCRIBE THE QUALITY, SCOPE, AND EXTENT OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED TO INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES; AND THE TIMING OF TRANSITION TO EXTENDED SERVICES.

Title IV DSB Response:

Supported Employment is for individuals with the most significant disabilities who have been determined eligible for VR services. Supported Employment should be considered when the comprehensive assessment of the rehabilitation needs of the individual demonstrate the need for extended services in order to maintain the individual's employment goal consistent with

his/her unique strengths, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice. Supported employment services are based on a determination of the needs of an eligible individual as specified in the individualized plan for employment (IPE) and are provided by the VR agency for a period of not more than 24 months following job placement, unless under special circumstances the eligible individual and the rehabilitation counselor jointly agree to extend the time to achieve the employment outcome identified in the IPE.

Prior to job placement in supported employment, individuals with the most significant disabilities receive VR services identified in the IPE, and which the VR counselor and the individual have determined will lead to achievement of the supported employment outcome. Supported employment services, also identified on the IPE, begin at the time of the individual's job placement. Ongoing services are furnished by DSB, using funds under the Supported Employment program and/or the VR program, from the time of job placement until the transition to extended services. Extended services means ongoing support services and necessary services that are: a) needed to support and maintain an individual with a most significant disability including a youth with a most significant disability, in supported employment b) organized or made available, singly or in combination, in such a way as to assist an eligible individual in maintaining supported employment c) based on the needs of an eligible individual, as specified in an individualized plan for employment d) provided by a State agency, a private nonprofit organization, employer, or any other appropriate resource, after an individual has made the transition from support from the designated State unit

Extended services to transition youth can be provided for a period of time not to exceed 48 months or until such time that a youth reaches the age of 25 and no longer meets the definition of a youth with a most significant disability, whichever occurs first. DSB funds can be provided for extended services to youth when there is no other source available. Funds may not be used to provide extended services to individuals who do not meet the definition of a youth with a most significant disability.

4. SECTIONS 101(A)(22) AND 606(B)(4) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT REQUIRE THE VR AGENCY TO DESCRIBE EFFORTS TO IDENTIFY AND ARRANGE, INCLUDING ENTERING INTO COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS, WITH OTHER STATE AGENCIES AND OTHER APPROPRIATE ENTITIES IN ORDER TO PROVIDE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES. THE DESCRIPTION MUST INCLUDE EXTENDED SERVICES, AS APPLICABLE, TO INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THE PROVISION OF EXTENDED SERVICES TO YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH 34 C.F.R. § 363.4(A) AND 34 C.F.R. § 361.5(C)(19)(V).

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB works with vendors to provide Supported Employment Services and Extended Services to consumers with most significant disabilities, including youth with most significant disabilities. As part of the intensive agreement with the VRTAC-QE, DSB is developing a vendor recruitment and training event to identify and develop agreements with additional vendors to ensure services are provided statewide. DSB continues to partner with Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, Goodwill Industries, World Services for the Blind, Easter Seals, and Arkansas Support Network to support individuals with most significant disabilities.

Supported employment is integrated competitive employment, or an individual working in an integrated employment setting on a short-term basis towards integrated competitive employment. This includes customized employment. Each of the SE services providers provides supported employment services for up to 24 months or longer, as needed. Extended services may be provided and funded by a provider for as long as the individual is employed; however, the VR agency may only fund extended services for youth for a period not to exceed four years or until the youth reaches age 25, whichever occurs first. Half of the funds that Arkansas receives under the supported employment grant must be used to support youth with the most significant disabilities.

F. ANNUAL ESTIMATES

1. ESTIMATES FOR NEXT FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR—

A. VR PROGRAM; AND

Title IV DSB Response:

Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under VR Program	Costs of Services using Title I Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
N/A	885	850	\$3,639,499.71	0

Update PY26-27:

Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under VR Program	Costs of Services using Title I Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
N/A	900	870	4,536,762.59	0

B. SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM.

Title IV DSB Response:

Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under Supported Employment Program	Costs of Services using Title I and Title VI Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
N/A	15	5 (using Title VI funds) 10 (using Title I funds)	\$120,000	0 (all will receive services using either Title VI or Title I funds as necessary)

G. ORDER OF SELECTION

1. PURSUANT TO SECTION 101(A)(5) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, THIS DESCRIPTION MUST BE AMENDED WHEN THE VR AGENCY DETERMINES, BASED ON THE ANNUAL ESTIMATES DESCRIBED IN DESCRIPTION (F), THAT VR SERVICES CANNOT BE PROVIDED TO ALL ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE STATE WHO APPLY FOR AND ARE DETERMINED ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES.

Title IV DSB Response:

The VR agency is not implementing an order of selection and all eligible individuals will be served.

2. FOR VR AGENCIES THAT HAVE DEFINED PRIORITY CATEGORIES DESCRIBE—

A. THE JUSTIFICATION FOR THE ORDER

Title IV DSB Response:

This is not applicable as DSB is not under an Order of Selection.

B. THE ORDER (PRIORITY CATEGORIES) TO BE FOLLOWED IN SELECTING ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS TO BE PROVIDED VR SERVICES ENSURING THAT INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES ARE SELECTED FOR SERVICES BEFORE ALL OTHER INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES; AND

Title IV DSB Response:

This is not applicable as DSB is not under an Order of Selection.

C. THE VR AGENCY'S GOALS FOR SERVING INDIVIDUALS IN EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY, INCLUDING HOW THE AGENCY WILL ASSIST ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS ASSIGNED TO

CLOSED PRIORITY CATEGORIES WITH INFORMATION AND REFERRAL, THE METHOD IN WHICH THE VR AGENCY WILL MANAGE WAITING LISTS, AND THE PROJECTED TIMELINES FOR OPENING PRIORITY CATEGORIES. NOTE: PRIORITY CATEGORIES ARE CONSIDERED OPEN WHEN ALL INDIVIDUALS IN THE PRIORITY CATEGORY MAY BE SERVED.

Title IV DSB Response:

This is not applicable as DSB is not under an Order of Selection.

3. HAS THE VR AGENCY ELECTED TO SERVE ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS OUTSIDE OF THE ORDER OF SELECTION WHO REQUIRE SPECIFIC SERVICES OR EQUIPMENT TO MAINTAIN EMPLOYMENT?

Title IV DSB Response:

No

H. WAIVER OF STATEWIDENESS.

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB has not requested a waiver of statewideness.

I. COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT.

1. ANALYSIS OF CURRENT PERSONNEL AND PROJECTED PERSONNEL NEEDS INCLUDING—

A. THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL CURRENTLY NEEDED BY THE VR AGENCY TO PROVIDE VR SERVICES, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY; AND

B. THE NUMBER AND TYPE OF PERSONNEL THAT ARE EMPLOYED BY THE VR AGENCY IN THE PROVISION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES, INCLUDING RATIOS OF QUALIFIED VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNSELORS TO CLIENTS;

C. PROJECTIONS OF THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY, WHO WILL BE NEEDED BY THE VR AGENCY TO PROVIDE VR SERVICES IN 5 YEARS BASED ON PROJECTIONS OF THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS TO BE SERVED, INCLUDING INDIVIDUALS WITH SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL EXPECTED TO RETIRE OR LEAVE THE FIELD, AND OTHER RELEVANT FACTORS.

Title IV DSB Response:

Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed	No. of Personnel Currently Needed	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years
Counselors	16 (10 vacancies)	26	26
Field Administration	3 (3 vacancies)	6	6
Regional Managers	6 (0 vacancies)	6	6

Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed	No. of Personnel Currently Needed	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years
Field Services Administrative Support	12 (5 vacancies)	17	17
Director's Office	7 (0 vacancies)	7	7
Finance	2 (1 vacancy)	3	3
Quality Assurance	2 (2 vacancies)	4	4
Central Office Administrative Support	2 (0 vacancies)	2	2
Business and Technology	5 (2 vacancies)	5	5

Update PY 26-27:

DSB updated the personnel table, which shows current personnel numbers (61 FTE), and given the move to a combined agency, the anticipated max number of employees is approximately 300 for the newly combined VR agency. Future needs for DSB depending on the structure should not exceed 52 employees due to the current budget limitations.

Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed	No. of Personnel Currently Needed	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years
Counselors	20	20	19
Field Administration	5	5	2
Regional Managers	6	6	6
Field Services Administrative Support	12	12	10
Director's Office	10	10	8
Quality Assurance	3	3	2
Business and Technology	5	5	5

D. RATIO OF QUALIFIED VR COUNSELORS TO CLIENTS:

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB currently has 14 VR counselors and 2 Older Individuals who are Blind Counselors (OIB) providing services to DSB consumers. DSB also has 8 VR counselor vacancies and 2 OIB counselor vacancies. At this time DSB is recruiting counselors who are certified or willing to

attend school to obtain their certification to ensure that DSB maintains an adequate counselor to consumer ratio. DSB is currently serving 520 OIB consumers, 948 VR consumers (including applicants who have yet to receive an eligibility determination), and 52 potentially eligible consumers. Counselors are supported by administrative staff and area managers to ensure client services are provided timely and effectively.

UPDATE PY26-27:

DSB currently has 61 Full-time positions filled.

DSB currently has 16 VR counselors and 4 Older Individuals who are Blind Counselors (OIB) providing services to DSB consumers. DSB also has 4 VR counselor vacancies. DSB's practice is to recruit master's degree certified vocational rehabilitation counselors or non-certified counselors who commit to obtain Voc. Rehab. Certification to ensure DSB maintains an adequate counselor to consumer ratio. DSB is currently serving 507 OIB consumers, 1000 VR consumers (including applicants who have yet to receive an eligibility determination), and 91-potentially eligible consumers. Counselors are supported by administrative staff and area managers to ensure client services are provided timely and effectively.

E. PROJECTED NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS TO BE SERVED IN 5 YEARS:

Title IV DSB Response:

In Program Year 2022, DSB served 1021 participants up from 932 in Program Year 2021 in the VR Program. Historically, DSB has reported 45-60% of individuals served as minorities. DSB has increased outreach efforts and work to reach more consumers. DSB expects to serve approximately, 1100 participants a year in the next 5 years. Of those DSB expects approximately 450 to be minorities.

Update PY 26-27: In Program Year 2024, DSB served 1365 participants, of which 675 or 49.45% were minorities. Year to date for Program Year 2025, DSB has served 1180 participants of which 577 or 48.90% were minorities. Therefore, DSB expects to serve approximately 1300 participants a year in the next 5 years. Of those DSB expects approximately 520 of those to be minorities.

2. DATA AND INFORMATION ON PERSONNEL PREPARATION AND DEVELOPMENT, RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION, AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING:

A. A LIST OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE STATE THAT ARE PREPARING VR PROFESSIONALS, BY TYPE OF PROGRAM; THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED AT EACH OF THOSE INSTITUTIONS, BROKEN DOWN BY TYPE OF PROGRAM; AND THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO GRADUATED DURING THE PRIOR YEAR FROM EACH OF THOSE INSTITUTIONS WITH CERTIFICATION OR LICENSURE, OR WITH THE CREDENTIALS FOR CERTIFICATION OR LICENSURE, BROKEN DOWN BY THE PERSONNEL CATEGORY FOR WHICH THEY HAVE RECEIVED, OR HAVE THE CREDENTIALS TO RECEIVE, CERTIFICATION OR LICENSURE.

Title IV DSB Response:

Institute of Higher Education	Type of Program	No. of Students Enrolled	No. of Prior Year Graduates
University of Arkansas - Fayetteville	MRC	18 (FT); 0 (PT)	10
University of Arkansas - Little Rock - University lost accreditation to issue Certified Rehabilitation Counseling in 2022	MRC	0 (FT); 0 (PT)	0

B. THE VR AGENCY'S PLAN FOR RECRUITMENT, PREPARATION AND RETENTION OF QUALIFIED PERSONNEL, WHICH ADDRESSES THE CURRENT AND PROJECTED NEEDS FOR QUALIFIED PERSONNEL; AND THE COORDINATION AND FACILITATION OF EFFORTS BETWEEN THE VR AGENCY AND INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS TO RECRUIT, PREPARE, AND RETAIN PERSONNEL WHO ARE QUALIFIED, INCLUDING PERSONNEL FROM MINORITY BACKGROUNDS AND PERSONNEL WHO ARE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB has cooperative agreements with each of the 3 colleges/universities in Arkansas in order to promote the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the designated state unit and institutions of higher education.

To address current needs for qualified personnel, DSB posts vacancies on the state employment website arstatejobs.com, the statewide newspaper, Workforce Services offices, other state agencies, and college and university recruitment bulletins. It also sends job notices to the Arkansas American Council of the Blind and the National Federation of the Blind for distribution. Recruitment efforts are ongoing to the 15 fully accredited graduate programs within TACE Region VI, including Arkansas colleges and universities in the region and those with a historically predominate minority enrollment.

Update PY 26-27: DSB posts vacancies on the state employment website, arcareers.arkansas.gov the statewide newspaper, Workforce Services offices, other state agencies, and college and university recruitment bulletins. It also sends job notices to the Arkansas American Council of the Blind and the National Federation of the Blind for distribution.

Effective July 1, 2019, all DSB vocational rehabilitation counselors were reclassified as either grade level GS06 Rehabilitation Counselor or GS08 Certified Rehabilitation Counselor. The GS08 Certified Rehabilitation Counselor classification requires CRC certification. According to state Office of Personnel Management (OPM) requirements, DSB now advertises for a GS08 position with the preferred qualification being a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and CRC certification. State hiring policy authorized by OPM allows DSB to hire graduates with

Bachelor's degrees in Rehabilitation for GS06 positions when there is no suitable applicant with a Master's degree with the condition the person will seek and obtain a Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling within seven years of employment and will meet CRC certification or become eligible to sit for CRC certification within one year of receipt of the Master's degree.

Bachelor's degree or non—MRC Master's degree — L051C Rehabilitation Counselor/GS06 — \$36,154.98 (annual) — \$17.3822 (hourly)

Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling (MRC)/CRC — L098C Certified Vocational Rehab Counselor/GS08 — \$45,009.95 (annual) — \$21.6394 (hourly)

UPDATE PY26-27:

Effective July 1, 2025, all DSB vocational rehabilitation counselors were reclassified as either grade level MED02 Rehabilitation Counselor or MED04 Certified Rehabilitation Counselor. The MED04 Certified Rehabilitation Counselor classification requires CRC certification. According to state Office of Personnel Management (OPM) requirements, DSB now advertises for a MED04 position with the preferred qualification being a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and CRC certification. State hiring policy authorized by OPM allows DSB to hire graduates with Bachelor's degrees in Rehabilitation for MED02 positions when there is no suitable applicant with a Master's degree with the condition the person will seek and obtain a Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling within seven years of employment and will meet CRC certification or become eligible to sit for CRC certification within one year of receipt of the Master's degree.

Bachelor's degree or non—MRC Master's degree — MRE02P Rehabilitation Counselor/MED02 — \$53,558.00 (annual) — \$25.7490 (hourly)

Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling (MRC)/CRC — MRE06P Certified Vocational Rehab Counselor/MED04 — \$67,183.00 (annual) — \$32.2995 (hourly)

The Staff Development section reviews the current training levels of all personnel and develops and monitors agency policy and procedure for training and retaining qualified personnel meet standards required by the Department of Education and other federal/state requirements. All DSB employees receive an annual personnel performance evaluation from their immediate supervisor, which is reviewed and approved by DSB Director. The evaluation considers the training each employee needs to fulfill job duties in providing services to our consumers.

DSB will continue to work closely with the universities to provide internship and practicum opportunities for students and notify universities when job openings become available. Students are recruited from university and college rehabilitation programs within the state to seek employment with DSB upon graduation. DSB maintains communication with the university programs including the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville (U of A), the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR), The University of Wisconsin-Stout, and the University of North Texas.

The agency actively recruits minorities and students with disabilities. Students, including minorities, are encouraged to join professional rehabilitation organizations such as the National Rehabilitation Association (NRA) and the National Association of Multicultural Rehabilitation Concerns (NAMRC). These rehabilitation professional organizations provide scholarship opportunities to individuals, including minorities, who major in the field of rehabilitation.

DSB revised VR Counselor job descriptions to update roles and responsibilities due to increasing duties, and also to assist with increasing salaries for DSB VR Counselors competitive to surrounding regions. DSB continues to update functional job descriptions with help from staff. DSB leadership is working with the VRTAC-QM as part of the employee retention pilot to improve employee engagement and retention.

Update PY26-27: DSB completed the employee engagement survey showing that over 80% of DSB employees were actively engaged. In July 2025, DSB staff entry level salaries were increased as part of the State of Arkansas Pay Plan Update. DSB developed three organizational change teams to assist with employee retention and engagement. The change teams are Organizational Culture, Process Improvement, and Recruitment and Retention. Staff on the teams research topics of importance to the staff and submit recommendations to leadership. Staff currently are working on improving agency forms and developing employee recognition activities.

C. DESCRIPTION OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND ACTIVITIES THAT ENSURE ALL PERSONNEL EMPLOYED BY THE VR AGENCY RECEIVE APPROPRIATE AND ADEQUATE TRAINING AND CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS:

I. PARTICULARLY WITH RESPECT TO ASSESSMENT, VOCATIONAL COUNSELING, JOB PLACEMENT, AND REHABILITATION TECHNOLOGY, INCLUDING TRAINING IMPLEMENTED IN COORDINATION WITH ENTITIES CARRYING OUT STATE PROGRAMS UNDER SECTION 4 OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998; AND

II. PROCEDURES FOR THE ACQUISITION AND DISSEMINATION OF SIGNIFICANT KNOWLEDGE FROM RESEARCH AND OTHER SOURCES TO VR AGENCY PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS AND FOR PROVIDING TRAINING REGARDING THE AMENDMENTS TO THE REHABILITATION ACT MADE BY THE WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT.

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB staff must possess specific knowledge concerning the problems of blindness and be allowed the opportunity for career development as related to the delivery of vocational rehabilitation services. DSB actively assesses the training needs of its employees and solicits their input regarding training needs. DSB surveys staff annually to determine the training or resources they require to perform their duties more efficiently and effectively. DSB also uses a state—approved personnel performance evaluation document to review an employee's performance and to identify individual training needs.

Leadership development and capacity – building opportunities are offered through a wide variety of methods:

1. U of A CURRENTS periodically surveys rehabilitation staff regarding training needs and develops courses and conferences based on the results or upon requests by DSB and other agencies. In the last fiscal year, CURRENTS offered face-to-face trainings on topics to include: DISC Leadership Styles Training, Why Leadership Matters, Leadership Empowerment, Collaboration and Delegation, Communications and Feedback, The Five

Dysfunctions and Team Assessment, Building Trust – Personal Histories, Accountability and Blocked Perspectives, We Are All In – A Well Oiled Machine.

Update PY26-27: During Program Years 24 and 25, DSB had staff participate in The National Pathways Leadership Academy, LeadVR, and the National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute training programs. The DSB Leadership Team began holding monthly meetings to enhance leadership development working with both outside leadership coaches and internal training. All members of the Leadership Team participated in one-on-one leadership coaching.

During PY24–25, DSB expanded staff development through Training Coordinator/Director Communities of Practice meetings, structured onboarding, continuous AWARE system training, and multiple Supported Employment trainings for both staff and vendors. Staff also participated in the Supported Employment course through Virginia Commonwealth University. Additional development included AR-B statewide Discovery & Planning training, AR-B & NTACT:C transition training, and customized professional development for Northwest Arkansas staff. Internal trainings such as Effective Communication, Leading From Every Seat, and The LPI Advantage strengthened communication skills, leadership behaviors, and team effectiveness. These targeted activities ensure that VR professionals and paraprofessionals receive practical, up-to-date training in assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology.

2. VRTAC-QM offered Kotter's 8-Step Process to Leading Change, What Are We Urgent About, Communicating Our Shared Sense of Urgency, Creating a Change Vision, Organizational Change, Employee Engagement, Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team, 360 Assessment, Mission, Vision, and Values.
3. STOUT Vocational Rehabilitation Institute offered Customer Service and Consumer Engagement.
4. VRTAC-QE offered training on Supported Employment and worked with DSB leadership on the Supported Employment Pilot Program.

In-house training is provided through DSB's Quality Assurance Coordinator, Field Administrator, and other experienced, credentialed professional staff; DSB's annual Statewide meeting; the annual Field Services meeting; periodic training meetings; and one-on-one training which is made available to all staff depending upon the need. Information is distributed at Director's meetings, Supervisors' meetings, emails and the agency website. Training is also purchased from outside sources, such as the Older Individuals Who Are Blind Training provided by Mississippi State University.

Update PY26-27: During Program Year 2024, DSB was able to hire a Trainer for specific staff development. The trainer provides in-house training on VR policy, procedures, DSB's case management system, and other soft skills. All new staff participate in training before beginning caseload work and the trainer provided training at DSB's annual Statewide and Field Services Meetings December 2024 and June 2025. Additional support training is provided as needed for DSB staff.

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and multiple Supported Employment trainings for both staff and vendors. Staff also participated in the Supported Employment course through Virginia Commonwealth University. Additional development included AR-B statewide Discovery & Planning training, AR-B & NTACT:C transition training, and customized professional development for Northwest Arkansas staff. Internal trainings such as Effective Communication, Leading From Every Seat, and The LPI Advantage strengthened communication skills, leadership behaviors, and team effectiveness. These targeted activities ensure that VR professionals and paraprofessionals receive practical, up-to-date training in assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology.

DSB's Technology Lab and Low Vision vendors provide training on aids and devices available for consumers at Field Service Meeting and Statewide. DSB's Technology Lab staff work closely with ICAN, the Telecommunications Access Program, and vendors to stay up to date on technology and opportunities for training. Staff have attended annual conferences such as the CSUN AT Conference.

Staff are encouraged to participate in professional, service, and consumer organizations, such as the National Rehabilitation Association, Lions Clubs, the National Federation of the Blind, the American Council of the Blind, and the Arkansas Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER), and opportunities are available to attend organizations' state and national conferences.

Retention of qualified personnel is addressed through CEU credit for staff training, as well as opportunities for expanding skills and knowledge in a variety of areas.

3. DESCRIPTION OF VR AGENCY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF PERSONNEL STANDARDS CONSISTENT WITH SECTION 101(A)(7)(B) TO ENSURE THAT VR AGENCY PROFESSIONAL AND PARAPROFESSIONAL PERSONNEL ARE ADEQUATELY TRAINED AND PREPARED, INCLUDING—

A. STANDARDS THAT ARE CONSISTENT WITH ANY NATIONAL OR STATE-APPROVED OR -RECOGNIZED CERTIFICATION, LICENSING, REGISTRATION, OR OTHER COMPARABLE REQUIREMENTS THAT APPLY TO THE PROFESSION OR DISCIPLINE IN WHICH SUCH PERSONNEL ARE PROVIDING VR SERVICES; AND

B. THE ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENTS, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 101(A)(7)(B)(II) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, TO ENSURE THAT THE PERSONNEL HAVE A 21ST CENTURY UNDERSTANDING OF THE EVOLVING LABOR FORCE AND THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

Title IV DSB Response:

The Arkansas Office of Personnel Management (OPM) continues to recommend the minimum qualifications, job descriptions and salary rates for specific classifications, based upon labor market surveys, which are then reviewed and approved by the legislature. The spring 2019 legislative session gave DSB the authority to pay tuition for its VR Counselors working on their CRCs. DSB is exploring ways to assist Area Field Supervisors with the costs of tuition to meet CSPD standards.

Internships are available to students in the rehabilitation programs across the state. DSB will have a new intern beginning January 2024.

Update PY26-27: DSB internships are available to vocational rehabilitation master's degree students. DSB has worked with 3 intern students since January 2024.

DSB recruits, and, to the degree possible, hires counselors with a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or other closely related degree. DSB implements individual education plans for existing personnel to be retrained to meet certification standards for Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) and Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC). Counselors have seven years to meet CSPD requirements from date of hire.

4. METHOD(S) THE VR AGENCY USES TO ENSURE THAT PERSONNEL ARE ABLE TO COMMUNICATE IN APPROPRIATE MODES OF COMMUNICATION WITH OR IN THE NATIVE LANGUAGE OF APPLICANTS OR ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE LIMITED ENGLISH SPEAKING ABILITY.

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB provides interpreter services for communication with persons with limited English-speaking ability on a contractual basis. A member of the Business and Technology staff is fluent in Spanish. Reader service, guide service, and any special adaptive equipment are made available to applicants for services, DSB participants, and DSB personnel. Information is also available in the medium of choice for persons making application for DSB services and for persons with disabilities who are employed by DSB.

DSB has been a long—standing partner with the Arkansas Deafblindness Project: Children and Youth with Sensory Impairment (CAYSI), formerly known as the Deaf/Blind Consortium. DSB refers participants to CAYSI and serves on its Advisory Committee, which provides training for parents and professionals to foster stronger partnerships among agencies who work with this population. The project maintains a deafblind registry and requests related information from DSB.

5. AS APPROPRIATE, DESCRIBE THE PROCEDURES AND ACTIVITIES TO COORDINATE THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT WITH PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT UNDER THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT.

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB works with Arkansas Workforce Services, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services and the Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education to plan and develop pre-employment transition services and to coordinate services for individuals being served dually and under the PROMISE grant. The Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education staff provide training and information on transition services to vocational rehabilitation and workforce services staff. In turn, vocational rehabilitation staff, both DSB and ARS train and collaborate with Education and Workforce to provide training on how to establish work based learning experiences, providing job exploration counseling and counseling on opportunities in enrollment in post-secondary counseling, as well as cross training on instructional models in supported employment. Our agencies work together towards utilizing best practices on Section 101, IDEA,

ADA and the Individual Education Plan (IEP). DSB's transition coordinator participates in monthly meetings with ESVI staff and teachers for the visually impaired.

J. COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS.

In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(11)(D) of the Rehabilitation Act—

1. DESCRIBE PLANS, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES FOR COORDINATION BETWEEN THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND EDUCATION OFFICIALS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PUBLIC EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, THAT ARE DESIGNED TO FACILITATE THE TRANSITION OF THE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM THE RECEIPT OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES IN SCHOOL TO THE RECEIPT OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES.

Title IV DSB Response:

The state of Arkansas has an agreement/MOU in place to facilitate the coordination of plans, policies and procedures for the state VR agencies and education officials. The agreement/MOU between the Arkansas Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Division of Learning Services, Special Education Unit- hereafter referred to as Special Education, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services and the Division of Services for the Blind establishes a collaborative partnership that will facilitate the coordination and delivery of pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities between the ages of 14 and 21, and also, the transition of high school students from secondary school to the achievement of their desired post-secondary outcomes, with a focus on post school outcomes and working towards the students' career goals.

The specific purposes are: 1) to strengthen shared efforts to prepare students with disabilities for successful careers, community jobs and independent living; 2) outline a collaborative framework for coordinating State and local services and resources; and 3) provide guidance in coordinating plans, policies and procedures developed to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including the receipt of transition services as described in IDEA, pre-employment transition services and vocational rehabilitation transition services leading to employment.

All parties will collaborate to foster a common understanding of transition requirements and responsibilities to build a partnership between transition counselors, transition personnel, school districts and vocational rehabilitation counselors throughout the State in order to enable students with disabilities to successfully transition from school to employment. This agreement reflects the federal requirements and provides the objectives and joint responsibilities of each party.

Update PY26-27: DSB continues to work with and maintain MOUs with these agencies. There has been no change in the MOU.

2. DESCRIBE THE CURRENT STATUS AND SCOPE OF THE FORMAL INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE VR AGENCY AND THE STATE EDUCATIONAL AGENCY. CONSISTENT WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE FORMAL INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT PURSUANT TO 34 C.F.R. § 361.22(B), PROVIDE, AT A MINIMUM, THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION ABOUT THE AGREEMENT:

- A. CONSULTATION AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, WHICH MAY BE PROVIDED USING ALTERNATIVE MEANS FOR MEETING PARTICIPATION (SUCH AS VIDEO CONFERENCES AND CONFERENCE CALLS), TO ASSIST EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES IN PLANNING FOR THE TRANSITION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM SCHOOL TO POST-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES AND OTHER VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES;**
- B. TRANSITION PLANNING BY PERSONNEL OF THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND EDUCATIONAL AGENCY PERSONNEL FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES THAT FACILITATES THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THEIR INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS (IEPS) UNDER SECTION 614(D) OF THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT;**
- C. THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES, INCLUDING FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES, OF EACH AGENCY, INCLUDING PROVISIONS FOR DETERMINING STATE LEAD AGENCIES AND QUALIFIED PERSONNEL RESPONSIBLE FOR TRANSITION SERVICES AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES;**
- D. PROCEDURES FOR OUTREACH TO AND IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WHO NEED TRANSITION SERVICES AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES. OUTREACH TO THESE STUDENTS SHOULD OCCUR AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE DURING THE TRANSITION PLANNING PROCESS AND MUST INCLUDE, AT A MINIMUM, A DESCRIPTION OF THE PURPOSE OF THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM, ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS, APPLICATION PROCEDURES, AND SCOPE OF SERVICES THAT MAY BE PROVIDED TO ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS;**
- E. COORDINATION NECESSARY TO SATISFY DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS SET FORTH IN 34 C.F.R. PART 397 REGARDING STUDENTS AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES WHO ARE SEEKING SUBMINIMUM WAGE EMPLOYMENT; AND**
- F. ASSURANCE THAT, IN ACCORDANCE WITH 34 C.F.R. § 397.31, NEITHER THE SEA NOR THE LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCY WILL ENTER INTO A CONTRACT OR OTHER ARRANGEMENT WITH AN ENTITY, AS DEFINED IN 34 C.F.R. § 397.5(D), FOR THE PURPOSE OF OPERATING A PROGRAM UNDER WHICH YOUTH WITH A DISABILITY IS ENGAGED IN WORK COMPENSATED AT A SUBMINIMUM WAGE.**

Title IV DSB Response:

The parties will collaborate to provide the following consultation and technical assistance activities to promote students to move to transition and post-school outcomes:

1. Providing direct instruction to vocational rehabilitation counselors, school transition personnel, and other persons supporting students with disabilities through group conferences, providing instructional materials and guidelines, reporting forms, training through webinars, and fielding telephone/email communications;
2. Coordinating public speaking and training activities on transition services provided by local education agencies under IDEA;

3. Developing model transition demonstration projects and establishing or supporting partnerships involving the local education agencies to achieve the goals of improved transition outcomes.

The following are the responsibilities of the - Arkansas Division of Services for the Blind and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services regarding transition planning and vocational rehabilitation services for eligible youth:

1. Staff will attend Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings when invited by any method that is most appropriate for the student.
2. Staff will review Pre-Employment Transition activities, vocational interests, and progress and share at IEP planning meetings to facilitate discussions of student's goals, needs, and objectives.
3. Staff will support student employment goals by providing supplemental services that work with the IEP to achieve student success.
4. Facilitate the identification of youth with disabilities who may benefit from vocational rehabilitation by the academic year in which the student is turning 16 or earlier if appropriate.
5. Make relevant data available about eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services and track information about employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. ARS and DSB will data share yearly at the end of the state fiscal year those students served jointly that have achieved competitive integrated employment by extracting WIOA post exit information from each agencies case management system and providing that information to the Special Education Unit.
6. Make LEA personnel, students, and their families aware of the vocational rehabilitation program, including VR eligibility requirements (in accordance with 34 CFR 361.42), the application procedures and scope of services (in accordance with 34 CFR 361.48) that are provided to all eligible or potentially eligible individuals.

The Special Education Unit, Arkansas Division of Services for the Blind and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services jointly agree to the following:

1. The Special Education Unit is the agency responsible for ensuring that a free appropriate public education (FAPE) is made available to eligible students pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. § 1412(a)(1).
2. School districts have the primary planning, programmatic, and financial responsibilities for the provision of education transition services and related services for students as a component of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and these services are provided to eligible students with disabilities, ages 14 to 21, and younger when determined appropriate through the implementation of the Individualized Education Program (IEP). The parties acknowledge that the Arkansas Division of Elementary and Secondary Education-Special Education Unit, has general supervisory responsibility over the educational program of any public agency providing FAPE to individuals with disabilities, ages birth to 21, as defined in state and federal statutes.

3. The distinction between transition and related services that are the planning, programmatic and financial responsibility of the school district will be determined based on a delineation of the customary services that the school provides. These distinctions will be made in coordination with the individual school district through an engagement and agreement process to work with Arkansas Rehabilitation Services and/or the Division of Services for the Blind towards describing the activities, supports, and funding that ARS will partner with the school district on to provide pre-employment transition services in the school setting or during the school day.
4. Arkansas Division of Services for the Blind and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services are financially responsible for providing pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities.
5. Arkansas Division of Services for the Blind and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services are the agencies financially responsible for providing vocational rehabilitation, job training, and placement services pursuant to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, 20 U.S.C. § 701, *et seq.*
6. Assistive Technology devices and services needed for individual students to operate in the classroom towards educational goals are the primary financial responsibility of the school system. However, vocational rehabilitation financial assistance may be used under an approved plan for services in instances where the assistive technology is required for work purposes outside of the school setting.
7. The parties acknowledge that the goals of Arkansas Division of Services for the Blind and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services are to ensure that all students with disabilities have access to pre-employment transition services, as well as traditional vocational rehabilitation transition services, while in secondary school.
 - a. LEAs will work cooperatively with ARS and DSB Pre-Employment Transition Counselors to allow access to students during the school day on days and times coordinated with the schools in order provide direct services.
 - b. LEAs will notify ARS and DSB Pre-Employment Transition Counselors of upcoming Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) meetings in order to ensure there is adequate planning for all students with disabilities to achieve post-secondary success in training, post-secondary education, or employment.
 - c. DSB and ARS will ensure that all students who have been found eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation Transition Services will receive a Plan for Employment that aligns with the student's interests and informed choice per the Individualized Education Plan prior to exiting the secondary school setting.

Outreach efforts will include a description of the vocational rehabilitation program, including the pre-employment transition program and the transition program within vocational rehabilitation. The potentially eligible definition, the eligibility requirements, the application procedures, and the scope of services that may be provided to students with disabilities will be included in outreach efforts.

Outreach efforts include but are not limited to attendance at IEP and transition planning meetings, career fairs, back to school nights, group orientations, transition fairs, and presentations coordinated throughout the year. The process includes:

1. Transition counselors to identify and outreach to all students with disabilities to make available the five required pre-employment transition services.
2. Outreach to students with disabilities as defined under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), students with disabilities for purposes of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, students with disabilities receiving school psychological, health, nursing, or social work services; and students with disabilities enrolled in an educational program and not in receipt of disability-related services from the educational program.
3. Coordination with the Department of Education, Special Education Unit to outreach to youth in Department of Youth Services settings, youth who have dropped out of an education program, and students who are at risk of dropping out of high school.

Documentation requirements under section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act for students with disabilities seeking subminimum wage employment. Under section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act, as amended by WIOA, 14(c) businesses referred to as "employers" are prohibited from employing any individual with disabilities who is 24 years of age or younger at subminimum wage, unless the individual has received documentation from DSB or ARS upon completion of all the following activities:

1. Pre-employment transition services under the Rehabilitation Act, as amended by WIOA, or transition services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and
2. Apply for vocational rehabilitation services and the individual was determined
 - a. Ineligible for vocational rehabilitation services.
 - b. Eligible for vocational rehabilitation services, had an approved individualized plan for employment, and
 - c. the individual was unable to achieve an employment outcome in competitive, integrated employment after a reasonable period of time, and his/her case was closed.
3. Career counseling and information and referral services to federal and state programs to help the individual discover, experience, and attain competitive integrated employment and the counseling and information was not for employment at sub-minimum wage.

These requirements will be shared by the SEA with LEAs, parents, guardians, teachers, and students. DSB and ARS will maintain the documentation and provide a copy to the individual within the timelines identified as specified under 34 CFR part 397. Any of the services identified above that the LEA provides must be documented by the LEA and provided to the student and DSB and ARS, as appropriate. DSB and ARS in consultation with the LEAS, will document the completion of this process at quarterly team meetings where the individual participant needs and next steps are discussed and documentation is shared, consistent with the confidentiality requirements of the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (20 USC 11232g(b) and 34 CFR

99.30 and 99.31) and IDEA (20 USC 1417(c) and 34 CFR 300.622) pursuant to section 511(d) of the Act and §397.10.

1. Neither the SEA nor the LEA will enter into an arrangement with an entity holding a special wage certificate under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act for the purposes of operating a program in which students or youth with disabilities are paid subminimum wage;
2. Before a 14(c) entity may begin compensating a youth with a disability at subminimum wage, the youth must complete Pre-Employment Transition Services through VR or the youth must present documentation showing completion of transition services under IDEA from the school system. The section titled *Documentation Requirements for Section 511* details the forms used for this process.
3. The LEA will refer a student with a disability known to be seeking subminimum wage employment to the VR program prior to referring that student to a subminimum wage program.

Update PY26-27: DSB continues to work with and maintain MOUs with these agencies. There has been no change in the MOU.

K. COORDINATION WITH EMPLOYERS

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB counselors serve as business consultants, because they are most familiar with the skills, training, and capabilities of their clients. DSB counselors must complete a minimum of 2 employer meetings per month. This activity is done with the interest of the participant in mind. Counselors seek out employers who have career matches that meet the interest and abilities of the participant, or it is done with the aspirations and future goals of the participant in mind.

DSB has a Business Engagement Coordinator who networks with employers to identify needs and opportunities for DSB to serve both employers and participants. DSB's Business Engagement Coordinator also works with the Pre-ETS team to identify employers to speak with students about opportunities as well as to offer Work-Based Learning opportunities for students with a disability. The Business Engagement Coordinator is responsible for developing and maintaining the relationships with the State and local Chambers of Commerce and building relationships across the state with employers and other state agencies to promote employment opportunities for individuals who are Blind or Visually Impaired.

DSB and other WIOA partners work together on the WIOA Business Engagement Committee to share information and provide information to employers on hiring individuals with disabilities. DSB staff participate in local Business Engagement Partner meetings at the one stop centers.

Update PY 26-27: Workforce Connections has realigned business engagement to a team of regional business workforce consultants and regional outreach coordinators that meet with businesses on behalf of all WIOA partners inclusive of DSB. This will drastically increase the number of employers that the agency is meeting with and will provide greater access to in-demand jobs in high-need sectors within the state of Arkansas. For reference, counselors in

Northwest Arkansas contacted 37 employers during Program Year 2024, with counselors in Northeast Arkansas connecting with an additional 25 employers. Staff in Central and South Arkansas reported contacts with 10 employers each for the program year. In the most recent year, our Existing Business Resource Division, newly renamed Arkansas Industry Connect, met with 300+ companies across the state of Arkansas. This removes the duplication of effort for counselors having a requirement to meet with employers and creates an environment where our team is working collaboratively to support one another and letting our counselors focus on case management and client services while AR Industry Connect speaks with companies and makes referrals to DSB.

L. INTERAGENCY COOPERATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES

In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(11)(C) and (K), describe interagency cooperation with and utilization of the services and facilities of agencies and programs that are not carrying out activities through the statewide workforce development system to develop opportunities for community-based employment in integrated settings, to the greatest extent practicable for the following:

1. STATE PROGRAMS (DESIGNATE LEAD AGENCY(IES) AND IMPLEMENTING ENTITY(IES)) CARRIED OUT UNDER SECTION 4 OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998;

Title IV DSB Response:

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services is the lead agency Increasing Capabilities Access Network (ICAN) program, which is the State program that carries out section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998, and DSB coordinates as needed. DSB has a cooperative agreement with Arkansas Rehabilitation Services to have dual caseloads in regard to participants who are deafblind. DSB provides blindness services and ARS addresses deafness needs.

Additionally, DSB has an assistive technology lab to assist consumers who are blind or visually impaired. The Technology Director works closely with ICAN. DSB has referred consumers to ICAN to borrow equipment while waiting on theirs to be delivered and to assist consumers in repairing their equipment. DSB participates in ICAN's quarterly meeting and their yearly training with NanoPac. When a consumer being served by DSB's technology lab has secondary disabilities, ICAN assists the lab in identifying additional technology resources.

The DSB Business and Technology Unit has tested accessibility on the AWARE data management system project, Office 365, and 508 Enhancements, a national project that will assist individuals who are blind or visually impaired in using Microsoft Share products. The DSB State Rehabilitation Technologist has been involved in testing some of the DWS Office 365 cloud programs. Assessments for assistive technology are completed by the DSB Business and Technology Unit, which has helped VR Counselors install computer equipment and perform other technology related tasks, so that they can provide basic technology support to participants in their respective geographic areas statewide. This initiative has also expanded the capacity of the DSB Business and Technology Unit.

Update PY 26-27: DSB's Technology Lab continues to coordinate with ICAN and participate in ICAN's quarterly meetings. ICAN's recent relocation has placed them in the same building and

space next door to the DSB Technology Lab enhancing the ability to coordinate and share resources. This coordination of efforts provides more opportunities for DSB consumers.

2. PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT BY THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE;

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB makes referrals of participants to commodity programs and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which are under the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

3. NON-EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES SERVING OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH;

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB maintains an active presence on numerous councils and committees, including: Arkansas Interagency Transition Partnership, Arkansas Workforce Development Board, The Arkansas Independent Living Council, Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE), The Governor's Commission on People with Disabilities, Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program, and Local Workforce Development Boards across the state.

DSB's Transition Manager and Field Services Administrator serve on the WIOA Partner Transition and Out of School Youth Subcommittee to assist with sharing resources and programing to reach out of school youth.

4. STATE USE CONTRACTING PROGRAMS;

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB has no state use contracting programs.

5. STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR ADMINISTERING THE STATE MEDICAID PLAN UNDER TITLE XIX OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT (42 U.S.C. 1396 ET SEQ.);

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB will continue its close working relationships with the DHS Division of Medical Services (DMS), which houses Medicaid; the DHS Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDS); and the DHS Division of Aging, Adult, and Behavioral Health Services (DAABHS). DSB has cooperative agreements outlining responsibilities and the provision of services of each agency to initiate Employment First activities. Each agency agrees to serve individuals with disabilities with a goal of competitive integrated employment. DSB partners with ARS with dual caseloads that has a similar agreement for the provision of services to State Medicaid recipients. DSB coordinates services with DAABHS, DMS, and the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences.

6. STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING SERVICES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES;

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB will continue active working relationships with the DHS Division of Medical Services (DMS), which houses Medicaid; the DHS Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDS); and the

DHS Division of Aging, Adult, and Behavioral Health Services (DAABHS). DSB has cooperative agreements outlining responsibilities and the provision of services of each agency to initiate Employment First activities. Each agency agrees to serve individuals with disabilities with the goal of competitive integrated employment with the DDS and DAABHS. DSB partners with ARS with dual caseloads that has a similar agreement for the provision of services to State Medicaid recipients. DSB coordinates services with DAABHS, DMS, and the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences DSB and the DHS Division of Developmental Disabilities serve on the Arkansas Interagency Transition Partnership (AITP), which coordinates transition services and discusses education—related issues. DSB also partners with DDS on Employment First Initiatives and APSE.

7. STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES; AND

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB will continue active relationships with the DHS Division of Medical Services (DMS), which houses Medicaid; the DHS Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDS); and the DHS Division of Aging, Adult, and Behavioral Health Services (DAABHS). DSB has cooperative agreements outlining responsibilities and the provision of services of each agency to initiate Employment First Activities. Each agency agrees to serve individuals with disabilities with the goal of competitive integrated employment. DSB along with ARS, DDS, and DAABHS have worked with DOL ODEP consultants to improve supported employment services for individuals with mental health issues. DSB coordinates services with DAABHS, DMS, and the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences

8. OTHER FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS OUTSIDE THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM.

Title IV DSB Response:

The Division of State Services for the Blind (DSB) cooperates with other WIOA partners and can make referrals for adult literacy, higher education, DHS programs, and other services as needed. DSB and ARS have shared cooperative agreements with the 33 Institutions of Higher Education. DSB works in close partnership with schools, especially the Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired to provide vocational rehabilitation services and Pre-ETS to students. DSB also coordinates with the Department of Education's Educational Services for the Visually Impaired (ESVI) to serve high school students who are blind or visually impaired. DSB has an MOU with the American Indian Center of Arkansas to provide services to dual clients more effectively. DSB has agreements with Children and Youth with Sensory Impairments (CAYSI) and Helen Keller National Center to provide services for individuals who are Deafblind.

DSB shares broadcast engineering services and uses facilities at the Arkansas Educational Television Network to provide DSB's Arkansas Information Reading Services (AIRS) and Newline. People who are blind or visually impaired can access AIRS broadcasts of news and other informational programming 24 hours a day via computers, smart phones, laptops, and live streaming. The signal is also broadcast on the secondary audio (MTS) of AETN-4, and is carried by many cable TV systems. Newline enables people who are blind or visually impaired to access over 300 newspapers and magazines via phone, Internet, digital talking-book player and MP3 players.

DSB works cooperatively with service organizations and non-profits to raise awareness of blindness issues and promote the independence of people who are blind or visually impaired. These organizations include Arkansas Lions Clubs, the National Federation of the Blind Arkansas Chapter, the American Council of the Blind Arkansas Chapter. The Arkansas Lions Eye Bank and Laboratory at UAMS, Mid-South Sight and Hearing, the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) and the Arkansas Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.

9. OTHER PRIVATE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS.

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB develops agreements in response to: (1) state and federal laws and regulations, (2) results of needs assessments, (3) suggestions from consumer groups, and (4) recommendations of staff and stakeholders including those in the Workforce Services arena. DSB uses the RSA guideline template to develop cooperative agreements.

DSB has been a long-standing partner with the Arkansas Deaf blindness Project: Children and Youth with Sensory Impairment (CAYSI), formerly known as the Deaf/Blind Consortium. DSB refers participants to CAYSI and serves on its Advisory Committee, which provides training for parents and professionals to foster stronger partnerships among agencies who work with this population. The project maintains a deafblind registry and requests related information from DSB. DSB has worked with the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) to improve services for those consumers who are deaf-blind and to provide training for DSB staff, including a pilot with ARS, DSB, HKNC, and CAYSI for Deafblind Students with a Disability. DSB operates the Arkansas Information Reading Services (AIRS), which is a service to groups as authorized under 34 C.F.R. § 361.49(a)(3).

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (DSB) CERTIFICATIONS AND ASSURANCES

The State Plan must include
1. Public Comment on Policies and Procedures: The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.
2. Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement: The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a Unified State plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140.
3. Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan: The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to:

The State Plan must include
3.a. the establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.b. either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.c. consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.d. the financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3).
3.e. as applicable, the local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.f. as applicable, the shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.g. statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.h. the requirements for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.i. all required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.j. the requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.k. the compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.l. the reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities as set forth in section 101(a)(18)(A).
3.m. the submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4. Administration of the Provision of VR Services: The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will:
4.a. comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(E) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act.

The State Plan must include
4.b. impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.c. provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services or, if implementing an order of selection, in accordance with criteria established by the State for the order of selection as set out in section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.d. determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.e. comply with the requirements for the development of an individualized plan for employment in accordance with section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.f. comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.g. provide vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the State, in accordance with section 101(a)(13) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.h. comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by sections 101(a)(14) and 511 of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.i. meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act if the State elects to construct, under special circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs.
4.j. with respect to students with disabilities, the State:
4.j.i. has developed and will implement,
4.j.i.A. strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and
4.j.i.B. strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and
4.j.ii. has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15), 101(a)(25) and 113).
4.j.iii. shall reserve not less than 15 percent of the allocated funds for the provision of pre-employment transition services; such funds shall not be used to pay for the administrative costs of providing pre-employment transition services.

The State Plan must include
5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement to the State plan:
5.a. The designated State unit assures that it will include in the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan all information required by section 606 of the Rehabilitation Act.
5.b. The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act separately for individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act.
6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program (Title VI):
6.a. The designated State agency assures that it will expend no more than 2.5 percent of the State's allotment under title VI for administrative costs of carrying out this program; and, the designated State agency or agencies will provide, directly or indirectly through public or private entities, non-Federal contributions in an amount that is not less than 10 percent of the costs of carrying out supported employment services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved for such purpose under section 603(d) of the Rehabilitation Act, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(H) and (I) of the Rehabilitation Act.
6.b. The designated State agency assures that it will use funds made available under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act only to provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, who are eligible to receive such services; and, that such funds are used only to supplement and not supplant the funds provided under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, when providing supported employment services specified in the individualized plan for employment, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(A) and (D), of the Rehabilitation Act.
7. Provision of Supported Employment Services:
7.a. The designated State agency assures that it will provide supported employment services as defined in section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act.
7.b. The designated State agency assures that the comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act an individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(7)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act.

Do you attest that these assurances will be met?

Yes

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (BLIND) CERTIFICATIONS

1. THE (ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPROPRIATE,) IS AUTHORIZED TO SUBMIT THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973 (REHABILITATION ACT), AS AMENDED BY TITLE IV OF WIOA[1], AND ITS STATE PLAN SUPPLEMENT UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT;

ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPROPRIATE

Title IV DSB Response:

Division of Services for the Blind

2. IN THE EVENT THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY IS NOT PRIMARILY CONCERNED WITH VOCATIONAL AND OTHER REHABILITATION OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES, THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY MUST INCLUDE A DESIGNATED STATE UNIT FOR THE VR PROGRAM (SECTION 101(A)(2)(B)(II) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT). AS A CONDITION FOR THE RECEIPT OF FEDERAL FUNDS UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES, THE (DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WHEN THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY HAS A DESIGNATED STATE UNIT)[2] AGREES TO OPERATE AND IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE STATE VR SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN[3], THE REHABILITATION ACT, 34 CFR 361.13(B) AND (C), AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[4], POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED BY THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION. FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE TO STATES UNDER SECTION 111(A) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT ARE USED SOLELY FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN;

ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY

Title IV DSB Response:

Division of Services for the Blind

3. AS A CONDITION FOR THE RECEIPT OF FEDERAL FUNDS UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY, OR THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WHEN THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY HAS A DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AGREES TO OPERATE AND IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE STATE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN[5], THE REHABILITATION ACT, AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[6], POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED BY THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION. FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER TITLE VI ARE USED SOLELY FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN;

4. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT OR, IF NOT APPLICABLE, THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY HAS THE AUTHORITY UNDER STATE LAW TO PERFORM THE FUNCTIONS OF THE STATE REGARDING THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT AND IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE VR PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH 34 CFR 361.13(B) AND (C);

5. THE STATE LEGALLY MAY CARRY OUT EACH PROVISION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT.

6. ALL PROVISIONS OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT ARE CONSISTENT WITH STATE LAW.

7. THE (ENTER THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW) HAS THE AUTHORITY UNDER STATE LAW TO RECEIVE, HOLD, AND DISBURSE FEDERAL FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT;

ENTER THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW

Title IV DSB Response:

Nathan Winter

8. THE (ENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW) HAS THE AUTHORITY TO SUBMIT THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND THE SUPPLEMENT FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;

ENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW

Title IV DSB Response:

Interim Director

9. THE AGENCY THAT SUBMITS THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT HAS ADOPTED OR OTHERWISE FORMALLY APPROVED THE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT.

[1] PUBLIC LAW 113-128. [2] ALL REFERENCES IN THIS PLAN TO "DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY" OR TO "THE STATE AGENCY" RELATE TO THE AGENCY IDENTIFIED IN THIS PARAGRAPH. [3] NO FUNDS UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT MAY BE AWARDED WITHOUT AN APPROVED VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 101(A) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT. [4] APPLICABLE REGULATIONS, IN PART, INCLUDE THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT GENERAL ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS (EDGAR) IN 34 CFR PARTS 76, 77, 79, 81, AND 82; 2 CFR PART 200 AS ADOPTED BY 2 CFR PART 3474; AND THE STATE VR SERVICES PROGRAM REGULATIONS AT 34 C.F.R. PART 361. [5] NO FUNDS UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT MAY BE AWARDED WITHOUT AN APPROVED SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SUPPLEMENT TO THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 606(A) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT. [6] APPLICABLE REGULATIONS, IN PART, INCLUDE THE CITATIONS IN FOOTNOTE 4, AS WELL AS SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM REGULATIONS AT 34 C.F.R. PART 363.

CERTIFICATION SIGNATURE

Title IV DSB Response:

Signatory information	Enter Signatory information in this column
Name of Signatory	Nathan Winter
Title of Signatory	Interim Director
Date Signed	[Enter date here]

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Title IV DSB Response:

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	64.0%	64.0%	65.0%	65.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	63.0%	63.0%	65.0%	65.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$6,800.0	\$6,800	\$6,870.0	\$6,870
Credential Attainment Rate	35.5%	36.5%	36.0%	37.5%
Measurable Skill Gains	57.5%	58.5%	58.0%	59.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	64.0%		65.0%	

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	63.0%		65.0%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$6,800		\$6,870	
Credential Attainment Rate	35.5%		36.0%	
Measurable Skill Gains	57.5%		58.0%	
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

1

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

GEPA 427 FORM INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLICATION PACKAGE - VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

1. DESCRIBE HOW YOUR ENTITY'S EXISTING MISSION, POLICIES, OR COMMITMENTS ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO, AND EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION IN, THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY.

Title IV DSB Response:

The Arkansas Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) mission is to enhance the personal and economic independence of blind and severely visually impaired persons of all ages in Arkansas. DSB is an independent consumer-controlled commission governed by the rules and regulations of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). DSB policies and procedures are aligned with WIOA to empower individuals who are blind or visually impaired to obtain, regain, retain, or advance in their employment. DSB provides academic, job-related, and disability skills training, support services, rehab technology, and other necessary services to maximize the opportunity for employment. Consistent with DSB policy, program eligibility requirements will be applied in compliance with Titles VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act, The Americans with Disabilities Act, and without regard to age, religion, disability, sex, race, color, or national origin. Eligibility requirements are applicable without regard to the particular service need or anticipated cost of services required by an applicant or the income level of an applicant or applicant's family. DSB does not impose a residency requirement on any applicant for services.

**2. BASED ON YOUR PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY, WHAT BARRIERS MAY IMPEDE
EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, OR OTHER
BENEFICIARIES?**

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB conducted a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment in 2022 that identified barriers to services and recommended steps to increase equitable access and outreach to underserved populations. A common barrier for individuals who are blind or visually impaired is access to transportation and technology. DSB continues to work to address barriers created by staff vacancies.

Update PY26-27: DSB conducts Consumer Satisfaction Surveys to ensure ongoing monitoring of consumer success and determine barriers to that success.

**3. BASED ON THE BARRIERS IDENTIFIED, WHAT STEPS WILL YOU TAKE TO ADDRESS
SUCH BARRIERS TO EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN THE PROPOSED
PROJECT OR ACTIVITY?**

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB is working to improve outreach across the state to reach underserved populations. Recently DSB has updated outreach materials and hired an Outreach Manager to assist with connecting to new communities. DSB continues to participate in opportunities across the state to share information about transportation barriers and push for access. DSB maintains relationships with consumer groups to share information and work together on resolutions. DSB works with individuals through their IPE to address barriers faced by consumers.

Update PY26-27: DSB's Outreach Manager attended events across the state to inform about DSB services. In Program Year 2024, the Outreach manager attended an average of 3 events per month and visited 3 out of 4 regions of the state for events. For PY 2025, the Outreach Manager has attended 19 events in 2 regions of the state. However, for PY 2025 Quarter 2 DSB staff were unable to travel due to budget concerns limiting access for the manager to travel and attend events outside their region. DSB will continue to work to identify or create opportunities for Outreach in all 4 regions of the state. DSB's Outreach Manager is working to develop connections with various communities statewide to expand opportunities to connect with potential consumers. Additional DSB staff attended a variety of outreach events across the state, ensuring that every region had representation. Staff in South were able to participate in at least 10 events during Program Year 2024, while Field Services Staff also participated in additional events in Northwest, Central, and Northeast to assist in conducting outreach across the state.

**4. WHAT IS YOUR TIMELINE, INCLUDING TARGETED MILESTONES, FOR ADDRESSING
THESE IDENTIFIED BARRIERS?**

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB will continue to address barriers for individuals eligible for services on their IPE and work with consumer groups and partner organizations to find resolutions to barriers whenever possible.

1. DESCRIBE HOW YOUR ENTITY'S EXISTING MISSION, POLICIES, OR COMMITMENTS ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO, AND EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION IN, THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY.

Title IV DSB Response:

The Arkansas Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) mission is to enhance the personal and economic independence of blind and severely visually impaired persons of all ages in Arkansas. DSB is an independent consumer-controlled commission governed by the rules and regulations of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). DSB policies and procedures are aligned with WIOA to empower individuals who are blind or visually impaired to obtain, regain, retain, or advance in their employment. DSB provides academic, job-related, and disability skills training, support services, rehab technology, and other necessary services to maximize the opportunity for employment. Consistent with DSB policy, program eligibility requirements will be applied in compliance with Titles VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act, The Americans with Disabilities Act, and without regard to age, religion, disability, sex, race, color, or national origin. Eligibility requirements are applicable without regard to the particular service need or anticipated cost of services required by an applicant or the income level of an applicant or applicant's family. DSB does not impose a residency requirement on any applicant for services.

2. BASED ON YOUR PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY, WHAT BARRIERS MAY IMPEDE EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, OR OTHER BENEFICIARIES?

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB conducted a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment in 2022 that identified barriers to services and recommended steps to increase equitable access and outreach to underserved populations. A common barrier for individuals who are blind or visually impaired is access to transportation and technology. DSB continues to work to address barriers created by staff vacancies.

Update PY26-27: DSB conducts Consumer Satisfaction Surveys to ensure ongoing monitoring of consumer success and determine barriers to that success.

3. BASED ON THE BARRIERS IDENTIFIED, WHAT STEPS WILL YOU TAKE TO ADDRESS SUCH BARRIERS TO EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY?

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB is working to improve outreach across the state to reach underserved populations. Recently DSB has updated outreach materials and hired an Outreach Manager to assist with connecting to new communities. DSB continues to participate in opportunities across the state to share information about transportation barriers and push for access. DSB maintains relationships with consumer groups to share information and work together on resolutions. DSB works with individuals through their IPE to address barriers faced by consumers.

Update PY26-27: DSB's Outreach Manager attended events across the state to inform about DSB services. In Program Year 2024, the Outreach manager attended an average of 3 events per

month and visited 3 out of 4 regions of the state for events. For PY 2025, the Outreach Manager has attended 19 events in 2 regions of the state. However, for PY 2025 Quarter 2 DSB staff were unable to travel due to budget concerns limiting access for the manager to travel and attend events outside their region. DSB will continue to work to identify or create opportunities for Outreach in all 4 regions of the state. DSB's Outreach Manager is working to develop connections with various communities statewide to expand opportunities to connect with potential consumers. Additional DSB staff attended a variety of outreach events across the state, ensuring that every region had representation. Staff in South were able to participate in at least 10 events during Program Year 2024, while Field Services Staff also participated in additional events in Northwest, Central, and Northeast to assist in conducting outreach across the state.

4. WHAT IS YOUR TIMELINE, INCLUDING TARGETED MILESTONES, FOR ADDRESSING THESE IDENTIFIED BARRIERS?

Title IV DSB Response:

DSB will continue to address barriers for individuals eligible for services on their IPE and work with consumer groups and partner organizations to find resolutions to barriers whenever possible.

VII. PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR COMBINED STATE PLAN PARTNER PROGRAMS

States choosing to submit a Combined State Plan must provide information concerning the six core programs—the Adult program, Dislocated Worker program, Youth program, Wagner-Peyser Act program, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act program, and the Vocational Rehabilitation program— and also submit relevant information for any of the eleven partner programs it elects to include in its Combined State Plan. When a State includes a Combined State Plan partner program in its Combined State Plan, it need not submit a separate plan or application for that particular program.²⁴ If included, Combined State Plan partner programs are subject to the “common planning elements” in Sections II-IV of this document, where specified, as well as the program-specific requirements for that program.

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS AUTHORIZED UNDER PERKINS (20 U.S.C. 2301 ET SEQ.)

(a) Plan Development and Consultation

- (1) Describe how the State plan was developed in consultation with the stakeholders and in accordance with the procedures in section 122(c)(2) of Perkins V. See Text Box 1 for the statutory requirements for State plan consultation under section 122(c)(1) of Perkins V.**

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

The Arkansas Department of Education developed the state's Perkins V Plan through a collaborative consultation process involving key stakeholders from

- Education
- Business and industry
- Community organizations
- Nonprofits
- State government leaders

This process included presentations and surveys conducted around the state during the past year. Those presentations included education conferences, and workforce board meetings, special population events and convenings and many others. In addition to these meetings the state took priority in hosting 16 regional meetings across the state to gather feedback from stakeholders, including:

- Educators
- Workforce representatives
- Special populations

This process was designed to gather feedback from a diverse array of voices, ensuring that the plan was responsive to local workforce needs, the interests of students, and the broader goals of the Arkansas Workforce Strategy and Arkansas WIOA Plan.

(2) Consistent with section 122(e)(1) of Perkins V, each eligible agency must develop the portion of the State plan relating to the amount and uses of any funds proposed to be reserved for adult career and technical education, postsecondary career and technical education, and secondary career and technical education after consultation with the State agencies identified in section 122(e)(1)(A)-(C) of the Act. If a State agency, other than the eligible agency, finds a portion of the final State plan objectionable, the eligible agency must provide a copy of such objections and a description of its response in the final plan submitted to the Secretary. (Section 122(e)(2) of Perkins V)

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

In revising the Arkansas Perkins V State Plan, the department took significant steps to ensure broad stakeholder involvement. Between the original submission and the revision, the department held 16 regional meetings across the state to collect updated feedback from key stakeholders. These meetings brought together representatives from various sectors, including:

- Secondary and postsecondary CTE programs
- Special populations, including students with disabilities, students in foster care, and at-risk youth
- Business and industry leaders
- Representatives from state and local agencies

These regional meetings offered participants the opportunity to provide feedback on crucial topics such as state leadership dollars, employability skills, definitions of programs of study,

size and scope of quality programs, and equity challenges for rural communities. Surveys were distributed to maximize input, and feedback from community members, including parents, students, and educators, was critical in shaping the revised plan.

From the surveys conducted at the regional meetings and other meetings across the state for the past year no substantive objections were made by stakeholders. In addition, for the public comment periods were held.

(3) Describe opportunities for the public to comment in person and in writing on the State plan. (Section 122(d)(14) of Perkins V)

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

Public Comment was provided in two statewide capacities for stakeholders. First, we held the 16 regional stakeholder meetings as mentioned earlier in this document. At the conclusion of each of those meetings each participant was shared a survey for their completion to provide feedback. At the conclusion of the 16 stakeholder meetings, the plan was submitted to ADE leadership for review and approval.

Public Comment was held from March 27, 2025 to April 29, 2025. A public hearing was held on Friday, April 18, 2025 at 10:00 A.M. The hearing was advertised in the newspaper for three consecutive days, and ADE conducted one public hearing to receive comments on the proposed plan. Interested persons also had the opportunity to submit written comments either at the public hearing or to the Division of Career and Technical Education during the public comment period.

Following the official public comment period no substantial changes were made as zero public comments were received through any means. After the public hearing was held, the proposed plan was brought before the governor's office for signature.

(b) Program Administration and Implementation

1. State's Vision for Education and Workforce Development

- a. Provide a summary of State-supported workforce development activities (including education and training) in the State, including the degree to which the State's career and technical education programs and programs of study are aligned with and address the education and skill needs of the employers in the State identified by the State workforce development board. (Section 122(d)(1) of Perkins V)**

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

The Arkansas Department of Education vision for education and workforce development is driven by the Arkansas Workforce Strategy, Arkansas WIOA Plan, and the LEARNS Act. These two initiatives are the driving force of education and workforce development for the state. The Arkansas Workforce Strategy is a multiple agency document under the direction of the Chief Workforce Officer and priority is identifying, growing, recognizing, and celebrating each

person's unique strengths and skill sets. The goal is to help every individual in Arkansas navigate learning and employment, make informed decisions, and help them reach the next step to achieve personal and professional success. The strategy includes four recommendations for the workforce in the state of Arkansas.

The Arkansas Department of Commerce (ACOM) should lead the alignment of business and industry priorities.

- Realign division policies and practices to improve skills to meet employer needs.

The Arkansas Department of Education (ADE), in partnership with the Department of Transformation and Shared Services (TSS), should lead the alignment of training and career pathways to ensure students learn applicable skills and competencies.

- Identify which skills are most important to Arkansas employers and reward meaningful credentials, i.e., certificates, diplomas, degrees, that align with the needs of job seekers, educators, and employers.
- Improve the public school accountability system to reward schools for providing real-world skills through high demand industry certifications.
- Effectively market non-traditional post secondary paths.
- Realign the higher education funding formula to enhance the value of providing training that leads to gainful employment.

Provide services to meet the needs and goals of job seekers and employers by creating a statewide workforce portal that allows Arkansans to:

- Seek jobs aligned to their skillset.
- Further their training and education to develop job readiness and real-world skills.
- Access existing resources, scholarships, and grants.
- Access a record of their skills and educational background that provides hiring and enrollment insight for employers and institutions of higher education.

Invest in regional strategic focus centers.

- Align focus centers with Arkansas' market strengths: Aerospace and Defense, Advanced Manufacturing, Firearm and Ammunition Manufacturing, Energy, Forestry, Food Manufacturing, Industrial Maintenance/Refrigeration/Boiler, Lithium Mining and Battery Technology, Precision Agriculture, Semiconductors, and Steel Manufacturing.
- Enhance programs at existing Career and Technical Education (CTE) and Secondary Career Centers in the following areas: Broadband, Construction, Engineering, Healthcare, Law Enforcement/EMT/Fire, Leadership/IT/Retail/Entrepreneurship, Skilled Trades, Tourism and Outdoor Economy, Transportation, and Utilities.
- Align state and federal resources with the workforce strategy to maximize outcomes and economic development.

The LEARNS Act of 2023 has many focus areas. Specifically, the letter R, in the LEARNS acronym, is focused on the Readiness of a student post-graduation. From the implementation of the LEARNS, students now prepare for life from cradle to career, with the implementation of:

- Early Career Experiences
- Success Ready Pathways

- Diplomas of Merit and Distinction
- Student Success Plans

Aligning these two initiatives in all aspects of career and technical education in Arkansas are the driving forces to ensure alignment of programs for students, business and industry, and the community. With the focus of a Workforce Strategy and the education alignment around readiness and ensuring our students are on a Success Ready Pathway provide Arkansans the opportunity to thrive.

b. Describe the State's strategic vision and set of goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce (including special populations) and for meeting the skilled workforce needs of employers, including in existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations as identified by the State, and how the State's career and technical education programs will help to meet these goals. (Section 122(d)(2) of Perkins V)

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

The strategic vision for an educated and skilled workforce in Arkansas derives from the Arkansas Workforce Strategy, Arkansas WIOA Plan and the LEARNS Act. The goal from both collaborative documents is that all Arkansans are on a path towards prosperity. Especially as we examine and set goals for our educational opportunities for students. We want to ensure the following.

- Early Career Experiences for all students annually. Ensuring that our students are exposed to high demand and wage jobs in Arkansas on a regular basis and relevant to their community is essential.
- Student Success Plans for all students no later than eighth grade. These plans are a relationship between the school, student, and family to ensure that the goals of the student are being met and that the team invested in the student will ensure an on time graduation with pathway plan post graduation.
- Success-Ready Pathways for all students will ensure our students graduate with the academic core needed to be successful, a meaningful student success plan that seamlessly transitions them to the next phase of life and a success ready pathway that provides readiness skills needed to be a productive member of society, while also having the durable skills needed.
- Career Coaches across the state to further serve our students and communities. The relationship with the students and this trusted adult allow for greater investment in success ready pathways. The relationship between the career coach and their community allow for that complicated language barrier and relationship to be formed between students and employers.
- Alignment of all CTE programs secondary and post-secondary to the high demand and wage list as identified by the state. The expansion and need for targeted programming will help fill gaps in the Arkansas workforce and ensure that our students are being prepared for jobs that exist and have family sustaining wages within the state.
- Provide more targeted support for those students who are historically underserved through expansion projects and create greater awareness of CTE for all.

- Create a stronger and seamless pathway for students from secondary programming to post-secondary programming. Using the data systems, policy agendas and other metrics to ensure that students have an awareness of their opportunities and alignment of their programs to meet their needs as well as the employers needs.

c. Describe the State's strategy for any joint planning, alignment, coordination, and leveraging of funds between the State's career and technical education programs and programs of study with the State's workforce development system, to achieve the strategic vision and goals described in section 122(d)(2) of Perkins V, including the core programs defined in section 3 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (29 U.S.C. 3102) and the elements related to system alignment under section 102(b)(2)(B) of such Act (29 U.S.C. 3112(b)(2)(B)); and for programs carried out under this title with other Federal programs, which may include programs funded 1965. (Section 122(d)(3) of Perkins V)

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

As highlighted in Section II.A.2, DCTE, DESE, the Division of Higher Education, and the Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Services are dedicated to creating excellent, student-centered CTE programs aligned with state workforce needs. This involves close collaboration and leveraging federal and state funds between CTE programs and workforce development. The Career Education and Workforce Development Board plays a crucial role in coordinating efforts across various entities to build a comprehensive CTE program focused on economic development. Act 1079 empowers the board to develop strategic plans that promote alignment between workforce education and higher education while identifying costs and revenue streams.

Specific examples of collaboration include:

- Arkansas Career Coach Program: through a grant received from the Arkansas Department of Human Services – Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (DHS-TANF) unit, funding is provided to support program implementation and reinforcement.
- Jobs for Arkansas Graduates (JAG): This program also receives funding from DHS-TANF and provides opportunities for career readiness, leadership development, and work-based learning to special population students in middle and high schools and postsecondary institutions.
- Career Readiness/Work-based Learning: ADE partners with the Arkansas Department of Commerce (ACOM), Division of Workforce Connections to train teachers and offer the WorkKeys curriculum, enhancing career readiness certification for secondary students in various educational settings.
- Secondary Career Centers: ADE partners with ACOM to coordinate the learning objectives and funding occurring on these high school programs partnered with post-secondary with oversight from commerce to align their workforce skills training.

In summary, DCTE's strategic vision prepares students for college and careers through

responsive CTE programs that meet Arkansas's economic needs. By integrating Perkins V resources with state initiatives, Arkansas aims to build a skilled workforce for future labor market demands.

d. Describe how the eligible agency will use State leadership funds made available under section 112(a)(2) of Perkins V for each of the purposes under section 124(a) of the Act. See Text Box 2 for the required uses of State leadership funds under section 124(a) of Perkins V. (Section 122(d)(7) of Perkins V)

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

Preparation for Non-Traditional Fields: ADE will use Leadership Funds to prepare students, especially from special populations, for high-skill, high-wage careers that are non-traditional for their gender. Support will include dual enrollment initiatives connecting colleges and high schools and enhanced gap and equity analysis to improve program effectiveness.

Support for Individuals in State Institutions: Leadership funds will train correctional staff to improve reentry skills, focusing on those from generational poverty or unstable environments. Provide training skills needed for our school for the deaf and blind and visually impaired as well.

Recruiting, Preparing, and Retaining CTE Teachers: Funds will support professional development across secondary and post-secondary schools, including partnerships with Arkansas Community Colleges to expand training for two-year college teachers. Technical Assistance for Eligible Recipients: ADE will assist CTE programs in needs assessments, program development, and ongoing reviews, and approve locally developed programs.

Additional Uses: Funds will also support career and technical student organizations and training for high school career coaches and college placement advisors to enhance employment readiness, particularly for nontraditional students and special populations.

(2) Implementing Career and Technical Education Programs and Programs of Study

(a) Describe the career and technical education programs or programs of study that will be supported, developed, or improved at the State level, including descriptions of the programs of study to be developed at the State level and made available for adoption by eligible recipients. (Section 122(d)(4)(A) of Perkins V)

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

Arkansas offers comprehensive CTE programs, each designed to equip students with the skills and knowledge needed for success in today's workforce. As part of the LEARNS Act initiative, Arkansas identified High-Wage, High-Demand (H2) career pathways, ensuring that students are prepared for jobs critical to the state's economic growth.

Through the LEARNS Act, DCTE is committed to aligning education with workforce needs, providing resources, partnerships, and professional development to ensure every student has the opportunity to succeed in a future-ready career.

The revision cycle for all programs of study involve a committee made up of CTE educators and business industry partners that are in a one to one ratio. This committee reviews the skills that should be acquired within the program of study as related to the occupational codes and help in adapting and revising standards as needed on a three year rotation. Reference [Appendix F](#) for all Arkansas approved pathways of studies.

(b) Describe the process and criteria to be used for approving locally developed programs of study or career pathways (see Text Box 3 for the statutory definition of career pathways under section 3(8) of Perkins V), including how such programs address State workforce development and education needs and the criteria to assess the extent to which the local application under section 13216F will—

(i) promote continuous improvement in academic achievement and technical skill attainment;

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

Arkansas is focused on providing accessible, comprehensive information on Career and Technical Education (CTE) to students, parents, and stakeholders through legislation, resources, and direct communication. Act 109 mandates comprehensive school counseling programs with support from state-certified counselors, while Act 1079 requires the creation of a credential catalog for high schools and colleges, along with a website showcasing career opportunities.

For secondary students, the state offers career planning classes, a statewide career planning system, and a Career Coach Program aimed at guiding students in career planning, with particular support for underrepresented groups. Additionally, the Division of Career and Technical Education (DCTE) offers districts technical assistance to ensure accessibility and compliance with equity policies.

At the postsecondary level, institutions are responsible for providing CTE information, with support from the Arkansas Division of Higher Education (ADHE), which maintains program lists and credit transfer systems.

Arkansas also emphasizes support for special populations through initiatives like Jobs for Arkansas Graduates (JAG), assistance for English Learners (EL), and the Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative, which connects low-income individuals to higher education and job training.

(ii) expand access to career and technical education for special populations; and

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

Arkansas is strengthening its commitment to equitable Career and Technical Education (CTE) by expanding access for special populations through targeted strategies. Key initiatives include:

- Career Pathways Initiative (CPI): CPI offers low-income individuals' education and credentials to enter target occupations, promoting economic self-sufficiency through partnerships with education, workforce, and social services.
- Funding and Monitoring: DCTE uses an updated application and scoring rubric to promote equitable fund distribution, monitor participation gaps, and offer professional development to schools with identified disparities.
- Career Development Course: All students, including special populations, take a Career Development course by 8th grade to create a personalized 4-6 year career plan.
- Jobs for Arkansas Graduates (JAG): This program supports at-risk youth with academic aid, employer engagement, project-based learning, and work-based credit opportunities.
- Disability Support Partnerships: Collaborations with Arkansas Transition Services and Rehabilitation Services provide professional development to improve CTE access for students with disabilities.
- Career Pathways Initiative (CPI): CPI offers low-income individuals education and credentials to enter target occupations, promoting economic self-sufficiency through partnerships with education, workforce, and social services.

These initiatives support Arkansas's vision for inclusive, high-quality CTE pathways leading to successful career outcomes.

(iii) support the inclusion of employability skills in programs of study and career pathways. (Section 122(d)(4)(B) of Perkins V)

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

Arkansas's Career and Technical Education (CTE) curriculum emphasizes the development of employability skills, integrating them into course frameworks and standards. The Division of Career and Technical Education (DCTE) provides resources to support teachers, including access to the ACT WorkKeys 2.0 curriculum, which helps students earn a National Career Readiness Certificate. By the end of 8th grade, every student must have a Student Success Plan, developed collaboratively with school personnel and families, that is updated annually to ensure a strong foundation in both academic and employability skills.

The Arkansas Department of Education (DESE) has established five guiding principles for skill development: growth, understanding, interaction, decision-making, and empathy. These principles are incorporated into CTE standards and programs.

At the postsecondary level, the Arkansas Division of Higher Education requires new programs to consider local business needs, ensuring that employability skills relevant to expected job positions are included in the curriculum.

(C)Describe how the eligible agency will—

- (i) make information on approved programs of study and career pathways (including career exploration, work-based learning opportunities, early**

college high schools, and dual or concurrent enrollment program opportunities) and guidance and advisement resources, available to students (and parents, as appropriate), representatives of secondary and postsecondary education, and special populations, and to the extent practicable, provide that information and those resources in a language students, parents, and educators can understand;

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

Arkansas provides students, parents, and stakeholders with accurate and accessible information about Career and Technical Education (CTE) opportunities through course requirements, resources, and direct communication. This commitment is supported by Acts 109 and 1079, passed during the 2019 legislative session, as well as ACT 242 of 2023.

Act 109 (School Counseling Improvement Act): Requires districts to implement comprehensive counseling programs led by certified counselors, focusing on academics, career planning, and social-emotional learning. The Department of Education provides technical assistance to ensure equitable access to these services.

Act 1079: Mandates the Office of Skills Development to create a catalog of nationally recognized credentials, instructional programs, and workforce opportunities, supported by an annual report and an informative website for students, educators, and industry.

ACT 242: created the process in which a public-school student may substitute comparable elective coursework pertaining to career and technical education for core academic classes that are required for graduation.

Secondary Level Initiatives:

- **Career Development Class:** Offered in middle grades, helping students explore high school and postsecondary programs, plan coursework, and discuss work-based learning and concurrent credit options, with parental input and translation support.
- **Statewide Career Planning System:** Expanded to include interest assessments, multi-year plans, and program information for grades 8-12.
- **Career Coach Program:** Aims to increase career and postsecondary success among students by offering hands-on career planning and guidance.
- **Technical Assistance:** Provides support for districts to ensure accessibility, accommodations, and adherence to equity policies when sharing CTE information.

Postsecondary Level:

The state's role is limited to maintaining a list of approved degree programs, concurrent credit agreements, and the Arkansas Course Transfer System for general education courses. Expanding to include CTE programs is under consideration.

These efforts aim to equip Arkansas students with the knowledge and tools

needed to make informed academic and career decisions.

(ii) facilitate collaboration among eligible recipients in the development and coordination of career and technical education programs and programs of study and career pathways that include multiple entry and exit points;

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

The Division of Career and Technical Education (DCTE) collaborates with various stakeholders, including educational institutions, workforce agencies, and industry representatives, to enhance Career and Technical Education (CTE) opportunities.

Key initiatives include:

- **Stakeholder Collaboration:** DCTE works with Adult Education, Arkansas Community College, Workforce Services, and others to review and update industry-recognized certifications (IRCs) (Appendix G), evaluate workforce needs, and identify career pathways that support students and adults.
- **Workforce Alignment:** Efforts are made to coordinate programs between K-12 and higher education, ensuring multiple entry and exit points in career pathways.
- **Student Success Plans:** DCTE incorporates individualized plans to help students achieve "success-ready" outcomes, preparing them for postsecondary education, military service, or careers with sustainable wages.
- **LEARNs Act Implementation:** Starting with the ninth-grade class of 2024-25, students will follow flexible college and career readiness pathways to guide their high school course selections. Completing these pathways allows students the opportunity to earn Diplomas with Merit or Distinction, enhancing postsecondary opportunities and providing accountability points for schools. This information is included in the Success Ready Pathway Guide available on the DCTE website to the public.

These efforts aim to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and habits needed for success in their chosen career paths.

(iii) use State, regional, or local labor market data to determine alignment of eligible recipients' programs of study to the needs of the State, regional, or local economy, including in demand industry sectors and occupations identified by the State board, and to align career and technical education with such needs, as appropriate;

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

Through the H2 Pathways designation process, DCTE collaborated with state agencies, educators, and industry partners to evaluate all CTE pathways offered to Arkansas students. In addition to reviewing pathways' employment and wage growth trends, the evaluation provided an opportunity for determination of alignment to industry needs based on geographic location within the state of Arkansas. The review identified 18 pathways that have anticipated growth and will yield a livable wage while meeting the needs of the local, state, and regional workforce. The analysis of pathways will be a continual process to ensure alignment to the State Board of Education, workforce development boards, and

state workforce goals and strategies.

(iv) ensure equal access to approved career and technical education programs of study and activities assisted under this Act for special populations;

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

Through collaborative partnerships with Arkansas Department of Human Services-TANF Division (DHS-TANF), DESE-Special Education (DESE-SPED) and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS), students from Special Populations are supported in achieving their fullest potential to pursue careers in high-wage, high-demand careers. The following strategies were developed in collaboration with partners and are utilized to promote equal access:

- Conduct professional development to assist local CTE educators, who support students from special populations
- Provide materials, resources, and support to eligible recipients to improve their recruitment efforts of students from special populations.
- Provide work-based learning opportunities for student from special populations
- Provide guidance and counseling on career development activities with an emphasis on employability skills development.

(v) coordinate with the State board to support the local development of career pathways and articulate processes by which career pathways will be developed by local workforce development boards, as appropriate;

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

Through the LEARNS Act all schools are required by accreditation purposes to offer at least three CTE programs of study on their campus. In addition one of those programs of study must meet the high demand and wage definition as outlined by the department. Coordination with the state board to review programs on a regular basis to ensure that program alignment is present will ensure that we are meeting the state workforce need as outlined by our workforce development boards and meeting the state workforce strategy.

(vi) support effective and meaningful collaboration between secondary schools, postsecondary institutions, and employers to provide students with experience in, and understanding of, all aspects of an industry, which may include work-based learning such as internships, mentorships, simulated work environments, and other hands-on or inquiry-based learning activities; and

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

Through Success Ready Pathways as mentioned earlier students will complete a series of three courses at minimum to suffice their success ready pathway. This course load will provide students opportunities to complete courses that align to the AR workforce but also connect with their post-secondary partners across the state. In addition the state has had in place for many

years Work Based Learning courses, standards and policy to allow students to actively engage in these experiences. Through continued partnerships and greater awareness of career and technical education we anticipate additional work based learning opportunities to exist for students across the state.

**(vii) improve outcomes and reduce performance gaps for CTE concentrators, including those who are members of special populations.
(Section 122(d)(4)(C) of Perkins V)**

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

Through established partnerships with DESE-SPED, DHS-TANF, and ARS. DCTE Will work to build upon previous data analysis from ESSA, WIOA, and external research, to identify gaps and enhanced learning opportunities, professional development and training for CTE teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals that can help close those gaps.

**(D)Describe how the eligible agency, if it opts to do so, will include the opportunity for secondary school students to participate in dual or concurrent enrollment programs, early college high school, or competency-based education.
(Section 122(d)(4)(D) of Perkins V)**

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

The Arkansas Division of Higher Education (ADHE) has a concurrent enrollment policy that allows students to earn college credit while also working towards a high school diploma. The policy includes guidelines for establishing and maintaining concurrent courses, such as:

Eligibility

Students must be recommended by their high school principal and meet the minimum criteria for advanced placement.

Credit

Students can earn college credit and up to one unit of high school credit for each concurrent course they successfully complete.

Grading

Concurrent courses must use the same grading standards as the college or university campus.

Course Exams

If the college or university uses departmental exams, the high school must use the same exams.

Multiple Institutions

A high school can have concurrent agreements with more than one college or university, but there should not be unnecessary duplication of courses.

(E) Describe how the eligible agency will involve parents, academic and career and technical education teachers, administrators, faculty, career guidance and academic counselors, local business (including small businesses), labor organizations, and representatives of Indian Tribes and Tribal organizations, as appropriate, in the planning, development, implementation, and evaluation of its career and technical education programs. (Section 122(d)(12) of Perkins V)

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

To accomplish this, CTE Coordinators across the state are responsible for organizing stakeholder meetings. These meetings bring together parties responsible for progressing CTE within the local community. Stakeholders should include, but not limited to:

- CTE Educators, Business and Industry Partners, Educational Leaders, Community Members, Career Coaches, Counselors, Local Workforce Board Members, Parents, Students, and Other appropriate members.

By facilitating these meetings, CTE Coordinators gather valuable input and insights from all involved, helping guide the planning, development, implementation, and evaluation of CTE programs. This collaborative approach ensures that the programs are closely aligned with workforce needs and educational standards, resulting in high-quality pathways for students to succeed in Arkansas's job market.

(F) Include a copy of the local application template that the eligible agency will require eligible recipients to submit pursuant to section 134(b) of Perkins V. See Text Box 4 for the statutory requirements for local applications under section 134(b) of Perkins V.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

Secondary

The ADHE Perkins Portal is used for subrecipients to submit their Local Application, which is divided into the following sections:

- Cover Page
 - Project Proposal
 - Proposal Information
 - Narrative
 - Impact
 - Perkins Indicator
 - Cost
 - Assurance
- WIB Collaboration
- Strengthen Academic and Technical Skills
- Special Populations
- Work Based Learning

Postsecondary

The ADHE Perkins Portal is used for subrecipients to submit their Local Application, which is divided into the following sections:

- Comprehensive Needs Assessment Results Summary (student performance analysis findings, other needs assessment findings, how needs were prioritized, and activities supported with Perkins funds)
- CTE Offerings
- WIB Collaboration
- Strengthen Academic and Technical Skills
- Special Populations
- Work Based Learning
- Early College Credit
- Coordination with Higher Education in Faculty Development
- Process for Addressing Disparities and Gaps
- Career Exploration and Development
- Professional Development
- High-Skill, High-Wage, In-Demand Prep
- Integration of Academics into CTE
- Increase Student Achievement
- Evaluation of Programs
- Pooling of Fund
- Administrative Funds
- Baseline and Targets.

(G) Include a copy of the comprehensive local needs assessment template and/or guidelines that the eligible agency will require of eligible recipients to meet the requirements of section 134(c) of Perkins V. See Text Box 5 for the requirements for the comprehensive local needs assessment under section 134(c) of Perkins V.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

Secondary Perkins V Portal Link:

<https://clna-dcte.ade.arkansas.gov/login?ReturnUrl=%2F>

(username and password required for access).

Postsecondary Portal Link: Perkins V Portal Link:

<https://arc.arkansas.gov/perkins/portal/home>

(username and password required for access).

See Appendix H: for Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment Template

(H) Provide the eligible agency's definition for "size, scope, and quality" that will be used to make funds available to eligible recipients pursuant to section 135(b) of Perkins V

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

Secondary Size:

Number of Programs & Credits

- Provide career awareness and exploration activities for students in grades 6-8.

- Provide nine (9) units of sequenced career and technical education courses representing three (3) programs of study where each program of study represents at least 3 units of sequenced courses.

Productivity of Programs

- With at least one career-ready pathway that is aligned with high-wage, high-demand jobs in Arkansas as determined by the annual list published by the Department of Education.

As outlined in:

Standards for Accreditation Rules (1-A.1.2.7, 1-A.1.3.9 and 2-K.2)

Career-Ready Pathways to Diploma Rules

Post-Secondary Size:

Number of Programs

- The institution or consortium offers a minimum of five Career and Technical Education programs of study.

Credits

- Programs of study require the number of undergraduate semester credit hours as defined in AHECB Policy 5.11.
 - Certificate of Proficiency 6 – 21
 - Technical Certificate 21 – 45
 - Associate of Applied Science 60 – 72

Productivity of Programs

- Programs must meet viability standards as defined by AHECB Policy 5.12.
 - An average of four graduates per year for career and technical education certificates (TC) and career and technical associate degree programs (AAS).

Secondary Scope:

Depth of Program

- Provide students an opportunity for:
 - Industry-Recognized Credentials
 - Work-Based Learning Experiences
 - Early Postsecondary Experiences

As outlined in:

Career-Ready Pathways to Diploma Rules

Breadth of Program

- Ensure success-ready graduates through career-ready pathways that lead to enlistment, enrollment, or employment.

As outlined in:

Career-Ready Pathways to Diploma Rules

Post-Secondary Scope:

Depth of Program

- Curriculum shows a progression of instruction to occupation specificity, which provides multiple entry and exit points.
- Curriculum offers academic, technical and employability skills, either through embedded or individual courses.

Breadth of Program

- Curriculum is aligned with industry needs and is informed by labor market information.
- Curriculum provides opportunities to obtain recognized credentials, industry certifications or degrees.

Secondary Quality:

Preparation of Students

- Be sufficient in size, which offers an approved sequence of three courses for the program of study.
- Participate in a Career and Technical Student Organization (CTSO) as recognized by the Arkansas Department of Education that provides students the opportunity to engage in leadership and career development activities.

Program Viability

- Have an active advisory council with the local Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment (CLNA)
- Have pathways meet the department's High Wage/High Demand (H2) designations.

Qualified Educator

- Have licensed educators with appropriate credentials for each course. Curriculum
- Approved programs are to follow policies and procedures as well as program guidelines established in DCTE Rules.
- Educators utilize state standards that are reviewed bi-annually.

Post-Secondary Quality:

Preparation of Students

- A quality Career and Technical Education program prepares students for high-wage, high-skill, in-demand jobs through a combination of classroom instruction, laboratory learning and work-based learning experiences.
- Students are provided the opportunity for early college credit (articulation/dual/concurrent) for both academic and technical courses.

Qualified Faculty

- A minimum of one full-time faculty member with appropriate credentials is required for each degree program.
- Faculty meet the minimum credential requirements as defined in AHECB Policy 5.11

Program Viability

- Review of each program's need/demand, curriculum, faculty resources, course delivery methods, student outcomes and program improvement activities in accordance with AHECB Policy 5.11

Curriculum

- Minimum resources for programs of study are established at the time the program is defined, which includes qualified faculty, library holdings, and industry-standard curriculum, technology and equipment needs.

(3) Meeting the Needs of Special Populations

(a) Describe the eligible agency's program strategies for special populations, including a description of how individuals who are members of special populations—

- (i) will be provided with equal access to activities assisted under this Act;**
 - (ii) will not be discriminated against on the basis of status as a member of a special population;**
 - (iii) will be provided with programs designed to enable individuals who are members of special populations to meet or exceed State determined levels of performance described in section 113, and prepare special populations for further learning and for high-skill, high wage, or in-demand industry sectors or occupations;**
 - (iv) will be provided with appropriate accommodations; and**
 - (v) will be provided instruction and work-based learning opportunities in integrated settings that support competitive, integrated employment.**
- (Section 122(d)(9) of Perkins V)**

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

Arkansas offers state-level programs designed to support individuals who are members of special populations meet state-determined levels of performance and succeed in college and career:

I-V.

Arkansas Career Coach Program: Arkansas Career Coach Program offers support to students from special populations. Applicants for the program must explain which special populations they will support and how. The Program includes Career Exploration Camps, which are one-day career exploration opportunities for middle and high school students. In many cases, these events are held on two- or four-year college/university campuses to expose students to a postsecondary environment. Students learn about the wide variety of careers that are available to them through hands-on activities and discussion with a variety of business and industry professionals who share information about working in their chosen career fields. In addition, all professionals who participate in the program agree to serve as mentors to students interested in their career field after the camp.

Jobs for Arkansas Graduates: JAG is a youth development program dedicated to helping “at risk students”, including many students from special populations, graduate from high school and make successful transitions to postsecondary education and meaningful employment. The Arkansas state affiliate is located in 108 school districts across the state.

Work-Based Learning Opportunities Leading to Future (WOLF): The WOLF program is designed to provide work-based learning experiences to students with disabilities in partnership with Arkansas Transition Services and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services. Their work experience is funded by Pre-Employment Training Services (PreETS funds).

Each student identified as having a disability under the state guidelines and admitted to a CTE program must have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) developed prior to placement in the program. A high-quality IEP will clarify the student’s unique educational needs and ensure that the student, his or her family, and all relevant stakeholders understand how the CTE program can help the student reach his or her college and career goals. Once a student with a disability is enrolled in a CTE program, state funding is available to local school districts and educational cooperatives for the purchase of adaptive equipment for students with physical disabilities enrolled in funded CTE programs. This funding helps ensure equitable access to and student success in CTE Programs of Study. DCTE has also begun working closely with Arkansas Transition Services and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services to provide professional development to CTE teachers on the appropriate and reasonable classroom accommodations and teaching strategies needed to ensure students with disabilities can succeed in their CTE courses. The Division of Career and Technical has partnered with Arkansas Transition Services and Arkansas Department of Rehabilitation Services to identify opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in work-based learning funding by Rehabilitation Services for at least one year. After doing so, they will be supported in transitioning to a JAG program to continue their work-based learning experience and improving their career development skills.

Through the collaborative National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT) Partnership, the Division of Career and Technical Education has collaborated with the office of Special Education – Transition Services and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services to offer trainings, workshops, and strategies to develop and implement the following programs:

- Communicating Interagency Relationships and Collaborative Linkages for Exceptional Services (CIRCLES) - Community, School-based, and IEP teams utilize information provided by students with disabilities to identify and provide services to support academic and career success during high school and beyond the high school diploma.
- CTE Summer Camp – Rising ninth graders attend a week-long camp at a secondary career center. During the camp, students explore up to five different CTE pathways and participate in career and college planning activities. Inclusion

- Film Camp – Students with developmental disabilities participate in a week-long camp and have an opportunity to learn more about the film industry, including acting, editing, producing, and craft services.
- Seamless Transition for Arkansas (STAR) Program – Comprehensive initiative designed to support underemployed students with disabilities and improve their opportunities for competitive employment through career experience, self-determination, family engagement, transition skills, and collaboration.

These programs are designed to assist students with disabilities enroll in and successfully persist through CTE pathways.

Additionally, the Arkansas Department of Education received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to implement a Perkins Innovation and Modernization (PIM) grant. The purpose of the PIM grant is to identify, support, and rigorously evaluate evidence-based and innovative strategies and activities to improve and modernize career and technical education (CTE) and ensure workforce skills taught in CTE programs funded under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2018 (Perkins V), align with labor market needs. The target population for this grant are students from rural communities, low-income families, and those with a disability.

(4) Preparing Teachers and Faculty

(a) Describe how the eligible agency will support the recruitment and preparation of teachers, including special education teachers, faculty, school principals, administrators, specialized instructional support personnel, and paraprofessionals to provide career and technical education instruction, leadership, and support, including professional development that provides the knowledge and skills needed to work with and improve instruction for special populations. (Section 122(d)(6) of Perkins V)

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

The Division of Career and Technical Education is also utilizing the partnership with Arkansas Transition Services (ATS) and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (federal Vocational Rehabilitation program) to educate the state's CTE and special education teachers and advocates on teaching strategies, classroom accommodations, and benefits of CTE for learners with disabilities. Activities include the following:

- Co-Teaching – CTE and Special Education teachers partner to provide classroom instruction and support for students with disabilities in a traditional classroom setting.
- Universal Design for Learning training for teachers and administrators – Professional development workshops for CTE teachers and administrators focused on teaching strategies to support students with disabilities in CTE courses.

(c) Fiscal Responsibility

**(1) Describe the criteria and process for how the eligible agency will approve eligible recipients for funds under this Act, including how—
(a) each eligible recipient will promote academic achievement;**

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

Eligible recipients must complete a comprehensive local needs assessment as well as a local application for funds. The local application must demonstrate how the proposed program(s) will satisfy the requirements of Perkins V and address the specific needs identified in the needs assessment. Once an application is submitted, it must pass through multiple levels of approval in Arkansas' online platform. Each level reviews the programs to ensure that the size, scope, and quality requirements were met and to ensure that the method of determining allowable costs were followed. Final approval of an application is not given until the eligible recipient meets all criteria. The approval process used at the postsecondary level is consistent with that of secondary. Annual expenditure requests are reviewed to determine if the request: (1) supports the Local Application; (2) is supported by Perkins data; and (3) is responsive to the needs of the local community.

At the secondary level, Arkansas will assess the academic achievement of CTE concentrators based on the proficiency standards in literacy, math and science established under the state's ESSA Plan – students' Atlas. To ensure eligible recipients will promote academic achievement, DCTE requires that local needs assessments must review local academic achievement data. Eligible recipients must also submit annual plans that enumerate the academically-based projects aligned to state standards that will be supported with Perkins V funds. DCTE also reviews student success in earning industry-approved credentials and early post-secondary credit through the Success Ready Pathways Merit and Distinction paths. Locally, each coop's CTE coordinator monitors academic achievement of CTE students on an ongoing basis, especially for those programs that are in improvement. Additional opportunities for CTE courses to count for academic credit and weighted credit exist in our state due to past legislation allowing for students to have accelerated learning opportunities in CTE as well.

(b) each eligible recipient will promote skill attainment, including skill attainment that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential; and

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

To ensure eligible recipients will promote skill attainment, recipients must annually submit a plan describing the state-approved industry-recognized credentials supported by each program of study. The list of recognized credentials will be available on the DCTE website. If a recipient chooses a local credential, that credential must have been identified in the local needs assessment. The credential must also be reviewed and approved by the Office of Skills Developments based on evidence that industry will recognize that credential as proof that students have attained the relevant skills. At the postsecondary level, all third-party, industry-based technical skills assessments that are currently being administered

have been identified, and colleges are required to report results into the higher education student information system. Colleges collaborate with local business councils to determine which credentials are in demand and to determine if Perkins funds or institutional funds are available to subsidize funding for students to acquire the credentials. When appropriate and practical, attainment of industry credentials is embedded in CTE degree programs. Colleges are required to report third-party, industry-recognized assessments to ADHE on an annual basis. This list of assessments is updated each year.

(c) each eligible recipient will ensure the local needs assessment under section 134 takes into consideration local economic and education needs, including, where appropriate, in- demand industry sectors and occupations. (Section 122(d)(5) of Perkins V)

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

The Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment (CLNA) is designed to be the lever for Perkins V implementation, program quality and equity in Arkansas. The CLNA will drive ongoing, meaningful, data-driven conversations with stakeholders and create an opportunity to build a shared understanding and vision for the CTE ecosystem in each community. It will align with the current ESSA CLNA process and will guide local application development and spending decisions by examining the depth and breadth of each local CTE ecosystem and identifying areas where targeted improvements can lead to increased opportunities for students. See CLNA document, Appendix H. Eligible postsecondary recipients will be given the opportunity to identify and fund activities that are responsive to the unique needs of the local community as identified in the Local Application.

(2) Describe how funds received by the eligible agency through the allotment made under section 111 of the Act will be distributed—

(a) among career and technical education at the secondary level, or career and technical education at the postsecondary and adult level, or both, including how such distribution will most effectively provide students with the skills needed to succeed in the workplace; and

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

Arkansas divides the local funds between secondary and postsecondary based on student enrollment in programs allotting 70 percent to secondary and 30 percent to postsecondary programs. Maintaining this division is the most efficient way to provide Arkansas' students with high-quality, student centered CTE programming that will give students the skills they need to succeed in the workplace. The enrollment of secondary students in CTE far exceeds the enrollment of postsecondary students, and this division creates a more stable funding stream for both groups. These formula funds will be allocated to eligible recipients according to the requirements of Perkins V.

- For the secondary allocation formula, Arkansas uses the student membership data collected by the national census for students ages 5-17 to distribute 30 percent of the funds. The remaining 70 percent of the secondary funds are distributed based on the number of individuals aged 5-17 who reside in the district and are from families below the poverty level.
- At the postsecondary level, the allocation formula is based on the number of Perkins concentrators who are Pell or Bureau of Indian Affairs grant recipients.

**(b) among any consortia that may be formed among secondary schools and eligible institutions, and how funds will be distributed among the members of the consortia, including the rationale for such distribution and how it will most effectively provide students with the skills needed to succeed in the workplace.
(Section 122(d)(8) of Perkins V)**

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

Consortia play a key role in improving the quality of Arkansas CTE programs. Consortia empower districts and schools across the state to improve the quality of CTE curriculum and ensure all kids are college and career ready by: incorporating more advanced technology, allowing for the purchase of necessary instructional equipment, and intensifying training for teachers. These consortia operate at the secondary and postsecondary levels as follows:

- Consortia in general: The consortium members (i.e., districts that assign funds to the consortium) make decisions regarding the operation of the consortium. One of the primary duties of the policy-making board should be the local plan, which sets forth the consortium's overall plan of action and methods that will be used to implement the plan. In addition, an annual consortium board meeting is held to determine that all Perkins guidelines are followed in reference to legislative audit requirements with agenda, sign-in sheets, and minutes forwarded to the DCTE Accountability Office. [Note: Generally, in Arkansas, the educational cooperative board is not the same as the consortium board. Only the districts that assign funds to the consortium gain representation on the consortium board.]
- Fiscal agents: The executive director or other staff members of the consortium serve as fiscal agents but are not the policy makers. Consortia fiscal agents must have a system in place to monitor the use of equipment purchased with Perkins funds during its useful life cycle.
- Use of funds: Funds allocated to a consortium shall be used only for purposes and programs that are mutually beneficial to all members of the consortium and can be used only for programs authorized under this title. Such funds may not be reallocated to individual members of the consortium for purposes or programs benefiting only one member of the consortium. All services must be provided on a consortium-wide basis. The specific activities funded by the Consortium on member campuses, however, may vary as needs on individual campuses indicate, provided these activities have merit toward improvement of the member institutions' performance on the core indicators.

- (3) For the upcoming program year, provide the specific dollar allocations for each eligible recipient made available by the eligible agency for career and technical education programs and programs of study under section 131(a)(e) of the Act and describe how these allocations are distributed to local educational agencies, areas career and technical education schools and educational service agencies within the State. (Section 131(g) of Perkins V)**

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

For the 2025-2026 school year the specific dollar allocations can be found here in Appendix I.

- (4) For the upcoming program year, provide the specific dollar allocations for each eligible recipient made available by the eligible agency for career and technical education programs and programs of study under section 132(a) of the Act and describe how these allocations are distributed to eligible institutions and consortia of eligible institutions within the State.**

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

For the 2025-2026 school year the specific dollar allocations can be found here in Appendix J.

- (5) Describe how the eligible agency will adjust the data used to make the allocations to reflect any changes in school district boundaries that may have occurred since the population and/or enrollment data was collected, and include local education agencies without geographical boundaries, such as charter schools and secondary schools funded by the Bureau of Indian Education. (Section 131(a)(3) of Perkins V)**

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

ADE will coordinate with the Office of Public School Accountability on data and enrollment in cases where schools have no geographic boundaries, such as public charter schools and virtual schools. Similarly, ADE will coordinate with these entities if boundary changes occur in the future. There are no schools in Arkansas funded by the Bureau of Indian Education.

- (6) If the eligible agency will submit an application for a waiver to the secondary allocation formula described in section 131(a)—**

- (a) include a proposal for such an alternative formula; and**
- (b) describe how the waiver demonstrates that a proposed alternative formula more effectively targets funds on the basis of poverty (as defined by the Office of Management and Budget and revised annually in accordance with section 673(2) of the Community Services Block Grant Act (42 U.S.C. 9902(2)) to local educational agencies with the State. (Section 131(b) of Perkins V)**

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

Arkansas will not submit a waiver.

(7) If the eligible agency will submit an application for a waiver to the postsecondary allocation formula described in section 132(a)—

(a) include a proposal for such an alternative formula; and

(b) describe how the formula does not result in a distribution of funds to the eligible institutions or consortia with the State that have the highest numbers of economically disadvantaged individuals and that an alternative formula will result in such a distribution. (Section 132(b) of Perkins V) Also indicate if this is a waiver request for which you received approval under the prior Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (Perkins IV).

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

Arkansas will not submit a waiver.

If the eligible agency will award reserve funds to eligible recipients under section 112(c) of Perkins V, describe the process and criteria for awarding those funds.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

Currently ADE awards reserve funds through two application opportunities each fiscal year. These two grants we identify as Innovation and Non-Traditional. The Innovation grant focuses on applications that are looking at innovative approaches to non-traditional pathways. Non-Traditional grant focuses on applications that are focused on a specific non-traditional event to encourage greater participation in a program. Both applications and rubrics can be found in Appendix K.

(8) Provide the State's fiscal effort per student, or aggregate expenditures for the State, that will establish the baseline for the Secretary's annual determination on whether the State has maintained its fiscal effort, and indicate whether the baseline is a continuing level or new level. If the baseline is new, please provide the fiscal effort per student, or aggregate expenditures for the State, for the preceding fiscal year. (Section 211(b)(1)(D) of Perkins V)

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

Arkansas' baseline for fiscal effort is aggregate expenditures of \$27,790,648. The baseline is a new level. For the preceding fiscal year (2024-25) fiscal effort was aggregate expenditures of \$29,253,313.

(D) Accountability for Results

(1) Identify and include at least one (1) of the following indicators of career and technical education program quality—

- (a) the percentage of CTE concentrators (see Text Box 6 for the statutory definition of a CTE concentrator under section 3(12) of Perkins V) graduating from high school having attained a recognized postsecondary credential;
- (b) the percentage of CTE concentrators graduating high school having attained postsecondary credits in relevant career and technical education programs and programs of study earned through a dual or concurrent enrollment program or another credit transfer agreement; and/or
- (c) the percentage of CTE concentrators graduating from high school having participated in work- based learning. (Section 113(b)(2)(A)(iv)(I) of Perkins V)

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

Arkansas will use option (a) for 5S1: the percentage of CTE concentrators graduating from high school having attained a recognized postsecondary credential; in addition the state will use our merit and distinction opportunities to report under 5S4.

Provide the eligible agency's measurement definition with a numerator and denominator for each of the quality indicator(s) the eligible agency selects to use.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

1S1: Four-Year Graduation Rate
Numerator Definition
The number of CTE concentrators who were members of the four-year adjusted cohort and earned a regular high school diploma within four years pursuant to the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (defined in section 8101 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) methodology provided in USED's Every Student Succeeds Act High School Graduation Rate Non-Regulatory Guidance.
Denominator Definition
Number of CTE concentrators who were included in the four-year adjusted cohort as expected to graduate pursuant to the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (defined in section 8101 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) methodology provided in USED's Every Student Succeeds Act High School Graduation Rate Non-Regulatory Guidance.

2S1: Academic Proficiency in Reading Language Arts
Numerator Definition

CTE concentrator performance in the challenging State academic standards adopted by the State under section 1111(b)(1) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as measured by the academic assessments in reading/language arts as described in section 1111(b)(2) of such Act.

Denominator Definition

Number of CTE concentrators who took the ESEA assessments in reading / language arts whose scores were included in the program year in the State's computation of the annual measure for reading / language arts. The denominator for this measure is a non-duplicate count of CTE concentrators where each student is counted only once in the denominator even if the student has completed more than one concentration.

2S2: Academic Proficiency in Mathematics

Numerator Definition

CTE concentrator performance in the challenging State academic standards adopted by the State under section 1111(b)(1) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as measured by the academic assessments in mathematics as described in section 1111(b)(2) of such Act.

Denominator Definition

Number of CTE concentrators who took the ESEA assessments in mathematics whose scores were included in the program year in the State's computation of the annual measure for mathematics.

2S3: Academic Proficiency in Science

Numerator Definition

CTE concentrator performance in the challenging State academic standards adopted by the State under section 1111(b)(1) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as measured by the academic assessments in science as described in section 1111(b)(2) of such Act.

Denominator Definition

Number of CTE concentrators who took the ESEA assessments in science whose scores were included in the program year in the State's computation of the annual measure for science.

3S1: Post-Program Placement

Numerator Definition

The number of CTE concentrators who, in the second quarter after exiting from secondary education, are in postsecondary education or advanced training, military service or a service program that receives assistance under title I of the National and Community Service Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12511 et seq.), are volunteers as described in section 5(a) of the Peace Corps Act (22 U.S.C. 2504(a)), or are employed.

Denominator Definition

The number of CTE concentrators who left secondary education during the reporting year.

4S1: Non-Traditional Program Concentration

Numerator Definition

The number of CTE concentrators from underrepresented gender groups who became a CTE concentrator in a program of study leading to a non-traditional career field.

Denominator Definition

Number of CTE concentrators who became a CTE concentrator in a CTE program of study leading to a non-traditional field.

Numerator Definition

The number of CTE concentrators graduating from high school having attained a recognized h2 postsecondary credential.

Denominator Definition

The number of CTE concentrators who graduated from high school.

(2) Provide on the form in Section V.B, for each year covered by the State plan beginning in FY 2020, State determined performance levels or each of the secondary and postsecondary core indicators in the State. (Section 113(b)(3)(A)(i)(I) of Perkins V).

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

See Table 1 and Table 2 in section V.

(3) Describe the procedure the eligible agency adopted for determining State determined levels of performance described in section 113 of Perkins V, which at a minimum shall include—

(a) a description of the process for public comment under section 113(b)(3)(B) of Perkins V as part of the development of the State determined levels of performance (see Text Box 7 for the statutory requirements for consultation on State determined performance levels under section 113(b)(3)(B) of Perkins V);

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

The eligible agency demonstrated its commitment to transparency and feedback through a comprehensive public comment process. In January 2025, proposed Perkins V 2025 core indicator baselines and "meaningful progress" targets were made publicly available. These proposed baselines and targets were posted on the DCTE website for a 30-day public comment period, accompanied by announcements in a Commissioner's Memo and on social media platforms. Feedback was actively solicited from business and industry representatives, educators, students, parents, and district administrators through these channels prior to the submission of the State Plan. These efforts ensured stakeholders had ample opportunity to provide input on the proposed performance levels and accountability measures. For further details, see the SDPLs document in Section V.

(b) an explanation for the State determined levels of performance that meet each of the statutory requirements in Text Box 8; and

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

The State-determined levels of performance are intentionally designed to focus on identifying and supporting the lowest-performing schools, with the understanding that lifting these schools will ultimately elevate outcomes for all students statewide.

This approach reflects a commitment to equity and realistic progress rather than setting overly ambitious targets that fail to address systemic challenges.

Theory of Action – Focus on the Bottom Performers:

The performance levels prioritize schools in the lowest percentiles, recognizing that targeted support and gradual, meaningful improvement in these schools will lead to broader gains across the state. By addressing gaps at the bottom, this approach ensures that all schools are given the chance to achieve the state's goals and more importantly, that progress is sustainable.

Data-Driven Baselines:

- For core indicator 1S1 (4-year graduation rate), the baseline was set at the 1st percentile of recent historical data. This ensures that the schools facing the most significant challenges are the focus of improvement efforts. Progress is defined as graduating at least one more student per year, a goal that balances accountability with achievable outcomes.
- Academic indicators (2S1, 2S2, 2S3) use the 5th percentile of 2024 data as a baseline, acknowledging the transition to the more rigorous ATLAS assessment, which has resulted in a significant recalibration of scores. Progress targets are structured so that by 2029, the lowest-performing schools will approximate the 10th percentile of the 2025 baseline.
- Post-secondary placement and non-traditional gender participation (3S1, post-secondary placement; 4S1 non-traditional) use the average of the two most recent years' data to set the baseline.
- For program quality indicators (achievement of industry recognized credentials; ICRs), the number of qualifying ICRs has been drastically reduced (i.e., less than half of previously recognized ICRs are still recognized). This reduction reflects a deliberate effort by the State to focus on high-demand, high-wage (H2) credentials, ensuring that the remaining options align closely with workforce needs and provide maximum value to students and employers.
 - Arkansas will have the federally mandated 5S1 (concentrator graduates with ICR), but importantly will also opt-in to using 5S4, which will be the percentage of CTE graduates achieving merit or distinction diplomas, as per the LEARNS act. The baselines have been aligned at approximately 5%, reflecting the shared emphasis on rigorous, high-value outcomes for students. While 5S1 is federally mandated and specifically focuses on concentrators earning H2 credentials, 5S4 expands on this concept by incorporating completers who achieve merit or distinction diplomas, whether it be via CTE merit/distinction pathways (e.g., completers who earn their respective H2 ICR), or via alternative merit/distinction pathways such as AP Scholars. The alignment of the initial baselines acknowledges the significant overlap between these two measures, as well as the practical realities of the transition to the LEARNS Act framework and the reduction in the number of qualifying H2 credentials.
- This approach ensures that schools have a clear and unified starting point as they adapt to the new requirements set out by the LEARNS act. Progress targets for both indicators are modest (0.5% annually), providing schools with the necessary time and support to establish and scale merit/distinction pathways. However, the state recognizes the potential for schools to accelerate progress in 5S4 as they implement these pathways. Accordingly, the state may revisit and revise these targets in future years to reflect more

ambitious expectations if early data suggest that schools are quickly getting up to speed on the merit/distinction framework.

Sustainability Over Ambition:

The intent is not to set overly ambitious goals that could discourage struggling schools, but rather to establish achievable benchmarks that encourage growth over time. This approach communicates that progress, no matter how incremental, is meaningful and valued, particularly for schools with historically low performance.

Equity-Driven Progress Metrics:

Metrics such as the annual increase of 0.25% for graduation rates and 0.5–2% for academic indicators are calibrated to ensure that schools in the bottom percentiles can demonstrate progress that is both realistic and significant. These benchmarks are designed to incentivize improvements while recognizing the unique challenges faced by lower-performing schools.

Anticipated Impact:

By focusing on schools in the lowest percentiles, this plan avoids the pitfalls of "one-size-fits-all" accountability systems that disproportionately benefit higher-performing schools. Instead, it seeks to reduce disparities and drive improvement where it is needed most, ultimately leading to system-wide gains.

(c) a description of how the State determined levels of performance set by the eligible agency align with the levels, goals and objectives other Federal and State laws, (Section 122(d)(10) of Perkins V).

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

The updated levels of performance align with federal and state initiatives, including:

ESSA and ATLAS Assessments: Academic indicators align with the rigor and goals of the ESSA and help in supporting a seamless transition to the new state assessment framework.

LEARNS Act Goals: Prioritizing 5S4 reflects the state's emphasis on preparing students for postsecondary success through merit/distinction pathways, consistent with the goals of the LEARNS Act.

Equity and Gap Reduction: Using percentile-based baselines ensures a targeted focus on supporting schools with the greatest needs, addressing disparities across special populations and underserved communities.

As part of the procedures for determining State determined levels of performance, describe the process that will be used to establish a baseline for those levels.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

The State-determined levels of performance are intentionally designed to focus on identifying and supporting the lowest-performing schools, with the understanding

that lifting these schools will ultimately elevate outcomes for all students statewide. This approach reflects a commitment to equity and realistic progress rather than setting overly ambitious targets that fail to address systemic challenges.

Theory of Action – Focus on the Bottom Performers:

The performance levels prioritize schools in the lowest percentiles, recognizing that targeted support and gradual, meaningful improvement in these schools will lead to broader gains across the state. By addressing gaps at the bottom, this approach ensures that all schools are given the chance to achieve the state's goals and more importantly, that progress is sustainable.

Data-Driven Baselines:

- For core indicator 1S1 (4-year graduation rate), the baseline was set at the 1st percentile of recent historical data. This ensures that the schools facing the most significant challenges are the focus of improvement efforts. Progress is defined as graduating at least one more student per year, a goal that balances accountability with achievable outcomes.
- Academic indicators (2S1, 2S2, 2S3) use the 5th percentile of 2024 data as a baseline, acknowledging the transition to the more rigorous ATLAS assessment, which has resulted in a significant recalibration of scores. Progress targets are structured so that by 2029, the lowest-performing schools will approximate the 10th percentile of the 2025 baseline.
- Post-secondary placement and non-traditional gender participation (3S1, post-secondary placement; 4S1 non-traditional) use the average of the two most recent years' data to set the baseline.
- For program quality indicators (achievement of industry recognized credentials; ICRs), the number of qualifying ICRs has been drastically reduced (i.e., less than half of previously recognized ICRs are still recognized). This reduction reflects a deliberate effort by the State to focus on high-demand, high-wage (H2) credentials, ensuring that the remaining options align closely with workforce needs and provide maximum value to students and employers.
- Arkansas will have the federally mandated 5S1 (concentrator graduates with ICR), but importantly will also opt-in to using 5S4, which will be the percentage of CTE graduates achieving merit or distinction diplomas, as per the LEARNS act. The baselines have been aligned at approximately 5%, reflecting the shared emphasis on rigorous, high-value outcomes for students. While 5S1 is federally mandated and specifically focuses on concentrators earning H2 credentials, 5S4 expands on this concept by incorporating completers who achieve merit or distinction diplomas, whether it be via CTE merit/distinction pathways (e.g., completers who earn their respective H2 ICR), or via alternative merit/distinction pathways such as AP Scholars. The alignment of the initial baselines acknowledges the significant overlap between these two measures, as well as the practical realities of the transition to the LEARNS Act framework and the reduction in the number of qualifying H2 credentials.
- This approach ensures that schools have a clear and unified starting point as they adapt to the new requirements set out by the LEARNS act. Progress targets for both indicators are modest (0.5% annually), providing schools with the necessary time and support to

establish and scale merit/distinction pathways. However, the state recognizes the potential for schools to accelerate progress in 5S4 as they implement these pathways. Accordingly, the state may revisit and revise these targets in future years to reflect more ambitious expectations if early data suggest that schools are quickly getting up to speed on the merit/distinction framework.

Sustainability Over Ambition:

The intent is not to set overly ambitious goals that could discourage struggling schools, but rather to establish achievable benchmarks that encourage growth over time. This approach communicates that progress, no matter how incremental, is meaningful and valued, particularly for schools with historically low performance.

Equity-Driven Progress Metrics:

Metrics such as the annual increase of 0.25% for graduation rates and 0.5–2% for academic indicators are calibrated to ensure that schools in the bottom percentiles can demonstrate progress that is both realistic and significant. These benchmarks are designed to incentivize improvements while recognizing the unique challenges faced by lower-performing schools.

Anticipated Impact:

By focusing on schools in the lowest percentiles, this plan avoids the pitfalls of "one-size-fits-all" accountability systems that disproportionately benefit higher-performing schools. Instead, it seeks to reduce disparities and drive improvement where it is needed most, ultimately leading to system-wide gains.

c) The updated levels of performance align with federal and state initiatives, including:

- ESSA and ATLAS Assessments: Academic indicators align with the rigor and goals of the ESSA and help in supporting a seamless transition to the new state assessment framework.
- LEARNS Act Goals: Prioritizing 5S4 reflects the state's emphasis on preparing students for postsecondary success through merit/distinction pathways, consistent with the goals of the LEARNS Act.
- Equity and Gap Reduction: Using percentile-based baselines ensures a targeted focus on supporting schools with the greatest needs, addressing disparities across special populations and underserved communities.

(4) Provide a written response to the comments regarding State determined performance levels received during the public comment period pursuant to section 113(b)(3)(B) of Perkins V. (Section 113(b)(3)(B)(iii) of Perkins V). As part of the written response, include a description of any the changes made to the State determined performance levels as a result of stakeholder feedback.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

DCTE received no public comments regarding the State determined performance levels.

(5) Describe how the eligible agency will address disparities or gaps in performance as described in section 113(b)(3)(C)(ii)(II) of Perkins V in each of the plan years, and if no meaningful progress has been achieved prior to the third program year, a description of the additional actions the eligible agency will take to eliminate these disparities or gaps. (Section 122(d)(11) of Perkins V)

As part of the written response, and pursuant to the Report of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP), 17F 18 the eligible agency could indicate that it will analyze data on the core indicators of performance to identify gaps in performance, explain how they will use evidence-based research to develop a plan to provide support and technical assistance to eligible recipients to address and close such gaps, and how they will implement this plan. The eligible agency is not required to submit a new State plan prior to the third program year in order to address this requirement.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Response:

Disparities or gaps in performance will be addressed within the local application. When performance falls below the accepted target, increased support from the public school accountability office as well as the DCTE staff, will be defined and implemented. Local recipients who continue to miss the target in subsequent years may be subject to increased support levels for the remaining years of the state plan.

The academic performance measures for Perkins V are aligned with the achievement and growth measures set out in the Arkansas ESSA plan, our recipients have a unified focus on increasing rigor and relevance in student learning as well as ensuring our students have a focus for their Success Ready Pathway.

EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAMS UNDER THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (PROGRAMS AUTHORIZED UNDER SECTION 6(D)(4) OF THE FOOD AND NUTRITION ACT OF 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2015(D)(4)))

A. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS [27]

1. THE NATURE OF THE E&T COMPONENTS THE STATE AGENCY PLANS TO OFFER AND THE REASONS FOR SUCH COMPONENTS, INCLUDING COST INFORMATION. THE METHODOLOGY FOR STATE AGENCY REIMBURSEMENT FOR EDUCATION COMPONENTS MUST BE SPECIFICALLY ADDRESSED. IF A STATE AGENCY PLANS TO OFFER SUPERVISED JOB SEARCH IN ACCORDANCE WITH PARAGRAPH (E)(2)(I) OF THIS SECTION, THE STATE AGENCY MUST ALSO INCLUDE IN THE E&T PLAN A SUMMARY OF THE STATE GUIDELINES IMPLEMENTING SUPERVISED JOB SEARCH. THIS SUMMARY OF THE STATE GUIDELINES, AT A MINIMUM, MUST DESCRIBE: THE CRITERIA USED BY THE STATE AGENCY TO APPROVE LOCATIONS FOR SUPERVISED JOB SEARCH, AN EXPLANATION OF WHY THOSE CRITERIA WERE CHOSEN, AND HOW THE SUPERVISED JOB SEARCH COMPONENT MEETS THE REQUIREMENTS TO DIRECTLY SUPERVISE THE ACTIVITIES OF PARTICIPANTS AND TRACK THE TIMING AND ACTIVITIES OF PARTICIPANTS;

SNAP E&T Response:

1. Nature of the E&T Components, Reasons for Such Components, Cost Information, Education Reimbursement Methodology, and Supervised Job Search Guidelines

Overview

Beginning April 1, 2026, Arkansas will operate a Mandatory-Only SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) Program. The State agency will offer structured E&T components designed to improve employability, increase earnings potential, and promote long-term self-sufficiency for SNAP participants.

Components are selected based on:

- Participant skill levels
- Regional labor market demand
- Alignment with workforce development strategies
- Provider capacity
- Fiscal integrity and oversight capability

All E&T components are administered in accordance with federal SNAP E&T requirements and applicable cost principles. Component-level cost information and projected administrative costs are provided below, and all components are reimbursed using a cost-reimbursement methodology consistent with the reimbursement requirements described for education components.

The State agency conducts Management Evaluations on a monthly basis. In addition, the State conducts an annual comprehensive review that aggregates results from monthly Management Evaluations, verifies resolution of corrective actions, and documents statewide trends and program integrity controls for the FFY.

A. E&T Components to Be Offered

1. Education and Vocational Training

Nature of Component

Arkansas will offer education and vocational training components including:

- Adult Basic Education
- High School Equivalency (GED) preparation
- Postsecondary education
- Short-term occupational training
- Industry-recognized credential programs
- Career and technical education aligned with in-demand occupations

Programs must be directly linked to employment outcomes and identified career pathways.

Reasons for Offering

A substantial portion of SNAP participants lack postsecondary credentials or marketable occupational skills. Education and training components are designed to:

- Address skill gaps

- Improve long-term employment stability
- Increase earnings potential
- Align participants with regional labor market demand
- Support credential attainment in high-growth industries

These components are central to improving employment outcomes for mandatory participants.

Cost Information – Education Components

Allowable costs include:

- Tuition and required fees
- Books and required supplies
- Credential testing fees
- Instructional costs
- Case management directly attributable to E&T
- Allocable administrative costs

Costs must be:

- Necessary and reasonable
- Allocable to SNAP E&T
- Properly documented
- Supported by auditable financial records

2. Work Experience

Nature of Component

Work Experience provides structured, supervised, unpaid work-based learning opportunities that build employability skills and workplace competencies.

Reasons for Offering

Many SNAP participants have limited work history. Work Experience:

- Builds soft skills
- Enhances job readiness
- Establishes work references
- Reinforces workplace expectations

Cost Information – Work Experience

Allowable costs include:

- Participant supervision
- Case management
- Administrative support
- Required supportive services

All costs must meet federal allowability standards.

3. Supervised Job Search (Offered in Accordance with 7 CFR 273.7(e)(2)(i))

Nature of Component

Supervised Job Search consists of structured job search activities conducted under direct supervision at approved provider locations.

Reasons for Offering

This component serves participants who are job-ready but require structured oversight to:

- Improve job search techniques
- Increase application quality
- Strengthen interview readiness
- Ensure compliance with participation requirements

Supervised job search provides accountability and measurable engagement.

B. State Guidelines for Supervised Job Search

1. Criteria Used to Approve Locations

The State agency approves supervised job search locations based on the following criteria:

- Capacity to provide direct, on-site supervision
- Qualified staff available during all scheduled hours
- Secure and professional environment
- Ability to maintain attendance records
- Ability to document job search activities
- Access to employment resources (internet, job listings, resume tools)
- Capacity to track participant hours and activity completion

Explanation of Criteria

These criteria were selected to ensure:

- Structured and verifiable engagement
- Prevention of self-directed, unsupervised activity being counted as supervised
- Compliance with federal requirements for direct supervision
- Accurate documentation for monitoring and audit purposes

2. Direct Supervision of Participant Activities

Supervised job search meets direct supervision requirements through:

- On-site staff oversight during all job search hours
- Structured daily or weekly schedules
- Staff review of applications and resumes
- Verification of employer contacts
- Real-time staff presence during activity completion

Participants may not complete supervised job search remotely unless real-time supervision and documentation standards are maintained. These standards ensure the SNAP E&T providers directly supervise participant activities and can verify both the timing and the nature of the activities performed.

3. Tracking of Timing and Activities

Providers must:

- Maintain daily attendance logs
- Record start and end times
- Document job applications submitted
- Record employer contacts
- Maintain participant activity logs
- Retain documentation for State monitoring review

Documentation is reviewed during monthly Management Evaluations to ensure compliance.

C. Methodology for State Agency Reimbursement for Education Components

The State agency utilizes a cost reimbursement methodology for education components.

1. Invoice Submission Requirements

Providers must submit:

- Itemized invoices by budget category
- Supporting documentation
- Participant enrollment verification
- Attendance documentation
- Cost allocation methodology
- Documentation of non-federal share (if applicable)

2. Cost Allocation Methodology

When providers serve both SNAP E&T and non-SNAP participants, costs must be allocated using a documented methodology that reflects the proportional benefit to SNAP E&T participants.

Acceptable allocation methods include:

- Actual enrollment percentages
- Time distribution records
- Direct cost tracking
- Attendance-based allocation

Providers may not bill SNAP E&T for costs attributable to non-SNAP participants.

3. Tuition and Scholarship Adjustments

If tuition is offset by:

- Scholarships
- Third-party funding
- Grants
- Other assistance

The provider must deduct those amounts prior to billing SNAP E&T.

Only the net allowable cost attributable to SNAP E&T participants is reimbursable.

4. Documentation and Oversight

The State agency conducts monthly Management Evaluations including:

- Invoice sampling

- Cost allocation review
- Participant reimbursement sampling
- Attendance verification
- Documentation validation

Monitoring is conducted by analysts independent of daily provider oversight to ensure objectivity and strengthen internal controls.

Arkansas's SNAP E&T components are designed to:

- Address participant skill gaps
- Align services with labor market demand
- Promote long-term employment outcomes
- Ensure fiscal integrity
- Maintain compliance with federal requirements

Education reimbursement is structured to ensure all expenditures are allowable, allocable, and properly documented. Supervised job search locations are approved based on structured criteria that ensure direct supervision and verifiable activity tracking.

This framework supports both Mandatory-Only operations and potential future program model adjustments.

Component details are provided below and align to the SNAP E&T State Plan submission requirements

Non-Education, Non-Work Component Details
Details: Supervised Job Search (SJS)

Supervised Job Search (SJS) Component

The State of Arkansas implements Supervised Job Search (SJS) as a structured component of the SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) program designed to assist participants in actively seeking and securing unsubsidized employment. This component is administered and is structured to ensure direct supervision and verifiable tracking of participant activities.

Nature of the Component

Supervised Job Search consists of organized and supervised job search activities conducted at State-approved provider locations. Activities are designed to strengthen job readiness and expedite entry into unsubsidized employment.

Participants may engage in:

- Contacting employers
- Completing job applications
- Submitting resumes
- Participating in interviews
- Networking and employer outreach
- Receiving job referrals

The component emphasizes structured oversight, coaching, and measurable engagement.

Target Population

Supervised Job Search serves SNAP recipients who are required to participate in SNAP E&T, consistent with Arkansas's participation model.

This component may serve:

- Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs)
- Homeless individuals
- Returning citizens (ex-offenders)
- Single parents
- Students (as applicable)
- Rural residents
- Underemployed individuals
- Veterans

Geographic Availability

Supervised Job Search is offered statewide across all 75 counties through approved SNAP E&T providers.

Criteria for Participation

Participants assigned to Supervised Job Search must demonstrate baseline readiness to engage effectively in structured job search activities.

Essential Skills and Knowledge

Participants should possess:

- **Basic literacy and numeracy skills** sufficient to read job descriptions, complete employment forms, and communicate with employers.
- **Basic computer literacy**, including the ability to navigate job search platforms, complete online applications, and use email.
- **Work readiness skills**, including punctuality, professional communication, and reliability.
- **Motivation and engagement** necessary to actively pursue employment opportunities.

Participants with skill gaps may be referred to education or job readiness services before or concurrently with SJS.

Providers may require orientation or assessment prior to enrollment to ensure readiness. Individual employment history, barriers to employment, and background considerations are assessed during intake.

Good cause determinations (e.g., illness, transportation barriers) are made exclusively by eligibility staff. E&T providers do not have authority to grant exemptions.

State Guidelines Implementing Supervised Job Search

1. Criteria Used to Approve Locations

Each provider offering Supervised Job Search is approved by the State agency based on the following criteria:

- Ability to provide direct supervision by trained staff
- Designated on-site days and times for structured job search sessions
- Capacity to document attendance and job search activities
- Secure and professional environment conducive to employment preparation
- Access to computers, internet, and employment resources
- Ability to record and track participation data in SNAP Works

These criteria ensure compliance with federal requirements for direct supervision and prevent unsupervised or self-directed job search from being counted as supervised activity.

2. Direct Supervision of Participant Activities

Supervised Job Search activities occur in person or virtually with real-time staff oversight.

Direct supervision includes:

- Staff presence during scheduled sessions
- Structured guidance in completing applications
- Resume development assistance
- Interview preparation and coaching
- Provision of job leads and referrals
- Monitoring participant engagement during assigned hours

Providers work with participants to establish employment goals and track progress toward those goals. Individual employment history and background factors are considered when tailoring coaching and referrals.

3. Tracking of Timing and Activities

Providers are responsible for maintaining documentation sufficient to verify participation, including:

- Attendance logs
- Start and end times of participation
- Employer contacts made
- Applications submitted
- Interviews attended
- Progress notes

Participation data is entered into SNAP Works and is subject to State agency review. The State agency conducts routine oversight, including review of attendance records and activity logs during Management Evaluations.

Level of Effort and Duration

Although federal regulations do not establish a specific time limit, Arkansas generally expects participants to engage in approximately 10–15 hours per week of supervised job search activities.

Typical participation duration:

- Minimum engagement: 30 days

- Standard maximum: 90 days

Duration may be adjusted based on participant progress and employment outcomes.

Supervised Job Search accounts for less than 50 percent of total E&T activities for individuals subject to work requirements, as it is a non-qualifying activity for ABAWD Requirement to Work purposes.

Support and Coaching

Providers offer structured employment support services including:

- Resume development
- Interview coaching
- Application assistance
- Job search skill development
- Identification of appropriate job leads
- Troubleshooting employment barriers

These services enhance participant employability and promote transition to unsubsidized employment.

Integration with Other E&T Components

Supervised Job Search is coordinated with other SNAP E&T services, including:

- Job readiness training
- Job placement services
- Work experience
- Education and training programs

This integration ensures participants receive comprehensive employment support.

Reimbursement Methodology

SNAP E&T providers may offer Supervised Job Search; however, reimbursement is limited to allowable administrative costs associated with supervision of the component.

Reimbursement is:

- Limited to salary and fringe benefits of staff performing supervised job search functions
- Not provided on a per-participant basis
- Subject to documentation and monitoring requirements
- Reviewed through routine invoice and Management Evaluation processes

All costs must be necessary, reasonable, and allocable to SNAP E&T.

Projected Participation and Costs

Projected Annual Participation (unduplicated individuals): 275

Estimated Annual Component Administrative Cost: \$948,750.00

Projections are based on anticipated enrollment levels and provider cost structures.

Oversight and Monitoring

All Supervised Job Search providers are subject to ongoing State agency monitoring. Monitoring includes:

- Review of participation documentation
- Verification of supervision practices
- Review of SNAP Works entries
- Invoice and cost documentation review

These controls ensure Supervised Job Search activities are consistent, measurable, and compliant with federal requirements under 7 CFR § 273.7(e)(2)(i).

Details: **Job Search Training (JST)**

Job Search Training Component

Nature of the Component

The Job Search Training component enhances the job readiness of SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) participants by equipping them with essential job-seeking skills, increasing motivation, and improving confidence in navigating the labor market.

This structured component provides individualized and group-based instruction designed to strengthen participants' employability and expedite entry into unsubsidized employment.

Summary of Activities and Services

Participants may receive:

- Resume and cover letter development
- Instruction on effective job search techniques
- Interview preparation, including mock interviews
- Career exploration and labor market alignment
- Skills testing and employment counseling
- Motivational coaching and self-efficacy development
- Assistance identifying job leads and employer referrals
- Training in use of computers, job boards, and email communication
- Goal setting and individualized employment action planning

Services may be delivered through workshops, one-on-one sessions, group instruction, or remote/virtual formats to ensure accessibility.

Target Population

This component serves SNAP recipients who are required to participate in SNAP E&T.

Populations that may be served include:

- Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs)
- Homeless individuals
- Returning citizens (ex-offenders)
- Single parents
- Students (as applicable)
- Rural residents

- Underemployed individuals
- Veterans

Geographic Availability

Job Search Training is available statewide across all 75 counties through approved SNAP E&T providers.

Expected Level of Effort

Participants assigned to Job Search Training are generally expected to engage in approximately 10–15 hours per week of structured activities.

Participation expectations may vary based on:

- Individual employment plans
- Participant needs
- Provider schedules

Non-ABAWD participants are not subject to federal hour limitations but are generally expected to participate in approximately 10 hours per week when assigned.

Participation may occur in person or remotely, depending on provider design and participant access.

Criteria for Participation

Participants must demonstrate baseline readiness to benefit from structured job search training.

Essential Skills and Knowledge

Participants should possess:

- **Basic literacy and numeracy skills** sufficient to complete job applications and understand job descriptions
- **Basic computer literacy**, including the ability to navigate online job search platforms and use email
- **Basic communication skills** necessary for interview preparation and employer interaction
- **Motivation and engagement** to actively participate and follow through on employment plans

Participants lacking foundational skills may be referred to education or remedial services before or concurrently with Job Search Training.

Educational Requirements

Participants with a High School Diploma, GED, or higher credential are eligible to participate. Individuals without these credentials may participate if assessed as job-ready and capable of engaging in structured job search activities.

Labor Market Attachment

Recent work experience is preferred but not required. Individuals with limited recent employment may receive foundational job search instruction to build readiness.

Provider-Specific Criteria

Providers may establish additional readiness criteria consistent with their service delivery model, such as:

- Attendance at orientation or intake assessment
- Reliable transportation for in-person sessions
- Alignment with specific industry sectors

Intake assessments are conducted to ensure services are aligned with participant capabilities and employment goals.

Tailored Services

Based on individual assessment, providers adjust training intensity and support services to ensure equitable access and maximize employment outcomes.

Projected Participation and Costs

Projected Annual Participation (unduplicated individuals): 277

Estimated Annual Component Administrative Cost: \$953,434.00

Participation and cost projections are based on anticipated enrollment levels and provider cost structures.

Purpose and Outcomes

The Job Search Training component is designed to:

- Improve job search effectiveness
- Increase participant confidence
- Enhance employment readiness
- Promote rapid connection to unsubsidized employment

This component supports Arkansas's broader SNAP E&T strategy of promoting sustainable employment and self-sufficiency.

Details: Job Retention (JR)

Nature of the Component

The Arkansas SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) program includes a Job Retention (JR) component designed to support participants in maintaining stable, unsubsidized employment following job placement. The component provides structured follow-up and supportive services to address barriers that may arise after employment begins, with the goal of promoting sustained employment and long-term self-sufficiency.

Job Retention services are available for a minimum of 30 days and up to 90 days following employment.

Participants must be currently employed to receive services under this component.

Summary of Activities and Services

The Job Retention component may include:

- **Follow-up Case Management:** Regular contact to monitor employment status and identify emerging barriers.
- **Workplace Skill Development:** Support in strengthening soft skills such as communication, punctuality, teamwork, and problem-solving.
- **Job Coaching:** Individualized guidance to navigate workplace expectations and resolve employment-related challenges.
- **Employer Engagement:** Coordination with employers, when appropriate, to address workplace issues and support retention.
- **Supportive Services:** Referrals and linkages to community resources, including transportation and childcare assistance.

In limited circumstances, cash payments to vendors may be made on behalf of participants to support employment retention. All reimbursement requests are reviewed by the SNAP E&T Unit to determine eligibility and compliance with program guidelines before approval.

Target Population

This component serves SNAP recipients who have participated in other SNAP E&T services and have secured employment.

Populations that may be served include:

- Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs)
- Homeless individuals
- Returning citizens (ex-offenders)
- Single parents
- Students (as applicable)
- Rural residents
- Underemployed individuals
- Veterans

Geographic Availability

Job Retention services are available statewide across all 75 counties through approved SNAP E&T providers.

Criteria for Participation

To be eligible for Job Retention services, an individual must:

- Have received prior SNAP E&T services; and
- Be currently employed in unsubsidized employment.

Skills and Knowledge Considerations

Participants are expected to possess:

- **Basic literacy and numeracy skills** relevant to workplace communications and job tasks.
- **Basic computer literacy**, when required for employment-related activities or communication.
- **Recent labor market attachment**, demonstrated through current employment.

- **Motivation and commitment** to maintain employment and actively participate in retention services.

Participants with identified skill gaps may be referred to education or training services as appropriate.

Provider-Specific Criteria

Providers may establish additional participation criteria based on service design and participant needs, such as:

- Employment verification
- Industry-specific requirements
- Transportation reliability

Individualized assessments are conducted to tailor retention services to participant circumstances and employment conditions.

Service Duration

Job Retention services are provided:

- For a minimum of 30 days following employment;
- For no more than 90 days following employment.

Providers are required to track employment status for up to 90 days following completion of E&T services.

Monitoring and Data Tracking

Providers must enter employment and retention data into SNAP Works, the State's Management Information System (MIS).

The SNAP E&T Central Office monitors:

- Employment verification
- Duration of employment
- Retention outcomes
- Service delivery compliance

Reports may be compiled to assess provider performance and participant outcomes.

Reimbursement Methodology

Allowable Job Retention costs include:

- Case management staff time
- Employer engagement activities
- Approved supportive services
- Vendor payments made on behalf of participants, when allowable and documented

All costs must be:

- Necessary and reasonable
- Allocable to SNAP E&T
- Properly documented
- Reviewed and approved in accordance with State oversight procedures

Reimbursement is not automatic and is subject to review and approval by the SNAP E&T Unit.

Projected Participation and Costs

Projected Annual Participation (unduplicated individuals): 87

Estimated Annual Component Administrative Cost: \$217,500.00

Projections are based on anticipated participant employment outcomes and provider cost structures.

Purpose and Outcomes

The Job Retention component is designed to:

- Increase employment stability
- Reduce early job separation
- Support career advancement
- Promote long-term economic self-sufficiency

By combining follow-up case management, supportive services, and structured oversight, Arkansas strengthens participant success beyond initial job placement.

Educational Program Details

Details: Basic/Foundational Skills Instruction (includes High School Equivalency Programs) (EPB)

Nature of the Component

The Basic/Foundational Skills Instruction component is designed to equip SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) participants with essential academic and life skills necessary to enhance employability and succeed in further education, vocational training, or employment.

This component includes educational programs and activities designed to improve literacy, reading, writing, mathematics, digital literacy, and foundational workplace competencies. It also includes preparation for obtaining a GED® or high school equivalency credential when needed.

Participants assigned to this component are those seeking a GED® or equivalent credential, or individuals whose assessment results indicate literacy or numeracy levels below required workforce standards.

Summary of Activities and Services

Participants may receive:

- **Literacy and Numeracy Development:** Instruction to improve reading comprehension, writing skills, and mathematics proficiency.
- **High School Equivalency Preparation:** GED® preparation and testing readiness support.
- **Digital Literacy Training:** Basic computer skills, internet navigation, email communication, and common software usage.

- **Life Skills Instruction:** Development of time management, communication, financial literacy, and workplace etiquette skills.
- **Assessment and Individualized Learning Plans:** Initial academic assessment (e.g., TABE or comparable tools) followed by tailored instruction aligned with career goals.
- **Tutoring and Academic Support:** One-on-one assistance, remediation, and referrals to adult education programs when needed.

Instruction may be delivered through classroom settings, virtual platforms, one-on-one tutoring, or blended formats to accommodate participant needs.

Expected Level of Effort

Participants are generally expected to engage in approximately **20 hours per week** of instructional activities.

Participation includes:

- Classroom or virtual instruction
- Completion of assignments and practice exercises
- Tutoring sessions
- Engagement with supplemental learning materials

Participation levels may be adjusted based on individual learning goals and progress, with case managers monitoring engagement to ensure skill development.

Target Population

This component serves SNAP recipients who are required or volunteer to participate in SNAP E&T.

Populations that may be served include:

- Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs)
- Homeless individuals
- Returning citizens (ex-offenders)
- Single parents
- Students (as applicable)
- Rural residents
- Underemployed individuals
- Veterans

Geographic Availability

This component is available statewide across all 75 counties through approved SNAP E&T providers.

Criteria for Participation

Participants assigned to this component are individuals who require foundational skill development to improve employability and readiness for further education or employment.

Educational and Skill Requirements

Participants typically:

- Do not possess a High School Diploma or GED®; or
- Score below required standards on academic assessments (e.g., TABE); or
- Demonstrate literacy and numeracy deficiencies that limit employment opportunities.

Digital Literacy

Many participants may have minimal computer skills. Providers incorporate digital literacy instruction to enable participants to:

- Complete online job applications
- Use email
- Navigate employment-related technologies

Labor Market Attachment

No recent labor market attachment is required. This component serves both individuals new to the workforce and those reentering employment who require remediation of basic skills.

Participant Commitment

Participants must demonstrate willingness to:

- Attend scheduled instructional sessions
- Engage in individualized learning plans
- Work toward measurable academic improvement

Providers conduct intake assessments to ensure appropriate placement and alignment with participant needs.

Non-Supplanting Assurance

The State agency ensures that costs attributed to the SNAP E&T program do not supplant funds used for other existing educational programs.

The State implements the following controls:

- All E&T expenditures are reviewed to confirm they are necessary, reasonable, and directly related to allowable E&T activities.
- Providers must certify that requested reimbursements are specific to SNAP E&T participants and are not costs already funded by federal, state, or local education programs.
- Costs are cross-checked against other funding sources to prevent duplication.
- Regular fiscal monitoring and documentation reviews are conducted.
- Any duplicated or unallowable costs are disallowed and subject to recovery.

This layered oversight ensures compliance with federal non-supplanting requirements.

Cost Parity Assurance

The State agency ensures that costs charged to SNAP E&T participants do not exceed costs charged to non-E&T participants receiving the same services.

Providers are required to:

- Use consistent tuition rates, fee schedules, and cost structures for both E&T and non-E&T participants.

- Provide documentation (rate sheets, contracts, invoices) demonstrating standard pricing.

During monitoring and fiscal reviews, the State agency verifies that:

- E&T participant costs are equal to or less than those charged to non-E&T individuals for comparable services.
- Any discrepancies are corrected immediately and overcharges are disallowed.

This process ensures equitable and compliant cost practices.

Monitoring and Oversight

This component is subject to ongoing State agency monitoring, including:

- Review of participant eligibility and assessment documentation
- Verification of attendance and instructional hours
- Fiscal review of invoices and supporting documentation
- Compliance review as part of routine Management Evaluations

Projected Participation and Costs

Projected Annual Participation (unduplicated individuals): 371

Estimated Annual Component Administrative Cost: \$1,279,950.00

Participation and cost projections are based on anticipated enrollment levels and provider cost structures.

Purpose and Outcomes

This component builds a foundational skill base that enables participants to:

- Pursue vocational training
- Engage effectively in job search
- Obtain employment
- Achieve long-term economic self-sufficiency

By addressing academic and digital literacy gaps, Arkansas strengthens participant readiness for both employment and career advancement.

Details: **Career/Technical Education Programs or other Vocational Training (EPC)**

Nature of the Component

The Career/Technical Education (CTE) and Other Vocational Training component provides structured, occupation-specific instruction designed to prepare SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) participants for employment in high-demand industries.

This component emphasizes competency-based, hands-on training that leads to industry-recognized credentials, certifications, or licensure aligned with local and regional labor market needs.

Training may prepare participants for employment in fields such as:

- Healthcare (e.g., Certified Nursing Assistant)
- Skilled trades (e.g., welding, HVAC, electrical)

- Manufacturing
- Transportation (e.g., Commercial Driver's License)
- Information technology
- Culinary arts
- Registered apprenticeship programs

Programs are short-term and outcome-driven, with measurable skill attainment.

Summary of Activities and Services

Participants may receive:

- Classroom-based technical instruction
- Hands-on lab training and simulated work environments
- Workplace readiness and soft skills instruction
- Career pathway counseling and navigation support
- Certification testing preparation
- Job placement assistance and employment transition support

Supportive services may include transportation, childcare, uniforms, required tools, and credentialing fees as allowable under SNAP E&T guidelines.

Providers

Training is delivered through approved providers including:

- Arkansas community colleges
- Technical institutes and vocational schools
- Registered apprenticeship programs
- Approved private training entities

All providers must meet State approval standards and monitoring requirements.

Level of Effort

Training programs are time-limited and typically range from 4–8 weeks for short-term programs and up to one year for advanced credentials.

Participants generally commit **20–30 hours per week** to classroom, laboratory, and study activities.

Case managers monitor progress and provide individualized support to promote successful completion and transition to unsubsidized employment.

Target Population

This component serves SNAP recipients who are required or volunteer to participate in SNAP E&T.

Populations that may be served include:

- Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs)
- Homeless individuals
- Returning citizens (ex-offenders)
- Single parents

- Rural residents
- Underemployed individuals
- Veterans

Criteria for Participation

Participants must demonstrate readiness to complete occupational training successfully.

Educational and Skill Requirements

Participants generally must:

- Possess a High School Diploma or GED®; or
- Demonstrate sufficient literacy and numeracy skills to complete coursework; or
- Meet minimum score thresholds on standardized assessments (e.g., TABE), if applicable.

Participants lacking foundational skills may be referred to Basic/Foundational Skills Instruction prior to enrollment.

Technical and Occupational Requirements

Participants must:

- Demonstrate interest and commitment to a specific occupational pathway
- Meet any physical or safety requirements associated with the training field
- Possess basic computer literacy for participation in online learning or trade-specific systems

Provider-Specific Criteria

Providers conduct intake and readiness assessments which may include:

- Review of transcripts or prior education documentation
- Skills testing
- Health or safety screenings
- Evaluation of attendance commitment

Additional requirements may be imposed based on program complexity, credentialing standards, or industry regulations.

Individualized learning plans are developed to align participant capabilities with selected training pathways.

Geographic Availability

This component is available statewide across all 75 counties.

Projected Participation and Costs

Projected Annual Participation (unduplicated individuals): 467

Estimated Annual Component Administrative Cost: \$1,987,085.00

Outcome Measure

Measure: Number and percentage of participants who gain a credential or certificate after participation in Career/Technical Education or Vocational Training.

Methodology:

- **Numerator:** Number of E&T participants who completed this component between 10/1/2025 and 9/30/2026 and earned a credential or certificate.
- **Denominator:** Number of E&T participants who participated in Career/Technical Education or Vocational Training during the same reporting period.

This measure captures credential attainment aligned with employment outcomes.

Non-Supplanting Assurance

The State agency ensures that SNAP E&T funds do not supplant existing federal, state, or local education funding.

To prevent supplanting:

- Contracts and subgrant agreements prohibit replacing Title II, WIOA, or other workforce funds with SNAP E&T funds.
- Providers certify that costs charged to SNAP E&T are incremental and directly attributable to E&T participants.
- The State conducts periodic fiscal and programmatic monitoring, including review of cost allocation methodologies.
- Any evidence of supplanting results in corrective action, including repayment or termination of agreements.

This ensures SNAP E&T funds remain supplemental in nature.

Cost Parity Assurance

The State ensures that costs charged to SNAP E&T participants do not exceed costs charged to non-E&T participants for comparable services.

Providers must:

- Maintain consistent tuition rates and fee schedules
- Provide documentation supporting cost structures
- Maintain accounting records distinguishing E&T from non-E&T participants

During routine fiscal monitoring and Management Evaluations, the State reviews billing, cost allocation, and reimbursement requests to confirm parity. Any discrepancies are addressed promptly and overcharges are disallowed.

Oversight and Monitoring

This component is subject to ongoing State monitoring, including:

- Review of participant eligibility and assessment documentation
- Verification of attendance and training completion
- Invoice and fiscal documentation review
- Compliance review through monthly Management Evaluations, with findings consolidated in an annual comprehensive review.

These controls ensure program integrity and alignment with federal SNAP E&T requirements.

Details: English Language Acquisition (EPEL)

Nature of the Component

The English Language Acquisition (ELA) component provides SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) participants with structured instruction designed to improve English language proficiency and enhance employability.

This component supports participants with limited English proficiency by strengthening speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills necessary for workforce participation and integration.

Instruction is delivered using evidence-based curricula by qualified instructors through classroom settings, virtual platforms, blended learning models, and technology-assisted instruction.

Summary of Activities and Services

Participants may receive:

- Instruction in speaking, listening, reading, and writing English
- Individualized language proficiency assessments
- Customized learning plans aligned with employment goals
- Workforce-related communication training
- Cultural competency and workplace expectations training
- Tutoring and language lab support

Instruction integrates job-related communication skills to facilitate successful transition into employment or further training opportunities.

Target Population

This component primarily serves SNAP recipients who are required or volunteer to participate in SNAP E&T and who demonstrate limited English proficiency, including:

- Refugees
- Immigrants
- Individuals with limited or no English language skills

Populations that may be served include:

- Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs)
- Homeless individuals
- Returning citizens
- Single parents
- Rural residents
- Underemployed individuals
- Veterans

Geographic Availability

English Language Acquisition services are available statewide across all 75 counties through approved SNAP E&T providers.

Level of Effort

Participants are generally expected to participate in approximately **10 hours per week (40 hours per month)** of scheduled instruction.

Participation may occur in person or virtually, depending on provider design and participant access.

The duration of participation varies based on individual progress and language proficiency levels and may range from several weeks to up to one year.

Criteria for Participation

To enroll in the ELA component, participants must:

- Demonstrate limited or no English language proficiency based on provider assessment; and
- Commit to attending scheduled classes on designated days and times.

No minimum literacy or labor market attachment is required. However, participants must demonstrate willingness to engage consistently in structured instruction.

Providers conduct intake assessments to determine language proficiency levels and develop individualized learning plans tailored to employment goals.

Projected Participation and Costs

Projected Annual Participation (unduplicated individuals): 15

Estimated Annual Component Administrative Cost: \$30,000.30

Non-Supplanting Assurance

The State agency ensures that SNAP E&T funds used for English Language Acquisition do not supplant existing federal, state, or local funding sources.

To prevent supplanting:

- E&T funds are used solely for supplemental services provided to SNAP E&T participants.
- Providers certify that costs charged to SNAP E&T are not funded through other education or workforce programs.
- Fiscal monitoring through monthly Management Evaluations, with findings consolidated in an annual comprehensive review. Management Evaluations include review of financial documentation and cost allocation methodologies.

Any evidence of supplanting results in corrective action.

Cost Parity Assurance

The State ensures that costs charged to SNAP E&T participants do not exceed costs charged to non-E&T participants receiving comparable English language services.

Providers must:

- Maintain consistent cost structures and tuition rates
- Document and verify standard pricing practices
- Maintain accounting records separating E&T from non-E&T participants

The State agency reviews cost documentation during routine monitoring to ensure compliance and prevent overcharging.

Monitoring and Oversight

The ELA component is subject to ongoing State oversight, including:

- Verification of participant eligibility
- Review of attendance and instructional hours
- Review of SNAP Works documentation
- Fiscal and programmatic monitoring through monthly Management Evaluations, with findings consolidated in an annual comprehensive review.

These controls ensure compliance with SNAP E&T requirements and maintain program integrity.

Details: Work Readiness Training (EPWRT)

Nature of the Component

The Work Readiness Training component equips SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) participants with essential workplace skills necessary to successfully obtain and sustain employment.

This component focuses on foundational employability competencies, workplace behaviors, and job search preparation. Training is designed to improve participants' understanding of employer expectations and enhance their ability to navigate the work environment effectively.

Work Readiness Training may include occupational skills instruction, employment counseling, refresher courses, WorkKeys preparation, and computer-assisted learning modules.

Summary of Activities and Services

Participants may receive:

- Instruction in workplace communication and professionalism
- Soft skills development (punctuality, teamwork, problem-solving)
- Resume writing and job application assistance
- Interview preparation and mock interviews
- Employment counseling and career development planning
- WorkKeys or similar job readiness assessments
- Technology-based learning modules
- Coaching and mentoring support

Training may be delivered through classroom instruction, workshops, virtual sessions, or blended formats.

Participants must have access to a computer or mobile device for virtual participation or be willing and able to attend in person.

Level of Effort

Participants assigned to Work Readiness Training are generally expected to engage in approximately **10 hours per week** of structured training activities.

The duration of participation varies based on individual need but typically ranges from several weeks up to three months.

Target Population

This component serves SNAP recipients who are required or volunteer to participate in SNAP E&T.

Populations that may be served include:

- Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs)
- Homeless individuals
- Returning citizens (ex-offenders)
- Single parents
- Students (as applicable)
- Rural residents
- Underemployed individuals
- Veterans

Criteria for Participation

Participants must meet the following criteria:

Work Registrant Status

Participants must be identified as work registrants or otherwise required to participate in SNAP E&T activities.

Foundational Skill Considerations

Participants may:

- Lack a high school diploma or GED®; or
- Demonstrate limited work history; or
- Exhibit gaps in workplace readiness skills; or
- Require structured job search preparation.

Basic Literacy and Numeracy

Participants should possess fundamental literacy and numeracy skills sufficient to engage in training activities. Those with significant skill gaps may be referred to Basic/Foundational Skills Instruction.

Motivation and Commitment

Participants must demonstrate willingness to attend scheduled sessions and actively participate in training requirements.

Assessment and Placement

Program intake staff conduct assessments and interviews to determine appropriate placement based on skill gaps, employment barriers, and readiness needs.

Geographic Availability

Work Readiness Training is available statewide across all 75 counties.

Projected Participation and Costs

Projected Annual Participation (unduplicated individuals): 475

Estimated Annual Component Administrative Cost: \$1,425,000.00

(Confirm if alternate participation or cost figures should be used.)

Outcome Measure

Measure: Number and percentage of participants who gain a credential or certificate after participation in Work Readiness Training.

Methodology:

- **Numerator:** Number of E&T participants who gained a credential or certificate during 10/1/2025 – 9/30/2026.
- **Denominator:** Number of E&T participants who participated in Work Readiness Training during 10/1/2025 – 9/30/2026.

Non-Supplanting Assurance

The State agency ensures that costs charged to the Work Readiness Training component do not supplant funds used for other existing educational or workforce programs.

This is accomplished through:

- Separate accounting and budgeting procedures for SNAP E&T funds
- Provider certification that costs billed are incremental and directly related to E&T participants
- Contract language prohibiting supplanting
- Regular fiscal monitoring and audits
- Corrective action procedures when necessary

These controls ensure SNAP E&T funds supplement, rather than replace, other funding streams.

Cost Parity Assurance

The State ensures that costs charged to SNAP E&T participants do not exceed those charged to non-E&T participants receiving comparable services.

Controls include:

- Provider agreements requiring cost parity
- Review of cost structures and pricing policies
- Verification of consistent billing practices
- Detailed invoice documentation
- Routine fiscal monitoring and Management Evaluations

Any discrepancies are addressed through corrective action or disallowance of overcharges.

Oversight and Monitoring

This component is subject to ongoing State monitoring, including:

- Review of participant eligibility and placement
- Verification of attendance and participation hours
- Fiscal review of invoices and cost documentation

- Compliance review during monthly Management Evaluations, with findings consolidated in an annual comprehensive review.

These procedures ensure compliance with SNAP E&T program requirements and fiscal integrity standards.

Work Experience

Details: Work Activity (WA)

Work Activity Component Description

Nature of the Component

The Work Activity (WA) component provides structured and supervised work experiences designed to help SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) participants develop essential employability skills and improve job readiness.

Work Activity placements are planned, time-limited, and aligned with individual employment goals. Activities are structured to build transferable job skills, increase workplace familiarity, and strengthen participants' connection to employers and community organizations.

Work Activity may include:

- Community service assignments
- Internships
- Work-based learning opportunities
- Public or nonprofit placements
- Structured administrative or support roles
- Other supervised work experiences appropriate to participant abilities

This component is designed to prepare participants for unsubsidized employment by providing practical experience and reinforcing workplace expectations.

Summary of Activities and Services

Participants:

- Engage in meaningful, supervised work assignments
- Receive oversight from program staff or host site supervisors
- Develop soft skills such as punctuality, responsibility, teamwork, and communication
- Receive coaching and feedback on workplace performance
- Have attendance and performance monitored regularly

Progress is evaluated through supervisor reports, attendance documentation, and performance feedback.

Level of Effort

Participants are generally expected to engage between **20–30 hours per week**, subject to federal SNAP participation requirements.

For individuals subject to SNAP work requirements, participation hours are calculated by dividing the household's authorized monthly SNAP benefit amount by the applicable state or federal minimum wage, in accordance with federal guidelines.

Participation typically ranges from **30 to 90 days**, depending on individual goals and readiness for transition to employment.

Target Population

This component serves SNAP recipients who are required or volunteer to participate in SNAP E&T.

Populations that may be served include:

- Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs)
- Homeless individuals
- Returning citizens (ex-offenders)
- Single parents
- Rural residents
- Underemployed individuals
- Veterans

Criteria for Participation

Participants must meet the following criteria:

Work Registrant Status

Participants must be designated as work registrants or otherwise required to participate in SNAP E&T activities.

Assessment of Abilities

Participants must be physically and mentally capable of performing structured work activities as determined through intake assessment.

Employment Barriers

Participants may include individuals who:

- Lack recent work history
- Need development of workplace skills
- Require structured experience to improve employability

Commitment to Participation

Participants must demonstrate willingness and ability to comply with scheduled work activity requirements.

Individualized Plan Alignment

Placement must align with the participant's individualized employment plan and career goals.

Program staff conduct intake interviews and assessments to determine readiness and suitability for Work Activity placement.

Geographic Availability

The Work Activity component is offered statewide across Arkansas.

Monitoring and Oversight

The State agency monitors all providers offering Work Activity to ensure compliance with federal and state guidelines. Monitoring includes:

- Review of attendance records
- Verification of hour calculations
- Supervisor performance documentation
- Compliance with SNAP participation requirements
- Fiscal and programmatic review during Management Evaluations

Projected Participation and Costs

Projected Annual Participation (unduplicated individuals): 51

Estimated Annual Component Administrative Cost: \$109,068.55

Purpose and Outcomes

The Work Activity component is designed to:

- Build recent work history
- Strengthen workplace behaviors
- Improve job readiness
- Facilitate transition to unsubsidized employment

By providing structured and supervised experience, this component supports participants in moving toward sustainable employment and long-term self-sufficiency.

2. A DESCRIPTION OF THE CASE MANAGEMENT SERVICES AND MODELS, HOW PARTICIPANTS WILL BE REFERRED TO CASE MANAGEMENT, HOW THE PARTICIPANT'S CASE WILL BE MANAGED, WHO WILL PROVIDE CASE MANAGEMENT SERVICES, AND HOW THE SERVICE PROVIDERS WILL COORDINATE WITH E&T PROVIDERS, THE STATE AGENCY, AND OTHER COMMUNITY RESOURCES, AS APPROPRIATE. THE STATE PLAN SHOULD ALSO DISCUSS HOW THE STATE AGENCY WILL ENSURE E&T PARTICIPANTS ARE PROVIDED WITH TARGETED CASE MANAGEMENT SERVICES THROUGH AN EFFICIENT ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESS;

SNAP E&T Response:

Case Management Services and Model

Case management is the foundation of Arkansas's SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) service delivery model. The State utilizes a provider-based, participant-centered case management model designed to ensure that each participant receives individualized support aligned with their Employment Plan and employment goals. Case management services are structured to promote engagement, address barriers, ensure compliance with participation requirements, and support successful completion of assigned E&T components.

Case Management Model

Each participant assigned to SNAP E&T is connected to a designated Case Manager, Employment Specialist, Career Coach, or similarly qualified provider staff member employed by an approved SNAP E&T provider. Case management is individualized, goal-oriented, and responsive to participant needs. The model emphasizes:

- Early and comprehensive assessment
- Development of a structured Employment Plan
- Continuous engagement and monitoring
- Barrier identification and mitigation
- Coordination of supportive services
- Documentation and accountability

The State agency (SNAP E&T Unit) provides oversight and monitoring of case management activities but does not deliver direct case management services. DHS eligibility staff retain responsibility for determining work registration status, exemptions, good cause determinations, and sanction decisions.

Referral to Case Management

Participants are referred to case management at the time of SNAP E&T assignment. Referrals are generated through the ARIES eligibility system and transmitted to SNAP Works, the State's E&T management information system. Participants are assigned to an approved E&T provider within their designated catchment area.

Upon receipt of referral, the provider must initiate contact within required timelines and schedule an intake assessment. Case management services begin upon enrollment in an approved E&T component.

This structured referral process ensures timely engagement and eliminates duplication between eligibility and E&T functions.

Core Case Management Services

All approved E&T providers must implement the following core case management functions:

1. Assessment and Planning

Providers conduct comprehensive assessments to identify participant skills, education levels, employment history, interests, strengths, and barriers to employment. Assessment tools may include the TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education) or other nationally recognized instruments, as appropriate. Supplemental career interest or aptitude tools may also be used.

Assessment results, identified barriers, and employment goals must be documented in SNAP Works.

2. Employment Plan Development

Providers develop an individualized Employment Plan (EP) that aligns participant strengths, goals, and labor market opportunities with appropriate E&T components. Signed Employment Plans must be retained by the provider and uploaded or documented in SNAP Works.

Employment Plans must be updated at least annually and whenever participant circumstances change.

3. Ongoing Monitoring and Progress Tracking

Providers maintain contact with participants at least once every thirty (30) days and document engagement, participation, and progress in SNAP Works. Case notes must reflect goals, activities, barriers, progress, and outcomes.

4. Supportive Service Coordination

Providers identify and coordinate allowable supportive services necessary for participation (e.g., transportation, testing fees, books). SNAP E&T funds may only be used for allowable costs directly attributable to E&T participation.

5. Barrier Resolution

When barriers are identified (e.g., medical, caregiving, transportation), providers assist participants in addressing those barriers and, when appropriate, submit a Good Cause request through the SNAP Works Non-Compliance tab for DHS review. \$3,323,056.056.

Compliance and Documentation

Providers must maintain accurate, timely, and detailed documentation in SNAP Works. Documentation maintained outside of SNAP Works is not considered compliant with SNAP E&T requirements.

Incomplete or missing documentation may delay invoice approval or reimbursement.

Case management hours claimed for reimbursement must directly correspond to documented allowable case management activities.

Non-Compliance Reporting

Providers must report participation issues promptly to ensure program integrity and timely eligibility action.

- **Missed Appointments:** Providers must attempt rescheduling within ten (10) days. After two no-shows, a Non-Compliance Task must be submitted in SNAP Works within five (5) calendar days.
- **Declined Participation:** Providers must document the refusal in case notes, close enrollment, and mark “declined participation” in Contact History to initiate system updates.
- **Failure to Cooperate:** A Non-Compliance Task must be submitted within five (5) calendar days of determining non-participation.

Failure to timely report non-compliance may result in findings during monthly Management Evaluations, with findings consolidated in an annual comprehensive review. Corrective Action Plans (CAPs) or further administrative action may result from repeated deficiencies.

Coordination with DHS, E&T Unit, and Community Resources

Coordination occurs through structured communication between SNAP E&T providers, DHS eligibility staff, and the SNAP E&T Unit.

- Providers document participation and compliance in SNAP Works.
- Non-compliance tasks trigger DHS eligibility review for potential sanction determination.
- Good Cause requests are reviewed by DHS eligibility staff.
- The SNAP E&T Unit monitors documentation and fiscal compliance through monthly Management Evaluations.

Providers may coordinate with:

- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) partners
- Community colleges and technical institutions
- Transportation providers
- Childcare providers
- Community-based organizations

SNAP E&T funds may not supplant other funding sources and are limited to allowable costs.

Ensuring Targeted Case Management Through an Efficient Administrative Process

The State agency ensures targeted and efficient case management through system controls and standardized procedures.

- SNAP Works requires completion of mandatory assessment fields, barrier grids, and Employment Plan documentation.
- Automated data exchanges between ARIES and SNAP Works reduce duplication and ensure real-time status updates.
- Monthly Management Evaluations review case notes, contact frequency, and alignment between services and Employment Plans.
- Findings from monthly evaluations are consolidated in an annual comprehensive review to assess trends, provider performance, and program integrity.

These administrative controls ensure that participants receive individualized, targeted case management services while maintaining fiscal accountability and operational efficiency.

Participation Expectations

All assigned SNAP E&T participants must receive case management services and participate in at least one approved E&T component consistent with their Employment Plan. Providers are responsible for ensuring participants meet required Levels of Effort for assigned components.

3. AN OPERATING BUDGET FOR THE FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR WITH AN ESTIMATE OF THE COST OF OPERATION FOR EACH FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR COVERED BY THE COMBINED PLAN. ANY STATE AGENCY THAT REQUESTS 50 PERCENT FEDERAL REIMBURSEMENT FOR STATE AGENCY E&T ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS, OTHER THAN FOR PARTICIPANT REIMBURSEMENTS, MUST INCLUDE IN ITS PLAN, OR AMENDMENTS TO ITS PLAN, AN ITEMIZED LIST OF ALL ACTIVITIES AND COSTS FOR WHICH THOSE FEDERAL FUNDS WILL BE CLAIMED, INCLUDING THE COSTS FOR CASE MANAGEMENT AND CASEWORK TO FACILITATE THE TRANSITION FROM ECONOMIC DEPENDENCY TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY THROUGH WORK. COSTS IN EXCESS OF THE FEDERAL GRANT WILL BE ALLOWED ONLY WITH THE PRIOR APPROVAL OF FNS AND MUST BE ADEQUATELY DOCUMENTED TO ASSURE THAT THEY ARE NECESSARY, REASONABLE AND PROPERLY ALLOCATED. A

**STATE MUST SUBMIT A PLAN AMENDMENT TO REQUEST BUDGET ADJUSTMENTS AT
LEAST 30 DAYS PRIOR TO PLANNED IMPLEMENTATION;**

SNAP E&T Response:

Tables below for SNAP E&T FFY26 Operating Budget

Please note that FNS approved the first half of the FFY26 grant proposal. The second half of the grant proposal has been submitted as of 2-18-2026 and awaiting final approval. The numbers represented below reflect the full FFY26 SNAP E&T budget submitted to FNS as of the 2-18-2026 revision. Please note that the figures below show the full amount of the provider request and DHS SNAP E&T will reimburse 50% of the eligible reimbursement request while the provider is responsible for providing the other 50% of the expense. If FNS adjusts any of the figures upon final approval SNAP E&T will submit a notice to WIOA.

Partner or Contractor Name	Amount of 100 percent Federal Funds	Total Amount of 50/50 Funds	Total Subgrant
Adult Education	\$195,000	\$2,757,857.78,952,857.078	
Adult Education	\$195,000	\$2,757,857.78,952,857.078	
Shorter College		\$96,979.10	\$96,979.10
Arkansas Employment Career Center		\$1,512,083.79	\$1,512,083.79
AR Northeastern College		\$470,847.42	470,847.42
Arkansas Employment Career Center		\$1,512,083.79	\$1,512,083.79
AR Northeastern College		\$470,847.42	470,847.42
	No longer a provider		
	No longer a provider		
Gateway Allied Health	No longer a provider \$1,281,509.89	~~\$1,281,509.89~~	
	No longer a provider		
Total Contractual Costs	\$97,500 currently approved by FNS	\$5,032,768.09	\$5,227,768.09

Expense Category	Non-Federal Share	Federal Share	Total
I. Direct Program and Admin Costs			
Salary/Wages (State agency only)		\$292,691.11	\$292,691.11
Fringe Benefits - provide approved fringe benefit rate percentage in line 8 below. Or provide total fringe benefits in line 9 if multiple rates are used by the State agency			
40.00%	\$ -	\$	
Fringe Benefits -		\$109,396.56	\$109,396.56 -
Non-capital equipment		\$105,923.73	\$105,923.73
Materials		\$0	\$0
Travel	\$ -	\$8,000	\$8,000
Building Space	\$ -	\$31,793.16	\$31,793.16
Equipment and other capital expenditures		\$0.00	\$0.00
Subtotal-State Agency Cost Only	\$ -	\$547,804.56	\$547,804.56
Contractual Costs: Is prepopulating from Contract-Partnerships Table, must not	\$2,418,884.05	\$2,613,884.05	\$5,032,768.10
County Administered	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -

Expense Category	Non-Federal Share	Federal Share	Total
Program Admin Cost, if applicable: Is prepopulating from Tab D - Optional County Admin Budget.			
County Administered Direct Program Admin Cost, if applicable. Enter County costs here if Tab D - Optional County Admin Budget table is not used.			\$ -
Total Direct Program and Admin Costs	\$2,418,884.05	\$3,161,688.61	\$5,580,572.66
II. Indirect Costs - using indirect cost rate: Indirect costs are only calculated on the subtotal of State agency costs shown on Row 15.			
Indirect Costs - provide approved indirect cost rate percentage in line 23 below.			
	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -

Expense Category	Non-Federal Share	Federal Share	Total
Indirect Costs - using Federally Approved Cost Allocation Plan.			
Federally Approved Cost Allocated Costs - State agency only.		\$161,367.44	\$161,367.44
County Administered Allocated Costs (only applicable to County Administered Programs)			\$ -
Total Allocated Costs based on Cost Allocation Plan	\$ -	\$161,367.44	\$161,367.44
III. In-kind contribution			
State in-kind contribution	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Administrative Costs	\$2,418,884.05	\$3,323,056.05	\$5,741,940.10
IV. Participant Reimbursements			
Dependent Care (including costs from contracts/partners and county administered programs)	\$31,562	\$31,562	\$63,124.00

Expense Category	Non-Federal Share	Federal Share	Total
Transportation & Other costs (including costs from contracts/partners and county administered programs)	\$ 284,058.00	\$284,058.00	\$568,116.00
State Agency Cost for Dependent Care	\$ -		\$ -
Total Participant Reimbursements	\$315,620.00	\$315,620.00	\$ 631,240.00
V. Total Costs	\$ 2,734,504.05	\$ 3,638,676.05	\$ 6,373,180.10

4. THE CATEGORIES AND TYPES OF INDIVIDUALS THE STATE AGENCY INTENDS TO EXEMPT FROM E&T PARTICIPATION, THE ESTIMATED PERCENTAGE OF WORK REGISTRANTS THE STATE AGENCY PLANS TO EXEMPT, AND THE FREQUENCY WITH WHICH THE STATE AGENCY PLANS TO REEVALUATE THE VALIDITY OF ITS EXEMPTIONS;

SNAP E&T Response:

SNAP recipients who are receiving TEA or Unemployment Benefits are excluded from E&T participation.

State Exemptions

List State exemptions from E&T and the participation, such as individuals to be exempted under each category.

EXEMPTION	TOTAL INDIVIDUALS
All non-ABAWD SNAP Work registrants 4-1-26 to 9-30-26 Mandatory Only Program Period	18,171
An individual's ability to engage in another vocational training component will be decided on a case-by-case basis. 4-1-26 to 9-30-26 Mandatory Only Program Period	30
When the individual is assigned an ABAWD discretionary exemption. Foster care ; residing in a domestic violence	200

shelter 4-1-26 to 9-30-26 Mandatory Only Program Period	
When the individual lives more than 35 miles (1 hour one way) from a location at which the individual may receive/engage in services. This includes DHS offices when virtual services are available. 4-1-26 to 9-30-26 Mandatory Only Program	300
When the individual successfully completes a vocational training component in the E&T program. Note that the individual will not be exempt from the general work requirements or the ABAWD work requirement and time limit 4-1-26 to 9-30-26 Mandatory Program	75
When the individual's out of pocket expenses required to participate in the program exceed the amount allowable or available for reimbursement (until a suitable component is available or their circumstances change). 4-1-26 to 9-30-26 Mandatory Program	30

QUESTION	RESPONSE FIELD
Total estimated number of work registrants exempt from mandatory E&T	18,806
Percent of all work registrants exempt from E&T	20.45%

5. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POPULATION THE STATE AGENCY INTENDS TO PLACE IN E&T;

SNAP E&T Response:

SNAP recipients who volunteer to participate per 7 CFR 273.7(e)(5)(i) up to March 31, 2026 at which time the voluntary SNAP Employment and Training with end and the Mandatory program will start effective April 1, 2026.

ABAWDs
 Homeless
 Veterans
 Students
 Single parents
 Returning citizens (aka: ex-offenders)
 Underemployed
 Those that reside in rural areas

6. The estimated number of volunteers the State agency expects to place in E&T;

SNAP E&T Response:

The state expects approximately 200 participants in FY26. This number has decreased due to the Federal Shut down and the fact that the State of Arkansas is changing to a Mandatory Only SNAP Employment and Training Program in April 2026

7. THE GEOGRAPHIC AREAS COVERED AND NOT COVERED BY THE E&T PLAN AND WHY, AND THE TYPE AND LOCATION OF SERVICES TO BE OFFERED;

SNAP E&T Response:

All 75 counties are covered. All components are available for assignment in all counties, though services will vary by location and availability.

8. THE METHOD THE STATE AGENCY USES TO COUNT ALL WORK REGISTRANTS AS OF THE FIRST DAY OF THE NEW FISCAL YEAR;

SNAP E&T Response:

The State agency identifies work registrants through system-generated coding within the Arkansas Integrated Revenue and Eligibility System (ARIES). During the eligibility determination and recertification process, eligibility staff enter and verify individual-level data, including age, disability status, employment status, student status, and other exemption criteria consistent with 7 CFR §273.7(b). Based on this information, ARIES automatically assigns work registration status codes. Individuals who do not meet a federal exemption are classified as work registrants. To determine the total number of work registrants for reporting purposes, the State agency runs a system extract reflecting work registration status as of October 1, the first day of the Federal Fiscal Year. The report captures: All active SNAP cases on October 1; Individuals coded as work registrants (non-exempt from general work requirements); Unique individuals identified by Social Security Number (SSN) to prevent duplicate counts across cases. Although the data extraction occurs after October 1 to allow for overnight system processing and finalization of eligibility updates effective October 1, the dataset reflects eligibility and work registration status effective October 1, not the date the report is run. The Deloitte reporting team maintains the structured query used for this annual extract to ensure consistent methodology, prevent duplicate counts, and ensure alignment with federal reporting requirements.

9. THE METHOD THE STATE AGENCY USES TO REPORT WORK REGISTRANT INFORMATION ON THE QUARTERLY FORM FNS-583;

SNAP E&T Response:

Line 1: Active SNAP recipients as of 10/01/25 who are assigned an applicable Work Participation Characteristic, which is not an exempt from Work Registration.

Line 2: Distinct count of active SNAP recipients with non-exempt Work Participation Characteristics at the end of each month. Non-duplicated count (count only once per FY).

Deloitte Reporting team is responsible for pulling the data from the various sources and compiling the data for the quarterly FNS583 reports and will review the data with the SNAP E&T unit management.

10. THE METHOD THE STATE AGENCY USES TO PREVENT WORK REGISTRANTS FROM BEING COUNTED TWICE WITHIN A FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR. IF THE STATE AGENCY UNIVERSALLY WORK REGISTERS ALL SNAP APPLICANTS, THIS METHOD MUST SPECIFY HOW THE STATE AGENCY EXCLUDES THOSE EXEMPT FROM WORK REGISTRATION UNDER 7 C.F.R. §273.7(B)(1). IF THE STATE AGENCY WORK REGISTERS NONEXEMPT PARTICIPANTS WHENEVER A NEW APPLICATION IS SUBMITTED, THIS METHOD MUST ALSO SPECIFY HOW THE STATE AGENCY EXCLUDES THOSE PARTICIPANTS WHO MAY HAVE ALREADY BEEN REGISTERED WITHIN THE PAST 12 MONTHS AS SPECIFIED UNDER 7 C.F.R. §273.7(A)(1)(I);

SNAP E&T Response:

The SSN is used to prevent duplicate counts throughout the year. The Deloitte Reporting team ensures safeguards and cross checks are put into place. Other options and tools utilized may include those listed below:

- Utilize the participant's Social Security Number (SSN) as a unique identifier to prevent duplicate counts within and across systems.
- Conduct computerized cross-checks within the ARIES system to flag multiple registrations or participation entries under the same SSN.
- Coordinate with the USDA's National Accuracy Clearinghouse (NAC), a federally mandated interstate data system designed to prevent duplicate enrollment and benefit issuance across states.
- Use additional identifiers such as birthdate, address, or household information to corroborate identity and prevent duplication.
- Perform periodic data matching and reconciliation processes during the federal fiscal year across local, state, and federal databases to identify and correct duplicate registrations.
- Train eligibility staff to check for potential duplication before approving or entering participant data.
- Monitor and audit program data regularly to ensure counts accurately reflect unique participants

Together, these comprehensive measures help ensure Arkansas prevents duplicate counting of SNAP work registrants throughout the fiscal year in compliance with federal regulations (7 CFR § 272.4(e), 7CFR § 273.3) and best practices outlined by USDA FNS.

11. THE ORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNITS RESPONSIBLE FOR CERTIFICATION AND THE UNITS OPERATING THE E&T COMPONENTS, INCLUDING UNITS OF THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM, IF AVAILABLE. FNS IS

SPECIFICALLY CONCERNED THAT THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION BE EFFICIENT AND THAT NONCOMPLIANCE BY THE PARTICIPANT BE REPORTED TO THE CERTIFICATION UNIT WITHIN 10 WORKING DAYS AFTER THE NONCOMPLIANCE OCCURS;

SNAP E&T Response:

The Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of County Operations (DCO), maintains clear organizational separation between eligibility certification functions and SNAP Employment & Training (E&T) program operations, while ensuring structured and efficient communication between the two units.

Organizational Structure

SNAP eligibility certification is administered by the Office of Field Operations (OFO) within DCO. OFO county eligibility staff are responsible for determining initial and ongoing SNAP eligibility, including work registration status, exemption determinations, and the imposition of disqualifications when appropriate.

The SNAP E&T program is administered by the Office of Program and Grant Management (OPGM) within DCO. OPGM is responsible for program oversight, provider management, policy development, contract administration, fiscal monitoring, and compliance oversight. SNAP E&T services are delivered through approved providers, including units within the Statewide workforce development system and other contracted entities.

Although certification and E&T operations are functionally distinct, both operate within the Division of County Operations, which ensures aligned leadership, coordinated policy direction, and streamlined communication pathways.

Communication and Reporting of Noncompliance

Arkansas utilizes integrated data systems to support timely and accurate communication between E&T providers, E&T program staff, and eligibility certification staff. Noncompliance reporting follows a structured and time-sensitive protocol to ensure adherence to federal requirements.

1. Provider Reporting:

SNAP E&T providers are contractually required to document and report instances of participant noncompliance in accordance with State policy. Providers must notify the SNAP E&T program within established reporting timeframes when a participant fails to comply with assigned E&T requirements without good cause.

2. Program Review and Validation:

Upon receipt of a reported noncompliance, SNAP E&T program staff review the documentation to ensure that required elements are present, including evidence of the assigned activity, attendance expectations, participant contact attempts, and any information related to potential good cause.

3. Referral to Certification Unit:

Once validated, the noncompliance is transmitted to the appropriate eligibility certification unit. Arkansas ensures that the certification unit is notified within 10 working days after the noncompliance occurs, consistent with federal expectations. Notification includes sufficient documentation to allow the eligibility worker to evaluate good cause and initiate appropriate adverse action procedures, if applicable.

4. **Eligibility Determination and Action:**

The certification unit is responsible for issuing proper notice, evaluating good cause, and imposing disqualification if required under 7 CFR § 273.7. Final authority for adverse action remains with the eligibility certification staff, ensuring separation of duties and due process protections.

5.

Workforce Development System Coordination

For SNAP E&T providers that are part of the Statewide workforce development system, coordination is facilitated through formal agreements, data-sharing protocols, and regular interagency meetings. These mechanisms ensure consistent interpretation of participation requirements, reporting expectations, and documentation standards.

Ongoing Oversight

The SNAP E&T program conducts routine monitoring of provider reporting timeliness and system workflows to ensure compliance with the 10-working-day reporting requirement. System dashboards and management reports are utilized to track noncompliance events, transmission dates, and certification actions to ensure operational integrity and regulatory compliance.

Through this structure, Arkansas maintains clear organizational boundaries between certification and E&T operations while ensuring efficient communication and timely reporting of noncompliance to the certification unit.

12. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE AGENCY AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS IT PLANS TO COORDINATE WITH FOR THE PROVISION OF SERVICES, INCLUDING ORGANIZATIONS IN THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM, IF AVAILABLE. COPIES OF CONTRACTS MUST BE AVAILABLE FOR INSPECTION; THE STATE AGENCY MUST DOCUMENT HOW IT CONSULTED WITH THE STATE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD. IF THE STATE AGENCY CONSULTED WITH PRIVATE EMPLOYERS OR EMPLOYER ORGANIZATIONS IN LIEU OF THE STATE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD, IT MUST DOCUMENT THIS CONSULTATION AND EXPLAIN THE DETERMINATION THAT DOING SO WAS MORE EFFECTIVE OR EFFICIENT. THE STATE AGENCY MUST INCLUDE IN ITS E&T STATE PLAN A DESCRIPTION OF ANY OUTCOMES FROM THE CONSULTATION WITH THE STATE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD OR PRIVATE EMPLOYERS OR EMPLOYER ORGANIZATIONS. THE STATE AGENCY MUST ALSO ADDRESS IN THE E&T STATE PLAN THE EXTENT TO WHICH E&T ACTIVITIES WILL BE CARRIED OUT IN COORDINATION WITH THE ACTIVITIES UNDER TITLE I OF WIOA;

SNAP E&T Response:

The State Agency will utilize a combination of 100% E&T Funds and 50/50 Funding streams. 50/50 consists of reimbursement of 50% invoiced expense from the third-party provider. The State Agency will draw the funds from FNS. The State Agency has the following E&T providers to administer services to all eligible SNAP participants across the entire state. Current FY24 E&T providers are:

- Adult Education
- Arkansas Employment Career Center (AECC)
- Shorter College
- Arkansas Northeastern College
- Gateway Allied Health

Date	State Workforce Development Board Name	Title(s) of Person Consulted	Outcome of Consultation
08/12/2025	Arkansas Workforce Connections	Special Programs Administrator - Office of Employment and Training	The Arkansas SNAP E&T management team met with Mr. Michael Tippin on August 12, 2025, to discuss the programs that they offer, how our two units work together and how we would like to further develop our working relationship to serve the clients of the SNAP E&T program. We are a member of their board, and we meet with them on a regular basis, but this provided our team with a better understanding of their process, programs and goals. We anticipate that we will develop a good working relationship for our clients.

13. THE AVAILABILITY, IF APPROPRIATE, OF E&T PROGRAMS FOR INDIANS LIVING ON RESERVATIONS AFTER THE STATE AGENCY HAS CONSULTED IN GOOD FAITH WITH APPROPRIATE TRIBAL ORGANIZATIONS;

SNAP E&T Response:

Not applicable

14. IF A CONCILIATION PROCESS IS PLANNED, THE PROCEDURES THAT WILL BE USED WHEN AN INDIVIDUAL FAILS TO COMPLY WITH AN E&T PROGRAM REQUIREMENT. INCLUDE THE LENGTH OF THE CONCILIATION PERIOD; AND

SNAP E&T Response:

Not applicable

15. THE PAYMENT RATES FOR CHILD CARE ESTABLISHED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CHILD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT PROVISIONS OF 45 CFR 98.43, AND BASED ON LOCAL MARKET RATE SURVEYS.

SNAP E&T Response:

Not applicable. Dependent care is a participant reimbursement.

16. THE COMBINED (FEDERAL/STATE) STATE AGENCY REIMBURSEMENT RATE FOR TRANSPORTATION COSTS AND OTHER EXPENSES REASONABLY NECESSARY AND DIRECTLY RELATED TO PARTICIPATION INCURRED BY E&T PARTICIPANTS. IF THE STATE AGENCY PROPOSES TO PROVIDE DIFFERENT REIMBURSEMENT AMOUNTS TO ACCOUNT FOR VARYING LEVELS OF EXPENSES, FOR INSTANCE FOR GREATER OR LESSER COSTS OF TRANSPORTATION IN DIFFERENT AREAS OF THE STATE, IT MUST INCLUDE THEM HERE.

SNAP E&T Response:

\$900 annually combined all participant reimbursements.

17. INFORMATION ABOUT EXPENSES THE STATE AGENCY PROPOSES TO REIMBURSE. FNS MUST BE AFFORDED THE OPPORTUNITY TO REVIEW AND COMMENT ON THE PROPOSED REIMBURSEMENTS BEFORE THEY ARE IMPLEMENTED.

SNAP E&T Response:

Allowable Participant Reimbursements	Participant Reimbursement Caps (optional)	Who provides the participant reimbursement?	Method of disbursement
Transportation (and other allowable transportation costs).	\$900 annually	State Agency	Reimbursement for actual expenses
Allowable educational expenses (testing costs, books, licensing, etc.	\$900 annually	State Agency	Reimbursement for actual expenses
Allowable employment costs (background checks, licensing, uniforms, personal safety items, etc.)	\$900 annually	State Agency	Reimbursement for actual expenses
Dependent Care	\$900 annually	State Agency	Reimbursement for actual expenses

18. FOR EACH COMPONENT THAT IS EXPECTED TO INCLUDE 100 OR MORE PARTICIPANTS, REPORTING MEASURES THAT THE STATE WILL COLLECT AND INCLUDE

IN THE ANNUAL REPORT IN PARAGRAPH (C)(17) OF THIS SECTION. SUCH MEASURES MAY INCLUDE:

A. THE PERCENTAGE AND NUMBER OF PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS WHO RECEIVED E&T SERVICES AND ARE IN UNSUBSIDIZED EMPLOYMENT SUBSEQUENT TO THE RECEIPT OF THOSE SERVICES;

SNAP E&T Response:

Unsubsidized employment in 2nd or 4th quarter after completion of participation in E&T

Numerator/Denominator: The denominator represents those who have completed E&T (not received services in 90 days or more) and the numerator is those who have completed E&T and have earned income in the relevant quarter.

B. THE PERCENTAGE AND NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS WHO OBTAIN A RECOGNIZED CREDENTIAL, A REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP, OR A REGULAR SECONDARY SCHOOL DIPLOMA (OR ITS RECOGNIZED EQUIVALENT), WHILE PARTICIPATING IN, OR WITHIN 1 YEAR AFTER RECEIVING E&T SERVICES;

SNAP E&T Response:

Education: Of the total number of participants for the entire fiscal year, report the percentage and number who:

- Received a high school diploma or equivalency prior to participation in E&T;
- Did not have a high school diploma or equivalency prior to participation in E&T; or
- Education was unknown at time of entry into E&T.

C. THE PERCENTAGE AND NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS WHO ARE IN AN EDUCATION OR TRAINING PROGRAM THAT IS INTENDED TO LEAD TO A RECOGNIZED CREDENTIAL, A REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP AN ON-THE-JOB TRAINING PROGRAM, A REGULAR SECONDARY SCHOOL DIPLOMA (OR ITS RECOGNIZED EQUIVALENT), OR UNSUBSIDIZED EMPLOYMENT;

SNAP E&T Response:

Education: Of the total number of participants for the entire fiscal year, report the percentage and number who:

- Received a high school diploma or equivalency prior to participation in E&T;
- Did not have a high school diploma or equivalency prior to participation in E&T; or
- Education was unknown at time of entry into E&T.

D. MEASURES DEVELOPED TO ASSESS THE SKILLS ACQUISITION OF E&T PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS THAT REFLECT THE GOALS OF THE SPECIFIC COMPONENTS INCLUDING THE PERCENTAGE AND NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS WHO ARE MEETING PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS OR ARE GAINING SKILLS LIKELY TO LEAD TO EMPLOYMENT; AND

SNAP E&T Response:**Component Outcome Measures**

Component	Outcome Measure	Methodology including the timeframes being reported (e.g. denominator and numerator).
Supervised Job Search	Number and percentage of people who obtained employment after completion of component.	Numerator includes the number of E&T participants who obtained employment after completing component during the period of 10/1/23 – 9/30/2024. Denominator will include the number of participants that participated in supervised job search during the period of 10/1/23 – 9/30/2024.
Job Search Training	Number of people who obtain employment after completion of component.	Numerator will include the number of E&T participants who obtained employment during 10/1/23 – 9/30/2024 after completion of participation, with the numerator being those who obtained jobs and the denominator those who participated in JST during the period 10/1/23 – 9/30/2024.
Job Retention	Number of E&T participants and former participants who are in unsubsidized employment during 10/1/23 – 9/30/2024 completion of participation in E&T.	Numerator is the number of participants that retained employment during 10/1/23 – 9/30/2024 after completion of participation of E&T job retention services and the denominator is the number of participants that participated in this component during the period 10/1/23 – 9/30/2024.

Component	Outcome Measure	Methodology including the timeframes being reported (e.g. denominator and numerator).
Basic/Foundational Skills Instruction	Number of E&T participants and percentage of people who obtain a GED® or High School.	Numerator will include the number of E&T participants who completed this component during 10/1/23 – 9/30/2024 and obtained a GED® or High School Diploma during the period of 10/1/2023 – 09/30/2024. The denominator includes those who participated in Basic Education during the period 10/1/23 – 9/30/2024.
Career/Technical Education Programs or other Vocational Training	The number and percentage of participants who gain a credential or certificate after participation in Career/Technical Education Programs or other Vocational Training.	Numerator will include the number of E&T participants who completed this component during the period of 10/1/23 – 9/30/2024 and gained a credential or certificate, and the denominator will include those who participated in Career/Technical Education Programs or other Vocational Training during the period 10/1/23 – 9/30/2024.
English Language Acquisition	The number and percentage of participants who receive an increased score indicating increased language skills after participating in English Language Acquisition component.	Numerator will include the number of E&T participants who received an increased score during the period of 10/1/23 – 9/30/2024, and the denominator will include those who participated in ESL during the period 10/1/23 – 9/30/2024.
Work Experience	Number of people who obtain employment after completion of component.	Numerator will include the number of E&T participants who completed this component and obtained employment after completing component during the period

Component	Outcome Measure	Methodology including the timeframes being reported (e.g. denominator and numerator).
		of 10/1/23 – 9/30/2024. Denominator will include the number of participants that participated in Work Experience during the period of 10/1/23 – 9/30/2024.
Work Readiness Training	The number and percentage of participants who gain a credential or certificate after participation in Work Readiness Training component.	Numerator will include the number of E&T participants who gained a credential or certificate during the period 10/1/23 – 9/30/2024, and the denominator will include those who participated in Work Readiness Training during the period 10/1/23 – 9/30/2024.

E. OTHER INDICATORS APPROVED BY FNS IN THE E&T STATE PLAN.

SNAP E&T Response:

Not applicable

B. ABLE-BODIED ADULTS WITHOUT DEPENDENTS (ABAWD) [28]

A State agency interested in receiving additional funding for serving able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) subject to the 3- month time limit, in accordance with 7 C.F.R. §273.7(d)(3), must include the following for each Federal fiscal year covered by the Combined Plan under WIOA:

1. ITS PLEDGE TO OFFER A QUALIFYING ACTIVITY TO ALL AT-RISK ABAWD APPLICANTS AND RECIPIENTS;

SNAP E&T Response:

Not applicable

2. ESTIMATED COSTS OF FULFILLING ITS PLEDGE;

SNAP E&T Response:

Not applicable

3. A DESCRIPTION OF MANAGEMENT CONTROLS IN PLACE TO MEET PLEDGE REQUIREMENTS;

SNAP E&T Response:

Not applicable

4. A DISCUSSION OF ITS CAPACITY AND ABILITY TO SERVE AT-RISK ABAWDs;

SNAP E&T Response:

Not applicable

**5. INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIZE AND SPECIAL NEEDS OF ITS ABAWD POPULATION;
AND**

SNAP E&T Response:

Not applicable

**6. INFORMATION ABOUT THE EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND WORKFARE COMPONENTS IT
WILL OFFER TO MEET THE ABAWD WORK REQUIREMENT**

SNAP E&T Response:

Not applicable

TRADE ADJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE (TAA)

Has the state incorporated TAA into the sections indicated above?

TAA Response:

Yes

JOBS FOR VETERANS' STATE GRANTS

Jobs for Veterans' State Grants
PY26-27 Mod

a. Describe how the state intends to provide employment, training, and job placement services to veterans and eligible persons under the JVSG program (i.e., virtually and in-person).

The JVSG program, in and of itself, does not constitute the entirety of Arkansas's veterans' services. Rather, the program is a partner within Arkansas's Workforce Development System. The JVSG is required by law to provide services to eligible veterans and other eligible persons. The JVSG-funded DVOPs, LVERs, and Consolidated Position (CP) staff who serve in a dual role as DVOP specialists and LVER, fill a role in

the overall program of services to eligible veterans and other eligible persons. The DVOPs, LVERs, and CPs are dedicated to their primary statutory responsibilities as defined by Veterans' Program Letters (VPL). The CP staff in their DVOPs roles focus on providing Basic and Individualized Career Services through case management to eligible veterans with significant barriers to employment (SBE) and other eligible persons. In their LVER role they coordinate with local business service teams and members of the community to advocate to employers on behalf of all veterans and to develop job opportunities specifically for veterans. The Consolidated Position staff serve in a dual role as DVOP specialist and LVER. The LVERs train all Arkansas Workforce Center staff to network for veterans and comply with priority service requirements. In addition, LVER staff collaborates with community partners in order to provide the additional services needed for the veteran community to obtain meaningful careers.

On a priority-of-service basis, workforce center staff members determine the eligible person's purpose for registering. The intake staff member, serving as the "greeter," is usually the first person that a veteran or other eligible person interacts with at an Arkansas Workforce Center (AWC). Once the Veteran or other eligible person is identified, the Workforce Center Staff conducts an initial assessment. This initial assessment uses a customized veteran intake questionnaire to help determine if the veteran or other eligible person has an SBE or if they are a member of another special priority group. If a determination is made that the client is an eligible veteran with an SBE or meets other special criteria, they are referred to the DVOP/CP specialist for further assessment and Individualized Career Services. Those veterans determined not to possess an SBE are provided with career services by other employment services staff.

These services include resume writing, computer skills, and interviewing techniques. If the veteran or other covered person needs more specialized services, they may be referred to another service provider/program within the AWC. All Individualized Career Services and training are provided on a priority-of-service basis.

b. List the populations to be served by Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) and consolidated position staff, including the eligibility criteria for referral for DVOP services.

Eligible veterans and eligible persons with significant barriers to employment (SBE) who are interested in receiving one or more individualized career services will be referred to DVOP/CP staff after intake staff complete the Eligibility Triage Form to ensure they meet the eligibility requirements. They must meet at least one of the following two criteria: (1) Are defined as an eligible veteran IAW 38 U.S.C. 4211(4) or eligible person IAW 38 U.S.C. 4101(5) and are experiencing at least one of the qualifying employment barriers listed below, and (2) are members of additional populations eligible for DVOP/CP specialist services as authorized by the current annual appropriations act, as outlined below.

1) Qualifying Employment Barriers. To receive DVOP/CP services, an eligible veteran or eligible person must affirm that they are experiencing at least one of the following employment barriers:

a. Has a disability, which may include any of the following:

- Special disabled veteran, defined in 38 U.S.C. § 4211(1) as a veteran who is entitled to compensation (or who but for the receipt of military retired pay would be entitled to compensation) under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for a disability rated at 30 percent or more, or rated at 10 or 20 percent in the case of a veteran who has been determined to have a serious employment handicap; or person who was discharged or released from active duty because of a service-connected disability.
- Disabled veteran, defined in 38 U.S.C. § 4211(3) as a veteran who is entitled to compensation (or who but for the receipt of military retired pay would be entitled to compensation) under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs; or a person who was discharged or released from active duty because of a service-connected disability.
- Other disability. Eligible veterans and eligible persons who self-identify as having a disability, as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 12102.

b. Is a Vietnam-era veteran, as defined by 38 U.S.C. § 4211(2) as an eligible veteran any part of whose active military, naval, or air service was during the Vietnam era, as defined by 38 U.S.C. § 101(29).

c. Is a recently separated veteran, defined in 38 U.S.C. § 4211(6) as a veteran who was discharged or released from active duty within the last three years.

d. Has been referred for employment services by a representative of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

e. Is experiencing homelessness, as defined in Sections 103(a) and (b) of the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. § 11302(a) and (b)).

f. Is justice-involved, as defined in WIOA Section 3(38), 29 U.S.C. § 3102(38) (definition of “offender”).

g. Is between the ages of 18–24 years of age at the time of enrollment.

h. Is educationally disadvantaged, meaning that the individual lacks a high school diploma or equivalent certificate.

i. Is economically disadvantaged, which means any of the following:

- Meets the definition of a low-income individual in WIOA Section 3(36), 29 U.S.C. § 3102(36).
- Unemployed.
- Heads of single-parent households containing at least one dependent child.

Note: An eligible person must personally meet eligibility criteria. They must both: a) meet the definition found in 38 U.S.C. § 4101(5), and b) be experiencing at least one of the criteria listed above (e.g., homeless, justice-involved, etc.). An eligible person who is

not a veteran may not claim eligibility for DVOP services based on their spouse's status as, for example, a Vietnam-era veteran.

2) Additional populations. Annual appropriations authorize DVOP/CP staff to serve certain non-veteran populations. We will review these additional populations annually to ensure DVOP/CP staff serve authorized eligible populations, and that LVERs work with employers on behalf of these additional populations. We currently note that these additional populations are (a) transitioning service members and (b) members of the Armed Forces who are receiving treatment in military treatment facilities or WTUs, as well as their spouses or other family caregivers.

c. Describe the roles and responsibilities assigned to Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists, Local Veterans' Employment Representative (LVER) staff, and consolidated DVOP/LVER positions by the state. These must be consistent with 38 U.S.C. 4103A and 4104.

In accordance with Title 38 U.S.C. Section 4103(a), CP/DVOPs provide Individual Career Services to eligible veterans and eligible persons to meet their employment needs, prioritizing services to special disabled veterans, disabled veterans, eligible veterans, and then to other eligible populations in accordance with priorities determined by the Secretary. The statute also requires that CP/DVOPs place maximum emphasis on assisting veterans who are economically or educationally disadvantaged. CP/DDVOPs provide employment assistance through Basic and Individualized Career Services in a case management service delivery strategy including, at minimum, a comprehensive assessment, employment plan, and consistent contact.

In their Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program role, the CP specialist works directly with eligible veterans and eligible persons who have significant barriers to employment. The services provided by a CP specialist are referred to as individualized career services but were once called intensive services.

CP/DVOP specialists facilitate employment of referred eligible veterans and eligible people during their case management, and as such contact employers on behalf of specific eligible participants to facilitate their employment. It is important that a CP/DVOP establishes a strong rapport and relationship with the eligible veterans they serve, to provide them with the best services possible to help them reach their employment goals.

CP/DVOPs will be required to work with eligible veterans to provide assessments, develop individual employment plans, and manage referrals to services to address identified barriers to employment. CP/DVOP specialists will be expected to provide a full range of services to eligible veterans and other eligible persons including but not limited to:

- Assessment of skill levels and service needs;
- Development of an individual employment plan with identified employment goals;
- Appropriate achievement objectives and an appropriate combination of services for the eligible veteran to achieve employment goals;
- Individual and group employment counseling, and career planning;
- Short term pre-vocational services that may include academic skills, communication skills, punctuality, personal maintenance skills, and personal conduct to prepare individuals for unsubsidized employment or training.

In their LVER role, CP staff will advocate, on behalf of all veterans, with businesses and industries. LVER/CPs will perform the full range of employer outreach activities, which are offered through the workforce system. Staff will report on outreach activities, on a quarterly basis, in the Manager's Quarterly Report. This includes the facilitation of employment, training, and placement services furnished to veterans through the state's employment service. They are, but are not limited to:

- Planning and participating in job and career fairs;
- Conducting employer outreach;
- Conducting job search workshops, and establishing job search groups;
- Coordinating with unions, apprenticeships programs and business or business organizations to promote and secure employment and training programs for veterans;
- Informing Federal contractors of the process to recruit qualified veterans;
- Promoting credentialing and licensing opportunities for veterans; and
- Coordinating and participating with other business outreach.

CP/LVERs will also have an active partnership with community-based organizations that provide or coordinate an array of services to veterans.

CP/LVERs are fully integrated into the Business Service Teams and promote Arkansas veterans to local employers by highlighting the advantages of hiring veterans and create job development contacts. The services of CP/LVERs and Business Service Teams are delivered through Job Fairs, Veterans Events, and Employer Support of the Guard and Reserves (ESGR). In addition, CP/LVERs work with all workforce staff and partners to identify and build capacity to increase resources for all veterans and educate on Priority of Service for veterans' requirements. CP/LVERs also market the Hire Veterans Medallion Program available to employer's hiring veterans.

Consolidated DVOP specialist and LVER position.

In accordance with applicable VPLs, the Consolidated Staff positions perform both the duties of a DVOP specialist and an LVER staff person and will promote a more efficient administration of service to veterans and does not hinder the provision of services to

eligible veterans and employers consistent with the requirements of 38 U.S.C. Section 4103A and 4104.

d. Demonstrate the manner in which DVOP, LVER and consolidated DVOP/LVER staff are integrated into the state's employment service delivery systems or American Job Center (AJC). This demonstration should show active engagement between JVSG and other AJC staff, such as through participation in staff meetings and cross-training opportunities.

Consolidated DVOP/LVER position integration goes beyond co-location, and functions as seamlessly as possible within the assigned workforce center or other outreach location where services can be leveraged to better facilitate the placement of SBE eligible veterans and eligible persons. CP/LVER staff will serve on Business Services Teams in a manner that is consistent with their federally mandated roles and responsibilities. Integration will also allow other than CP/DVOP staff to deliver services on a priority basis. Arkansas will promote cross training in the way of case management and alignment with other providers of individualized career services. Veterans and other eligible persons receive priority of service by all AWC staff to ensure access to the full range of resources available within the One Stop System.

Arkansas JobLink (AJL) is the state's integrated web-based workforce development management information system (MIS) used by the state and local areas to share and manage participant data between the JVSG program, Wagner-Peyser program, the Trade Adjustment Assistance program and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act program. All workforce staff have access to and can view all services provided to the veteran regardless of funding stream. By partnering with other state agencies, Arkansas Workforce Services is maximizing its outreach potential. Efforts aimed at providing information about our services to veterans include promoting and attending local Job Fairs and Hiring our Heroes and Women Veterans Summits events.

All hiring events are advertised in the local paper and video streamed on public access media throughout the local AWC. We also seek assistance from County Veteran Service Officers for those seeking employment. Arkansas is also exploring ways to better connect veterans seeking employment with Apprenticeship opportunities. We have strengthened our partnership with Registered Apprenticeship in recent years through collaboration with the Arkansas Apprenticeship Coalition in implementing the Arkansas Energy Sector Partnership grant. Through this collaboration, the state now has a mobile training center which is operated by the Arkansas Apprenticeship Coalition to provide "green" skills education to apprentices statewide.

We promote the Federal Bonding Program among all our partners and staff to increase awareness of this tool to improve outcomes for the offender population. We also routinely include discussion of this program and the Work Opportunity Tax Credit

(WOTC) program's target populations when speaking to employers, since many job seekers are members of both groups.

e. Describe the state's performance incentive award program to encourage individuals and/or employment service offices to improve and/or achieve excellence in the provision of services to veterans, including:

1. the nomination and selection process for all performance incentive awards to individuals and/or offices;

In accordance with 38 U.S.C. 4112 and VPL 01-24, Attachment #5, the Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) includes a 1% "set aside" of the total grant amount for use as incentive awards. The individual will be scored based on performance or activities during the program year (July 1 through June 30), for which the award is given. These funds will be obligated by September 30th of each year and expended by December 31st of each year and will be awarded as Monetary Awards to approximately fifteen (15) staff members who display exceptional service to veterans and eligible persons.

Award winners will be announced during JVSG Annual Training Conference held during the 4th Quarter of each year. Any part of the 1% of these funds that is not obligated by the 4th Quarter will remain unobligated at the grant closeout.

Overview

The overall goal in utilizing the Incentive Awards is to motivate JVSG staff (and Non-JVSG individuals providing employment, training, and placement services to veterans, funded under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) or the Wagner-Peyser Act) on their focus of improving the JVSG Program and overall Employment Services to all veterans and eligible spouses within the state and local workforce investment areas. This includes, but not limited to, increasing DVOP caseloads or activities; plans to overcome SBEs the veteran may have; increase employment opportunities and commitment from employers to hire and retain veterans; and assist employers with job development activities.

For non-JVSG staff, they must demonstrate exceptional customer service relating to the quality of veteran services received, be knowledgeable and comply with JVSG processes or increase the overall productivity and advocate for veterans and other eligible person(s), as shown through success stories. The State Veteran Coordinator (SVC) will continue to encourage participation through promoting the Incentive Awards program during all state conferences and meetings.

Award Plan Selection

The Incentive Award program will be utilized for DVOPs, LVERs, Consolidated DVOP/LVER, Employment Service staff, and WIOA staff members that provide

employment, training, and placement services to veterans and eligible spouses. The nominees must provide exemplary employment services to veterans and eligible spouses or affect improvements of veterans' service delivery system. All information will be collected from the Tableau Reporting System using the DVOP Intensive Service Report, Veteran Last Service Date, Staff Assisted Service Counts, Job Service Activity Reports, referrals and placements, and the Employer Contact Tracking Report.

The award recognizes staff that have made a substantial contribution or effort to:

1. Improve and modernize employment and placement services, as well as training opportunities for Veterans and other eligible person(s). (e.g., Virtual Platforms, social media).
2. Outstanding Case Management process.
3. Providing the provision of "Priority of Service" and integration of services to Veterans and other eligible person(s) at Arkansas Workforce Centers.
4. Improve outcomes for Veterans and other eligible persons. (e.g., vocational rehabilitation & Homeless Veterans Reintegration Programs (HVRP), Arkansas Department of Veteran Affairs (ADVA).
5. Establish strong working partnerships with other Veteran organizations and/or the local community at large to improve services to Significant Barriers to Employment (SBE) Veterans and other eligible persons.
 - a. Community Outreach- VSO, DAV, VFW, American Legions etc.
 - b. Direct Employer marketing
 - c. Other State Agencies
 - d. Area Chambers of Commerce
6. Develop innovative approaches and best practices, that demonstrate the excellence in provision of quality employment and training services to Veterans and other eligible persons.
 - a. WIOA Partners
 - b. Office of Apprenticeship
 - c. Office of Skills Development
7. Promote and encourage the hiring of Veterans through the Hire Veterans Medallion Program (HVMP).

2. the approximate number and value of cash awards using the one percent incentive award allocation;

The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services will award Monetary Award Amounts (approximately 5 for each category) for an approximate total of fifteen (15) total recipients, based on the amount of the grant which could fluctuate and is distributed through the Arkansas Department of Finance & Administration. The state's payroll system in each category (DV/LV-CP, Job Service, WIOA) are:

First Place: 42% of award / 5
Second Place: 32% of award / 5
Third Place: 26% of award /5

3. the general nature and approximate value of non-cash performance incentive awards to be charged to the base allocation; and

Arkansas does not anticipate awarding any non-cash performance incentive awards.

4. any challenges the state may anticipate to carrying out a performance incentive award program as mandated by 38 U.S.C. § 4102A(c). This should include any state laws or policies that prohibit such awards, if applicable. Describe the state's efforts in overcoming those challenges.

Arkansas does not anticipate any challenges in carrying out the performance incentive award program.

f. List the performance targets for direct services to veterans provided by JVSG staff, as measured by participants':

The following are performance targets are established for PY26-27:

Employment (Second Quarter After Exit): 53%

Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit): 50%

Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit): \$7,500

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (UI)

A. CONTENTS OF A COMPLETE UI SQSP PACKAGE

1. TRANSMITTAL LETTER

2. BUDGET WORKSHEETS/FORMS

Unemployment Insurance Response:

Home > Unemployment Insurance Reports > UI1 Staff Hours

First | Previous | 4 of 4 Records | Next | Last

Field Help

Query Add Update Save Cancel Validate Submit Output Exit

ETA UI1 Staff Hours (OMB No. 1205-0132)

Report for Period Ending: 09/30/2026
Creation Date: 10/01/2025 16:39
Submit Date: 10/01/2025 12:02

State: AR
Revision Date:
*** SUBMITTED ***

Region: 4

ANNUAL HOURS PER STAFF YEAR AND QUARTERLY DISTRIBUTION					
	Annual	First Quarter	Second Quarter	Third Quarter	Fourth Quarter
Hours Worked	1,655.59	417.30	406.23	412.76	417.30
Hours Paid	2,088.00	528.00	512.00	520.00	528.00

Comments: (Maximum size of the comment is 3000 characters)

Application for Federal Assistance SF-424		
* 1. Type of Submission: ☐ Preapplication ☒ Application ☐ Changed/Corrected Application		
* 2. Type of Application: ☒ New ☐ Continuation ☐ Revision		
* If Revision, select appropriate letter(s): * Other (Specify): 		
* 3. Date Received: 09/21/2023		4. Applicant Identifier: UIPL n. 13-23 UI FY24 Base_Ar
5a. Federal Entity Identifier: UIPL n. 13-23 UI FY24 Base_Ar		5b. Federal Award Identifier: UIPL n. 13-23 UI FY24_Ar
State Use Only:		
6. Date Received by State: 09/14/2023		7. State Application Identifier: UIPL n. 13-23 UI FY24 Base_Ar
8. APPLICANT INFORMATION:		
* a. Legal Name: Arkansas Division of Workforce Services		
* b. Employer/Taxpayer Identification Number (EIN/TIN): 71-6006690		* c. UEI: LY2NJKQJRS29
d. Address:		
* Street1: P.O. Box 2981		
Street2:		
* City: Little Rock		
County/Parish: Pulaski		
* State: AR: Arkansas		
Province:		
* Country: USA: UNITED STATES		
* Zip / Postal Code: 72203-2981		
e. Organizational Unit:		
Department Name: Arkansas Dept. of Commerce		Division Name: Division of Workforce Services
f. Name and contact information of person to be contacted on matters involving this application:		
Prefix: Mr.		* First Name: Don
Middle Name:		
* Last Name: Childers		
Suffix:		
Title: DWS PHAS Assistant Controller		
Organizational Affiliation: Arkansas Division of Workforce Services		
* Telephone Number: (501) 537-5817		Fax Number:
* Email: donald.childers@arkansas.gov		

Application for Federal Assistance SF-424		
* 9. Type of Applicant 1: Select Applicant Type: A: State Government		
Type of Applicant 2: Select Applicant Type: 		
Type of Applicant 3: Select Applicant Type: 		
* Other (specify): 		
* 10. Name of Federal Agency: Employment and Training Administration		
11. Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number: 17.225		
CFDA Title: Unemployment Insurance		
* 12. Funding Opportunity Number: ETA-UIPL-13-23-BASE		
* Title: Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 State Workforce Agency Unemployment Insurance (UI) Resource Planning Targets and Guidelines		
13. Competition Identification Number: ETA-UIPL-13-23-BASE		
Title: Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 State Workforce Agency Unemployment Insurance (UI) Resource Planning Targets and Guidelines		
14. Areas Affected by Project (Cities, Counties, States, etc.): Add Attachment Delete Attachment View Attachment		
* 15. Descriptive Title of Applicant's Project: Provide States with preliminary FY 2024 UI State Administration Base resource Planning Targets, general guidelines for resource planning, and explanation of base resources.		
Attach supporting documents as specified in agency instructions. Add Attachments Delete Attachments View Attachments		

Application for Federal Assistance SF-424	
16. Congressional Districts Of:	
* a. Applicant: AR-02	* b. Program/Project: AR-A11
Attach an additional list of Program/Project Congressional Districts if needed. Add Attachment Delete Attachment View Attachment	
17. Proposed Project:	
* a. Start Date: 10/01/2023	* b. End Date: 09/30/2026
18. Estimated Funding (\$):	
* a. Federal	18,081,722.00
* b. Applicant	0.00
* c. State	0.00
* d. Local	0.00
* e. Other	0.00
* f. Program Income	0.00
* g. TOTAL	18,081,722.00
* 19. Is Application Subject to Review By State Under Executive Order 12372 Process? ☐ a. This application was made available to the State under the Executive Order 12372 Process for review on . ☒ b. Program is subject to E.O. 12372 but has not been selected by the State for review. ☐ c. Program is not covered by E.O. 12372.	
* 20. Is the Applicant Delinquent On Any Federal Debt? (If "Yes," provide explanation in attachment.) ☐ Yes ☒ No If "Yes", provide explanation and attach Add Attachment Delete Attachment View Attachment	
21. *By signing this application, I certify (1) to the statements contained in the list of certifications** and (2) that the statements herein are true, complete and accurate to the best of my knowledge. I also provide the required assurances** and agree to comply with any resulting terms if I accept an award. I am aware that any false, fictitious, or fraudulent statements or claims may subject me to criminal, civil, or administrative penalties. (U.S. Code, Title 18, Section 1001) ☒ ** I AGREE ** The list of certifications and assurances, or an internet site where you may obtain this list, is contained in the announcement or agency specific instructions.	
Authorized Representative:	
Prefix: Mr.	* First Name: Hugh
Middle Name:	
* Last Name: McDonald	
Suffix:	
* Title: Secretary - Arkansas Department of Commerce	
* Telephone Number: (501) 682-7351	Fax Number:
* Email: hugh.mcdonald@arkansas.gov	
* Signature of Authorized Representative: Hugh Chiechi	* Date Signed: 09/21/2023

3. THE STATE PLAN NARRATIVE

Unemployment Insurance Response:

BIENNIAL STATE QUALITY SERVICE PLAN ARKANSAS – FY 2026

During FY 2026, the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (ADWS) is transitioning away from the mainframe legacy environment to a new, web-based system utilizing cloud technology, with an emphasis on customer self-service. This shift aims to optimize staff resources in response to ongoing declines in federal program and administrative funding.

As of February 2022, ADWS successfully adopted a service center model, moving away from the local office-driven approach. This change has eliminated barriers for claimants who previously had to travel to local offices in person, which can be particularly challenging in rural areas. It also helps maintain cost-effective service delivery. ADWS continues to collaborate with the Arkansas Data Team and the Office of State Technology to expand the use of unified systems across different departments. ARLaunch, designed for job seekers, has been operational since February 2025 and includes the UI Certification Hub. This platform allows claimants to meet and track their work search requirements, file their weekly certifications, and update their contact and payment information, all utilizing Login.gov for ID verification. We remain focused on identifying opportunities to partner with other agencies to enhance public services and to leverage common tools whenever possible.

Improving Processes

ADWS is actively collaborating with the business community to enhance employer-facing systems. Our goal is to streamline requirements and increase participation by facilitating quality electronic responses to the necessary information, ensuring the integrity of the UI program. This initiative includes ongoing training sessions for employers, which explain the benefits of the updated processes. Employers can now upload additional documentation to the Tax21 system, including reasons for separation, benefit charge notices, and adjudication questionnaires. By providing one centralized location for submitting new hire registry updates, quarterly UI contribution reports, responses to UI benefit notices, and reporting suspected UI fraud, we aim to encourage compliance and active participation from employers.

Currently, ADWS accepts electronic applications for UI benefits through the EZARC (online claims filing system) and in person at local offices statewide. Each office has a computer lab connected to the EZARC application, with staff available to assist claimants in filing claims, whether electronically or on paper. UI has transitioned to a single phone number format, allowing both employers and claimants to receive assistance with UI questions or issues via a toll-free service center number. This change has enabled us to leverage existing staff to provide services across the state, despite the closure of nine local offices. This approach is more economical and allows for the delivery of quality and consistent service statewide.

ADWS participated in the Claimant Experience Pilot and was the first state to implement Login.gov and United States Postal Service (USPS) pilot processes for ID verification.

This initiative has been highly successful, helping Arkansas claimants provide the necessary verification while reducing travel time and maintaining the integrity of the UI trust fund. The ID verification tool is also used under a state contract for access to ARLaunch for job seekers, further protecting claimant information and reducing fraud. Like all states, Arkansas faced an extreme increase in claims during the pandemic, creating challenges in managing the volume while retaining staff. In response, ADWS is refocusing on providing comprehensive training for new hires and developing incentives to retain experienced staff.

The Governor's enhanced pay plan has resulted in a 30.55% increase in starting pay for entry-level UI staff, creating an incredible opportunity to attract new talent to the agency. With the introduction of a clear career path, we hope to keep staff engaged and demonstrate that there are opportunities for advancement within the agency.

Entry-level staff at the service center undergo a week-long classroom training with reference materials. This includes two days of hands-on claims processing in a group setting, which helps staff fully understand the material. New employees then process claims of varying difficulty for two to three weeks to familiarize themselves with the

requirements for claimants and employers. These claims are reviewed by supervisors for quality assurance. Once it is determined that they have mastered the necessary skills, new hires proceed to phone call training. This starts with listening to recorded calls and analyzing issues as a group. They then move on to one-on-one real-time call observations with experienced staff members, before being prepared to handle Tier One calls, which typically involve simpler issues. They have quick access to supervisors and other team members via chat functions to address any issues as they arise. We hold monthly training sessions on various topics to keep staff informed of program changes and fraud prevention strategies. In addition, weekly emails from UI management address issues as they occur.

We prioritize staff participation in training sections offered through the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA) learning management platform, which has proven effective for training new Benefits Accuracy Management (BAM) and Data Validation (DV) staff.

ADWS also maintains a strong working relationship with our DOL regional office, which provides excellent guidance on a variety of topics. Training and retention remain focal points for ADWS as we strive to cultivate and maintain a well-trained and experienced staff. Our mission includes focusing on succession planning and utilizing the National Integrity Academy as a development tool for UI Administration management staff. ADWS is committed to delivering quality service while working to reduce and eliminate improper payments. Ongoing training will continue to emphasize a thorough understanding of the unemployment insurance program. This dedication to staff development will be instrumental in achieving these goals.

Timely Delivery and Backlog

Arkansas has faced challenges due to the loss of experienced and well-trained staff, a situation that has persisted since the pandemic. This ongoing turnover has further complicated the adherence to the 21-day first pay timeliness measure. We received approval to increase financial incentives for staff to become expert adjudicators previously and the Governors new pay plan has also assisted in better compensating this staff, a process that typically requires more than two years of experience to master. In the 2025 fiscal year, the ADWS fully transitioned away from the in-house imaging system and continuing to enhance the DocuWare system. This includes adding more documents to the logic that automatically images to claims. Since the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program relies heavily on images to make quality decisions and ensure the integrity of the UI trust fund, the accurate, expedient, reliable imaging and retention of source documents is crucial. We are also working on transitioning from barcodes to QR codes to improve efficiency and reduce the need for human intervention, which should help minimize error rates.

Additionally, we have reinstated the ability for staff to image their own documents. While this has increased adjudicators' administrative time, it has decreased the waiting time for other departments, resulting in a net gain in the speed of decision-making. Furthermore, additional staff have been trained and promoted to expert status, which has alleviated bottlenecks in making expert decisions. The IT department has focused on moving away from the mainframe, and we look forward to implementing further enhancements to the adjudication system in the coming year to expedite processes and reduce the time required to make quality decisions.

Supporting Reemployment

RESEA

All Unemployment Insurance (UI) claimants are evaluated based on various demographic factors to identify those who are most likely to exhaust their benefits before returning to the workforce. Selected claimants are required to attend an initial Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) review, where they meet one-on-one with a reemployment specialist. During the initial review, participants must fulfill certain RESEA program requirements. These include completing a Career Action Plan (CAP), conducting labor market research, tracking work search activities, creating or providing a resume. Claimant are scheduled for a mandatory subsequent activity in the week following their initial review consisting of a 1-hour workshop of their choice. They may choose from Career Path Explorations, Job Search Strategies and Resume Writing/Interview Preparation. All program requirements are discussed in detail during the initial review. Failure to comply with these requirements may lead to a delay or loss of unemployment benefits.

As of September 1, 2024, the RESEA program has been fully integrated into the Reemployment Division. A comprehensive review of the program's operations in the state was completed, along with retraining for all staff in the initial months. Under new leadership, the program has continued to evolve, becoming more efficient and better suited to meet participant needs. We are currently working on developing a self-scheduling system within the ARLaunch platform, which is expected to be fully operational by March 2026. This system will allow staff to devote more time to providing services that assist claimants in returning to work and ensuring compliance with UI requirements. Additionally, it will offer claimants greater flexibility regarding the timing of the services they receive.

Short-Term Compensation

Arkansas is an active participant in the Short-Term Compensation (STC) program often referred to as shared work. This program gained visibility with employers during the pandemic period where Arkansas had record participation. Reemployment continues to support employers and claimants through the STC process by explaining the program, and the benefits to employers to maintain employee's connection to the workforce and avoid layoffs.

Work Search

ACT 587 amends Arkansas Code §11-10-507 and took effect on January 1, 2024, and increased the required number of job search contacts to five per week for each claimant. The amendment further specified what qualifies as a required work search contact and mandates the audit of 100 work search logs submitted by claimants each week. To reinforce the work search requirements, all UI claimants will also be required to report their work search activities on each weekly certification for benefits. This change, along with additional claimant training, aims to enhance the integrity of the UI trust fund by encouraging claimants to actively seek employment and re-enter the workforce as quickly as possible.

Additionally, ARLaunch for job seekers currently allows users to track their work search requirements, but this will become mandatory for all methods of weekly certification starting January 1, 2026. This new requirement will facilitate the staff's ability to verify and audit the information provided more efficiently.

UI Program Integrity

As outlined in the Integrity Action Plan, the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (ADWS) is actively enhancing controls within the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program to combat the rising incidence of fraudulent claims. One strategy employed by ADWS to reduce UI fraud is its continued collaboration with the employer community. By fostering relationships with organizations such as the Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce and the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), ADWS is able to offer training and gather insights on the needs of businesses, which helps identify potential issues related to separation, wage earnings, and identity theft in claims. ADWS also participated in the Login.gov and USPS ID verification pilot programs, which have been instrumental in detecting and preventing fraudulent payments from being processed while adhering to all Department of Labor (DOL) requirements concerning due process. We continue to leverage data analytics to identify trends and links among fraudulent claims. Through the Integrity Data Hub (IDH), which utilizes weekly file transmissions, ADWS aims to identify potential fraud during the waiting period for claims. Moving forward, we are exploring ways to fully utilize IDH processes to enable real-time data comparisons that will further prevent fraud schemes.

Similar to the Unemployment Insurance State Information Data Exchange System (SIDES), ADWS's Automated Adjudication System (AAS) is web-based and designed to enhance the efficiency of the non-monetary determination process. Since its implementation in Arkansas, ADWS has continually improved the system to streamline the adjudication process further. Through the electronic response system, employers can receive and respond to Notices to Last Employer, Notices to Base Period Employer, and questionnaires regarding non-monetary issues online. ADWS acknowledges that the United States Department of Labor (USDOL) encourages states to fully implement SIDES. However, Arkansas's Automated Adjudication System and electronic response system, which are based on our state UI law, provide functionalities similar to SIDES. This allows Arkansas to tailor questionnaires to elicit more information from employers without incurring additional subscription costs. ADWS will consider incorporating SIDES into its modernized benefits system in the future.

Worker Misclassification

ADWS has been facing difficulties in identifying misclassified workers. Retaining qualified staff has proven to be challenging because they have more financial incentives to leave ADWS and move to other state agencies that require similar work. With the Governors pay plan we were able to increase the entry pay grade for Auditors who conduct misclassification investigations and audit employers for compliance, and we are currently in the process of filling these positions. We believe that this enhancement for our staff, along with continued use of technology to simplify audit processes, will help us better identify misclassified employees and meet the audit core measures set by the Department of Labor (DOL).

Required Reporting

As all states have suffered through the pandemic period, we have seen large turnovers through attrition of well qualified UI reporting staff. The reporting requirements are complex and interwoven creating additional challenges for unseasoned staff. This as well as staff shortages in the budget units, financial management service and UI core program units has stressed this difficult situation. ADWS continues to face the issues of

timely reporting and is in the process of hiring additional support staff to assist with these processes.

Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA)

Percent of Interstate/Intrastate Payments Made Timely

To meet the target, the state must achieve an average of over 87% for all interstate and intrastate first payments of Unemployment Compensation (UC) made within 21 days from the week ending date of the first compensable week. Currently, the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (ADWS) is at 62.2%, which is 24.8% below the target. This shortfall is largely due to staffing issues that have affected both the Service Center and Adjudication sections. Previous declines in performance in both departments have slowed the processing of initial and additional claims, significantly increasing the time taken to issue decisions. However, in the last two months, the averages have improved and returned to acceptable levels. It will take a few quarters to raise the 12-month rolling average back up to target levels.

Detection of Recoverable Overpayments

To meet the target, the state must achieve a detection rate of recoverable overpayments greater than 57.5%. However, during the grading period, ADWS only detected 9.78% of collectible overpayments. This figure is misleadingly low due to a delay in processing identified overpayments caused by a previously reported system issue.

Employer Tax Liability Decision Made Timely

In order to meet the target, the state must achieve an average of over 90% for all employer tax liability determinations made within 90 days after the end of the first quarter. Currently, ADWS is at 89.84%, which is 0.16% below the target. This shortfall is linked to an increase in employer-related identity theft schemes, where individuals create fake backdated accounts (covering two quarters) and report false wages to file claims and obtain fraudulent unemployment insurance benefits. To address this issue, we are proposing to partner with another state agency to implement additional steps and verification processes before an online account can be created.

Core Measures

The Detection of Overpayments Measure

This measure reflects the percentage of detectable and recoverable overpayments estimated by the Benefit Accuracy Measurement (BAM) survey, which has been established for recovery through regular Unemployment Insurance (UI) Benefit Payment Control (BPC) program operations. The performance period for the BPC component spans three years, ending on March 31, 2024, while the performance period for the BAM component concludes three years later, on September 30, 2024. For the relevant BPC and BAM reporting periods, Arkansas reported a rate of 116.45%. This figure exceeds the acceptable range of above 50% and below 95%. We believe this high rate is related to a previously mentioned issue regarding the detection of recoverable overpayments. Specifically, the agency experienced a period during which overpayments were researched, but determinations were not issued due to a system issue.

Effective Audit Measure

The Effective Audit Measure, as noted in UIPL No. 03- 11, is a blended measure of the following four factors:

1. Percentage of Contributory Employers Audited Annually
2. Percentage of Total Wage Changed as a Result of Audit
3. Percentage of Total Wages Audited
4. Average Number of Misclassifications Detected Per Audit

Each of the four factors has a minimum standard score that states must meet to pass the Effective Audit Measure, as well as an overall combined score that must be achieved. The measure also requires each state to direct additional emphasis to the factor(s) that state personnel deem important to the state. An additional two points must be earned among any of the four factors to attain the overall passing score of at least 7.0. A CAP is required for states that do not meet the measure based on calendar year 2024 data. ADWS did fail this measure for the 2024 calendar year with the following scores:

1. Employers Audited (penetration rate) 0.9% which is below the required 1.0% .
2. Change in Total Wages from Audits (picking up wages during the audit process), 2.6% which is above the requirement of 2.0%.
3. Total Wages Audited, 0.9% which is below the required 1.0%.
4. Average Number of Misclassified Employees Detected per Audit, 0.8% which is below the required 1.0%.
5. Total of all Factors, 5.2% which is below the required 7.0% total score for the measure.

We continue to face challenges with audit measures as we adjust our strategies due to staff turnover and the influx of new accounts. ADWS has lost experienced audit staff through attrition and moves to more financially rewarding positions. As part of the Governor's new pay plan, these positions offer increased salaries and a more defined career path, aiming to incentivize staff to remain with the agency. We strongly believe that implementing career paths along with additional financial incentives will help retain highly skilled employees, attract new talent, improve our scores, and enable ADWS to successfully meet these core measures in the future. We are still working on filling two additional positions.

Improper Payments Measure

The Improper Payments Measure is defined as Unemployment Compensation (UC) overpaid plus UC underpaid divided by the total amount of UC paid. It is based on estimates from the results of the BAM survey of paid UC claims in the State UI, Unemployment Compensation for Federal Employees, and Unemployment Compensation for Ex-Servicemembers programs. The Payment Integrity Information Act (PIIA) requires agencies to examine the risk of erroneous payments in all programs and activities they administer. This Federal law defines the term improper payment as: Any payment that should not have been made or that was made in an incorrect amount, including an overpayment or underpayment, under a statutory, contractual, administrative, or other legally applicable requirement; and Includes:

- * Any payment to an ineligible recipient
- * Any payment for an ineligible good or service
- * Any duplicate payment
- * Any payment for a good or service not received, except for those payments where authorized by law
- * Any payment that does not account for credit for applicable discounts.

PIIA requires Federal programs to report an annual improper payment rate. It also requires agencies to include all identified improper payments in the reported estimate, regardless of whether the improper payment in question has been or is being recovered (see UIPL No. 09-13, Change 1 for ETA's approved improper payment rate computation methodology).

States are expected to maintain an improper payment rate of less than 10% for covered UC programs. This ALP is applicable to the 2023 PIIA performance period (July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023). A state failing to meet the ALP for the 2023 PIIA performance period will be expected to develop a CAP as part of the FY 2026 SQSP.

ADWS had an effective improper payment rate of 14.56% for the BAM effective period of July 2022-June 2023, which is higher than the required 10% or less, with work search creating 37.88 percent of all improper payments. The current method of a serial yes/no question on weekly certification paired with the increased firmer requirements effective 1/1/2024, created a much more difficult obstacle for BAM to be able to verify information on work search from claimants looking backward to provide accurate information. This is being addressed via the new requirement for claimants to record their work search efforts on the weekly certifications.

Separation issues account for 30.88% of all overpayments during this period, making it a critical area for continued collaboration with employers. We have noticed that employers often do not respond to adjudication notices but do respond to BAM notices, providing separation information that can retroactively render a claimant ineligible, resulting in improper payments. It is challenging to find the right balance between making timely decisions and allowing employers sufficient time to respond with accurate information. To address this, we continue to offer educational sessions to help employers understand how responding to Unemployment Insurance (UI) notices and providing accurate information can positively impact their ratings for years to come. We aim to foster buy-in for this process.

Benefit year earnings remain our third highest contributing factor for improper payments, accounting for 20.66%. We have made a concerted effort to educate claimants by controlling claims when wages are no longer reported via continued claims. This includes information provided in claimant handbooks, service center calls, and by sending out wage earnings audits as quickly as possible to stop payments as soon as an issue is identified. We continue to seek ways to reduce this percentage.

UI Overpayment Recovery Measure

As explained in UIPL No. 09-13, the recovery rate is "the value of improper overpayments recovered divided by the value of improper overpayments identified." The ALP for the recovery rate measure is 68 percent for the 2024 PIIA performance period. Pursuant to the UI Reports Handbook (ET Handbook No. 401, 5th edition), the June quarter ETA 227 reports are due August 1st each year. A state failing to meet the ALP for the 2024 PIIA performance period will be expected to develop a CAP as part of the FY 2024 SQSP.

ADWS' UI overpayment recovery measure of 79.19 for the July 2023-June 2024 time frame is 11.19%, higher than the required 68%. We have worked and implemented plain language determinations and billing forms, which we believe has assisted in increasing our collections.

Secretary Standards

Data for the most recent secretary's year April 2024 through March 2025 was as follows.

1. First Payment Promptness, Intrastate 14/21 days: 62.2%, less than 87% or above requirement.
2. First Payment Promptness, intrastate 35 days: 84.7%, less than the required 93% or greater requirement.
3. First Payment Promptness Interstate 14/21 days: 68.9%, less than the 70% or greater requirement.
4. First Payment Promptness Interstate 35 days: 92.8%, greater than the 78% or greater requirement.
5. Lower Authority Appeals 30 days: 74.7%, greater than the 60% or greater requirement.
6. Lower Authority Appeals 45 days: 91.0, greater than the 80% or higher requirement.

First Payment Promptness percent of all first payments within 14/21 days after the compensable week. ADWS is making great strides but continues to struggle with this measure. For the period April 1, 2023, through March 31, 2024, at 64.5% or 22.5% less than the required level of performance. This is due to staffing struggles and the inability to retain seasoned well-trained staff. This ongoing turnover has further complicated the adherence to the 21-day first pay timeliness measure. We received approval to increase financial incentives for staff to become expert adjudicators previously and the Governors new pay plan has also assisted in better compensating this staff, a process that typically requires more than two years of experience to master.

Average Age of pending lower authority appeals time lapse less than 45 days from the filing date. ADWS has exceeded the 80% of all pending decision less than 45 days from the filing date. For the period April 1, 2023, through March 31, 2024, ADWS was at 91.0%. The volume of appeals has reduced and as of June 2025, is back to ALP standards for the 12-month rolling average for both 30 and 45 days.

UI Programs

State Directory of New Hires (SDNH)/National Directory of New Hires (NDNH)

ADWS' Benefit Accuracy Measurement (BAM) Unit is compliant with the NDNH matching requirements as set forth in ET Handbook No. 395, 5th Edition, Chapter VI, UIPL 03-07, and UIPL No., Change 1.

Benefit Accuracy Measurement (BAM)

State BAM operations or operational components that are not compliant with investigative and/or method and procedure requirements established in ET Handbook No. 395, 5th Edition, and through findings established through ET Handbook No. 396, 4th Edition monitoring reviews (based on the annual determination letter issued on or before May 1, 2023), are expected to be addressed in a CAP. This includes paid and denied claim population variances outside established control limits.

ADWS met or exceeded all ALPs associated with BAM Operations per the BAM Annual Determination letter. Being able to get the paygrade increases has increased stabilization of employees and with that the seasoned trained staff.

Initially it was ruled that Arkansas did not meet all the ALPs for BAM Compliance, but an email from Catherine Rolling dated June 6, 2025, states that ALPs were met and will not be included on the SQSP.

Tax Performance System (TPS)

ADWS' UI Tax Operations adhere to federal reporting and oversight requirements. No issues were identified in the TPS review for 2025. During the 2025 fiscal year, ADWS transitioned away from its existing in-house imaging system and continued to enhance

the DocuWare system by adding more documents to the logic used for automatically imaging claims. Since the UI program relies on images to make informed decisions and ensure the integrity of the UI trust fund, accurate, expedient, and reliable imaging and retention of source documents is crucial. We are also working towards transitioning from barcodes to QR codes to improve efficiency, reduce human intervention, and minimize error rates. This change allowed for a thorough review in 2025.

Data Validation (DV)

ADWS submitted all DV items for validation and certification by June 10, 2025. All DV elements in tax and benefits passed with no issues. We continue to process several populations that have had issues in the past each quarter to identify any potential issues early.

Other UI Performance

UI Reporting Requirements

The 204 containing the analysis of the effectiveness of the calculation of rates and charges has had challenges since the law change for non-charges during the pandemic period. These reports were submitted late but prior years were corrected with great effort from both program and IT staff in June of 2025. This report should not be an issue in the future.

Issue Detection Dates

ADWS acknowledges the need to enhance the recording of issue detection dates and determination dates for nonmonetary determinations while maintaining a minimum standard of at least 95% accuracy in evaluating these determinations. From April 1, 2024, to March 31, 2025, ADWS achieved an accuracy rating of 88.02% in recording issue detection and determination dates. The inability to meet the minimum standard can be attributed to several challenges the state has faced during this period. Staff retention has been a persistent issue since 2020, leading to an increased workload for the adjudication team alongside a growing number of nonmonetary determination cases. This situation has hindered Adjudication Managers' ability to provide regular feedback to their staff, as they also need to adjudicate cases on a part-time basis. Additionally, many of the Managers are new and inexperienced, having held their positions for just over a year. These roles are crucial for observing, training, and providing feedback to adjudication staff regarding the quality of nonmonetary determinations. Ongoing training will be a priority in setting goals for the strategic planning sessions in the coming years.

Future Performance Requirements

UIPL 07-21 announced for states that utilize RESEA programs a new reemployment core measure, designed to focus on RESEA program performance. RESEA program must pass Mid-Year Results target for 3 years, Arkansas Passed with no identified issues.

Coordinating with DOL and OIG

ADWS actively works with OIG on fraud schemes both reporting to OIG when suspicious activity has been identified and receiving information from OIG and identifying in our system claims associated with larger fraud schemes. The working relationship has benefited ADWS by bringing press attention to efforts to criminally prosecute offenders and deter future fraud attempts.

ADWS complies with all OIG requests for information and provides all data to the best of our ability to continue to combat fraud in the UI program.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

WIOA is designed to provide job seekers with increased access to employment, education, training, and other support services to succeed in the labor market, match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete, improve the coordination of employment and training services and resources, and strengthen collaboration with state and local partners. The State of Arkansas elected to coordinate and integrate as many workforce development programs as possible, and therefore, elected to submit a combined state plan designed to streamline the investments in our workforce development system. The combined plan integrates and streamlines the services provided by program partners: ADWS and its Arkansas Rehabilitation Services and Adult Education Services Divisions, the Division of Services for the Blind, and the Arkansas Department of Human Services. As part of this effort, ADWS hosts biannual statewide partner meetings each spring and fall. These training and strategy sessions included workforce development partners and stakeholders, including employers, economic developers, Workforce Development Board Members, and community college representatives with the goal of developing broader and deeper partnerships, integration of programs and services within their regional area to help prepare Arkansas' workforce to meet the needs of current and potential employers. Additionally, our workforce development partners present their programs' information to the Arkansas Workforce Development Board at their quarterly meetings to increase the level of integration of the state's workforce program. Moving forward, ADWS plans to continue our efforts in collaborating with private sector employers, non-profit organizations and stakeholders who can assist us in maximizing the full potential of the Arkansas' workforce system.

To ensure that claimants are aware of the array of services provided through the workforce center, claimants are required to obtain ES services as part of their initial claim filing process. Specific enhancements made by UI include notification to claimants with inactive Arkansas Job Link (AJL) accounts of the requirement that their accounts be activated and current, including a resume. Resumes uploaded to an individual AJL account are then searchable by employers. A current AJL account ensures that claimants have maintained their work registrations and are able to access services offered through the Arkansas Workforce Centers.

UI Technical Assistance Resources

ETA Regional Office

ADWS maintains a close working relationship with our regional partners and has regular meetings to go over concerns and seek additional guidance with reorganization and modernization challenges. This has been especially beneficial as our Reemployment Director is relatively new to the role and is working to update processes.

UI Integrity Center

ADWS currently utilizes features of the UI Integrity center in behavioral insights, state services, the integrity data hob, national integrity academy, and knowledge exchange library. These tools have been used to train new and existing staff and help staff better identify potentially fraudulent activity. We use the library to research additional ideas

on our planned modernization efforts and our plan to continually assess and improve the Arkansas UI processes and systems.

UI Information Technology Support Center

The ITSC was utilized when Arkansas was on the road to a vendor-based solution and was helpful in the RFP process. Much of what Arkansas learned in this process assisted ADWS in coming to the decision that an iterative process would work better with our resource limitations and had a higher success rate as a long-term solution.

Maintaining Solvency of the State's Trust Fund

The continued strengthening of Arkansas' labor market since the pandemic to pre-pandemic levels is reflected in the current LMI data. Arkansas' Unemployment Insurance program served as an important safety net for thousands of Arkansas families during the pandemic. Unlike the prior recession, the increase in demand for unemployment claims did not exhaust the program's trust fund. Arkansas did not need the assistance of Title XII Advances to pay UI Benefits. ADWS trust fund balance of \$997,170,513.85 at the end of CY 2025.

Assurances

By signing the SQSP Signature Page, ADWS certifies that it will comply with the assurances listed in Handbook 336, 18th Edition. ADWS will institute any plans or measures necessary to comply with the requirements. Additionally, UIPL 25-21 requires information for Assurance "H", "Assurance of Contingency Planning"; and Assurance "J", "Assurance of Automated Information Systems Security.

H. Assurance of Contingency Planning:

Date IT Contingency Plan Implemented: April 2025

IT Contingency Plan Reviewed/Updated: Biannual

IT Contingency Plan Tested: Tested April 2025

J. Assurance of Automated System Security

Date Risk Assessment Conducted: April 2025

System Security Plan Reviewed/Updated: Biannual

System Security Plan implemented: April 2025

Assurance of Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA)

DUA training was last completed in April 2025 and will be completed each year.

The Standard Operating Procedures for the DUA program are included in the DUA handbook made available to staff

4. Milestones

First Pay Promptness

1	First Payment Promptness												
2	Federal Fiscal Year: 2025-2026 SQSP Corrective Action Plan & Progress Report					Back to Biennial Overview 2025				Back to Alternate Overview 2026			
3	State: Arkansas					Federal Fiscal Year 2025				Federal Fiscal Year 2026			
4	Performance Measures	ALP	CAP Based on 04/01/2023 - 03/31/2024 Performance	CAP Based on 04/01/2024 - 03/31/2025 Performance	State's Target/Actual Performance	12/31/2024 Quarter 1	3/31/2025 Quarter 2	6/30/2025 Quarter 3	9/30/2025 Quarter 4	12/31/2025 Quarter 1	3/31/2026 Quarter 2	6/30/2026 Quarter 3	9/30/2026 Quarter 4
5	First Payment Promptness: % of all 1st payments within 14/21 days after the compensable week.	≥ 87%	62.20%	64.50%	Target	68.0%	73.0%	79.0%	76.0%	80.0%	85.0%	87.0%	
Actual					71.7%	72.6%	64.6%	75.6%	80.4%				
6	First Payment Promptness, 14/21 days Intrastate UI full weeks	≥ 87%	59.84%	62.20%	Target	70.0%	75.0%	80.0%	80.0%	85.0%	85.0%	88.0%	
7					Actual	71.0%	72.3%	64.3%	75.2%	79.6%			
8	First Payment Promptness, 14/21 days Interstate UI full weeks	≥ 70%	64.42%	68.90%	Target	68.0%	72.0%	74.0%	78.0%	80.0%			
9					Actual	72.6%	76.4%	73.8%	78.0%	80.9%			
10	First Payment Promptness, 35 days Intrastate UI full weeks	≥ 93%	72.92%	84.70%	Target	85.0%	94.0%	88.0%	90.0%	90.0%	93.0%		
11					Actual	94.0%	86.0%	83.8%	86.0%	87.1%			
12	First Payment Promptness, 35 days Interstate UI full weeks	≥ 78%	83.17%	92.80%	Target					87.0%			
13					Actual					88.6%			
14	Regional Office Comments in cell below:												
15													

1. Rewriting the UI AAS questionnaires into an easier-to-understand format (8th-grade reading level) to get better/more accurate information.

12/31/2024: We continue to work through the questionnaires to plain language. Once the mainframe migration is completed, the process will begin to include the updated forms in the IT systems.

03/31/2025: Questionnaires are still being re-written. Improvements have been made but changing the 12-month rolling average takes time.

06/30/2025: The rewriting process has been completed, but the installation will be later after the mainframe conversion.

09/30/2025: The rewriting process has been completed, but the installation will be later after the mainframe conversion. IT staff are focused on testing and getting off the mainframe.

12/31/2025: The rewriting process is complete; however, the installation will occur after the mainframe conversion. IT staff are currently addressing issues caused by the transition from the mainframe. Once operations are stabilized, this will be incorporated into the enhancement process.

2. Having staff from other UI areas help with adjudication to help with backlogs in AAS and to help retain timeliness.

12/31/2024: Two staff members have temporarily moved into AAS, along with UI Technical staff who are working half-days to make decisions aimed at increasing production.

03/31/2025: Additional staff have been hired to go along with the UI Technical staff working half days in AAS. We have completed basic training on a few more UI Technical staff to help.

06/30/2025: Trained more UI Technical staff to help in adjudication. Finished additional training for some UI Technical staff to do more advanced decisions.

09/30/2025: We have increased the work level on AAS for the UI Technical staff and are getting back to ALP standards. Will take a while for the 12-month average to show the progress. Recently more staff have moved to UI Technical and will learn AAS.

12/31/2025: AAS is fully staffed, and the UI technical team consistently meets its weekly decision-making targets to help. An additional training session is scheduled for March 26 to increase the level of difficulty these staff members can handle in decision-making. If all remains on this positive trajectory, we believe we will continue to move closer to timeliness. mainframe. Once operations are stabilized, this will be incorporated into the enhancement process.

3. Hiring additional staff and getting them up to speed as quickly as possible without sacrificing quality.

12/31/2024: We have hired new staff, but the turnover rate equals the number of hires due to the challenging work. We have opened the positions to other UI staff.

03/31/2025: New staff have been hired this quarter and are in training along with training of more UI Technical staff to help with adjudication.

06/30/2025: Adjudication is now up to date. Continuing with UI Technical staff spending half days doing AAS to stay caught up.

09/30/2025: Continuing with UI Technical staff helping out and have had other staff move to AAS recently. The training is ongoing. Will have more UI Technical staff train to do AAS in the near future.

12/31/2025: AAS is now fully staffed, and we are continuing to deploy UI technical staff to manage the increased workload and ensure their skills remain engaged.

Nonmonetary Determination Timeliness

Nonmonetary Determination Timeliness												
Federal Fiscal Year: 2025-2026 SQSP Corrective Action Plan & Progress Report					Back to Biennial Overview 2025				Back to Alternate Overview 2026			
State: Arkansas					Federal Fiscal Year 2025				Federal Fiscal Year 2026			
Performance Measures	ALP	CAP Based on 04/01/2023 - 03/31/2024 Performance	CAP Based on 04/01/2024 - 03/31/2025 Performance	State's Target/Actual Performance	12/31/2024 Quarter 1	3/31/2025 Quarter 2	6/30/2025 Quarter 3	9/30/2025 Quarter 4	12/31/2025 Quarter 1	3/31/2026 Quarter 2	6/30/2026 Quarter 3	9/30/2026 Quarter 4
Nonmonetary Determination Timeliness	≥ 80%	11.26%	21.00%	Target	30.0%	39.0%	47.0%	53.0%	70.0%	80.0%		
				Actual	17.7%	21.0%	24.3%	37.4%	48.2%			
Regional Office Comments in cell below:												

1. Rewriting the UI AAS questionnaires into an easier-to-understand format (8th-grade reading level) to get better/more accurate information.

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03/31/2025: Questionnaires are still being re-written. Improvements have been made but changing the 12-month rolling average takes time.

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- Hiring additional staff and getting them up to speed as quickly as possible without sacrificing quality.

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06/30/2025: Adjudication is now up to date. Continuing with UI Technical staff spending half days doing AAS to stay caught up.

09/30/2025: Continuing with UI Technical staff helping out and have had other staff move to AAS recently. The training is ongoing. Will have more UI Technical staff train to do AAS in the near future.

12/31/2025: AAS is now fully staffed, and we are continuing to deploy UI technical staff to manage the increased workload and ensure their skills remain engaged.

Effective Audit Measures

Effective Audit Measure (EAM) - Score ≥ 7 ; exceed all 4 factors												
Federal Fiscal Year: 2025-2026 SCSP Corrective Action Plan & Progress Report					Back to Biennial Overview 2025				Back to Alternate Overview 2026			
State: Arkansas					Federal Fiscal Year 2025				Federal Fiscal Year 2026			
Performance Measures	ALP	CAP Based on 01/01/2023 - 12/31/2023 Performance	CAP Based on 01/01/2024 - 12/31/2024 Performance	State's Target/Actual Performance	12/31/2024 Quarter 1	3/31/2025 Quarter 2	6/30/2025 Quarter 3	9/30/2025 Quarter 4	12/31/2025 Quarter 1	3/31/2026 Quarter 2	6/30/2026 Quarter 3	9/30/2026 Quarter 4
EAM - Factor 1 (Contributory Employers Audited)	Score ≥ 1	0.90	0.9	Target	1.0	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.5	1.5		
				Actual	0.9	1.4	1.2	1.6	1.1			
EAM - Factor 3 (Total Wages Audited)	Score ≥ 1	0.70	0.9	Target	0.9	1.3	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5		
				Actual	1.0	1.5	1.9	1.7	1.4			
EAM - Factor 4 (Avg # of Misclassified Workers Detected per Audit)	Score ≥ 1	1.30	0.8	Target	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.6	1.7		
				Actual	0.9	0.7	1.6	1.7	1.9			
Effective Audit Measure Total Score	Score ≥ 7	8.20	5.2	Target	7.0	7.2	7.5	7.0	7.0	7.0		
				Actual	5.5	5.6	6.7	6.7	6.4			
Regional Office Comments in cell below:												

- Hiring additional auditors to get fully staffed at the higher pay grades with higher audits counts requirements per quarter.

12/31/2024: We ended the 2024 quarter with 243 audits completed. The average of Q1-Q3 was 170 audits, and staff increased the completed audits by 70 audits. This shows a trend toward meeting and exceeding.

03/31/2025: We were able to hit EAM 1 due to data cleanup and a temporary increase of staff resources. In the process of hiring new staff to replace the three that left.

06/30/2025: The new pay plan implementation has also increased the applicant pool for auditors, and this has helped increase the metrics for each EAM as well as the overall EAM score.

09/30/2025: Another staff has been hired, and the new pay plan has made the position a higher position and more desirable pay grade. This should help keep staff and attract new staff.

12/31/2025: All ten auditor positions have now been filled at the new pay grade. Furthermore, we are advertising two Auditor II roles to bring increased expertise for managing more complex audits and organizations with larger workforces.

- Monthly monitoring of staff audits by the Audit Supervisor and report to the Assistant Director of Reemployment.

12/31/2024: Due to the additional staff of 4 auditors, we completed 243 audits. However, we have lost 2 auditors at the beginning of 2025. Manager holds weekly meetings to address staff needs and concerns.

03/31/2025: State has lost 3 staff which has impacted the ability to focus on EAM 4. Management has addressed the need for additional resources to maintain EAM 1-3 and increase EAM 4 to show improvement for next update.

06/30/2025: This has shown improvements, and it has built on the improvements from last quarter's status report.

09/30/2025: These are still being monitored by management monthly and quarterly and reported to the Director of UI.

12/31/2025: Management continues to review and monitor audits to identify training needs. The addition of the Auditor 2 positions will help address deficiencies more rapidly, as well as serve as mentors once up to speed on UI Contribution-specific audit procedures.

3. More E-audits being completed to get to the ALP standard

12/31/2024: We are still working to improve this EAM. We are meeting the standard, but want to continue improving, this will include filling a vacant Auditor position.

03/31/2025: This should also improve the overall metric of 7 or above when hiring to fill the three vacancies currently in the Field Audit Unit. The department lost three staff and are in the process of hiring more staff.

06/30/2025: One vacancy has been filled with a tenured auditor that will require minimal retraining. Two additional vacancies will be filled during the quarter which will improve performance and EAM scores.

09/30/2025: Another vacancy has been filled, and the employee will start at the end of October. She is moving from UI Technical and will have some working knowledge of UI so her learning curve will not be as long.

12/31/2025: This milestone consistently meets or exceeds the standard, but we remain committed to enhancing overall efficiency.

4. Weekly meetings will be had with staff on workflow by the supervisor. This will keep all informed of the completed audits and adjustments to schedules can be made to keep up production.

12/31/2025: Regular weekly meetings with staff help to address deficiencies, and it has aided in fixing deficiencies in scoring of data validation.

5. The agency has added the EDM(Employer Data Module) to the Integrity Data Hub to be able to report fictitious employers and to receive info on potential fictitious employers from other states.

6. 12/31/2025: The Field Audit Manager uses current trends to update and assign audits, ensuring targeted improvements for each EAM score.

Improper Payments Measure

Improper Payments Measure												
Federal Fiscal Year: 2025-2026 SQSP Corrective Action Plan & Progress Report					Back to Biennial Overview 2025				Back to Alternate Overview 2026			
State: Arkansas					Federal Fiscal Year 2025				Federal Fiscal Year 2026			
Performance Measures	ALP	CAP Based on PIA Year 2023 BAM Batches 202227 - 202326	CAP Based on PIA Year 2024 BAM Batches 202327 - 202426	State's Target/Actual Performance	12/31/2024 Quarter 1	3/31/2025 Quarter 2	6/30/2025 Quarter 3	9/30/2025 Quarter 4	12/31/2025 Quarter 1	3/31/2026 Quarter 2	6/30/2026 Quarter 3	9/30/2026 Quarter 4
Improper Payments Measure	< 10%	5.53%	12.59%	Target					14.00%	12.00%	9.90%	
				Actual					14.74%			

Regional Office Comments in cell below:

1. Change the phone system to take weekly claims with the work search.

09/30/2025: Currently working with the vendor to accomplish this. Should be completed by the 1st quarter of 2026.

12/31/2025: The replacement ARKLINE, a phone-based weekly certification system, was introduced in the second week of January 2026. It is anticipated to positively influence and lower the improper payment rate related to work search issues. Claimants must report their completed work search

activities as part of the weekly certification process, using both online platforms and the phone system.

2. Make AR Launch the main job search system for the state.

09/30/2025: We are working to accomplish this goal. It is up and running, but Arknet is still available and does not have the technology to record the work search. ARLaunch should be internet system in the first quarter of 26.

12/31/2025: ARLAUNCH is now the system of record for searching for work in the state of Arkansas. Tools have been put in place to encourage its use by serving as a one-stop shop to look for work, identify training opportunities, update address and direct deposit information, and file weekly certification.

3. Add Youtube videos on UI topics(fraud, claiming benefits, etc) to the claim filing system.

12/31/2025: The scripting process has started, and collaboration with the communications team is underway to determine the sequence of video creation, the platforms for posting, and their integration into the new Arkansas Division of Reemployment Website in development.

Detection of Overpayments

Detection of Overpayments												
Federal Fiscal Year: 2025-2026 SQSP Corrective Action Plan & Progress Report					Back to Biennial Overview 2025				Back to Alternate Overview 2026			
State: Arkansas					Federal Fiscal Year 2025				Federal Fiscal Year 2026			
Performance Measures	ALP	CAP Based on 04/01/2023 - 03/31/2024 Performance	CAP Based on 04/01/2024 - 03/31/2025 Performance	State's Target/Actual Performance	12/31/2024 Quarter 1	3/31/2025 Quarter 2	6/30/2025 Quarter 3	9/30/2025 Quarter 4	12/31/2025 Quarter 1	3/31/2026 Quarter 2	6/30/2026 Quarter 3	9/30/2026 Quarter 4
Detection of Overpayments - Core Measure - ≥50% & ≤95% of Detectable/Recoverable Ops are Established for Recovery	≥ 50% & ≤ 95%	104.41%--not a CAP; address in narrative	116.45%	Target					70.00%			
Regional Office Comments in cell below:					Actual				66.72%			

1. Finish the work with the vendor on AR Launch and make it the internet weekly certification process.

12/31/2025: The replacement ARKLINE, a phone-based weekly certification system, was introduced in the second week of January 2026. It is anticipated to detect issues with work search, which is the largest percentage of the improper payment rate and overpayments currently due to the 2024 law change.

2. Finish the project with the vendor to have the phone system record the weekly work searches for claimants before paying the weeks.

12/31/2025: The ARKLINE system was successfully replaced, and work search reporting is now required as part of the weekly certification process.

3. Add Youtube videos to the new AR Launch system to help claimants understand about work search fraud.

12/31/2025: The scripting process has started, and collaboration with the communications team is underway to determine the sequence of video creation, the platforms for posting, and their integration into the new Arkansas Division of Reemployment Website in development.

Benefit Accuracy Measurement (BAM)

Benefit Accuracy Measurement (BAM)												
Federal Fiscal Year: 2025-2026 SQSP Corrective Action Plan & Progress Report					Back to Biennial Overview 2025				Back to Alternate Overview 2026			
State: Arkansas					Federal Fiscal Year 2025				Federal Fiscal Year 2026			
Performance Measures	ALP	CAP Based on 2024 BAM Annual Determination Letter	CAP Based on 2025 BAM Annual Determination Letter	State's Target/Actual Performance	12/31/2024 Quarter 1	3/31/2025 Quarter 2	6/30/2025 Quarter 3	9/30/2025 Quarter 4	12/31/2025 Quarter 1	3/31/2026 Quarter 2	6/30/2026 Quarter 3	9/30/2026 Quarter 4
BAM Operations Compliant - Paid Comparison Reports	< -10 & > 5%		14.56%	Target					-8.00%	-5.00%		
				Actual		-11.10%	-12.16%	-11.23%	-8.97%			
BAM Operations Compliant - Paid Sample Selection	480 or 360		479	Target		120	120	120	120	120	120	
				Actual		121	121	127	114			
BAM Operations Compliant - Misc. (As Needed)	Pass		Fail	Target					Pass	Pass	Pass	
				Actual					Pass			
NDNH BAM Compliance	Pass		Fail	Target					Pass	Pass	Pass	
				Actual					Pass			

Regional Office Comments in cell below:

1. Pull extra samples of paid claims for audit to get to ALP standards
09/30/2025: The agency has pulled extra cases to make sure they get to ALP standards
12/31/2025: BAM pulled 114 cases in the quarter ending 12/31/2025 keeping on track to pull greater than 480 for the year.
2. Work with IT to make sure the 5159 numbers match the BAM paid sample numbers
09/30/2025: It is currently trying to test to get off the mainframe. We work with them as time in their schedule allows.
12/31/2025: We have just got off the mainframe and are currently ensuring that other reports are running as expected. We are also on the list to work with IT to confirm that the numbers align.
3. Management follow-up on audit numbers to make sure they meet ALP.
09/30/2025: Management has started to pull additional cases to make sure ALP standards are met.
12/31/2025: Management ensured all quarters have been plotted and the projected number of cases exceed the required number.

1. Re-writing the UI AAS questionnaires into easier to understand format (8th grade reading level) to get better/more accurate information.

FY 2025 Quarter 1 Status Report (Quarter Ending 12/31/2024):

We continue to work though the questionnaires to plain language. Once the mainframe migration is completed, the process will begin to include the updated forms in the IT systems.

FY 2025 Quarter 2 Status Report (Quarter Ending 3/31/2025):

Questionnaires are still being re-written. Improvements have been made but changing the 12 month rolling average takes time.

FY 2025 Quarter 3 status report (Quarter Ending 6/30/2025):

The rewriting process has been completed, but the installation will be later after the mainframe conversion.

FY 2025 Quarter 4 Status Report (Quarter Ending 9/30/2025):

The rewriting process has been completed, but the installation will be later after the mainframe conversion. IT staff are focused on testing and getting off the mainframe.

3. Working with HR staff on increasing the financial incentive to have UI service center staff (that already have a lot background) to expedite the hiring process.	Completion Date
FY 2023 Quarter 1 Status Report (Quarter Ending 12/31/2022) We are still working with HR to increase the pay grade of the AAS staff to be higher than a workforce specialist. This will make the positions an advancement in the position scale of the agency. FY 2023 Quarter 2 Status Report (Quarter Ending 3/31/2023) This is still being worked on with HR, as the new admin database is in place, this has been put on hold for now. FY 2023 Quarter 3 status report (Quarter Ending 6/30/2023) We continue to provide information on turnover and statistics as increased determination numbers to attempt to justify higher pay in efforts to incentivize employee retention in Adjudication. FY 2023 Quarter 4 Status Report (Quarter Ending 9/30/2023)	8/30/2024
FY 2024 Quarter 1 Status Report (Quarter Ending 12/31/2023) FY 2024 Quarter 2 Status Report (Quarter Ending 3/31/2024) FY 2024 Quarter 3 Status Report (Quarter Ending 6/30/2024) FY 2024 Quarter 4 Status Report (Quarter Ending 9/30/2024)	
4. Train UI technical staff to make sure they're formed one party over decisions.	Completion Date
FY 2023 Quarter 1 Status Report (Quarter Ending 12/31/2022) We are setting up training online and in person to train the UI Technical staff to be able to help out in Adjudication when needed. They will start with the Novice level and party issues first. FY 2023 Quarter 2 Status Report (Quarter Ending 3/31/2023) This has not been implemented yet due to staffing issues in other areas. We have had to pull UI Tech staff to help in those areas along with DUA due to a tornado. FY 2023 Quarter 3 status report (Quarter Ending 6/30/2023) The second set of UI Tech training was completed this quarter. UI Technical helped out answering calls for the Service Center and has not been able to do the adjudication training as of yet but it is scheduled for September. FY 2023 Quarter 4 Status Report (Quarter Ending 9/30/2023) FY 2024 Quarter 1 Status Report (Quarter Ending 12/31/2023) FY 2024 Quarter 2 Status Report (Quarter Ending 3/31/2024) FY 2024 Quarter 3 Status Report (Quarter Ending 6/30/2024) FY 2024 Quarter 4 Status Report (Quarter Ending 9/30/2024)	8/30/2024
5. Maintain communication between BAM, AAS, and UI Technical to continue to streamline processes.	Completion Date
FY 2023 Quarter 1 Status Report (Quarter Ending 12/31/2022) We are trying to be more proactive in getting the process streamlined for now and also for when we modernize our system in the next few years. We will need to make the adjudication process more efficient and easier. FY 2023 Quarter 2 Status Report (Quarter Ending 3/31/2023) UI Technical has helped AAS and the UI Service Center with adjudication, answering calls, and with document emails. All department try to work together for the betterment of the agency. BAM and UI Technical were scheduled to have AAS training in the third quarter, but it had to be delayed due to a tornado that triggered DUA and due to staffing issues in AAS and the Service Center. FY 2023 Quarter 3 status report (Quarter Ending 6/30/2023) We are in the process of hiring more staff for AAS and utilizing BAM staff to assist.	8/30/2024

3. UI PROGRAM INTEGRITY ACTION PLAN (UI IAP)

Unemployment Insurance Response:

State Quality Service Plan (SQSP)

Integrity Action Plan (IAP)

Arkansas – Fiscal Year (FY) 2024

Accountable Agency Official(s).

List the person or persons accountable for ensuring integrity in the state's unemployment insurance (UI) program.

Name: Kristen Rhodes-Berry

Title: Assistant Director of Unemployment Insurance Email: Kristen.rhodes@arkansas.gov

Phone: 501-683-5366

***Note:** Unemployment Insurance Program Letter (UIPL) No. 09-23, issued on June 30, 2023, makes reference to UIPL No. 22-21, Change 2, throughout the guidance. However, on July 13, 2023, the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) issued UIPL No. 10-23, which rescinded UIPL No. 22-21, Change 2. UIPL No. 11-23, also issued on July 13, 2023, changed the amount of the integrity grant funding originally issued under UIPL No. 22-21, Change 2, but maintained the guidance on required and recommended fraud prevention and detection and overpayment recovery activities.

(Topic #1: National Priority) – Ensuring UI program integrity by assessing and evaluating fraud risks, implementing, and maintaining sufficient controls to effectively mitigate the likelihood and impact of fraud, and reducing improper payments.

- In evaluating fraud risks, states should consider both eligibility fraud risks and identity (ID) fraud risks.
- **State plans to evaluate UI fraud risks and implement and maintain sufficient controls to effectively prevent fraud and reduce improper payments, including state actions to develop their own state-specific antifraud strategy.**
 - Key elements of an antifraud strategy include:
- **Who** is responsible for fraud risk management activities? Arkansas' fraud risk management is a team effort and includes but is not limited to UI claims processing and Administration, Benefits IT staff running data analytics, Contributions IT staff running data analytics, Internal Audit and fraud prevention staff working with law enforcement and OIG.
- Establish roles and responsibilities of those involved in fraud risk management activities, such as the antifraud entity and external parties responsible for fraud controls

and communicate the role of the Office of Inspector General (OIG) to investigate potential fraud.

- **UI Claims processing staff:** Report suspicious activity with the claims filing process. For example, consistent email address or employer combinations, incorrect geographic information, (City, County, and Zip Code do not reconcile.)
- **UI Administration:** Writing policy and procedures to report employer or claimant potential fraud schemes.
- **Benefits IT staff:** Ensure geofencing is actively working to deter foreign threats. Data Analysis that looks for the same employer account number, claims with no addresses, signs of inaccurate geographic information (City, State, Zip not matching area of employer)
- **Contributions Staff:** Ensuring payment is received when an employer is attempting to create an account more than 6 months in the past. Looking for consistent wages across multiple quarters, and geographic information on claim vs employer account, filing reports and not submitting payments, with claims.
- **Internal Audit Staff:** Researching account number and large scheme issues, and patterns for potential fraud.
- **What is the program doing to manage fraud risk?**
 - ADWS takes possible fraud identification seriously and is of the utmost importance in the UI program. We complete data analytics on demographic information, including geographic information on each claim, and utilize the Integrity Data Hub, to pull information reported by other states.
 - Implemented staff training designed specifically on identifying potential fraudulent claims and ID verification. These are completed in sprints and refreshed every six months.
- Describe the program's activities for preventing, detecting, and responding to fraud, as well as monitoring and evaluation.
 - ADWS currently utilizes:
 - Social Security crossmatch during the application process verifies:
 - Legal Name
 - Date of Birth
 - SSN
 - DOL sponsored solutions such as Login.gov and USPS for ID verifications as well checking IDs in person at Local offices.
 - Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlement (SAVE) - SAVE verifications are executed after the application is completed by the non-citizen claimants and while staff are processing the claim.

- Department of Corrections and Department of Community Corrections - Crossmatches run each week against applications and weekly certifications.
- Interstate Connections Network (ICON) - All claims are checked through State Identification Subsystem (SIDI) and the Interstate Benefits Inquiry (IBIQ), to ensure there are no claims in other states for the same claim period, or overpayments to be collected in other states utilizing the benefits offset process.
- Internet Protocol (IP) Addresses are monitored, and multiple claims submitted by the same IP address (other than our workforce centers who are whitelisted) are watched.
- Data Analytics are used and no more than 4 claims can have the same first line address, bank routing information, or e-mail address.
- Integrity Data Hub is used for:
 - Suspicious Actor Repository (SAR)
 - Multi-State Crossmatch (MSCM)
 - Identity Verification (IDV)
 - Bank Account Verification (BAV)
 - Fraud Alerts
 - Foreign Internet Protocol (IP) Address Detection
 - Suspicious Email Domains
- Geofencing to exclude foreign IP addresses.
- Receives and uses examples from the Fraud Alert System as teaching tools.
- National Integrity Academy. ADWS encourages staff to complete modules in their career tract and to learn more about other positions and sections.
- The Internal Audit section is currently utilizing the additional funds made available for researching federal program fraud and actively working with the Office of Inspector General (OIG) on prosecutions.
- **When** is the program implementing fraud risk management activities?
 - Create timelines for implementing fraud risk management activities, as appropriate, including monitoring and evaluations.
 - **Where** is the program focusing its fraud risk management activities? ADWS is currently focusing on ID verification and employer fraud schemes. Working with DOL and the USPS for ID Verification at no additional cost to the state has been a beneficial process and a great

learning tool. ADWS looks forward to partnering with DOL in the future on additional “plug and play” solutions.

- Partnering with OIG on large prosecutions where possible and connecting theft of public benefits with larger criminal activity rings for longer periods of incarceration and restitution has created press coverage in efforts to deter possible future bad actors.
- Demonstrate links to the highest internal and external residual fraud risks outlined in the fraud risk profile. ADWS continues its commitment by demonstrating the concern from upper management and the Governor’s office with fraud, waste, and abuse in the UI program. Continued training occurs with all UI staff in monthly sprints and a report on progress in reducing fraud is submitted to the Governor’s office each quarter.
- Why is fraud risk management important?
 - Communicate the antifraud strategy to employees and other stakeholders, and link antifraud efforts to other risk management activities, if any. ADWS continues to place the utmost importance on identifying fraud in the UI program to maintain the integrity of the UI Trust Fund.
 - See A Framework for Managing Fraud Risks in Federal Programs at <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-15-593sp.pdf> for additional information.
- **State use of tools, services, strategies, process improvements, and/or procedural changes adopted by the state to combat fraud, verify identities, and enhance recovery efforts. States must identify which tools, solutions, and service provider(s) are used in the state’s fraud management operations, including but not limited, to the following areas: data analysis, risk-based ID verification, fraud prevention and detection, and cybersecurity.**
- Include strategies, solutions, and/or activities using funds the Department has made available to states for combatting fraud and strengthening UI program integrity under UIPL Nos. 28-20;28-20, Change 1;28-20, Change 2;28-20, Change 4;22-21;11-23; and 02-22.

Fraud Prevention and detection

- As part of the online EZARC application, a check with the Social Security Administration that verifies the following data elements match:
 - Social Security Number
 - Legal Name
 - Date of Birth
- A Notice to Last Employer (5013 form) is sent to each employer listed on the claim.

- The employer must be selected from a list created in the Contributions system (Tax21).
- If employer information entered is not in the Tax21 system, the pseudo account number 999999999 is inserted.
- A staff member researches pseudo account numbers for possible misclassification of wages, fraudulent claim, or possible employer fraud before the claim can be processed.
- The responses to these notices are sent to a queue that staff work and set issues to move through the adjudication process for a decision with appeals rights.
- Employers can indicate “Employee does not work here” or “Employee is still employed here” on that form which assists in identifying fraudulent claims.
- A Notice to Base Period Employer (550 form) is submitted to all employers in the base period.
 - The base period employers are identified in the wage file and submitted by employers on quarterly wage reports (209B).
 - If a fraudster lists an incorrect last employer, that employer can select “Claimant is still Employed” or provide additional information to assist in locating possible fraud.
- Cybersecurity:
 - EZARC, the online claim system, and the ARKNET weekly certification systems, are both geofenced which allows access to IP addresses that are only from within the US.
 - The vendor and the Department of Information Services (state IT group) monitor the systems for suspicious activity.
 - Data analytic reports, (for example numerous claims being filed with the same IP address in short time frames) are reported to ADWS who then researches the claims involved.
 - ARKLine (phone weekly claim system)/ARKNet (internet based weekly claim system) are no longer able to use the most common pins (ie 0000, 1111, 1234, last four of SSN or Date of Birth Month and year.)
- Provide details on overpayment recovery efforts including:
 - Actions with banks, financial institutions, and with Federal law enforcement’s forfeiture and seizure efforts. Recovery Efforts:
 - Collection letters mailed to claimants from the Benefits Payment Control systems.
 - Federal Treasury Offset Program (TOPS) to recover overpayments on claims.

- Arkansas State Income tax offset through the Department of Finance Administration.
 - Interstate Reciprocal Overpayment Recovery Arrangement (IRORA) to collect for other overpayment balances due in other states or territories as well as encourage other states and territories to collect for Arkansas balances due.
 - Contact banks on fraudulent claims to recoup funds paid.
 - Wage garnishments and assessments are filed to collect overpaid funds.
 - Assessments filed securing real property.
 - Possible Criminal Prosecution.
 - Working with OIG on larger fraud schemes.
- Information on how the state is using waivers of recovery of overpayments both for regular UI and temporary UC programs created by the CARES Act, including if the state is using approved blanket waivers as described in UIPL No. 20-21, Change 1.
 - ADWS applied for and received one blanket waiver approval via DOL.
 - ADWS does have a CARES act related finding that requires retroactivity to determine if claims that should have been paid using UI funds instead of PUA funds. As the weeks have been moved to the UI program ADWS has identified several claimants that would have been paid less in UI benefits than they received as part of the PUA program. We are in the process of data entering these balances due and waiving them per guidance in UIPL 20-21.
- The remaining Cares Act issues, when bad actors have been identified are currently being setup for active collections.
- How the state is using the Treasury Offset Program (TOP) for benefit overpayment recovery, how the state is ensuring covered debts are being submitted, and any barriers/challenges in working with TOP.
 - ADWS actively uses the TOP program as well as State income tax for offsetting both claimants and employers balance due. Both efforts have been successful, although burdensome with the IRS additional requirements to safeguard Federal Tax Information. This has required ADWS to have a separate and even more secure system, where only three individuals have access to meet the Pub 1075 requirements. While the trust fund benefits from collecting in this fashion, additional funds are not provided in the operations budget for the arduous task, and UI Admin spends additional funds to meet the requirements of Pub 1075.
- **State use of UI Integrity Center resources, with a particular focus on state connection to the Integrity Data Hub (IDH) and use of its datasets to crossmatch unemployment compensation (UC) claims and aid in the prevention and detection**

of fraud and improper payments (see Training and Employment Notice (TEN) No. 24-21);

- Discuss the state's connection to the IDH, including frequency of IDH use.
 - Does the state submit all initial and continued claims for IDH cross-matching? If not, what is preventing the state from sending all claims? Yes, all claims info is submitted each week.
- If the state is not connected to the IDH and/or is connected but not regularly submitting UI claims data through a webservice/real-time connection to IDH, provide details on the state's plan for how to increase usage and an anticipated timeline to:
 - Connect to the IDH. ADWS currently connects and submits files to IDH.
 - Increase frequency of IDH use. Yes, ADWS is currently researching a real-time approach. When claimants apply for benefits through the online system, and before staff process the application, the score would be populated so staff can go through additional ID verification efforts at that time as opposed to retroactively, to further reduce the improper payment rate.
 - Fully leverage all available IDH capabilities. IDH capabilities include:
 - Suspicious Actor Repository (SAR) Utilized
 - Multi-State Crossmatch (MSCM) Utilized
 - Identity Verification (IDV) Utilized
 - Bank Account Verification (BAV) Utilized
 - Fraud Alerting Utilized
 - Foreign Internet Protocol (IP) Address Detection Utilized
 - Suspicious Email Domains and Patterns Utilized
 - Update the IDH connection to a webservice/real-time connection. ADWS is currently researching a real-time approach. When claimants apply for benefits through the online system, and before staff process the application, the score would be populated so staff can go through additional ID verification efforts at that time as opposed to retroactively, to further reduce the improper payment rate. If this cannot be accomplished due to current system limitations, we will create the file daily in the future.
 - Identify barriers to using any of the available IDH capabilities. ADWS is researching connecting to IDH in real-time to stop payment from being issued and stopping needed retro activity. We are currently still utilizing the mainframe system, which makes adapting the data to new solutions burdensome and financially prohibitive. The work to move to a cloud-based infrastructure is currently planned to be completed by the end of calendar year 2024.

- If the state has not executed IDH Participation Agreement - Version 5.0 (see TEN No. 24-21), provide details on the anticipated timeline to update to IDH Participation Agreement – Version 5.0.

Discuss the state's use of the UI National Integrity Academy's virtual trainings and/or eLearning lessons. ADWS currently utilizes these tools in training.

We are encouraging staff to complete the training sections available through the National Association of State Workforce Agencies' (NASWA) learning management platform which has been successful with training new Benefits Accuracy Management (BAM) and Data Validation (DV) staff. ADWS also utilizes the good working relationship with our DOL regional office that provides excellent guidance on a variety of topics.

- Discuss the state's use of UI Integrity Knowledge Exchange Library resources, including the Behavioral Insights Toolkit (*see* TEN No. 15-21). Yes, we utilize the toolkit and implement the suggestions as possible.
- Discuss the state's participation in State Consultative Services. ADWS has used state consultant services especially for the prior RFP. This service was extremely helpful and beneficial to our modernization efforts.

Note: The IDH Team has a one-page dashboard report for each state summarizing current IDH utilization and areas where IDH use might be expanded. Please reach out to IDHTeam@naswa.org to request a copy of your state's IDH utilization dashboard report.

- **State use of required and recommended integrity controls and overpayment recovery activities as outlined in UIPL No. 11-23, including any additional effective cross-matching and overpayment recovery activities and identified best practices.**
- Provide details regarding the state's use of each cross-match/integrity control and overpayment recovery activity (required and recommended) as outlined in UIPL No. 11-23. Include details on the frequency of crossmatch/integrity controls use (*e.g.*, conducted on all initial claims, all continued claims, only when suspicious activity is identified?) and frequency of overpayment recovery activities.
- Crossmatches/integrity controls and recovery activities include:

Crossmatches/Integrity Controls

- ID Verification; At each initial, reopened, and additional UI claim for benefits.
- National Directory of New Hires (NDNH); Weekly against current claims.
- Quarterly Wage Records Crossmatch; Currently quarterly but transitioning to daily in March of 2024.
- Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlement (SAVE); At each Initial, reopened, and additional claim.
- Referral of allegations reasonably believed to constitute UC fraud, waste, abuse, mismanagement, or misconduct to DOL-OIG; As identified.

- UI Integrity Center's IDH; Currently weekly, researching lift needed to go to real time as initial, additional and reopened claims are filed.
- Digital Authentication, such as Multifactor Authentication (MFA); Currently used via Login.gov and USPS, or in person at the local office, by providing physical ID.
- Device Fingerprint/Reputation Management; Not currently utilizing.
- Fraud Risk Scoring (*i.e.*, Case Management Prioritization); Via IDH currently each week.
- Comparisons and crossmatches that detect shared characteristics, Each night as part of batch processing.
- Social Security Administration crossmatches (*i.e.*, Unemployment Insurance Query (UIQ), Prisoner Update Processing System (PUPS), Death Master File); Weekly, for others, still working on getting PUPS up in AR.
- Federal, state, and local incarceration crossmatches; Weekly.
- Deceased Records crossmatches; Weekly.
- Vital Statistics crossmatches; Weekly
- State Directory of New Hires (SDNH); Weekly but transitioning to daily in March 2024.
- Department of Motor Vehicle crossmatch; Not currently participating.
- Interstate Benefits (IB) crossmatch; At the initial, reopened, or additional claims.
- State Identification Inquiry (SID) and IB8606 enhancements made to the Interstate Connection (ICON) network crossmatch to prevent concurrent claim filing in multiple states; At the initial, reopened, and additional claim.
- Use of a unique identifier to identify claimants instead of using the full SSN; Currently using full SSN.
- Fictitious employer crossmatches; Researching to create solution, to run as employer accounts are created.
- Periodic IT security assessments and audits consistent with National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)-compliant information technology security guidelines; Quarterly, and as fraud schemes are identified.
- Adequate internal controls to protect the integrity and security of state assets; Quarterly, and as fraud schemes are identified.
- Implement a cross-functional integrity task force to develop and implement state-specific action plans to reduce UI improper payments.
 - Promising practices:
 - Working with DOL and the USPS for ID Verification at no additional cost to the state has been a beneficial process and a great learning tool. ADWS

looks forward to partnering with DOL in the future on additional “plug and play” solutions.

- Partnering with OIG on large prosecutions where possible connecting theft of public benefits with larger criminal activity rings for longer periods of incarceration and restitution. This has created press coverage in efforts to deter possible future bad actors.

Overpayment Recovery Activities

- Benefit Offsets; As identified in overnight batch processes.
- TOP; Balances reported annually and increase and decreases for additional interest and payments made outside of the OTP system weekly.
- Cross Program Offset Recovery Agreement (CPORA); Daily.
- Interstate Reciprocal Offset Recovery Arrangement (IPORA); Daily
- Negotiating repayment plans; ADWS is unable to take settlement and compromise for benefits balances due.
- Accepting repayments through various methods (*e.g.*, online, via debit/credit card); Currently accept cash and check. Working to implement online payment method but stalled with vendor issues.
- State Income Tax Offset Program: Balances are submitted once each year, and updates are submitted weekly for interest and payments made outside of the system. Payments are received from the Department of Finance and Administration monthly for balances collected.
- Wage garnishments: As identified as part of the quarterly cross match process. We are planning for this feature to be done as the wages are reported by employers.
- Property liens and assessments; As the appeal period has exhausted for balances over \$200.00.
- Offsets of lottery winnings, homestead exemptions, and other benefits; Does not currently participate, no ability in current Arkansas Law.
- Active participation in probate and/or bankruptcy proceedings; Yes, for balances over \$500.00 where fraud has been assessed.
- Skip tracing; Does not currently participate.
- Work proactively and collaboratively with banks and financial institutions; Yes, as possible and over the \$500.00 threshold when an assessment has been field.
- Civil actions; Yes, as needed.
- Credit bureau referrals: This would be handled at the county level if an assessment has been filed.
- State/federal prosecution As needed for fraud over payments over \$5,000.00 threshold.

- Penalties and interest on overpayments in compliance with state and federal law; yes 15% penalty then 35% additional penalty for fraudulent if not paid within 30 days. Interest added each month at 10% per year.
- Collection agency referrals; Does not currently participate.
- Implementing a voluntary fraud self-disclosure program; Yes, claimants can indicate that they committed fraud on wage earnings investigations notices, or by calling the service center.
- Other recovery methods as determined by state law or policy.
- Identify any additional integrity controls or recovery activities the state uses that are not listed in UIPL No. 11-23. Actively engaging with the employer community and fostering that relationship to ensure employers fully understand the requests for information, to stop separation fraud, wage earnings investigations, failure to attend a scheduled interview, work search audits, failed to pass a pre-employment drug screen.
- Provide promising practices. ADWS has recently integrated the New Hire Registry reporting requirement, into the employer reporting system. We are planning on running New Hire cross matches daily, to as quickly as possible identify potential wage earnings issues.
- Identify challenges with crossmatches or in overpayment recovery activities. Crossmatches are great, but they are all retroactivity based. Once a claim is in pay status per the JAVA rule, they must remain in pay status, even though they appeared on a verified crossmatch. It would benefit the improper payment rate, if we were able to stop payments once identified, and resume if the claimant is found to have not committed fraud. Also, the requirement to reach back out to the employer after the submission of a new hire entry, with the same individual, Date of Birth and Legal name seems excessive, and leads to the claimant receiving additional benefits that they are most likely ineligible to receive.
- If the state does not currently use one of the integrity controls or recovery activities listed in UIPL No. 11-23, provide the state's plan and anticipated timeline to request and obtain access to the cross-match/integrity control or to implement the overpayment recovery activity.

Note: If the state does not plan to obtain access to a crossmatch/integrity control or implement a specific recovery activity, please explain.

State use and employer participation in State Information Data Exchange System (SIDES) (see TEN No. 12-16).

- Provide details on the state's current usage of SIDES.
 - Like the UI State Information Data Exchange System (SIDES), ADWS' Adjudication (AAS) system is web-based and designed to streamline and increase the efficiency of the nonmonetary determination process. Since AAS was implemented in Arkansas, ADWS has continued to enhance the system to further streamline the adjudication process. Through the electronic response

system employers receive and respond to Notices to Last Employer, Notices to Base Period Employer, and questionnaires regarding nonmonetary issues via the Internet. ADWS is aware that the United States Department of Labor (USDOL) encourages states to fully implement SIDES; however, ADWS' Automated Adjudication System and electronic response system for employers, which is based upon our own state UI law, enables Arkansas to maintain the same functionality as SIDES along with ability to tailor questionnaires designed to elicit more information from employers with no additional subscription costs to the agency. ADWS will consider incorporating SIDES into its modernized benefits system.

- If the state does not currently use all available SIDES exchanges, provide the state's plan for how to connect to all SIDES exchanges and an anticipated timeline to implement each SIDES exchange. Sides Exchanges include: ADWS does not currently participate in any of the below listed SIDES programs but is considering after we move to a more modernized cloud-based system.
- Separation Information
- Monetary & Potential Charges
- Additional Fact-Finding
- Determinations & Decisions
- Earnings Verification
- Benefit Charges

Identify any barriers to SIDES exchange participation, either in state promotion or in employer adoption. Due to the ADWS's current state on the mainframe, integrating additional items with the mainframe is cost prohibitive and overly complex. Once we move to the cloud-based environment, we will consider joining SIDES.

State strategies designed to facilitate claimants' compliance with state work search requirements while also supporting their reemployment such as adoption of the work search requirements in the Model Work Search Legislation (see TEN No. 17-19).

1. Outline the state's work search requirement and explain state challenges with work search improper payments. The Arkansas Legislature passed additional legislation to increase the number of work search activities each week, and better define in statute what is considered work search activity, as well as increased the number of work search audits UI staff must perform each week. ADWS is a work search warning state, which assists with this measure. We are working towards transitioning to a more updated claims filing system that will require work search activity to be entered in the weekly certification process. This will greatly increase the quality and quantity of the information received and reduce staff time needed to complete the required audits.
2. Discuss the state's plan to improve work search compliance by reducing work search errors and strengthening reemployment. ADWS UI is more fully integrating with the RESEA program to better facilitate job search and access to supportive services. We are

also working with a vendor to require work search specific reporting at the time of weekly certification filing. The new system to report work search activity will include current LMI information as well as designated training providers for those needing training or re-training, to better re-attach to the workforce. This new system will allow UI staff to reach out to Arkansas employers immediately as opposed to requesting the work search log from the claimants after they have been selected for audit. Fostering a good working relationship with the employer community is key to the success of this project.

(Topic #2) – State plans and actions to address the state's top three improper payment root causes in Payment Integrity Information Act (PIIA) 2022.

1.
 - a. Identify the state's top three improper payment root causes.
 - i. Separation Issues 44.1% of improper payments,
 - ii. Wage Earnings Issues 40.8% of improper payments
 - iii. Other issues 6.67% of improper payments
 - b. Explain the state's challenges in reducing improper payments in the top three root cause categories.
2. Separation issues, are most directly tied to staffing issues in the Adjudication department. As all states have experienced ADWS had large staffing turnovers during the pandemic period and is working to incentivize retention of existing staff while enticing additional staff to come to the UI program. Adjudication takes an average of 2 years to absorb the knowledge needed to make quality decisions. The quality of our decisions is well above the required measures, due to a dedicated effort by management, but timeliness continues to be a challenge for the limited number of experienced staff. If the issue is not heard timely and was in pay status, per the JAVA rule, they must remain in pay status until a decision is made, increasing the amount of the overpayment.
3. Wage Earnings Issues: As all are crossmatched, we are identifying the problem after it has occurred. We are working with the employer community to redesign the wage earnings detection system, to enable audit notices to be created the day the wages are reported by the employer. By encouraging employers to report wages as close to the end of the quarter as possible and allowing them to postdate the accompanying payments not due for 30 days after the end of the quarter, we expect to identify wage earnings issues more quickly and further reduce the improper payment rate.
4. Other issues: These are a combination of responsibilities and the time required to work the items submitted by employers. We are working with the employer community to ease the burden on submitting additional documentation utilizing the online systems and reduce the staff touch needed to add the items to the official record. We believe this will reduce the lag time to set issues, for decisions, to during the waiting week, and before the claim is in pay status.

5. the state's plan to reduce improper payments in each root cause category. Listed above by root cause.

(Topic #3) – State coordination and collaboration with the DOL-OIG and other state and Federal law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute UI fraud and recover overpayments. This should also include state plans to continue providing all confidential UC information to DOL-OIG for purposes of both investigating fraud and performing audits. ADWS has an active relationship with OIG and works to submit all fraud to OIG for possible prosecutions. This has been most beneficial when they can tie UI fraud to other fraud rings for larger criminal charges, including multi state schemes, human trafficking, illegal drug sales and smuggling.

Criminal prosecutions from claims related to the pandemic period are proving difficult to criminally prosecute due to statute of limitations, and staff time constraints. With the recent legislative changes reducing the maximum benefits amount to 12 compensable weeks of at max benefits \$5,412.00 in UI benefits. At this dollar value of benefits, we have had challenges working with employers to participate in the criminal prosecution process. While the funds collected will assist in keeping the trust fund at the optimal balance, this does not provide additional funds for this staff intensive processes, which would be charged to UI Administration funds, which is already stretched thin.

(Topic #4) – State plans to strengthen program integrity in UI tax operations, including current activities and plans to identify and prevent worker misclassification, State Unemployment Tax Act (SUTA) Dumping, and fictitious employer schemes, and development/use of effective employer audit strategies (i.e., use of remote audits).

- Current activities and plans to address:
 - Worker Misclassification

ADWS has continued to struggle with the identification of misclassified workers. Retaining well qualified staff has been challenging as they have more financial incentive for leaving ADWS and moving to other state agencies and completing similar work requirements. We recently received approval to increase the pay grade for senior field tax representatives that complete misclassification investigations as well as audit employers for compliance. We believe this enhancement for staff as well as continued use of technology to simplify audit process will assist in the identification of misclassified employees and meeting the audit core measures with DOL.

- SUTA Dumping:

ADWS currently uses the SDDS (SUTA Dumping Detection System) but has not identified many instances of true SUTA dumping. We have been successful with educating employers to better understand the requirements, which may then lead to a transfer of experience and the creation of a payment plan, to assist the employers in correcting the identified issues.

- Fictitious employer schemes

- **UI Claims processing staff:** Report suspicious activity with the claims filing process. For example, consistent email address or employer combinations, incorrect geographic information, (City, County, and Zip Code do not reconcile.)
 - **UI Administration:** Writing policy and procedures to report employer or claimant potential fraud schemes.
 - **IT staff:** ensure geofencing is actively working to deter foreign threats. Data Analysis looking for the same employer account number, claims with no addresses, signs of inaccurate geographic information (city, state, zip, not matching area of employer), IP address tracking.
 - **Contributions Staff:** Ensuring payment is received when an employer is attempting to create an account more than 6 months in the past. Looking for consistent wages across multiple quarters, and geographic information on claim vs employer account, filing reports and not submitting payments, with claims
 - **Internal Audit Staff:** Researching Account number and large scheme issues, and patterns for potential fraud.
- Development/use of effective employer audit strategies (including, but not limited to, use of remote audits)

(Topic #5) – State plans and actions to strengthen internal security and ensure that all appropriate internal controls and processes are in place and are adequate to assess internal risks and threats, ensure program integrity, and minimize program vulnerabilities (see UIPL No. 14-17)

(Topic #6) – State plans and actions to evaluate the effectiveness and equity of fraud prevention and detection, ID verification, and improper payment reduction activities. State should include strategies to ensure that processes used to detect and prevent fraud are effective and do not limit the ability for a legitimate claimant to apply for and become eligible for UC. States implementing or using facial recognition technology in their ID proofing processes must also report findings from bias testing and provide updates on efforts to mitigate biases or barriers in this section of the IAP.

- Identify potential barriers that are created by fraud prevention and detection functions for legitimate claimants. Provide plans and actions designed to mitigate such risks. ADWS has claimants who are unable to be approved through the Login.gov online based ID verification tool for a variety of reasons. This may be through the phone number not being in the claimant's name, or not having a current Driver's License or state issued ID card. Alternate options are available for in person verification at 200+ post offices, through the USPS pilot program, and additional types of documentation are acceptable to be utilized at the local office including military ID and mortgage paperwork for example. Then, additional options of identification can be provided at the local office including, expired DL or state issued ID, State issued school ID with picture, Concealed Carry License or Medical card.

- As required in UIPL No. 11-23, states must ensure there is at least one timely, effective, and accessible non-digital alternative to online ID verification, which should not be overly burdensome on applicants, limit access to public benefits programs or the timely receipt of benefits, or stigmatize members of the public in any way. Provide details on the state's non- digital ID verification option(s).
- Alternate options are available for in person verification at 200+ post offices, through the USPS pilot program, and additional types of documentation are acceptable to be utilized at the local office including military ID and mortgage paperwork for example. Additional options of identification can be provided at the local office including, expired DL or state issued ID, State issued school ID with picture, Concealed Carry License or Medical card.
- Include how the state flags cases for suspected fraudulent activity and how investigation resources are assigned, including:
 1. What risk scoring elements and/or prioritization elements are used. Multistate state claims and suspicious actors, bank accounts reported by IDH, incorrect geographic information on the claim (for example City and Zip Code do not match, or residential address and selected County do not match.)
 2. How the risk scoring elements and/or prioritization elements are weighted. Via IDH score methodology.
 3. How the state evaluates the weights based on false positives and negatives.
 4. How risk scoring elements and/or prioritization elements are updated. Via IDH
 5. How the state ensures the fraud risk scoring and/or prioritization of cases does not negatively affect legitimate claimants. A requirement to contact the service center is issued, giving the claimant 10 days to report to a USPS location or local office to prove ID in person. If this is not completed in the 10 days, then an issue is set for failed to report, and is sent to adjudication for a decision including appeal rights.
 6. Include details on how the state measures claimants' usage of both digital and non-digital identity verification options, how the state reviews digital services for false positive and false negatives, and how the state ensures legitimate claimants have alternative paths to prove their identity and/or resolve issues, including providing a possible recourse. If a claimant selected Login.gov, and was unsuccessful, a requirement to contact the service center is issued, giving the claimant 10 days to report to a USPS location or local office to prove ID in person. If this is not completed in the 10 days, an issue is set for failure to report and is sent to adjudication for a decision including appeal rights.

(Topic #7) – State plans and actions to mitigate negative consequences for victims of UI ID fraud, including ensuring simplified processes to remove the victim's liability for overpayments resulting from ID fraud.

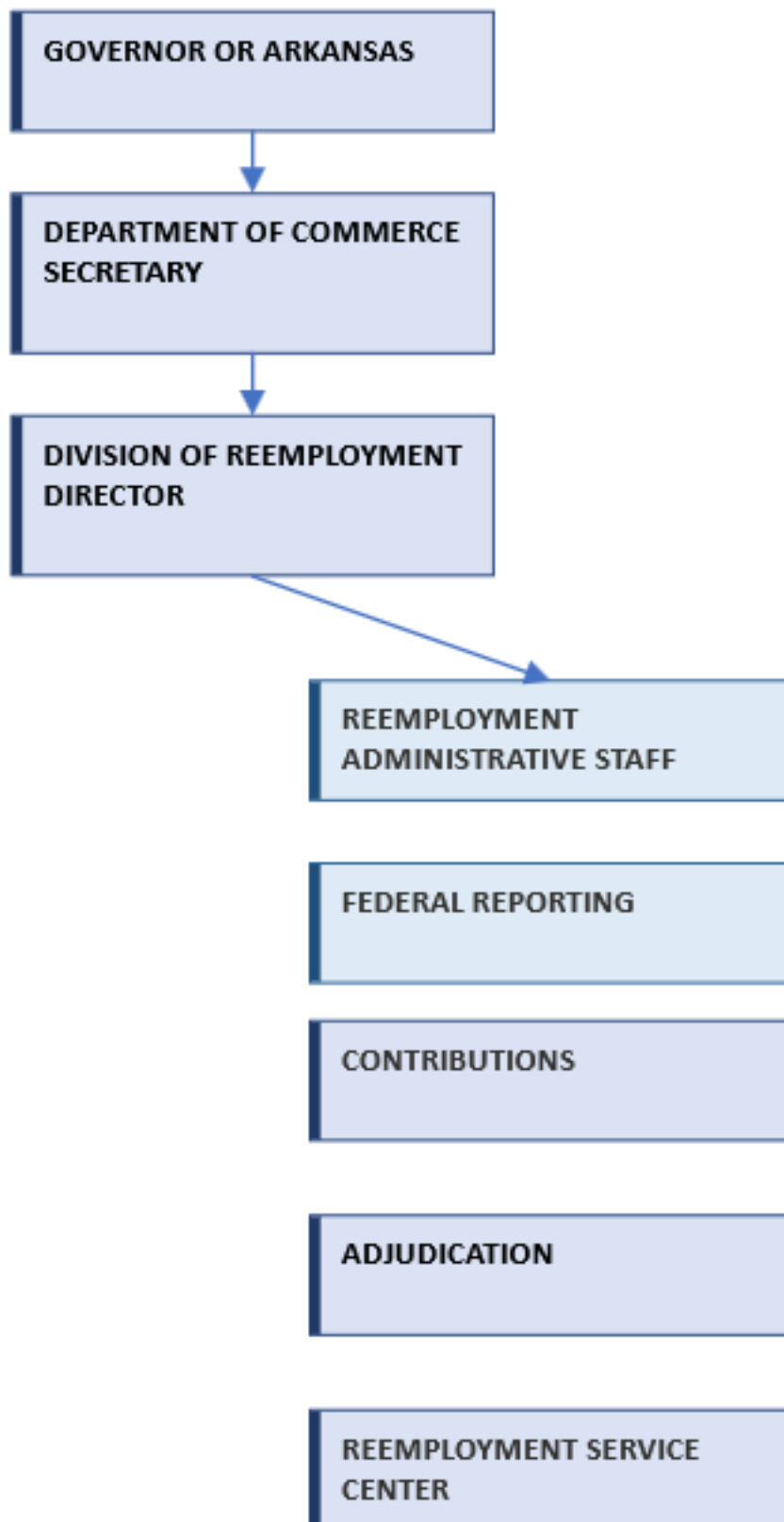
- Include details regarding how the state provides a reporting mechanism for UI ID fraud on their websites, communicates status updates for such investigations, and takes action to protect the victim when the state determines that UI ID fraud has occurred (*see* UIPL No. 11-23 for more details on protecting victims of ID fraud). All information is available through the ADWS website and the Attorney General's office websites. Claimants are required to file a police report in their local jurisdiction that a claim was filed using their identity without their consent. The bank account and other information on the claim are researched via the internal fraud unit and bank subpoenas. A decision is then issued to the claimant at the correct contact information and the false address information, including appeal rights. If it was determined to be an identity theft claim, the overpayment is moved to a pseudo SSN in case the bad actor is identified in the future. This stops all collections efforts against the identity theft victim.
- Include the state's procedures for mitigating negative impacts on the UI ID fraud victim (*e.g.*, establishing a pseudo claim record, temporarily marking the overpayment as "uncollectible", etc.). Listed above.

(Topic #8) – If the state has not provided complete and accurate overpayment reporting on the ETA 227 reports (Overpayment Detection and Recovery Activities), and the ETA 902P report (Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Activities), the state must provide information on plans for improvement, including timeframes and milestones, for addressing the issue and ensuring complete, accurate, and timely reporting in FY 2024.

- If the state has submitted all data for the ETA 227 or 902P reports, this section is not applicable, and the state can input "N/A". All ADWS corrections have been submitted for the 227 reports and 902P reports.

4. Organizational Chart

Unemployment Insurance Response:



B. REQUIREMENTS FOR STATES ELECTING TO INCLUDE UI IN THE COMBINED STATE PLAN

1. SUBMIT AN SQSP IN THE FOLLOWING MANNER DEPENDING ON THEIR TIMING IN THE SQSP CYCLE:

A. IF A STATE IS IN THE FIRST YEAR OF THEIR 2-YEAR CYCLE, THE STATE IS REQUIRED TO SUBMIT THE MOST RECENTLY APPROVED COMPLETE SQSP PACKAGE. A COMPLETE SQSP PACKAGE WILL INCLUDE THE TRANSMITTAL LETTER, BUDGET WORKSHEETS/FORMS, STATE PLAN NARRATIVE, CAPS (INCLUDING THE MILESTONES AND THE COMPLETION DATE FOR EACH MILESTONE), THE UI IAP, ORGANIZATIONAL CHART, AND THE SQSP SIGNATURE PAGE. ONE OF THE KEY GOALS FOR THE UI PROGRAM IS TO ENSURE THAT CLAIMANTS ARE ABLE TO SUCCESSFULLY RETURN TO WORK. AS SUCH, THE SQSP STATE PLAN NARRATIVE MUST PROVIDE A DISCUSSION OF THE PLAN COORDINATION WITH OTHER WIOA COMBINED PLAN PROGRAMS TO ENSURE A COORDINATED EFFORT AND INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY.

The components of the SQSP package are included in the UI section above.

B. IF A STATE IS IN THE SECOND YEAR OF THE 2-YEAR CYCLE, THE STATE IS REQUIRED TO SUBMIT THE MOST RECENTLY APPROVED COMPLETE SQSP PACKAGE WITH A MODIFICATION THAT MUST INCLUDE THE TRANSMITTAL LETTER, BUDGET WORKSHEETS/FORMS, ORGANIZATIONAL CHART, AND THE SQSP SIGNATURE PAGE. THE MODIFICATION MAY ALSO INCLUDE CAPS FOR NEW IDENTIFIED PERFORMANCE DEFICIENCIES, AND ANY REQUIRED MODIFICATIONS TO EXISTING CAPS. THE CAP MUST LIST BOTH SPECIFIC MILESTONES FOR KEY CORRECTIVE ACTIONS OR IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITIES, AND THE COMPLETION DATE FOR EACH MILESTONE.

Unemployment Insurance Response:

Not applicable

2. SUBMIT THE REQUIRED OFF-YEAR SQSP COMPONENTS AS A MODIFICATION TO THE COMBINED STATE PLAN ON THE SAME CYCLE AS THE REGULAR SQSP PROCESS WHICH MUST BE APPROVED BY SEPTEMBER 30TH EACH YEAR

Unemployment Insurance Response:

Not applicable

PERFORMANCE INDICATOR APPENDIX

ALL WIOA CORE PROGRAMS

ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES - ADULT PROGRAM

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Title I Response: Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	81.0%	81.0%	81.0%	81.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	79.0%	79.0%	79.0%	79.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	7,750.00	7,750.00	7,750.00	7,750.00
Credential Attainment Rate	73.0%	73.0%	73.0%	73.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	73.7%	73.7%	73.7%	73.7%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹

ADULT MODIFICATION:

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	72.9%		72.9%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	71.1%		71.1%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$7,750.00		\$7,750.00	

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Credential Attainment Rate	73.0%		73.0%	
Measurable Skill Gains	66.3%		66.3%	
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable.

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

**ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES - DISLOCATED PROGRAM
PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Title I Response:

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	83.0%	83.0%	83.0%	83.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	83.0%	83.0%	83.0%	83.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	9,200.00	9,200.00	9,200.00	9,200.00
Credential Attainment Rate	75.0%	75.0%	75.0%	75.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	75.6%	75.6%	75.6%	75.6%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹DLW MODIFICATION:

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	74.7%		74.7%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	72.3%		72.3%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$8,280.00		\$8,280.00	
Credential Attainment Rate	75.0%		75.0%	
Measurable Skill Gains	66.3%		66.3%	
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable.

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

**ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES - YOUTH PROGRAM
PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Title I Response:

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	76.6%	76.6%	76.6%	76.6%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	77.0%	77.0%	77.0%	77.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	3,950.00	3,950.00	3,950.00	3,950.00
Credential Attainment Rate	58.0%	58.0%	58.0%	58.0%

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Measurable Skill Gains	65.9%	65.9%	65.9%	65.9%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹

YOUTH MODIFICATION:

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	68.9%		68.9%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	69.3%		69.3%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$3,950.00		\$3,950.00	
Credential Attainment Rate	52.2%		52.2%	
Measurable Skill Gains	65.9%		65.9%	
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable.

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

WAGNER-PEYSER ACT - WAGNER PEYSER PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**Title III Response:**

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	70.8%	70.8%	70.8%	70.8%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	70.1%	70.1%	70.1%	70.1%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	6,905.00	6,905.00	6,905.00	6,905.00
Credential Attainment Rate	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Measurable Skill Gains	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹**WAGNER/PEYSER MODIFICATION:**

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	63.7%		63.7%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	63.1%		63.1%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$6,905.00		\$6,905.00	
Credential Attainment Rate	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Measurable Skill Gains	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAM - ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Title II Response

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	43.0%	47.5%	44.0%	48.5%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	36.0%	48.5%	37.0%	49.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$4,700	\$5,200	\$4,800	\$5,300
Credential Attainment Rate	41.0%	41.5%	42.0%	42.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	53.0%	59.9%	54.0%	60.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹

ADULT EDUCATION MODIFICATION:

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	49.0%		50.0%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	49.0%		50.0%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$5,500.0		\$5,600.0	
Credential Attainment Rate	43.0%		44.0%	
Measurable Skill Gains	60.0%		61.0%	

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM (COMBINED OR GENERAL) - VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (ARS)

Title IV ARS Response:

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	64.0%	64.0%	65.0%	65.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	63.0%	63.0%	65.0%	65.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$6,800	\$6,800	\$6,870	\$6,870
Credential Attainment Rate	35.5%	36.5%	36.0%	37.5%

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Measurable Skill Gains	57.5%	58.5%	58.0%	59.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹

ARS MODIFICATION:

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	64%	64%	65%	65%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	63%	63%	65%	65%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$6,800	\$6,800	\$6,870	\$6,870
Credential Attainment Rate	35.5%	35.5%	36%	36%
Measurable Skill Gains	57.5%	57.5%	58%	58%

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

**VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM (BLIND) - VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION
PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (DSB)**

Title IV DSB Response:

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	64.0%	64.0%	65.0%	65.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	63.0%	63.0%	65.0%	65.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$6,800.0	\$6,800	\$6,870.0	\$6,870
Credential Attainment Rate	35.5%	36.5%	36.0%	37.5%
Measurable Skill Gains	57.5%	58.5%	58.0%	59.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹

DSB MODIFICATION:

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	64%	64%	65%	65%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	63%	63%	65%	65%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$6,800	\$6,800	\$6,870	\$6,870
Credential Attainment Rate	35.5%	35.5%	36%	36%

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Measurable Skill Gains	57.5%	57.5%	58%	58%

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

ESE MODIFICATION:

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline

ADDITIONAL INDICATORS OF PERFORMANCE

Additional Indicators of Performance
Not applicable

OTHER APPENDICES

Introduction

Arkansas is steadfast in the belief that a highly qualified workforce is more than a means to an end. It is possible for every Arkansan. Meaningful employment offering a livable wage is one of the most powerful tools to break cycles of adversity. When our residents find satisfaction and pride in their work, we witness transformative social outcomes: reductions in poverty, incarceration, substance abuse, mental health issues, suicide, homelessness, and educational shortfalls, alongside improvements in overall health.

Our priority is identifying, growing, recognizing, and celebrating each person's unique strengths and skill sets. Our goal is to help every individual in Arkansas navigate learning and employment, make informed decisions, and help them reach the next rung on the ladder to achieve personal and professional success.

In Arkansas, we see the workforce as a combination of diverse skills, talents, and untapped potential and we know everyone brings different things to the table. Together, we will build a future where every Arkansan has the opportunity to grow, thrive, and contribute to our shared prosperity.



Executive Summary

The Arkansas Workforce Strategy is a collaborative, competency-based, customer-centric, and responsive workforce system that meets current and future needs of employers, incumbent workers, and job seekers.

Arkansas employers are facing significant challenges in attracting talent with the skills needed to run and grow their businesses. This is largely due to low labor force participation and educational attainment coupled with an increasingly dynamic labor market with evolving skill requirements. Many Arkansans are underemployed or detached from the labor force, and facing challenges with poverty, food insecurity, housing, health, and criminal justice system involvement.

Solving these challenges can lead to improved employer productivity and growth; attraction of new business and industry; improved educational, credential, and skill attainment; improved population health and economic security; reduced recidivism; and increased efficiency and effectiveness at all levels.

To address these needs, the Arkansas Governor's Workforce Cabinet has developed a comprehensive strategy that is resident-centric, employer-led, demand-informed, and data-driven. The strategy was developed leveraging established best practices, broad stakeholder engagement, user-centered design, a national network of experts, emerging technological advances, and Arkansas' mature foundation for data-driven transformation and shared services.

Employer-facing supports include Talent Pipeline Management for timely signaling of evolving job and skill needs, and support for hiring, upskilling, and retention through workforce analytics, digital credentials, and skills-based hiring. Education and training providers will receive timely information for continuously aligning programs with employer needs and the ability to communicate program enrollment needs to close employer demand gaps. State and community-based programs and the public-facing online portal will support all residents on pathways to employment and economic security, maximizing the impact of braided state, federal, and philanthropic funding through "no wrong door" integrated service delivery strategies. The entire system will be supported by secure, compliant, privacy-preserving data sharing, integration, and analytics for continuous monitoring, improvement, evaluation, and research.

Workforce Strategy Recommendations

Recommendation #1: The Arkansas Department of Commerce (ACOM) should lead the alignment of business and industry priorities.

- Realign division policies and practices to improve skills to meet employer needs.

Recommendation #2: The Arkansas Department of Education (ADE), in partnership with the Department of Transformation and Shared Services (TSS), should lead the alignment of training and career pathways to ensure students learn applicable skills and competencies.

- Identify which skills are most important to Arkansas employers and reward meaningful credentials, i.e., certificates, diplomas, degrees, that align with the needs of job seekers, educators, and employers.
- Improve the public school accountability system to reward schools for providing real-world skills through high demand industry certifications.
- Effectively market non-traditional postsecondary paths.
- Realign the higher education funding formula to enhance the value of providing training that leads to gainful employment.

Recommendation #3: Provide services to meet the needs and goals of job seekers and employers.

- Create a statewide workforce portal that allows Arkansans to:
 - Seek jobs aligned to their skillset.
 - Further their training and education to develop job readiness and real-world skills.
 - Access existing resources, scholarships, and grants.
 - Access a record of their skills and educational background that provides hiring and enrollment insight for employers and institutions of higher education.

Recommendation #4: Invest in regional strategic focus centers.

- Align focus centers with Arkansas' market strengths: Aerospace and Defense, Advanced Manufacturing, Firearm and Ammunition Manufacturing, Energy, Forestry, Food Manufacturing, Industrial Maintenance/Refrigeration/Boiler, Lithium Mining and Battery Technology, Precision Agriculture, Semiconductors, and Steel Manufacturing.
- Enhance programs at existing Career and Technical Education (CTE) and Secondary Career Centers in the following areas: Broadband, Construction, Engineering, Healthcare, Law Enforcement/EMT/Fire, Leadership/IT/Retail/Entrepreneurship, Skilled Trades, Tourism and Outdoor Economy, Transportation, and Utilities.
- Align state and federal resources with the workforce strategy to maximize outcomes and economic development.

Why Was This Strategy Developed?

In recent years, Arkansas, like many states, has faced evolving economic and labor market challenges that necessitated a fresh approach to workforce development.

- **Changing Economic Landscape:** The state's economy has been transitioning, with growing and emerging sectors demanding new skills and competencies. This shift required a reevaluation of the workforce skills being developed to ensure they align with current and future market demands.
- **Skill Gaps and Labor Force Participation:** Arkansas is challenged by a noticeable skills gap, where employers struggle to find candidates with the necessary skills, especially in fastgrowing industries. Additionally, labor force participation rates lagged behind national averages, pointing to untapped potential in the state's workforce.
- **Educational Alignment with Industry Needs:** There is a growing recognition that educational pathways need better alignment with industry requirements to ensure that students and job seekers are prepared for successful careers.
- **Social Determinants of Employment:** Factors such as access to childcare, transportation, and healthcare are increasingly understood to impact employment opportunities and outcomes, necessitating a more holistic approach to workforce development.
- **Technological Advancements:** The rapid pace of technological change underscores the need for a workforce system that can adapt to future developments and integrate new tools and data analytics effectively.

In response to these needs, Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders issued [Executive Order \(EO\) 23-16](#), which created the Governor's Workforce Cabinet and the position of the Chief Workforce Officer (CWO) to advise the Governor on issues regarding workforce development and career education in Arkansas and to undertake the following duties:

- Coordinate, integrate, and optimize services, funding, and resources to maximize desired outcomes and improve operational efficiencies.
- Ensure a talent-driven education and workforce system that addresses the current and future needs of Arkansas employers and individuals.
- Prepare and implement a data-driven workforce strategic plan using high-quality data and subject matter expertise.

The workforce strategy was thus developed to address these dynamic challenges. It is designed to create a more collaborative, skills-based, customer-centric, and responsive workforce system that not

only meets the current needs of employers and job seekers but is also poised to adapt to future economic and technological shifts.

Governor's Workforce Cabinet: Leading Arkansas' Workforce Transformation

In the pursuit of a robust and future-ready workforce, the Governor's Workforce Cabinet brings together a team of dedicated and experienced leaders. Each member plays a pivotal role in shaping our workforce strategy, drawing on their unique expertise and insights.

Chief Workforce Officer: Mike Rogers

Mike Rogers, as the Chief Workforce Officer, spearheads the strategic direction and coordination of Arkansas' workforce development initiatives.

Secretary of the Arkansas Department of Commerce: Hugh McDonald

Hugh McDonald oversees the state's economic development and works to ensure that the workforce strategy aligns with the evolving needs of Arkansas' business community.

Secretary of the Arkansas Department of Education: Jacob Oliva

Jacob Oliva focuses on the educational aspects of workforce development, ensuring that our schools and educational institutions provide the skills and knowledge needed in the modern job market.

Secretary of the Arkansas Department of Corrections: Lindsay Wallace

Lindsay Wallace plays a key role in workforce reintegration strategies, focusing on providing opportunities and training for individuals re-entering society from the correctional system.

Secretary of the Arkansas Department of Human Services: Kristi Putnam

Kristi Putnam's contribution involves addressing the human aspects of workforce development, including access to childcare, healthcare, and other support services that enable Arkansans to participate fully in the workforce.

Secretary of the Arkansas Department of Labor and Licensing: Daryl Bassett

Daryl Bassett's expertise lies in ensuring fair labor practices and fostering a regulatory environment conducive to business growth and protecting the public.

Secretary of the Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs: Kendall Penn

Kendall Penn focuses on the integration of veterans into the workforce, ensuring that their valuable skills and experiences are recognized and utilized in civilian employment.

Secretary of the Arkansas Department of Transformation and Shared Services: Leslie Fisk

Leslie Fisk's role is instrumental in streamlining government services and processes to support workforce development, ensuring efficiency and effectiveness.

Development of The Strategy

The development of the Arkansas Workforce Strategy involved multi-faceted stakeholder engagement and was developed through a comprehensive process that combined data analysis, stakeholder engagement, and best-practice research.

- **Employers:** Input from over 500 employers was gathered during site visits, employer focus groups, forums, and workshops. This input provided critical insights into employer challenges, needs, and successful strategies.
 - **Resident Personas:** A design thinking workshop brought together the Governor's Workforce Cabinet, agency staff, and national thought leaders to ideate a holistic vision for the workforce strategy.
 - **National Experts:** Participation from national organizations brought in a wealth of knowledge and best practices from across the country, providing valuable insights into the strategy formulation.
 - **Industry and Non-Profit Organizations:** Extensive engagement with businesses and non-profits offered real-world perspectives on labor market needs, employment barriers, and potential solutions.
 - **Educational Institutions:** The strategy involved inputs from all levels of the Arkansas education system.
 - **Workforce Development Boards and Career Coaches:** These partnerships provided insights into the ground realities of job matching, career counseling, and skill development.
 - **Community and Economic Development Entities:** This involvement helped in understanding the broader economic implications of the workforce strategy.
- The creation and development of the Arkansas Workforce Strategy were marked by a collaborative, data-driven, and innovative approach.
- **Data-Driven Research and Analysis:** The process began with a thorough analysis of Arkansas' labor market data, economic trends, and workforce challenges. This included studying unemployment rates, skill gaps, industry demands, and educational outcomes.
 - **Stakeholder Engagement:** A series of workshops and forums were conducted to gather input from a diverse range of stakeholders. This included employers, industry leaders, educational institutions, workforce development professionals, community organizations, and policymakers. Their insights were crucial in understanding the real-world implications and needs of the workforce system.
 - **Design Thinking Workshops:** These workshops brought together state, regional, and cross-sector stakeholders to brainstorm innovative solutions for Arkansas' workforce development challenges.
 - **Best Practices Research:** The development team conducted extensive research on national and global best practices in workforce development. This helped in understanding what strategies have been effective elsewhere and how they could be adapted to fit Arkansas' unique context.
 - **Collaboration with Policy Experts:** Policy experts were consulted to ensure that the strategy was aligned with state and federal laws and regulations and to ensure its feasibility and effectiveness.

Who Is This Strategy Intended to Serve and Benefit?

The Arkansas Workforce Strategy is designed to serve a broad spectrum of stakeholders, ensuring that the benefits of a robust and dynamic workforce are widespread across the state.

- **Job Seekers, Underemployed, and Unemployed Individuals:** The strategy provides access to training and upskilling opportunities, equipping individuals with the skills necessary to compete for in-demand jobs.
- **Individuals with Barriers to Employment:** The strategy provides tailored support and training to individuals who face barriers to employment such as child and eldercare, transportation, or housing.
- **Incumbent Workers:** For those already employed, the strategy offers avenues for upskilling

and reskilling, helping them advance in their careers and adapt to changing job requirements.

- **Employers and Businesses:** The strategy benefits employers by ensuring a supply of skilled workers aligned with industry needs, thus improving productivity and economic competitiveness.
- **Educational Institutions and Training Providers:** Schools, colleges, and universities benefit from the strategy's focus on aligning educational programs with labor market needs, enhancing the relevance and value of their offerings.
- **Rural and Underserved Communities:** The strategy stimulates economic growth and workforce development in rural and underserved areas, addressing regional disparities.
- **Learners:** The strategy ensures that all learners, including youth and adults, are well-prepared with relevant skills and knowledge.
- **Economic Developers and Policymakers:** By enhancing the state's workforce quality, the strategy supports broader economic development goals and aids policymakers in strategic decision-making.
- **State and Local Economies:** Overall, a more skilled and adaptable workforce benefits the entire state economy by attracting future businesses and residents, encouraging investment, and fostering innovation.

The Arkansas Workforce Strategy is intended to serve as a comprehensive framework benefiting individuals across various stages of their career journey, businesses seeking skilled labor, educational entities, communities, and the broader state economy. Its inclusive approach ensures that the advantages of a skilled and responsive workforce extend to all corners of Arkansas, fostering economic growth and prosperity.

How Does This Strategy Intend to Effect Meaningful Change?

The Arkansas Workforce Strategy's theory of change focuses on transforming the state's workforce system into one that is skills-based, customer-centric, responsive, and collaborative. This transformation is guided by four strategic themes:

1. **Collaborative:** Fostering partnerships across sectors to align workforce development with industry needs.
2. **Skills-Based:** Aligning training and career pathways with real-world skills and competencies.
3. **Customer-Centric:** Tailoring services to meet the unique needs and goals of job seekers, incumbent workers, and employers.
4. **Responsive:** Adapting quickly to economic changes and labor market trends for timely alignment of workforce efforts.

These themes collectively aim to create a more dynamic, inclusive, and effective workforce ecosystem in Arkansas. Each of these themes is implemented through multiple strategic initiatives which are detailed in the following sections.



Strategic Theme 1: Collaborative

Collaboration is a guiding principle of the Arkansas Workforce Strategy. Addressing workforce challenges requires the expertise and insights of various sectors, including education, business, government, and community organizations. The complexities of the modern workforce system necessitate a coordinated approach.

Collaboration breaks down silos between different entities, leading to more cohesive and efficient strategies. It acknowledges that building a resilient, dynamic, and skilled workforce is a collective effort, requiring the commitment and participation of all stakeholders. Arkansas prioritizes partnership and alignment across sectors and departments to create a cohesive workforce development effort.

Governor's Workforce Cabinet

As an interagency body, the Governor's Workforce Cabinet serves as the central coordinating and decision-making entity overseeing the implementation and continuous improvement of the workforce strategy.

Role in the Arkansas Workforce Strategy:

- **Cross-Functional Partnership:** The Cabinet members work across roles, transcending

traditional agency boundaries to partner on comprehensive solutions. This cross-functional collaboration ensures that every aspect of workforce development is addressed from multiple perspectives, providing dynamic solutions to complex challenges.

- **Barrier Removal and Simplification:** A core goal of the Cabinet is to dismantle obstacles that hinder workforce development and employment. This involves simplifying processes, making it easier for Arkansas residents to access the services they need without getting entangled in bureaucratic complexities.
- **Creative Problem Solving and Innovation:** Open communication and innovative thinking are at the forefront of the Cabinet's problem-solving approach. By fostering an environment of creativity and open dialogue, the Cabinet finds novel solutions to workforce challenges, ensuring that strategies are not only effective but also forward-thinking.
- **Operational Excellence Through Continuous Improvement:** The Cabinet's initiatives lead to operational excellence by continuously improving processes and workflows. This commitment to ongoing refinement ensures that the strategies implemented are efficient, effective, and aligned with the evolving needs of the workforce.
- **Seamless Service Transition for Residents:** One of the Cabinet's primary goals is to facilitate a seamless transition of services to Arkansas residents, eliminating the confusion and frustration often associated with navigating multiple government agencies. The Cabinet aims to create a streamlined, user-friendly experience for all who engage with workforce development services.
- **A Commitment to Collaborative Success:** Through these strategies, the Governor's Workforce Cabinet is not just addressing the immediate workforce needs of Arkansas but is also laying a foundation for sustained economic growth and individual empowerment. Their collaborative approach symbolizes a new era of workforce development, one where every stakeholder – from government to individual resident – plays a vital role in shaping a prosperous future for Arkansas.

The Governor's Workforce Cabinet is more than just a steering committee; it is a dynamic force driving the Arkansas Workforce Strategy. Its ongoing role is integral to the strategy's success, ensuring that the vision of a skilled, adaptable, and thriving Arkansas workforce is realized and sustained over time.

Employer Collaboratives through Talent Pipeline Management

Employer collaboratives are industry-led partnerships that play a crucial role in aligning workforce development efforts with the specific needs and challenges of various sectors. The primary focus of employer collaboratives is to convene businesses, industry leaders, and key stakeholders to work together to address workforce challenges and opportunities in their respective sectors. Talent Pipeline Management (TPM) is a cutting-edge approach to meeting talent demand. Developed by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, TPM is revolutionizing how businesses address their workforce needs.

Role in the Arkansas Workforce Strategy:

- **Align Education with Industry Needs:** TPM helps align educational and training programs with the specific needs of industries, ensuring that students and job seekers acquire relevant, in-demand skills.
- **Close Skills Gaps:** By clearly articulating employer needs, TPM helps to close the skills

gap, ensuring that the workforce is trained for the jobs that are available now and in the future.

- **Create Efficient Talent Pipelines:** Through collaboration with education providers and workforce development programs, TPM creates more efficient and targeted talent pipelines.
- **Enhance Workforce Data Analysis:** TPM's focus on data and metrics contributes to a more sophisticated understanding of labor market dynamics, assisting in strategic workforce planning.
- **Strengthen Employer Collaboration:** TPM fosters a collaborative environment where businesses within sectors and industries work together to address common workforce challenges.
- **Inform Policy and Strategy:** Insights from TPM inform state workforce policies and strategies, ensuring they are responsive to actual employer needs.
- **Support Economic Development:** By ensuring a skilled workforce, TPM aids in attracting new businesses and supporting the growth of existing ones, thereby driving economic development.

- **Enhance Career Pathways:** By providing clear information on industry needs, TPM helps in crafting career pathways that are aligned with real job opportunities.

In Arkansas, TPM is integrated into the workforce strategy as a key tool for engaging employers and ensuring that workforce development efforts are closely aligned with the needs of the state's economy. By adopting TPM, Arkansas is taking a proactive, employer-centric approach to workforce development, setting the stage for a more responsive and effective workforce ecosystem.

Strategic Theme 2: Skills-Based

Skills-based practices are foundational to the Arkansas Workforce Strategy. They represent a shift in focus from traditional educational credentials to the skills and competencies that individuals possess, aligning workforce development more closely with current and emerging market demands. By focusing on skills rather than traditional job qualifications, this approach directly addresses the skills gap, ensuring that the workforce possesses the competencies that employers need. Through this approach, Arkansas intends to build a workforce that is adaptive and prepared for the challenges of the future economy.

Credential Transparency

Credential transparency revolutionizes how credentials are recognized and valued across the state's workforce and educational systems by creating clarity and uniformity in the credentialing landscape. It is intended to make the qualifications of job seekers more transparent and understandable to employers, educators, and individuals themselves.

Role in the Arkansas Workforce Strategy:

- **Establish Credential Registry:** Implements a comprehensive, state-wide registry that lists all available credentials, including degrees, certificates, licenses, badges, and apprenticeships, along with their associated skills and competencies.
- **Facilitate Skills-Based Practices:** Offers human and machine-readable data that demonstrates the relationship between skills, credentials, and learning opportunities, thereby aligning educational and occupational pathways with current market demands.
- **Increase Accessibility and Usability:** Ensures that information about credentials and programs is easily accessible and usable by all stakeholders, including job seekers, employers, and

education providers.

- **Empower Job Seekers:** Individuals can better understand and communicate their qualifications, making informed decisions about their career paths and educational opportunities.
- **Aid Employers in Talent Acquisition:** Employers gain a clearer understanding of potential employees' skills and competencies, leading to more effective hiring and workforce development strategies.
- **Support Data-Driven Decision Making:** The credential registry provides valuable data that can inform policy decisions, educational program development, and workforce planning. Credential transparency plays a crucial role in creating a more transparent, efficient, and responsive workforce system, one where every credential is recognized for its value and relevance in the broader economic context. This initiative enhances the alignment of education and training with real-world career opportunities, benefiting individuals, employers, and the state's economy alike.

Learning and Employment Records

In the rapidly evolving job market, traditional credentials are often insufficient to fully capture an individual's skills and experiences. The Arkansas Workforce Strategy addresses this gap through the implementation of Learning and Employment Records (LERs). Learning and Employment Records are digital records that comprehensively document an individual's learning achievements and work experiences, providing a portable and verified record of their skills and competencies.

Role in the Arkansas Workforce Strategy:

- **Empower Individuals with Data Ownership:** LERs give individuals control over their data, allowing them to manage and share their professional information as needed or desired.
- **Interoperability:** LERs are designed to be interoperable across various platforms and systems, ensuring that they can be easily shared and recognized by employers, educational institutions, and other stakeholders.
- **Verification and Security:** These digital records are securely stored and verifiable, ensuring the authenticity of the information they contain and the privacy of the individuals they represent.
- **Improve Hiring Efficiency:** Employers benefit from a more accurate understanding of candidates' skills, leading to more efficient and effective hiring processes.
- **Bridge Education and Employment:** LERs help bridge the gap between educational institutions and the job market, ensuring that training programs are aligned with real-world skill demands.

Learning and Employment Records enable a more accurate matching of skills with job requirements, facilitating better alignment between workforce capabilities and employer needs. LERs empower individuals to showcase their full range of competencies and experiences, promoting a more dynamic and responsive skills-based labor market.

Skills-Based Learning, Employment, and Advancement Platform

A forthcoming online portal will be a skills-based learning, employment, and advancement platform designed as part of the Arkansas Workforce Strategy. It will serve as a one-stop hub for accessing a

wide range of resources, including training programs, job listings, and career guidance, personalized to each individual's unique skills, experience, preferences, and goals. The portal will simplify the journey from learning to employment, making it more efficient and user-friendly for Arkansas residents.

Role in the Arkansas Workforce Strategy:

- **Skills-Based Matching:** Utilizing advanced matching algorithms, the portal will connect job seekers with employers based on skill compatibility, moving beyond traditional credential-based hiring.
- **Leverage Learning and Employment Records (LERs):** Incorporating LERs, the portal will enable individuals to maintain a comprehensive and verified record of their skills and work history.
- **Connect Learning to Employment:** The platform will provide access to a range of learning and training opportunities, allowing individuals to acquire or upgrade skills in alignment with market demands.
- **Empower Individuals:** The platform will empower job seekers and workers by providing them with tools and information to navigate their career paths effectively.
- **Enhance Employer Engagement:** The portal will enable employers to identify and connect with candidates more efficiently, based on skill needs.
- **Facilitate Continuous Learning and Advancement:** The platform will promote a culture of continuous learning and skill development, crucial for career advancement and workforce adaptability.
- **Streamline Work Search Activities:** The portal will feature an intuitive dashboard for Unemployment Insurance claimants to track their required weekly work search activities to maintain benefit compliance while simultaneously connecting with jobs that match their skills and experience.

The online platform will provide an integrated digital environment where individuals can explore, acquire, and showcase their skills and competencies. The portal will support the overall Arkansas Workforce Strategy by seamlessly integrating education, training, and employment services into a unified platform, aligning individual skill sets and career aspirations with local employment and advancement opportunities.

Strategic Theme 3: Customer-Centric

A customer-centric approach underpins the Arkansas Workforce Strategy, highlighting the commitment to design and deliver workforce services that are attuned to the needs, preferences, and experiences of both job seekers, incumbent workers, and employers.

By focusing on the needs and feedback of the customer, workforce services become more accessible, intuitive, and effective, leading to higher satisfaction and better outcomes. This theme is about more than just providing services; it's about creating positive, impactful experiences for every individual and employer who interacts with the Arkansas workforce system. Through this approach, the strategy seeks to build a more inclusive, responsive, and user-friendly workforce environment in Arkansas.

Integrated Service Delivery

Integrated service delivery is a holistic approach to providing public services that focuses on efficiently and effectively meeting the needs of individuals through coordinated and streamlined processes. It is characterized by the integration of services across different agencies and sectors to provide a comprehensive support system for individuals seeking employment, training, or other

related services.

One strategic activity to support integrated service delivery is the implementation of [CiviForm](#), an innovative digital tool designed to streamline the application process for government and community services. Developed with support from Google.org, it simplifies the experience of finding and applying for various services, making them more accessible and efficient for residents.

Role in the Arkansas Workforce Strategy:

- **Facilitate Access to Workforce Services:** Integrated service delivery, enabled by tools like CiviForm, allows residents easy access to a range of services critical for employment and training.
- **Enhance Efficiency and Effectiveness:** By breaking down silos between different service providers, integrated service delivery ensures that resources are utilized more efficiently and effectively, leading to better outcomes for residents.
- **Data-Driven Service Improvement:** The data collected through integrated service delivery processes can be used to continuously improve service delivery, tailor services to meet emerging needs, and inform workforce policy decisions.
- **Enhance User Experience:** By providing a one-stop-shop for services, integrated service delivery makes it easier for residents to access the support they need, improving overall satisfaction and engagement.

Integrated service delivery reflects the commitment to a more coordinated, efficient, and customer-centric approach to workforce development. This initiative is crucial for ensuring that all Arkansans can easily access the support and opportunities they need to succeed in today's dynamic job market.

Workforce Data Infrastructure

The establishment of a shared services workforce data infrastructure will serve as an essential foundation for facilitating integrated service delivery and enhancing customer-centric practices. It represents a strategic investment in creating a robust and interconnected data ecosystem.

Role in the Arkansas Workforce Strategy:

- **Enable Integrated Service Delivery:** Robust, shared data infrastructure is crucial for facilitating the seamless flow of information between education, training, employment, and supportive services to address the specific needs and goals of individuals and employers.
 - **Enhance Communication and Coordination:** With shared data, agencies and programs can more effectively communicate and coordinate their efforts. This unified approach ensures that individuals receive comprehensive support tailored to their needs.
 - **Streamline Referral Processes:** Workforce data infrastructure supports "No Wrong Door" service delivery by enabling streamlined and efficient referral processes across different agencies and programs, ensuring individuals receive comprehensive and coordinated services regardless of their initial point of contact.
 - **Privacy and Security:** Prioritizes data privacy and security, ensuring that sensitive information is protected in compliance with legal and ethical standards.
- The establishment of a robust shared service workforce data infrastructure harnesses the power of data to create a more adaptive, responsive, and effective workforce ecosystem, catering to the ever-changing needs of the Arkansas economy and residents.

Strategic Theme 4: Responsive

A responsive workforce system is agile, adaptable, and capable of responding to changing economic conditions, labor market trends, and individual needs. It is crucial to cater to the diverse and evolving needs of job seekers and workers, providing support that is tailored to individual pathways and career goals.

This theme is about ensuring that Arkansas' workforce is dynamic, forward-thinking, and capable of meeting the challenges of a rapidly evolving job market. By embracing adaptability and responsiveness, Arkansas can ensure its workforce is prepared for the future, contributing to the state's overall economic resilience and growth.

Jobs and Employment Data Exchange

The [Jobs and Employment Data Exchange \(JEDx\)](#) is a public-private partnership initiative of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation that modernizes workforce data through standardized data formats and data trusts. It is designed to produce enhanced, timely data on jobs and employment, facilitating better labor market information and more efficient administration of government programs.

Role in the Arkansas Workforce Strategy:

- **Streamline Employer Reporting:** Simplifies how employers report data, reducing burden and improving data quality.
- **Generate Longitudinal Workforce Data:** Offers comprehensive data about jobs and employment, supporting advanced workforce analytics while maintaining privacy.
- **Empower Individuals:** Provides workers with current, verifiable employment records for job applications, educational opportunities, and accessing benefits.
- **Enrich Job and Work Experience Data:** Extends job-related data, including skills, tasks, and responsibilities for inclusion in Learning and Employment Records through the online portal and other LER-enabled platforms.

By providing clearer, more timely insights into employer demand and labor market trends, JEDx enables Arkansas to adapt workforce development efforts swiftly, aligning training and policies with real-time economic needs. This initiative not only supports the strategy's overarching goals but also fosters a more dynamic, informed, and effective workforce ecosystem.

Workforce System Digital Twin and Analysis

The Workforce Digital Twin concept involves creating a virtual model of the state's workforce ecosystem, using real-time data and analytics to simulate, predict, and visualize workforce dynamics, enabling more informed decision-making.

Role in the Arkansas Workforce Strategy:

- **Enhance Workforce Planning:** The digital twin serves as a powerful tool for advanced workforce planning, allowing for a deeper understanding of the workforce ecosystem and its future trajectory.
- **Support Proactive Policy Making:** By simulating various policy outcomes, it helps in crafting proactive strategies that can better address future workforce needs.
- **Optimize Resource Allocation:** The digital twin concept identifies the most effective ways to allocate resources for training, education, and workforce development.
- **Facilitate Collaboration and Innovation:** Encourages innovative approaches to

workforce development and fosters collaboration by providing a common platform for understanding workforce trends and needs.

By providing a virtual representation of the workforce ecosystem, the workforce digital twin concept allows for agile responses to labor market changes and proactive planning. This approach ensures that the workforce system remains adaptable, efficient, and aligned with both current and future economic and employment trends, thereby supporting the broader objectives of the Arkansas Workforce Strategy.

How Will This Strategy Be Funded and Supported?

A critical aspect of the Arkansas Workforce Strategy involves establishing mechanisms for funding, resource allocation, and ensuring the sustainability of the strategic initiatives. This section outlines the approach to securing the necessary resources and managing them effectively to support the long-term viability of the strategy.

Funding and Optimization Strategies:

- **Financial Oversight and Coordination:** Establish a task force within the Governor's Workforce Cabinet to manage and prioritize workforce-related revenue streams across state government, ensuring effective allocation and use of funds.
- **Development of a Funding Stream Inventory:** Create a comprehensive inventory of all funding streams in a structured data format, detailing allowable uses to inform optimization models for effective fund allocation.
- **Educational Initiatives on Funding Flexibility:** Launch educational campaigns and workshops to raise awareness and understanding among state departments about blending and braiding funds, adhering to federal and state regulations.
- **Integration of State and Federal Resources:** Leverage the Arkansas Department of Transformation and Shared Services' infrastructure, including advanced analytics and cloud-native applications, to optimize resource utilization and improve service delivery. These strategies aim to optimize the use of funds while ensuring compliance with laws and regulations, ultimately enhancing the efficiency and impact of Arkansas' workforce development initiatives.

How Will the Success of This Strategy Be Measured and Evaluated?

Performance management, evaluation, continuous improvement, and communication are essential components of the Arkansas Workforce Strategy, ensuring that the strategic initiatives are not only effective but also adaptable and responsive to changing needs and conditions.

Performance Management Framework:

- **Establish Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):** Developing clear KPIs aligned with the strategic goals, such as employment rates, skill gap closure, employer satisfaction, and participant engagement levels.
- **Regular Monitoring:** Implementing systems for the regular collection and analysis of performance data to assess progress against objectives.

Evaluation Mechanisms:

- **Program Evaluations:** Conducting periodic evaluations of all programs and initiatives to assess their effectiveness, impact, and return on investment (ROI).
- **Stakeholder Feedback:** Gathering and incorporating feedback from participants,

employers, educators, and other stakeholders to understand the effectiveness of initiatives from multiple perspectives.

Continuous Improvement Processes:

- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** Utilizing data and insights gained from performance management and evaluations to inform decisions and improve strategies.
- **Adaptive Approach:** Remaining flexible by adapting strategies and initiatives in response to performance outcomes and emerging trends.
- **Innovation and Best Practices:** Encouraging innovation and the adoption of best practices to enhance program effectiveness and efficiency.

Communication and Transparency:

- **Regular Reporting:** Sharing performance results with stakeholders through reports, dashboards, and presentations to maintain transparency and accountability.
- **Collaborative Review Sessions:** Hosting regular sessions with key stakeholders to review performance data, discuss challenges, and identify opportunities for improvement.

These processes ensure that the implementation of the strategy remains effective, relevant, and aligned with the state's strategic workforce initiatives. By fostering a culture of accountability, adaptability, and continuous learning, the strategy is well-positioned to make a meaningful impact on Arkansas' workforce ecosystem.

How Can Individuals and Organizations Get Involved or Contribute to Arkansas' Workforce Future?

We invite all stakeholders—employers, educators, community organizations, state agencies, and residents—to join us in realizing the vision of the Arkansas Workforce Strategy. This strategy is not just a plan; it's a commitment to a brighter, more prosperous future for our state and its people.

Employers and Industry Leaders: Engage with us to shape the future of workforce development.

Educators and Training Providers: Help us build a pipeline of skilled workers who are ready to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

Community and Non-Profit Organizations: Collaborate with us to reach and support individuals across Arkansas.

Policymakers and Government Agencies: Join us in this cross-agency effort to create a cohesive and comprehensive workforce system.

Residents of Arkansas: Your future is at the heart of this strategy. Your skills, your dreams, and your hard work are the cornerstones of Arkansas' tomorrow.