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ARKANSAS

**WIOA**

WORKFORCE INNOVATION & OPPORTUNITY ACT

**STATE PLAN**

PYS 2022-2023

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ARKANSAS PYS 2022-2023 (MOD)

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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)

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.)

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)))

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.))

Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program (programs authorized under 38, U.S.C. 4100 et. seq.)

Unemployment Insurance programs (programs authorized under State unemployment compensation laws in accordance with applicable Federal law)

### B. PLAN INTRODUCTION OR EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2020, the Arkansas Workforce Development Board commissioned a comprehensive WIOA Systems Evaluation, Skills Gap Analysis, and series of Customer Service Surveys. This evaluation was conducted to assist the State in ensuring the ongoing development of its workforce development system. Although this evaluation was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, we still believe that it provides a roadmap towards systemic changes and improvements needed for the entire system. Throughout this State Plan, we have included results of this evaluative effort.

## II. STRATEGIC ELEMENTS

### A. ECONOMIC, WORKFORCE, AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES ANALYSIS

#### 1. ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE ANALYSIS

Although the economic trends of the State of Arkansas depend partly on the location in the state, Arkansas has a healthy economy. Despite a population size of less than one percent of the nation (.9% based on the 2020 U.S. Census), four 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), a national chain of gas stations (Murphy USA), and a major trucking company providing services to the United States, Canada, and Mexico (J.B. Hunt).

Arkansas is also fortunate to be home to major operations with companies headquartered in other states such as Murphy Oil, Baxter International, Lockheed Martin, Hewlett-Packard, FedEx, Post Foods, Kimberly-Clark, Amazon, Nucor to, and Standard Lithium, 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 Windstream.

Much of Arkansas is rural, and this challenge must be faced throughout this plan. Most jobs are in the urban areas of the state, but some job possibilities currently exist in rural areas. Southern Arkansas is home to North America's biggest brine processing industry and the largest reported lithium brine resource in the U.S. Rural areas are major sources of timber. Many of the state's 22 public two-year colleges (or their branches) are in rural areas, thus hiring professions and other office worker in rural areas, as well as providing education in rural areas. Rural areas

include state and county government offices, small businesses, nursing homes, and medical facilities.

Some large businesses choose to keep their headquarters in rural areas. For example, Murphy USA chose to keep its corporate headquarters in El Dorado (population approximately 18,000), where Murphy Oil began. When they had a problem attracting the needed hundreds of talented professionals to be workers, they developed an entertainment non-profit company (the Murphy Arts District) to make the town more attractive to young professionals. Local areas and other state and community resources must help businesses and industries who wish to stay in rural areas to develop plans to help them stay.

As a service to the citizens of Arkansas, including Local Workforce Development Areas seeking information for participants, the Labor Market Information section of the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (ADWS) provides employment information through its website <http://www.discover.arkansas.gov>. This website projects the 10 industries to be the largest employers in 2022.

#### TOP 10 INDUSTRIES - PROJECTED FOR 2022

1. MERCHANT WHOLESALERS, DURABLE GOODS - 26,433
2. LOCAL GOVERNMENT, EXCLUDING EDUCATION AND HOSPITALS - 42,913
3. BUILDING EQUIPMENT CONTRACTORS - 19,790
4. OFFICES OF PHYSICIANS - 27,189
5. RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS - 34,943
6. SERVICES TO BUILDINGS AND DWELLINGS - 15,527
7. BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICES - 10,060
8. CREDIT INTERMEDIATION AND RELATED ACTIVITIES - 20,553
9. ANIMAL SLAUGHTERING AND PROCESSING - 34,724
10. SOCIAL ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS - 6,056

The ADWS May 2020 Wage Survey, identified the ten largest occupations, and the number employed, and the average wage in 2020. These ten occupations represent almost a fourth of the 1,177,860 estimated employees covered in the 2020 wage survey.

OCCUPATION	EST. EMPLOY.	AVERAGE WAGE	% OF TOTAL EMPLOY.
FAST FOODS/COUNTER WORKERS	36,650	\$22,210	3.11%
RETAIL SALESPERSONS	36,030	\$28,090	3.06%
HEAVY AND TRACTOR TRUCK DRIVERS	35,940	\$46,630	3.05%
CASHIERS	27,370	23,830	2.32%
OFFICE CLERKS, GENERAL	26,290	\$32,880	2.23%
REGISTERED NURSES	25,300	\$63,640	2.15%
GENERAL AND OPERATION	20,400	\$91,530	1.73%

OCCUPATION	EST. EMPLOY.	AVERAGE WAGE	% OF TOTAL EMPLOY.
MGRS			
HOME HEALTH/PERSONAL CARE AIDES	20,170	\$23,510	1.71%
STOCKERS/ORDER FILLERS	20,170	\$27,960	1.71%
LABORERS, FREIGHT, STOCK, MOVERS	19,780	\$28,910	1.68%

Many of these industries and occupations are expected to keep growing. Most of these industries and occupations can be found in every Local Workforce Area of Arkansas. ADWS expects employment in the industries listed in the chart below to increase the most numerically from 2018 to 2028.

NAICS Title	Est. Employ 2018	Proj. Employ 2028	% Change
Restaurants and Other Eating Places	90,011	103,398	14.87%
Individual and Family Services	25,261	32,369	28.14%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	34,782	40,395	16.14%
Offices of Physicians	25,312	30,038	18.67%
Local Government, Excluding Education and Hospitals	41,740	46,062	10.35%
Insurance Carriers	16,806	20,438	21.61%
General Medical and Surgical Hospitals	52,392	55,953	6.80%
Employment Services	29,158	32,507	11.49%
Elementary and Secondary Schools	71,932	75,173	4.51%
Religious Organizations	25,120	28,148	12.05%
Offices of Other Health Practitioners	9,283	11,967	28.91%
Building Equipment Contractors	17,625	20,260	14.95%
State Government, Excluding Educ. and Hospitals	34,280	36,787	7.31%
Home Health Care Services	6,948	9,391	35.16%

NAICS Title	Est. Employ 2018	Proj. Employ 2028	% Change
Nursing Care Facilities (Skilled Nursing Facilities)	22,865	25,061	9.60%
Computer Systems Design and Related Services	9,594	11,493	19.79%
Truck Transportation	32,419	34,314	5.85%
Services to Buildings and Dwellings	15,148	16,893	11.52%
Child Day Care Services	10,236	11,911	16.36%
Grantmaking and Giving Services	3,097	4,759	53.66%

The Arkansas Economic Commission has identified 8 key industries for the state: Aerospace and Defense; Corporate and Shared Services; Distribution and Logistics Services; Food and Beverage; Metals; Paper and Timber Products; Software Development and Data Management Services; and Transportation Equipment Manufacturing. This list is a change from the list in the original Arkansas State Plan (<http://www.arkansasedc.com/industries>).

The report, “State of Arkansas Long-Term Industry and Occupational Projections 2018-2028,” is available at <https://www.discover.arkansas.gov/Employment/Employment-Projections/index>. Projections for individual Local Workforce Development Areas are also available at that website. Projections for occupations will vary by local area, but the 20 occupations to have the greatest numerical increases in Arkansas, along with education generally required for these occupations, is listed in the chart below.

The different make-up of the LWDAs demonstrates that each region of the state has a unique makeup of industries in its area, with its own challenges for meeting the needs of employers in that region. The three charts below, with information from the Arkansas 2021 Labor Market and Economic Report, list largest occupations, projected major occupational groups, growing Supersectors for the Arkansas LWDAs.

More detailed information may be found in original report, which may be downloaded from: [www.discover.arkansas.gov](http://www.discover.arkansas.gov)

### **Largest 2 Occupations (2020)**

Central Arkansas	Fast Food and Counter Workers, Retail Salespersons
City of Little Rock	Registered Nurses, Retail Salespersons
Eastern Arkansas	Fast Food and Counter Workers, Cashiers
North Central	Fast Food and Counter Workers, Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers
Northeast	Retail Salesperson, Fast Food and Counter Workers
Northwest	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers, Retail Salespersons
Southeast	Fast Food and Counter Workers, Home Health

Central Arkansas	Fast Food and Counter Workers, Retail Salespersons
	and Personal Care Aides
Southwest	Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand; Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers
West Central	Retail Salespersons, Fast Food and Counter Workers
Western	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers, Fast Food and Counter Workers

**Projected Top Growing Major Occupational Group (2020 - 2022)**

Central Arkansas	Personal Care and Service Occupations
City of Little Rock	Healthcare Support Occupations
Eastern Arkansas	Production Occupations
North Central	Management Occupations
Northeast	Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations
Northwest	Management Occupations
Southeast	Personal Care and Service Occupations
Southwest	Architecture and Engineering Occupations
West Central	Community and Social Service Occupations
Western	Education, Training, and Library Occupations

**Top Growing Industry Supersectors (2020 - 2022)**

Central	Construction
City of Little Rock	Financial Activities
Eastern Arkansas	Natural Resources and Mining; Trade, Transportation, and Utilities (tied)
North Central	Manufacturing
Northeast	Professional and Business Services
Northwest	Professional and Business Services
Southeast	Professional and Business Services
Southwest	Government
West Central	Other Services (except Government)
Western	Professional and Business Services



Based upon the top growing occupations listed above, Local Workforce Areas will need to address any skills gaps that arise due to insufficient education levels compared to projected education levels needed. Shortages of skilled workers in rural and lower-income areas of the state, coupled with the lack of “soft skills” and emotional intelligence on the part of these workers will need to be addressed. The entire workforce development system must work collectively to address these issues to ensure that our workforce is ready to enter these occupations successfully.

**THE 2021 ARKANSAS LABOR MARKET AND ECONOMIC REPORT WAS PRODUCED BY THE OCCUPATIONAL/CAREER INFORMATION SECTION OF OF THE ARKANSAS DIVISION OF WORKFORCE SERVICE'S LABOR MARKET INFORMATION UNIT. THIS REPORT PROVIDES RELEVANT INFORMATION ABOUT THE ECONOMY OF ARKANSAS AND THE TEN (10) LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AREAS.**

**THIS REPORT MAY BE ACCESSED AT:**

**[https://www.discover.arkansas.gov/\\_docs/Publications/Economic-Report-OCI/Economic-Report.pdf](https://www.discover.arkansas.gov/_docs/Publications/Economic-Report-OCI/Economic-Report.pdf)**

### **COVID-19**

Some of the data in this economic report reflects the impact of COVID-19 while other data sets may not yet reflect the impact. It is unknown what the full impact of COVID-19 will be on the data.

### **Population**

The state of Arkansas' population shrunk to 3,011,542 in 2020, declining 4,262 from 2019 to 2020 but increasing 21,132 from 2016 to 2020. Of Arkansas's 10 Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDAs), Northwest Arkansas saw the largest increase in population, adding 20,888 in 2020. The Eastern, North Central, Southeast, Southwest, West Central, and Western Arkansas LWDAs saw decreasing populations in 2020.

### **Age Distribution**

An analysis of Arkansas' population distribution by gender and age group for 2010, 2018 and 2030 revealed that between 2010-18 the number of people 65+ grew substantially while the younger population (under-20) reduced. In fact, the 65+ group increased its share of the total population from 14.4% in 2010 to 17.0% in 2018, a growth of about 90,000 people. During the same period, the under 20 age group went down from 27.3% to 26.0%, a net decrease of about 14,000. Based on the population projections, by 2030, 26.7% of the state population will be under age 20 while 20.3% will be age 65 or older resulting in the older population continuing to increase its share of the total population.

### **Racial and Ethnic Composition**

This subsection describes the projected racial and ethnic composition of the state population from 2013-2060. Four major ethno-racial groups are identified: whites, blacks, Hispanics, and other races. Hispanics are not a racial group but rather an ethnic group, which means that whites, blacks and other races are found in this group. In this study, the whites, blacks and other races groups exclude Hispanics. The ethno-racial composition of the total population (all ages) and the younger population (under age 20) are examined.

Whites constitute the current and projected predominant population group in Arkansas. The under 20 age group is more diverse than the total population with whites constituting 63.7% of the under 20 population in 2018 as compared to 72.2% of the total population (all ages).

The white population group is expected to experience a decrease in its share of the total population from 72.2% in 2018 to a projected 68.1% in 2030, a decrease of about 4.1

percentage points. The trend is also expected for the under age 20 population, with the share of the white group decreasing from 63.7% in 2018 to a projected 59.0% in 2030, a decrease of 4.7 percentage points.

The remaining three groups (blacks, Hispanics, and other races), all are expected to show an increase in their share of total population. However, the Hispanics are anticipated to experience the largest percentage growth going from 7.7% in 2018 to 10.1% in 2030. This is also true for the under age 20 population with the Hispanic group growing from 11.6% in 2018 to 14.5% in 2030.

## **Urban-Rural**

There are two different definitions that categorize urban and rural areas in the country, one developed by the US Census Bureau and the other by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The US Census Bureau defines urban and rural areas based strictly on population size and density and they do not necessarily follow municipal boundaries. The OMB follows a regional-economic concept to define counties or county-equivalent units as metropolitan, micropolitan or neither. A metropolitan area (MSA) consists of one or more counties with a core urban population of 50,000+ and a micropolitan area has a core urban population of at least 10,000 but less than 50,000. Metropolitan areas are categorized as urban while counties that are not part of a metropolitan area are considered rural.

This subsection follows the OMB definition of urban and rural to classify the state counties into three major groups: metropolitan, micropolitan, and other rural. The majority of the state population is urban. In 2010, about 60% of all Arkansans lived in metropolitan areas while about 40% lived in rural areas (micropolitan and other rural). Population estimates from 2010-18 show that metropolitan areas are growing steadily but modestly. On the other hand, the populations of the micropolitan and other rural areas keep shrinking. In 2018, the share of all Arkansans living in urban areas grew to 62.5% while population in rural areas (micropolitan and other rural) decreased to 37.5%.

## **Metropolitan Areas**

Out of eight metropolitan areas, Little Rock-North Little Rock-Conway, Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers, Fort Smith, and Jonesboro are the most populated. In 2010, these four areas alone hosted close to half (49.6%) of the state population and in 2018, their share passed the halfway mark with 52.8% of all Arkansans living in these metropolitan areas.

In 2018, 21.1% of the state population lived in Pulaski, Faulkner and Saline counties in the LR-NLR-Conway metropolitan area. In the same year, within the Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers area, Benton and Washington counties were the most populated sharing 16.9% of the total population. Between 2010 and 2018, most of the gains in the state urban population came from population growth in Benton and Washington. During this period, these two counties alone increased their share of total population by 2.3 percentage points.

In general terms, the population in a geographic region can vary over time due to changes in several factors: number of births, deaths, and migration. For instance, in 2011, 52.6% of the population change (from the previous year) in the LR-NLR-Conway MSA was due to migration into the area. Out of this, domestic migration accounted for 40.3% while international migration contributed 12.3%. On the other hand, in 2016, 18.9% of the population change was due to domestic migration out of the region (hence a negative percentage) while 32.7% was due to international migration into the area.

The overall migration patterns for these two metro areas are different. During this period, the Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers area experienced consistently positive international and domestic migration accounting jointly for about 60% or more of their annual population change. On the other hand, domestic migration in the LR-NLR-Conway area has been decreasing over

the years and at times has even been negative. Since 2014, annual international migration in this area has accounted for a larger share of population change compared to their domestic counterpart.

## **Industry**

This section describes projected labor demand trends by industry sector for the state and Local Workforce Development Areas (WDA) for the decade of 2018-28. The analysis is based on the long-term (2018-28) State and Local WDA industry projections published by the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services and the national long-term industry projections published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. 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, labor demand in the state is expected to increase by 118,681 jobs between 2018-28, an 8.42 percent increase. Goods-Producing industries are expected to add 10,940 new jobs, while the Services-Providing industries should see most of the growth, with 100,981 new jobs being added. Self-Employed and Unpaid Family Workers could see 6,760 more jobs during this period.

The Natural Resources and Mining supersector is expected to gain 955 jobs during the projection period. Driving the growth is the Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting sector, which could see a gain of 891 jobs over the projection period. However, Logging could see a loss of 306 jobs, placing among the Top 10 of the Top 20 Declining Industries list. The Mining sector is slated to experience a net gain of 64 jobs. While Support Activities for Mining could see a gain of 80 jobs, Oil and Gas Extraction is predicted to lose 65.

Construction is estimated to be the top and fastest growing among Goods-Producing supersectors, adding 5,967 jobs, or 11.75 percent to its workforce during the projection period. More than 66 percent of the growth could come in the Specialty Trade Contractors subsector, with a growth of 3,965 new jobs over the 10-year period. Driving this growth is Building Equipment Contractors, which is forecast to add 2,635 new jobs, an increase of 14.95 percent, making the Top 20 Growing

Industries list. On the negative side of the economy, Land Subdivision could see a loss of more than a third of its workforce, placing second in the state in percent decline.

The Manufacturing supersector is expected to increase employment by 4,018 jobs by 2028. Non-Durable Goods Manufacturing could see 3,027 of these jobs and the Food Manufacturing subsector is the driving force behind the growth, with a projected gain of 2,329. Animal Slaughtering and Processing is the top growing industry in Manufacturing, with a growth of 1,417 jobs. Fabric Mills is forecasted to be the fastest growing industry in the state between 2018 and 2028,

nearly tripling in size, as an influx of clothing and fabric manufacturing firms have expressed interest in the state over the years. However, on the negative side of the job market, several Non-Durable Goods Manufacturing industries, five, in all, made the Top 20 Declining Industries list. Leading the pack is Printing and Related Support Activities, with a loss of 413, placing fourth in the state in numeric decline. Apparel Knitting Mills is slated to be the fastest declining industry in Manufacturing, and third statewide, with a potential loss of 29.63 percent of its workforce.

Durable Goods Manufacturing is expecting a net gain of 991 jobs over the next 10 years. The largest increase in jobs should be seen in the Transportation Equipment Manufacturing subsector, with 1,222 jobs anticipated overall. Iron and Steel Mills and Ferroalloy Manufacturing could see a 28.43 percent rise in jobs, placing the industry among the ten fastest growing industries in the state. The Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing subsector is also projected to add more than 1,000 jobs during the projection period. However, not all Durable

Goods Manufacturing industries are slated to see so bright a future. The Machinery Manufacturing subsector is estimated to lose 486 jobs, placing second in the state in numeric decline. In all, seven Durable Goods Manufacturing industries made the Top 20 Declining Industries list. Foundries is projected to be among the ten fastest declining industries in the state, with a loss of 16.35 percent of its workforce, or 260 jobs.

The Trade, Transportation, and Utilities supersector is projected to gain 10,752 jobs over the 10-year period. Wholesale Trade could see an increase of 2,119 jobs, with Merchant Wholesalers, Durable Goods, anticipating adding 1,659 jobs. Wholesale Electronic Markets and Agents and Brokers is estimated to add 256 new jobs, while Merchant Wholesalers, Nondurable Goods is expected to increase employment by 204. Retail Trade could increase by just 3,880 jobs over the projection period. The long-term outlook for General Merchandise Stores looks promising, with a net gain of 1,469 jobs, but will likely see a few bumps along the way. The Motor Vehicle and Parts Dealers subsector is also set to experience strong growth, adding 1,266 new jobs. On the negative side of the labor market, Food and Beverage Stores is expected to lose 305 jobs between 2018 and 2028, possibly due to increased use of self-check-out and grocery pickup and delivery. Book, Periodical, and Music Stores is slated to be the fastest declining among Retail Trade industries, and sixth statewide, with a loss of 21.97 percent of its workforce, due to online purchasing of these products as well as online streaming services.

The Transportation and Warehousing sector is projected to add 4,398 jobs. Truck Transportation is the biggest driver of this growth, adding 1,895 new jobs, making the Top 20 Growing Industries list. Warehousing and Storage is slated to increase by an additional 1,080 jobs. Other Transit and Ground Passenger Transportation is estimated to be the third fastest growing industry in the state, increasing by 40.09 percent between 2018 and 2028, while Support Activities for Rail Transportation could also be among the ten fastest growing industries in the state, with a 28.48 percent rise in jobs. Scenic and Sightseeing Transportation is projected to lose 16.67 percent of its workforce during the 2018-2028 period. Utilities is expected to experience a net gain of 355 jobs by 2028. Electric Power Generation, Transmission and Distribution is slated to add 300 jobs, while Natural Gas Distribution could cut 70 from its workforce.

Information is projected to be the only supersector to experience a net loss of jobs, with 665 being eliminated during the projection period, a 5.93 percent decline. The Telecommunications subsector could see a significant net loss of 754 jobs over the projection period, becoming the top declining industry in the state, and among the ten fastest declining, at a rate of 21.65 percent. Cable and Other Subscription Programming is slated to be the fastest declining industry in the state, losing 41.18 percent of its workforce.

One positive in the Information supersector is Data Processing, Hosting and Related Services, which is forecasted to gain 293 jobs, or 20.71 percent during the 2018-2028 projection period. The Financial Activities supersector is projected to add 5,958 new jobs, with the Finance and Insurance sector accounting for 4,940 of those new jobs. The Insurance Carriers and Related Activities subsector is estimated to add 4,103 jobs to its workforce. Driving this growth is Insurance Carriers, with a growth of 3,632, placing the industry among the ten highest growing industries in the state, also placing in the Top 20 Fastest Growing Industries list with a 21.61 percent growth. The Credit Intermediation and Related Activities subsector is estimated to add 622 new jobs to its workforce. The Real Estate and Rental and Leasing sector is predicted to increase by 1,018 jobs, or 7.48 percent growth. The majority of the gain is likely to occur in the Real Estate subsector, adding 986, or 10.39 percent to its workforce. Lessors of Nonfinancial Intangible Assets (except Copyrighted Works) is forecasted to lose 12.20 percent of its workforce, placing in the Top 20 Fastest Declining Industries list.

The Professional and Business Services supersector is expected to add 18,915 jobs by 2028. The Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services sector should anticipate 5,114 jobs over the projection period. Driving job growth is Computer Systems Design and Related Services, which is estimated to gain 1,899 of those jobs, placing in the Top 20 Growing Industries list. Management, Scientific, and Technical Consulting Services is forecast to be in the Top 20 Fastest Growing Industries list, raising employment by 21.90 percent. The Management of Companies and Enterprises sector could add 5,613 new jobs between 2018 and 2028, an increase of 16.14 percent. The Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services sector could see a growth of 8,188 new jobs. Within the sector, Employment Services should see the most growth with an estimated 3,349 new jobs, placing among the ten highest growing in the state. One downside is Travel Arrangement and Reservation Services, slated to lose 89 jobs, or 24.18 percent of its workforce, fourth in the state.

Education and Health Services is projected to be the top growing supersector in the state, with 36,472 new jobs being added by 2028, a 12.19 percent rise in employment. Educational Services could see a growth of 5,166 jobs. Elementary and Secondary Schools should see most of this growth with 3,241 jobs anticipated to be added. Health Care and Social Assistance is forecasted to be the top and fastest growing sector, with 31,306 jobs expected. Of those jobs, 13,315 could be found in the Ambulatory Health Care Services. Individual and Family Services is projected to be the top growing industry in Education and Health Services, adding 7,108 new jobs, the second highest in the state and among the ten fastest. Home Health Care Services is slated to add 35.16 percent to its workforce, placing fourth in the state in percent growth. In all, seven industries in Education and Health Services made the Top 20 Growing Industries list and six industries made the Top 20 Fastest Growing Industries list.

At 13.44 percent, the Leisure and Hospitality supersector would be the fastest growing in the state, equivalent to 15,915 new jobs during the projection period. Most of the growth is likely to come in the Accommodation and Food Services sector, which is projected to add 14,715 new jobs, a 13.75 percent increase. Driving this growth is Restaurants and Other Eating Places, which is forecast to add 13,387 new jobs between 2018 and 2028, becoming the top growing industry in the state. The Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation sector is estimated to add 1,200 jobs.

The Other Services (Except Government) supersector could add 7,079 new jobs by 2028, an increase of 11.77 percent. Religious, Grantmaking, Civic, Professional, and Similar Organizations could lead the supersector with 6,023 jobs. Grantmaking and Giving Services could increase employment by 53.66 percent, second fastest in the state. Religious Organizations is anticipated to add the most jobs, with 3,028 new jobs between 2018 and 2028. Drycleaning and Laundry Services is slated to lose 112 jobs, while Personal and Household Goods Repair and Maintenance is forecasted to lose 14.22 percent of its workforce. The Government supersector is projected to grow by 6,555 jobs during the 10-year period. State, Government, Excluding Education and Hospitals should see 2,507 new jobs, while Local Government, Excluding Education and Hospitals could see a growth of 4,322 new jobs, placing both on the Top 20 Growing Industries list. However, Postal Service should see a decrease of 314 jobs by 2028 as small short-term gains likely will not be enough to offset long-term losses. Federal Government, Excluding Post Office is expected to gain 40 jobs.

### **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 2016-2026. The Northwest WDA is expected to grow at the fastest rate (14.2%) and also add the most number of jobs (37,546). The North Central WDA is next with a growth rate of

13.8% adding 9,158 jobs. The other WDAs that are expected to experience more than 10% growth were Central WDA, West Central WDA, and Northwest WDA. As expected, those WDAs located in the Mississippi Delta Region, the Eastern WDA and Southeast WDA experience the least percentage growth.

The majority of the jobs across all industry sectors are located in three local Workforce Development Areas – Northwest, Little Rock and Central. The three areas together account for about 51.2 % of all WDA jobs with the Northwest taking the largest share. Apart from jobs in Health Care and Social Assistance, the majority of the jobs in the large industry sectors are located in the Northwest. The Little Rock Area accounts for the largest number of jobs in Health Care and Social Assistance. Among the medium-sized industry sectors, most of the jobs in Transportation and Warehousing and Management of Companies and Enterprises are located in the Northwest.

### ***1. Central Arkansas LWDA***

The Central Arkansas LWDA saw a decrease in the labor force of 3,372 to 251,378 from 2019 to 2020, but the labor force increased by 3,389 over the 2016 to 2020 period. Employment decreased by 10,460 between 2019 and 2020 and decreased by 3,130 over the five-year period. The LWDA has seen an increase in unemployment over the same time periods.

From 2019 to 2020, unemployment increased by 7,088, and from 2016 to 2020, unemployment increased by 6,519. The LWDA's unemployment rate rose by 2.6 percent over the five-year period. In 2021, the unemployment rate decreased by six-tenths of a percent from January to 4.4 percent in July 2021.

Registered Nurses is projected to be the top growing occupation in the Central Arkansas LWDA between 2020 and 2022, adding 124 jobs, increasing its workforce to 3,233 jobs. Security and Fire Alarm Systems Installers is anticipated to be the fastest growing occupation, raising employment levels 6.52 percent to 147. Fast Food and Counter Workers could be the top declining occupation during the 2020-2022 projection period, with a loss of 859 jobs, a 10.01 percent drop.

However, Audio and Video Equipment Technicians, is slated to lose 40.40 percent of its workforce during the same time frame, becoming the fastest declining occupation. Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations is slated to gain 212 jobs from first quarter 2020 and first quarter 2022, becoming the top growing major group.

### ***2. City of Little Rock LWDA***

This LWDA holds the distinction of being the only LWDA comprised of a single metropolitan and geographical area. The City of Little Rock Local Workforce Development Area's (LWDA) population decreased by 569 between 2018 and 2019, bringing the population to 197,312. The City of Little Rock's population grew by 369 between 2015 and 2019. The area is the county seat of Pulaski County and includes part of the Little Rock-North Little Rock-Conway Metropolitan Statistical Area.

Registered Nurses was estimated to have the most employees in Little Rock with 8,070 employed in 2020 with an average wage of \$69,901. Retail Salespersons is the second largest occupation with 7,280 employed, earning an average wage of \$29,149. General and Operations Managers, with an estimated employment of 4,650, had the highest average wage of the 10 largest occupations, earning \$107,178 annually.

Dentists, General topped the Occupations Paying the Most list with an annual salary of \$208,418. Biological Science Teachers, Postsecondary, with an average annual salary of \$200,227, ranked second on the Occupations Paying the Most list. The entry wage estimate for

employers of all sizes was \$24,173 for 2020. The median wage estimate for employers with 250-499 employees was \$36,916, while wages for experienced workers averaged \$63,286 for employers in all size categories.

### **3. Eastern Arkansas LWDA**

The labor force in the Eastern Arkansas LWDA decreased by 509 to 45,734 in 2020 from 2019, and has decreased by 2,331 from 2016 to 2020. Employment decreased from 2019 to 2020, losing 1,967 workers to 42,116. Unemployment saw an increase from 2019 to 2020, having 1,458 more unemployed, enough to change the unemployment rate from 4.7 percent to 7.9 percent. Since the beginning of 2021, the unemployment rate fluctuated from 6.9 percent in January to 6.2 percent in April, ending July 2021 at 6.5 percent.

Fast Food and Counter Workers was estimated to have the most employees in Eastern Arkansas with 1,470 employed in 2020 with an average wage of \$21,807. Cashiers was the second largest occupation with 1,280 employed, earning an average wage of \$24,757. Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education, with an estimated employment of 640, had the highest average wage of the 10 largest occupations, earning \$49,594 annually.

### **4. North Central Arkansas LWDA**

The North Central Arkansas LWDA labor force decreased by 152 from 2019 to 2020 and decreased by 937 between 2016 and 2020. Employment fell by 1,894 while unemployment increased by 1,760 from 2019 to 2020. The unemployment rate increased to 6.5 percent or 1.8 percent from 2019 to 2020. The unemployment rate fluctuated in 2021, but ended at 5.0 percent in July.

Fast Food and Counter Workers was estimated to have the most employees in North Central Arkansas with 2,570 employed in 2020 with an average wage of \$21,806. Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers was the second largest occupation with 2,200 employed, earning an average wage of \$35,150. General and Operations Managers, with an estimated employment of 1,130, had the highest average wage of the 10 largest occupations, earning \$71,575 annually.

### **5. Northeast Arkansas LWDA**

The Northeast Arkansas LWDA labor force decreased to 112,157 in 2020, or by 11,006 since 2019, and decreased over the 2016-2020 period by 7,505. Employment decreased by 4,087 while unemployment increased by 3,081 from 2019 to 2020. The unemployment rate rose to 6.1 percent, an increase of 2.6 percent from 2019 to 2020. The area's unemployment rate settled to 4.8% by July 2021.

Retail Salespersons was estimated to have the most employees in Northeast Arkansas with 3,610 employed in 2020 with an average wage of \$27,873. Fast Food and Counter Workers was the second largest occupation with 3,340 employed, earning an average wage of \$21,899. General and Operations Managers, with an estimated employment of 1,620, had the highest average wage of the 10 largest occupations, earning \$87,320 annually.

Physicians, All Other and Ophthalmologists, Except Pediatric topped the Occupations Paying the Most list with an annual salary of \$289,269. Obstetricians and Gynecologists, with an average annual salary of \$259,610, ranked second on the Occupations Paying the Most list.

### **6. Northwest Arkansas LWDA**

The Northwest Arkansas LWDA labor force increased but employment decreased from 2019 to 2020, with the labor force gaining 3,311 to 330,952 and employment decreasing by 3,362 to

315,358. Unemployment increased by 6,673 to 15,594 in 2020, and has seen an increase of 6,135 since 2016. The unemployment rate rose from 2019 to 2020 by two percent to 4.7 percent. The area's unemployment rate increased by a total of 1.7 percent from 2016. The unemployment rate ended July 2021 at 3.3 percent.

Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers was estimated to have the most employees in Northwest Arkansas with 12,870 employed in 2020 with an average wage of \$49,135. Retail Salespersons was the second largest occupation with 9,770 employed, earning an average wage of \$28,893. General and Operations Managers, with an estimated employment of 5,410, had the highest average wage of the 10 largest occupations, earning \$93,665 annually.

Physicians, All Other and Ophthalmologists, Except Pediatric topped the Occupations Paying the Most list with an annual salary of \$246,185. Nurse Anesthetists, with an average annual salary of \$234,037, ranked second on the Occupations Paying the Most list.

Educational Services is slated to add 1,611 jobs between 2020 and 2022, becoming the top growing industry in the Northwest Arkansas LWDA, moving employment to 30,219. Performing Arts, Spectator Sports, and Related Industries is predicted to be the fastest growing industry, increasing by 22.53 percent. On the negative side of the economy, Food Services and Drinking Places is forecast to cut 2,594 jobs during the 2020-2022 projection period, a 10.53 percent reduction, because of the pandemic effects on the industry.

Motion Picture and Sound Recording Industries could see a worse outcome, potentially losing 60.43 percent of its workforce, dropping to 129 jobs by 2022. Professional and Business Services leads all supersectors in Northwest Arkansas in numeric change, with 2,506 new jobs, a 4.98 percent gain, moving employment from 50,356 in 2020 to 52,862 in 2022.

## **7. Southeast Arkansas LWDA**

Southeast Arkansas saw a decrease in the labor force of 1,573 to 79,951 from 2019 to 2020, and employment decreased by 3,319 to 74,352 for the same time period. Both the labor force and employment have decreased since 2016 by 2,209 and 3,570 respectively. Unemployment increased by 1,746 to 5,599 from 2019 to 2020 and the unemployment rate increased to 7.0 percent in 2020. After starting at 6.6 percent in January 2021, the unemployment rate fell by four-tenths of a percent to 6.2 percent in July 2021.

Fast Food and Counter Workers was estimated to have the most employees in Southeast Arkansas with 2,900 employed in 2019 with an average wage of \$22,085. Home Health and Personal Care Aides was the second largest occupation with 1,770 employed, earning an average wage of \$22,401. Registered Nurses, with an estimated employment of 1,340, had the highest average wage of the 10 largest occupations, earning \$59,787 annually.

Audiologists topped the Occupations Paying the Most list with an annual salary of \$286,493. Anesthesiologists, with an average annual salary of \$278,709, ranked second on the Occupations Paying the Most list.

## **8. Southwest Arkansas LWDA**

The Southwest Arkansas LWDA labor force decreased from 2019 to 2020 by 1,547 to 91,140, while employment decreased by 3,378 to 85,184. Over the five-year period from 2016 to 2020, the area has seen a decrease of 2,643 in the labor force and decrease of 4,210 in employment. Unemployment increased by 1,831 from 2019 to 2020, and increased by 1,570 over the five-year period. The unemployment rate rose by two percent from 2019 to 2020 to 6.5 percent.



After various fluctuations in the unemployment rate during 2021, the rate settled at 5.4 percent in July 2021.

Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing is estimated to be the top growing industry in Southwest Arkansas, adding 319 jobs, for an employment level of 2,769. Mining (Except Oil and Gas) could raise employment levels by 40.20 percent, moving from 301 jobs in 2020 to 422 in 2022.

On the negative side of the labor market, Educational Services is slated to lose 246 jobs, dropping employment to 7,996. Private Households is forecast to cut 154 jobs, or 27.55 percent of its workforce, dropping from 154 jobs in 2020 to 405 in 2022, becoming the fastest declining industry in the area. Government is estimated to be the only supersector to experience job gain, with a projected gain of 106 new jobs between 2020 and 2022, a 1.77 percent rise in employment to a level of 6,107.

### **9. West Central LWDA**

In 2020, the labor force and employment decreased in the West Central Arkansas LWDA. The labor force decreased by 1,914 to a total of 130,485, while employment increased 5,138 to a total of 121,956. The labor force decreased by 1,343 from 2016 to 2020 and employment decreased by 3,936. Unemployment increased from 2019 to 2020 by 3,224 to 8,529. This caused the unemployment rate to rise from 4.0 percent to 6.5 percent. The unemployment rate fluctuated through 2021, but dropped back to 5.2 percent by July 2021.

Religious, Grantmaking, Civic, Professional, and Similar Organizations is predicted to be the top growing major group adding 330 new jobs and increasing employment levels to 9,336. Amusement, Gambling, and Recreation Industries is slated to be the fastest growing industry in West Central Arkansas, raising employment by 25.70 percent as an increase in casino operations could drive the area's economy.

As many other areas have shown, Food Services and Drinking places have taken a hit during the pandemic and is predicted to experience a net loss of 1,176 jobs, dropping to 8,879 employment. Motion Picture and Sound Recording Industries is slated to lose 34.12 percent of the workforce, becoming the fastest declining industry. Other Services (Except Government) is forecast to be the top growing supersector, adding 281 jobs between 2020 and 2022, a 2.58 percent rise in employment.

### **10. Western Arkansas LWDA**

The Western Arkansas LWDA labor force decreased by 1,037 to 111,094 and employment decreased by 3,681 to 104,581 from 2019 to 2020. Over the 2016-2020 period, the labor force decreased by 2,510 while employment decreased by 4,559. Unemployment and the unemployment rate both increased significantly from 2016 to 2020. Unemployment increased by 2,049 to 6,513 unemployed, while the unemployment rate rose by 2.4 percent to 5.9 percent. The area's unemployment rate fluctuated through 2021, ending at 4.2 percent in July.

Administrative and Support Services leads the Western Arkansas WDA region in numeric growth, adding an anticipated 480 new jobs, and moving employment levels to 6,259. Plastics and Rubber Products Manufacturing is slated to ramp up employment soon, increasing by 25.72 percent. On the negative side of the labor market, Food Services and Drinking Places is predicted to lose 514 jobs, dropping employment to 7,258, becoming the top declining industry.

Motion Picture and Sound Recording Industries is estimated to cut 59.57 percent from its workforce during the projection period, dropping employment below 50. Professional and Business Services is slated to be the top growing supersector, adding 534 jobs between 2020 and 2022, a 5.41 percent rise in employment.

### **Labor Force and Unemployment Rate**

The labor force decreased by 8,346 between 2019 and 2020 and employment decreased by 41,946 over the same period. Unemployment increased by 33,600 from 2019 to 2020, and has seen an increase of 28,940 since 2016. The state's unemployment rate rose by 2.6 percent from 2019 to 2020. Over the 2016-2020 period, the unemployment rate rose 2.2 percentage points to 6.1 percent for 2020. The state's unemployment rate was 4.3 percent in July 2021.

The State's monthly unemployment rate remained lower than the U.S. unemployment rate during the first six months of calendar 2021. In January 2021, the Arkansas unemployment rate was 4.6%, compared to the U.S. unemployment rate of 6.3%. This trend continued in July 2021, as the Arkansas rate was 4.3% compared to the national rate of 5.4%.

### **Median Household/Per Capita Personal Income**

Arkansas' median household income was \$47,597 in 2019 which increased by \$1,871 from 2018 to 2019 but is below the national median household income of \$62,843 for 2020.

Arkansas' per capita personal income in 2020 was \$47,109, an increase of \$2,527 from 2019. Over the 2016-2020 period, the per capita personal income increased by \$7,363. The state's per capita personal income is below the United States per capita personal income of \$59,729.

### **Employment**

In 2020, whites made up 77.8 percent of the labor force while the total of all minority groups made up 22.2 percent of the labor force. The unemployment rate for all races, including Hispanics, was 6.1 percent. The unemployment rate for all minority groups combined was 9.3 percent. Hispanics of all races made up 7.3 percent of the labor force, with an unemployment rate of 5.4 percent.

### **Education**

Five of the eight education categories are projected to see positive net growth between 2020 and 2022. Occupations requiring no formal education are projected to lose 10,346 jobs during the projection period. Jobs requiring a high school diploma or equivalent are expected to lose 5,297 jobs during the projection period and had the highest educational attainment in 2019 at 34.9 percent. Occupations requiring a bachelor's degree are expected to grow by 3,488 jobs and 15.1 percent of the population 25 years and over had a bachelor's degree in 2019. Growth in occupations requiring a master's degree or doctoral or professional degree is expected to be 495 and 261 jobs respectively. Educational attainment of the state's population aged 25 years and over shows that 87.5 percent have earned at least a high school diploma or equivalent, up 1.3 percent from 2018.

### **Wages**

Fast Food and Counter Workers was estimated to have the most employees across the state with 36,650 employed in 2020 with an average wage of \$22,210. Retail Salespersons was the second largest occupation with 36,030 employed, earning an average wage of \$28,090. General and Operations Managers, with an estimated employment of 20,400, had the highest average wage of the 10 largest occupations, earning \$91,530 annually.

Obstetricians and Gynecologists topped the Occupations Paying the Most list with an annual salary of \$258,940.

Anesthesiologists, with an average annual salary of \$234,970, ranked second on the Occupations Paying the Most list.

The entry wage estimate for employers of all sizes was \$23,087 for 2020. The median wage estimate for employers with 250-499 employees was \$35,939, while wages for experienced workers averaged \$55,624 for employers in all size categories. Of the 1,177,860 estimated employees, 218,812 made less than \$11 an hour

while 277,468 made more than \$26 an hour. Employees making between \$16 and \$20.99 totaled 200,881.

### **Skills Gap Analysis**

As illustrated in the University of Arkansas' Workforce System Evaluation Report, the strategies for identifying skills gaps differ across Local Workforce Areas. Some Local Areas rely upon employers to articulate their needs, while others utilize data from the state's Labor Market Information (LMI) Unit at: [www.discover.arkansas.gov](http://www.discover.arkansas.gov), combined with conducting in-person meetings with local industry and business leaders as well as consulting with local and regional Chambers of Commerce.

Services to address these skills gaps, once identified, include career services, occupational skills training, and supportive services to assist participants who have an interest in a demand occupation obtain the skill set needed to become employed in a demand occupation and maintain employment.

Additionally, claimants complete the ACT Work Keys curriculum and attempt to earn the Career Readiness Certificate (CRC) in order to meet their employment goals and to help determine what areas need improvement. The Workforce Center staff, in collaboration with the employer, determines which level rating on the (CRC) is needed for the job posting. Applicants who meet this level on the CRC can apply for this job and the employer has crucial information at the beginning of the interview process. If an applicant is not currently meeting a required level on the CRC, they are referred to the local Adult Education facility to improve their skill sets and retest for the CRC.

Finally, services such as On the Job Training (OJT) and Work Experience are offered to participants assist in their career search. These services are planned, structured learning experiences that takes place in a workplace for a limited period of time. They also leads to employers hiring customers who do not initially have the required skill set but gain the necessary skills and experience during the process. These services are used as targeted recruiting to help employers build a pipeline of trained workers.

### **Populations with Barriers to Employment**

State WIOA Policy PY17-06, *WIOA Populations with Barriers to Employment*, provides guidance to Local Workforce Areas in serving these populations. The guidance includes the populations, as defined in WIOA section 3(24), and provides detailed charts that articulates many of the issues that these populations may face that are obstacles to attaining employment that leads to self-sufficiency. Additionally, there is information included regarding solutions to these barriers, population identification, and outreach solutions.

This policy may be found at:

<https://www.dws.arkansas.gov/src/files/PY17-06-WIOA-Barriers-to-Employment-Issuance-.pdf>

On a monthly basis, a query of the WIOA database is ran to identify the number of program participants with these barriers, by local workforce development area. This information is distributed to each of the ten local workforce development areas for analysis and the development of additional outreach strategies designed to increase their participation in the workforce development system.

## **2. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES ANALYSIS**

### **STATE AGENCY PROGRAM RESPONSIBILITY**

Agency	Core Program	Non-Core Program
ADWS	§ Adult (Title I) § Dislocated Worker (Title I) § Youth (Title I) § Wagner-Peyser (Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by Title III)	§ Trade Adjustment Assistance for Worker Program (Chapter 2, Title II Tract Act) § Jobs for Veterans State Grants (Title 38, Chapter 41) § Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Program (Title I) § Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program (42 U.S.C.)
ADWS	§ Adult Education and Family Literacy (WIOA Title II) § Vocational Rehabilitation (Title I Rehabilitation, as amended by Title IV) as of July 1, 2016	
ADWS	§ Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (Title I Rehabilitation, as amended by Title IV) as of July 1, 2016	
ADHS	§ Employment and Training Programs under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program	§ SNAP Employment & Training

### THE STATE'S WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Arkansas continues to support the Governor's belief that our State's workforce development system must be built on three core principles:

- That education and skills attainment are the foundation to a strong and resilient workforce;
- That an employer-led workforce development system is key to the growth of a highly skilled and job ready workforce; and
- That innovation is critical to a dynamic and effective workforce system.

To support these principles, in January 2021, Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson unveiled a new cornerstone to achieving the goal of assisting Arkansans in acquiring and retaining good-paying jobs to support themselves and their families.

Ready for Life, an initiative for those who want to improve their skills or change careers as well as gather career and employment data from business and industry, will strengthen the state's workforce and offer business leaders better information about the state's talent pool.

"This initiative combines a gold mine of information about educational and employment opportunities that will make it easier for Arkansans to enhance their education or to change careers even," Governor Hutchinson said. "Ready for Life will make it easier for employees and employers to find each other, and it will offer business leaders a quick snapshot of the state of the employee pool in Arkansas as they recruit talent."

Governor Hutchinson has allocated \$14.7 million in federal Governor's Emergency Education Relief Funds in support of Ready for Life, which is a partnership with the Arkansas Chamber of

Commerce, Arkansas Economic Development Commission, the Division of Workforce Services, K-12, and Institutions of Higher Education.

## **ARKANSAS WORKFORCE CENTERS**

The Arkansas Workforce Centers are at the forefront of the workforce activities and represent Arkansas's version of the American Jobs Center. There are 29 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.

The Arkansas Workforce Centers are overseen at the state level by the ADWS and are managed locally by each of the local workforce development boards. Local boards are comprised of local businesses, labor, partner agencies, and other key stakeholders to create a diverse and functional group. The boards, in alignment with the States' vision, provide front line strategic implementation for state-wide initiatives in addition to their locally-determined priorities. State initiatives include sector strategies, career pathway development, and delivery of standardized business services. Local priorities include layoff aversion, specific career pathway development, youth programs, targeted sector partnerships, work-based learning, and others.

Local boards are tasked with procuring a one-stop operator for the daily operation of their perspective 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. Arkansas Workforce Centers are fully integrated with WIOA, Wagner-Peyser, Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG), Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Unemployment Insurance (UI), Adult Education and Family Literacy, Vocational Rehabilitation. Local partnerships and integration also exist in many areas with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training Programs and others.

With this foundation for service integration, Arkansas Workforce Centers operate under the "no wrong door" philosophy, while local areas have developed their own customer flow strategies that are unique to their areas. Typical customers entering the center are engaged by an intake process that is designed to identify the needs of the individual by gathering information and then utilizing the appropriate resources for those needs. In some cases, the resources are initiated by a referral to a partner program. Customers are given solutions and next steps to their questions, barriers, and issues by connecting directly with the appropriate workforce system partner as part of this philosophy.

The Adult Education Section funds 36 local adult education programs, including two community-based and/or privately operated literacy councils, and special projects such as the Arkansas Adult Learning Resource Center through state and federal grants. The service delivery systems are diverse. Programs are funded through a variety of local administrative entities, including public schools systems, community based organizations, colleges, community colleges, technical institutes, and the Arkansas Department of Corrections. Local programs provide adult education services such as teaching academic skills to people who function from beginning reading through NRS educational functioning ABE Level 6 level and all levels of English as a Second Language (ESL). These services are free and provided in classes held in locations throughout each program's service area. Additional programs such as family literacy, Integrated and Education Training, and Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy (WAGE™) are also offered in workplaces and correctional institutions. In the 2018-2019 program year, 22, 980 adult Arkansans received services from programs receiving adult education funding; 4, 611 or 20 percent were English Language Learners and 3, 438 or 15 percent were individuals in institutional settings such as correctional facilities or community corrections programs.

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) has field offices co-located at Arkansas Workforce Centers in Harrison and Searcy. ARS maintains counselor itinerary points at all other Workforce Centers.

DSB continues to support its 17 accessible kiosks for consumers at Arkansas Workforce Center locations. The original ten kiosks were placed in the same cities where DSB has offices; the second set of seven kiosks was placed in cities with either two- or four-year institutions of higher education. The kiosks provide consumers the same access to the Internet to search for jobs as a sighted person seeking services from workforce centers. DSB provides training to workforce center staff and clients on the use of the kiosks.

Division of Workforce Services local workforce center services are available to all citizens in Arkansas. DSB created the pilot kiosk project to increase participation of blind or visually impaired persons in the local workforce centers with the assistance of DSB Vocational Rehab Counselors. DSB continues to partner with Division of Workforce Services to assist consumers with specific questions related to blindness.

### **WORKFORCE SYSTEM SERVICES - UNEMPLOYED AND UNDEREMPLOYED**

Arkansas Workforce Centers offer the full array of career services outlined in WIOA 134(c)(2) for unemployed and underemployed jobseekers. Career services available at the centers vary because of local area inflexion and needs of particular communities. Basic career services are available at these center locations throughout Arkansas. Each center has computers, printers, copiers, printed resources, and staff to assist jobseekers. Many of the services, including Arkansas Job Link and Discover Arkansas LMI Portal, can be accessed virtually though the internet via computer, smart phone, or tablet. Arkansas Job Link is the state job matching system and the virtual one-stop-shop where Arkansans can centralize all their career search activities. It allows jobseekers to self-enter his/her resume(s) and job search 24/7. Arkansas Job Link also provides access to a toolbox of job search assistance links, including career exploration, training resources, self-marketing tools, Unemployment Insurance information, and additional job banks. The built-in event calendar communicates upcoming hiring events, job fairs, and other workforce activities.

Discover Arkansas LMI Portal allows jobseekers to make informed data-driven career decisions. This labor market system provides a wide variety of regional labor market services, such as labor trends, statistics, economics, demographics, salaries, and employer data. It allows jobseekers to set up a personal page for their career exploration data to be readily accessible. Basic career services also extend beyond the virtual world. After the initial assessment, customers, as appropriate, may be provided with direct linkages to additional workforce activities, including multiple education and training opportunities across the workforce system though partner referrals.

Many of these partners are housed within the workforce center.

### **JOBSEEKER SERVICES**

Individualized career services within the Arkansas Workforce Centers vary across the state, but all the offices offer a full line of activities to prepare jobseekers for the modern workforce. They address many of the soft skills and technical skills training Arkansas employers require such as:

Labor exchange services must also provide labor market information to the individuals seeking services. The information must be accurate and include information on local, regional and national labor markets, such as:

- Job vacancies
- Skills necessary to obtain the jobs

- In-demand occupations and related earning potential
- Opportunities for advancement in those occupations

All One-Stops must provide the following career services:

- Outreach, intake and orientation
- Initial assessment
- Labor exchange services
- Eligibility determination
- Referrals to programs
- Performance and cost information
- Information on unemployment insurance
- Financial aid information
- Follow-up services

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

## **TRAINING SERVICES**

Career services are not always enough to enable job seekers to obtain self-sufficient employment. In some instances, formal training is required. Arkansas Workforce Centers offer multiple training services such as:

- Occupational skills training
- On-the-job training (OJT)
- Registered Apprenticeships
- Incumbent worker training
- Skill upgrading and retaining
- Entrepreneurial training, and

- Adult education and family literacy activities

Training services are funded through WIOA programs, Pell Grants, partner programs, and state and local grants. Local areas are responsible for establishing and implementing local policies for eligibility, Individual Training Account (ITA) limits, and the identification of in-demand sectors or occupations. Through multiple initiatives and projects, Arkansas has focused training and career development activities on sector strategies/partnerships and career pathway development. At the state level, the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) has been updated pursuant to WIOA Sections 122 and 134. This list ensures that Arkansans are able to make informed decisions on training providers and programs based on accurate data including completion and placement rates; labor market information; and wage expectations.

## **SUPPORTIVE SERVICES**

In order to assist jobseekers in obtaining or retaining employment through career or training services, Arkansas Workforce Centers offer a variety of supportive services. Local areas are responsible for establishing a supportive service policy that outlines types, eligibility, limits, etc. Examples of supportive services include child care; transportation; needs-related payments; tools and equipment; uniforms; and other clothing. In addition to WIOA-funded supportive services, local areas have developed relationships with community partners that assist with utility payments, food, shelter, and other basic needs.

## **BUSINESS SERVICES**

The focal point of all workforce system activities is business and industry. These activities are taking place statewide and may include:

- **Access to facilities** - Use of Workforce Center facilities by a business for a variety of purposes such as meetings, trainings, orientations, interviews, etc.;
- **Assessments** - Any test or assortment of tests used to measure the skills, interests and/or personality traits of a jobseeker, potential employee, or current employee;
- **Business education** - Seminars, round tables, workshops, focus groups, etc.;
- **Business information** - Information given to a business pertaining to a variety of incentive programs or other information requested that provides a benefit to that business;
- **Hiring events** - A customized event for a single employer that assists with recruiting, interviewing, and hiring of one or more positions;
- **Job fairs** - Event for multiple employers that assists with the recruiting, interviewing, and hiring of one or more positions;
- **Job postings** - Staff-entered or web-entered job orders approved by staff;
- **Labor market information** - Information on state and local labor market conditions; industries, occupations, and characteristics of the workforce; area business identified skills needs; employer wage and benefit trends; short and long-term industry and occupational projections; worker supply and demand; and job vacancies survey results;
- **Rapid Response** - A variety of services to businesses that are facing restructuring and downsizing including onsite workshops for employees in transition; job placement assistance; and information on unemployment benefits;
- **Screening** - Any service that involves the initial evaluation of applications or resumes that assists the employer in the recruiting process;



- **Training and retraining** - Any service provided to a business that involves the training or retraining of current or future employees including OJTs, Work Experiences, Incumbent Worker Training, etc.

The individual program services offered are detailed and provide program specific information in Section VI and VII.

## **SERVICES TO DISABLED PERSONS**

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services is the general vocational rehabilitation agency in Arkansas. It has the responsibility of providing targeted services to eligible Arkansans with disabilities that assist clients in obtaining or maintaining competitive integrated employment. Currently there remain significant barriers to working age Arkansans with disabilities in participating in the state's workforce. This is evidenced by the Annual Disability Statistics Compendium: 2018, indicating only 30.8% of individuals age 18 to 64 with disabilities are employed. This places the state in the lower 10% nationally.

Through the Governor's Executive Order 10-17, DSB coordinates with other state agencies to increase employment of Arkansans with disabilities. The order also aims to focus consumer services first toward the goal of self-sufficiency through employment.

[1] Reference: Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Demographics and Statistics (StatsRRTC), (2008); Report on Disability Demographics for Arkansas; Retrieved 12/21/2015, URL: <https://www.disabilitystatistics.org/reports/report.cfm?fips=2005000emp-state>.

### **B. The Strengths and Weaknesses of Workforce Development Activities**

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

## **STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES**

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; however, the state needs to focus on outreach and education about the services available.
- The State's business leaders 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.
- Key industries are involved in strategic planning and committed to driving the talent development system in Arkansas.
- Economic development is involved in planning activities at the state and local level and has identified targeted industries.
- Partnerships at state level are strong and will enable the state to successfully and fully implement WIOA, thereby enhancing services to the public through the State's talent development system.

- Despite stagnant budgets, staffing has been maintained to provide services in all 75 counties.

## **WEAKNESSES**

- Arkansas has a shrinking labor force.
- Secondary education's involvement in workforce development, strategic planning and program design needs to be strengthened.
- Funding for community colleges is insufficient.
- While there are strong partnerships in some areas of the state with community colleges and workforce development, involvement from all community colleges statewide should be stronger.
- Funding models for education are inadequate.
- Marketing and outreach of the State's talent development system is inadequate and too many employers and jobseekers are unaware of the services and opportunities available.
- Employers' outreach to students and their parents regarding potential occupations needs to be increased.
- Parent and students lack knowledge of business/industry in the State.
- Government is not at the table as an employer.
- Kiosks for consumers who are blind are not available statewide and staff turnover at the locations make it necessary to provide frequent and ongoing training.
- Staff training programs for serving the customers across agencies are not in place, especially recognizing the special needs of serving persons with disabilities.

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

- Current Registered Apprenticeship presents tremendous opportunities for opening workforce development strategies.
- Strong industry/workforce partnerships exist in some areas of the State.
- The State has new leadership to drive the new current agenda of collaboration and coordination.
- Bringing community colleges to the table to enhance the State's talent development system.
- Opportunities for community college programs to increase capacity.
- Program-based learning needs to be explored and utilized.
- Community College partnerships should be expanded to increase credential attainment.

## **CHALLENGES**

- Arkansas has an aging workforce and the younger generation is not skilled to replace retiring workers.
- Regional disparities in workforce and industries make it difficult to recruit new industries.

- Misalignment of services and programs could threaten enhanced service delivery and integrity of the talent development system.
- Duplication of efforts and programs reduces the efficiency of already stagnant or declining budgets.
- Systemic education issues exist in secondary and higher education.
- Industries may be lost due to a lack of skilled labor.
- There is a lack of existing workforce training funds.
- Budgets for workforce development programs are stagnant or declining due to a lack of funding from federal sources.
- Coordination at the state level for implementation of WIOA is strong; however, this level of collaboration and coordination is labor intensive and often takes team members away from oversight and leadership responsibilities. Maintaining the current level of collaboration is critical to success.

### **C. State Workforce Development Capacity**

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

Arkansas is well-poised to provide workforce and talent development activities given the strong knowledge base of its practitioners. 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 Asa Hutchinson 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, some who are new to being co-located in a workforce center, 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. 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, including the WIOA Title I programs, Wagner-Peyser, TANF, and Adult Education 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.

Although funding has been stagnant over the past 20 years in Adult Education, providers still serve all 75 counties in Arkansas. Adult education currently receives \$19 million in state funding and \$5.2 million in federal funding to serve approximately 28,000 clients. The funding continues to be used for Adult Education and Family Literacy activities, such as adult basic education, literacy, workplace education, family literacy activities, English language acquisition

activities, integrated English literacy and civics education, workforce preparation, correctional education, and integrated education and training.

The Adult Education Section has a strong working collaborative relationship with other state agencies and organizations to help provide education, literacy, and workforce services to clients that help reduce duplication of services and provide braided funding opportunities of approved activities. Some of the current collaborations include:

- The Arkansas Literacy Council to increase the number of literacy councils throughout the state
- The Division of Workforce Services and the Department of Human Services to provide educational support and training to Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) clients
- The Arkansas Rehabilitation Services to provide assistance for adult education students with a documented disability(ies)
- Local courts and community corrections programs to provide academic instruction to first time offenders and reentry individuals
- Arkansas Community Colleges (ACC) to provide career pathways that lead to a sustainable income to students without a high school diploma
- The Arkansas Department of Corrections to continue to provide federal funding to incarcerated adults without a high school diploma

In addition, besides the traditional classroom, one of the ways adult education is providing services is through distance education. In 2018-2019, 83 percent of programs provided distance learning instruction. Currently, all adult education and literacy providers, with the exception of Arkansas Correctional School, has trained staff to offer distance learning. The state office has restructured the distance learning program to provide professional development training and certified curricula that can assist with student learning. For students who are unable to attend an adult education or literacy council program or desire to work independently, distance learning has been a great alternative for education access.

The capacity to provide needed workforce development services to individuals with disabilities is difficult to predict. The WIOA mandate to spend 15 percent of client service dollars on pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities has required the state's vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies to take a hard look at how best to utilize existing resources to address overall client needs. It is essential VR agencies look for partnership opportunities at both the state and local levels to find alternative ways of providing services that allow individuals with disabilities to enter into and remain in competitive integrated employment.

The State has a strong partnership between the workforce development system and Registered Apprenticeship (RA). This partnership has been strengthened through a series of USDOL RA focused discretionary grants awarded to the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services through the ApprenticeshipUSA Initiative. The awarded grants through the ApprenticeshipUSA Initiative include: the Arkansas Apprenticeship Pathways Initiative (AAPI), Arkansas Expands Apprenticeship (AREA), and the State Accelerator Planning grant. These grants promote the expansion of both the number of registered apprentices across the State as well as the number of occupational-based RA programs to meet employer-driven workforce needs in both traditional and non-traditional RA industries. Additionally, these grants promote an increased diversity in the population being served across RA programs. These grants are geared towards creating and expanding RA programs in targeted growth industries, strengthen employer and service provider partnerships, as well as provide an opportunity for participants to learn occupational specific skills as well as good wages while gaining college credit. Through

partnerships with the Arkansas Apprenticeship Coalition, Community Colleges, ADWS and Local Workforce Development Area Business Services Outreach Staff, the USDOL State Office of Apprenticeship, and the Office of Skills Development, the State is working to utilize RA as an integrated WIOA workforce development tool to serve employer workforce development needs. Furthermore, all Registered Apprenticeship programs that desire so have been added to the list of approved eligible training providers.

## **B. STATE STRATEGIC VISION AND GOALS**

### **Vision**

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.

### **Mission**

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.

#### **Vision for the Arkansas Workforce Development Delivery System**

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 adopted a vision for the Arkansas Workforce Development Delivery System at their regular quarterly meeting in October 2015. This vision provides standards for a high quality workforce center including customer service, innovation and service design, and systems integration and high-quality staffing.

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 provide 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, or obtain guidance on how to make career choices, or are businesses and employers seeking skilled workers.

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 literacy programs; 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, II, III) 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 States, local boards, elected officials, 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.

### **Characteristics of a High-Quality Arkansas Workforce Center**

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.

#### **Customer Service**

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:

- **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.
- **Deliver Quality Business 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, workforce centers use the forthcoming performance measure(s) on effectiveness in serving employers to support continuous improvement of these services.

- **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.

- **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.
- **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.
- **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.

### **Systems Integration and High-Quality Staffing**

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.

*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.
  - a. Identify and promote best practices (private and public) for developing and sustaining partnerships.
  - b. Expand partnership with economic development to refine sector strategies.
  - c. Improve communication/participation between education entities, local and state boards, government agencies, community-based organizations, and employers.
  - d. Increase accountability and clarity of action between all workforce related boards.
  - e. Increase the utilization of Registered Apprenticeship programs as viable talent development opportunities.
  - f. Increase connections with employers and Vocational Rehabilitation agencies to provide support and employment for youth and adults with disabilities.
  - g. 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.
  - h. 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).
  - i. Expand small business participation.

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

Goal 2 Objectives:

1.
  - a. 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.
  - b. Develop an integrated data system that will enable the sharing of information between partner agencies to more efficiently service both employers and jobseekers.
  - c. Promote training that leads to industry recognized credentials and certification.
  - d. Support transportable skill sets for transportable careers.
  - e. Support career pathways development and sector strategy initiatives as a way to meet business and industry needs.
  - f. Expand service delivery access points by the use of virtual services.
  - g. Develop a common business outreach strategy with a common message that will be utilized by all workforce system partners.

- h. 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.
- i. Utilize customer satisfaction surveys to ensure continuous improvement of the State's talent development system.
- j. 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.
  - a. Increase access to the workforce development system through a no wrong door approach to services.
  - b. Change employer and jobseeker perceptions of the workforce system.
  - c. Develop an image-building outreach campaign that educates Arkansans about the services and the career development opportunities available in the State.
  - d. Utilize technology, including social media and search engine optimization, to better connect jobseekers and employers with the talent development system in Arkansas.
  - e. 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.
  - a. Conduct a statewide skills and asset analysis to determine the skills gap present and resources available to solve the skills issue.
  - b. Develop and implement an action plan to close the basic core, technical, and soft skills gaps in Arkansas.
  - c. Analyze the effectiveness of currently used job readiness standards and ensure coordination between the Arkansas Career Readiness Certificate program and the Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy (WAGE) program.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) has a focus on helping 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:

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- 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

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.

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, when implemented will achieve this outcome.

### **3. 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.)*

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. Arkansas's common performance targets are located in Appendix 1.

#### **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 and other feedback to make continuous or quality improvements.*

In 2020, the Arkansas Workforce Development Board (AWDB), engaged two University of Arkansas departments, the Counselor Education Program and the 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 Service Surveys.

This evaluation, completed and presented to the AWDB on June 16, 2021, was conducted to assist in evaluating effectiveness and ensuring continuous improvement.

The evaluation used designs that employed the most rigorous analytical and statistical methods that were reasonably feasible, such as the use of control groups (20 CFR § 682.220) as appropriate.

The entire 232-page evaluation report can be found at:

<https://www.dws.arkansas.gov/programs/>

The evaluation found the following:

##### **Overall Evaluation Recommendations:**

Creating better work opportunities for Arkansans means building a well-trained workforce for our state's employers. This will require ADWS to collaborate with businesses large and small, WIOA partners, nonprofit organizations, and others. It also requires a workforce system in which workforce centers are willing learn from the best practices across the state. The following recommendations may be used by ADWS to develop training courses or modules which can be provided to ADWS centers around the state. In doing so, ADWS may increase the quality of skills gap identification and analysis, as well as overall service quality across the state.

**1. Co-Enrollment:** Co-Enrollment in partner programs, though a WIOA mandate, seems to be little more than an afterthought for many center staff members. Data documenting rates of co-enrollment were not immediately available to the evaluators, and were obtained through surveys and interviews with partner programs. The evaluators recommend that Arkansas Workforce Development Leadership and the Arkansas Workforce Development Board and area managers develop data collection methods to effectively track and monitor rates of co-enrollment. Only by having accurate and up-to-date information concerning co-enrollment can ADWS begin to encourage and promote additional co-enrollment with WIOA partners.

**2. Partner Programs and Organizations:** In an online "One-Stop Operations Guidance" document (doleta.gov TEG), the Department of Labor states that, "WIOA places a strong emphasis on planning across multiple partner programs to ensure alignment in service delivery. One key goal is to develop effective partnerships across programs and community-based providers to provide individuals the employment, education, and training services they need. Effective partnering is pivotal to maximize resources and to align services with career pathways and sector strategies." Many partner organizations reported that they do not have data available to adequately partner with Workforce Centers. Information collected from partner organizations in all assigned areas indicate that they have significant difficulty in collecting and providing quality data. These organizations are willing and even eager to partner with ADWS centers, but don't have processes in place to collect data and

provide support and assistance. It is recommended by the evaluators that Arkansas Workforce Department Leadership and the Arkansas Workforce Development Board work with all workforce areas to identify and engage additional community partners, and to provide training and assistance to those partners in data collection techniques.

**3. Business Survey:** It is recommended by the evaluators that ADWS address each of the concerns expressed in the survey. These concerns are serious, and even though the overall results showed a "...moderate degree of satisfaction with WIOA programs..." the concerns must be addressed. These concerns include: Less than half of WIOA recipients (42%) reported receiving the majority of services needed to address workforce needs; Many respondents described Workforce Center staff as "unresponsive" or "inattentive;" Many comments brought up the difficulty of posting job openings through the ADWS or the employers' website; Several comments noted a lack of interaction between staff and businesses. The evaluators recommend that additional training programs be established to improve staff/customer relationships. It is further recommended that training and promotional materials specific to web based job postings be developed and implemented. As an initial step, the evaluators recommend that all web based processes be evaluated for ease of use. Any processes that are considered unwieldy or awkward should be modified to maximize usefulness. It is necessary that the website used for posting job openings be user friendly in order to encourage its use. Upon completion of necessary website revisions, educational methods related to the use of the site for job postings should be developed and initiated. Ease of use must be the primary goal. The evaluators recommend that short video guides be developed and added to the website to lead potential posters and customers through the job posting process.

**4. Customer Survey:** This survey showed a 62% overall satisfaction rate with WIOA programs and a 68% satisfaction rate with Workforce Center staff. While these numbers are good, there are findings in the survey that require attention from Arkansas Workforce Development Leadership and the Arkansas Workforce Development Board. The survey found that, "many" respondents reported "poor customer service", "a rude attitude", "inattentive staff", or "uninformed staff". In spite of the high overall satisfaction rating with the program, "many" respondents cited these issues. The evaluators, therefore recommend additional training in customer service for all local center staff. In addition, the survey found that, "The current phone system does not appear suited to surge demand of ADWS or WIOA services." Because it is possible that the increased demand on the phone system due to the COVID pandemic is at least partially responsible for the problems reported by customers, the evaluators highly recommend that the phone system be professionally evaluated immediately. If these problems continue post-COVID, the evaluators recommend that the system be upgraded as soon as it is feasible. This upgrade, installed across all workforce centers in the state will no doubt be expensive, but quality services are dependent upon an effective and reliable communication system.

**5. Compliance Review:** The evaluators make no recommendations for change in this area. As previously stated, it is the opinion of the evaluators that the six centers reviewed for this study are in substantial compliance with all ADWS regulations, and that the managers take their regulatory responsibilities seriously. The reviewed centers provided compliant but unique services. Centers were able to meet or exceed overall guidelines and regulations while maintaining unique services designed to meet the specific service needs of the regions in which they are located. The evaluators further believe that the review of these six centers provides a representative picture of ADWS centers across the state.

**6. Other Recommendations:** It is highly recommended that ADWS establish methods for high performing centers and workforce areas to provide training for other centers. In the areas of referral procedures, training of service recipients, and skills gaps identification and assessment, centers all seem to recognize the need for the services. There exists, however, a significant difference in the quality and success of the services provided. It is recommended that ADWS provide incentives for high performing areas to develop training modules (in-person and

online) which can be shared with less successful centers.

The evaluators further recommend Arkansas Workforce Development Leadership and the Arkansas Workforce Development Board establish a system to ensure ongoing supervision and monitoring of the quality improvement process. This system should include regular formative and summative evaluation on a regular basis.

### C. STATE STRATEGY

1. The state's workforce system is complex, comprising numerous programs, services, and initiatives administered by state agencies, secondary and higher education, community and technical colleges, local adult education providers, Registered Apprenticeship, and vocational rehabilitation providers. System partners are responsible for the delivery of a wide range of workforce education and training programs and related services, as well as education programs that support career preparation and advancement.

The system is interrelated because the programs and agencies serve either a common customer or are charged with achieving similar employment and education outcomes for their targeted customer groups. Therefore, the strategic planning process is designed to identify and focus on systemic issues that affect multiple parts of the system programs or agencies that address broad, big-picture workforce issues. Because the system strategic plan focuses on issues that span agencies and programs, it fulfills a unique and complementary role in the workforce system and does not duplicate the purpose or scope of other agency or program plans.

Several priority issues were identified by the Arkansas Workforce Development Board that are being addressed by system partners during our ongoing strategic planning activities.

#### ***Increasing Skills and Education Attainment***

Education is the foundation to a strong workforce. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted numerous individuals across the state, causing unprecedented increases in unemployment and rapid changes in the way people learn and access information. In a post-pandemic recovery era, Arkansas will need more focus on equity, education, and training, which is crucial to creating more skilled workers, deeper talent pools, and a more resilient workforce.

As the skill requirements of jobs increase and change rapidly, businesses need a diverse, highly skilled pipeline of workers ready for the jobs they create, and Arkansans need access to training so they can be equipped for those jobs.

Below are specific strategies identified to help increase skills and education attainment and to ensure Arkansas has the best workforce development system in the country.

1. **Increase career awareness.** Every Arkansan needs access to quality career information that will help them identify occupations and jobs that are growing in their area and available training programs that can help to prepare them for those jobs. Career information includes individual experiences with employers and access to data and career exploration tools, such as *Discover Arkansas*.
2. **Advocate for increased educational attainment.** Enhance programs to raise the high school graduation rate and improve the technical curriculum offered – including remote online learning environments. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the evolution of education in the digital age. The importance of digital literacy is highlighted in the effort to increase the number of postsecondary degrees, credentials, or certificates needed to address the education attainment gap
3. **Promote access to job training for high-demand fields.** Many employers have job openings that remain unfilled because of a lack of workers with the right skill sets. To meet those demands, specifically in a post-pandemic era, recruitment and re-training are vital. The key is to promote the use of Arkansas Workforce Centers and engage with

workforce development boards for incumbent worker training programs, internships, and apprenticeships to collectively reconnect the disconnected workforce and job seekers to high-demand fields. Employers in all sectors are called upon to collaborate with partner agencies to identify and adopt effective strategies to increase alignment and make better use of resources. It is also important that all partners recognize that the need for high-demand fields are not the same from region to region.

4. **Increase access to education for those that have barriers.** Support persons with disabilities, adult learners, former offenders, and others with equitable access to employment, education, and resources. Additionally, support initiatives that promote opportunities for disconnected youth between the ages of 16-24, to build a career path and obtain the skills and education needed to prepare them for successful employment and continued educational achievement. Increased Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act funding for at-risk youth programs permits the implementation of more high-quality, work-based learning opportunities, like apprenticeships. Financial assistance for books and materials, childcare, transportation, internet access, and electronic devices are wrap-around support critical to successful participation in training and educations.

### ***Fostering Employer Leadership***

Arkansas will proactively address the changing needs of the economy for a job-driven system by strengthening and expanding business engagement strategies. Employer-led job training programs have the best career outcomes. Employers know best what skills their workers need, and employer involvement is key for workforce development and job readiness. Businesses that invest in developing North Carolina's workforce will benefit from well-trained employees and a more innovative and diverse workplace that better reflects its community.

Below are specific strategies identified to ensure a stronger connection to the business community and to ensure that the workforce system is meeting the needs of the economy.

- Create a workforce development system that is value-driven for employers, aligns education with industry demands, prepares Arkansans for the future, and drives economic development. To meet this goal, we will streamline customer access, measure, and invest in what works and coordinate across agencies to actively engage employers to drive Arkansas' workforce system.
- Increase the number of employers participating in work-based learning experiences and apprenticeships while also establishing employer champions, including current members of the State and Local Workforce Development Boards.
- Leverage employer data on workforce projections and training needs using tools and measures for business engagement. Technology such as *Ready For Life* can be utilized to assist Arkansas businesses to connect with and get more information about job seekers in Arkansas.

### ***Supporting Local Workforce Innovation***

Arkansas' workforce development system is supporting communities across the state that are developing great local models of workforce development. Arkansas must build upon these successes by highlighting them for replication to continue to build and expand innovative workforce solutions.

Below are specific strategies identified to ensure Arkansas workforce development system is innovative.



- Advance leadership development opportunities to workforce professionals. Education and workforce partnerships drive successful career-readiness initiatives. Empowering local workforce leaders with development opportunities that encourage knowledge transfer will promote capacity building, strengthen the effectiveness of localized efforts, and improve outcomes across the communities they serve.
- Support initiatives to innovate and replicate good ideas. Local leaders know the unique needs, challenges, and opportunities of the communities they serve. Supporting the piloting of new ideas designed for their communities is critical. When local innovation efforts are successful, communities across the state can learn from them and incorporate them into their local efforts as well. In this way, replication of good ideas can become best practices across the state. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ADWS convened weekly virtual meetings with Local Workforce Development Areas to share best practices and innovative service delivery strategies. We will continue these regularly scheduled meetings as part of our ongoing strategy.
- Promote local COVID-19 pandemic workforce recovery initiatives leveraging technology to reimagine the talent pipeline. Employers want educated, skilled, and competent workers to help them solve tomorrow's business challenges today. The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened this workforce need. Utilizing technology to retool the employer/job seeker connection and upskilling and reskilling our workforce for emerging and high-demand roles is an effective and efficient way to address talent expectations.

### ***Promoting Governance and System Alignment***

Arkansas' workforce system includes multiple agencies, programs, and funders. Collaboration, policy alignment, systemic communication, integration, and modernization of the workforce system will ensure a strong and healthy workforce system that can adapt to an ever-changing economy.

Below are specific strategies identified to ensure Arkansas' workforce development system has strong system integration while fostering collaboration.

- Strengthen and support system integration and inclusive practices through continuous coordination, communication, and data sharing among the key components of Arkansas' workforce system
- Support increased awareness, communication, accessibility, and understanding of the Arkansas Workforce System through building a broad brand awareness aimed at attracting a large and diverse customer base, promoting a unity of effort to increase accessibility and user-friendly navigability. Continue to evolve the scope of technology in the career center system to provide enhanced remote accessibility to all Arkansans.
- Research advanced technology for marketing to adapt to new generations entering the workforce by staying abreast of the rapidly changing demands and needs of businesses and job seekers to ensure that our workforce system remains nimble, adaptive, and fully utilized. As technology advances, there is a continuous need to adapt to consumer expectations and environmental changes such as the recent pandemic.
- Measure and report on the effectiveness of the workforce development system including the usage and quality of services by collecting, understanding, tracking, and sharing data effectively to maintain a responsive and successful workforce development system, while evaluating the current system to identify any changes to maximize outcomes for Arkansas. The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services utilizes this data to ensure alignment of workforce development programs in Arkansas.

## Industry Sector Partnerships

The Arkansas Sector Partnership (ASP), a partnership of employers, state agencies, education providers, Registered Apprenticeship, and community leaders, will engage project stakeholders in ongoing regional planning efforts across the state to assess workforce development needs and job demand. Input obtained from regional planning efforts will be used to adjust training (on an as needed basis) to meet employer needs. The ASP will utilize a regional planning sector framework that focuses on critical factors that include: 1) existing labor market information and other workforce related data; 2) regional input from community stakeholders; 3) industry sector/employer input; 4) aligned education and training activities to meet employer needs; 5) aligning business services/workforce services/case management services to serve workforce customers (both employers and dislocated workers); and 6) continuous improvement and sustainability after the life of the grant.

ASP will engage in regional planning activities, structured around WIOA regions, including assessing the workforce development and economic landscape to identify employer training needs, industry trends, and areas of job growth. The resulting information, data, and analysis will serve as a basis for serving dislocated workers and employers under ASP as well as serve as the cornerstone of WIOA regional and statewide planning activities. The regional and sector strategies planning activities will include career pathways to design career ladders that will focus on hard to serve individuals.

Both geographic and industry-based sector strategies are proven to be effective methods for aligning workforce service providers and community partners to address the occupational based training needs of employers.

The ASP regional planning process will also assess existing workforce services and community resources infrastructure to support workforce development efforts emphasizing the needs of hard to serve populations including those participating in career pathways. The ASP will engage in the following activities to ensure the development of a comprehensive regional and sector plan:

- - Identifying aligned industry credentials for those skills and competencies needed.
  - Assessing how well those skills and competencies are reflected in existing training programs and curricula; and
  - Identifying and mapping the necessary skills and competencies for in-demand jobs;
  - Establishing social and/or peer learning networks among regions using sector strategies;
  - Training for staff in State and local areas necessary to facilitate regional planning and implement regional strategies;
  - Developing regional plans;
  - Asset mapping and other analysis, such as SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats);
  - Acquisition, analysis, and utilization of LMI and workforce information to identify regional trends;
  - Partnership and program development with stakeholders, employers, and training programs;

This structure will also ensure that employers and regional industry representatives are actively engaged in designing and implementing strategies in five key areas: 1) serving on the project's leadership team; 2) helping implement program strategies and goals; 3) identifying and mapping the necessary skills and competencies for the programs; 4) assisting with curriculum development and designing the program; and 5) assisting with the design of an assessment and/or credential that will address industry skill needs.

Finally, the state utilized WIOA Set-Aside funds to award additional funding to each of the state's ten (10) Local Workforce Development Areas. This additional funding was used for regional planning purposes and designed to assist the areas in their ongoing broad strategic approaches.

### **Career Pathways**

Arkansas leaders recognize the need for an education and training system that addresses the state's economic challenges. Through the Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative (CPI), the state has sought to coordinate publicly funded education with social services and workforce and economic development programs to produce a better-trained workforce and promote economic growth. The Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative is a series of connected education and training programs and support services that enable individuals to secure employment within a specific industry or occupational sector and to advance over time to successively higher level of education and employment in that sector. Each step on a career pathway is designed explicitly to prepare workers and students for the next level of employment and education. Using the career pathways framework, the workforce system seeks to target jobs in industries of importance to local economies and create avenues of advancement for current workers, jobseekers, and future labor market entrants, as well as a supply of qualified workers for employers.

Community colleges play a linchpin role in career pathways. The career pathways framework promotes systemic reform for community colleges -- providing a model that better aligns their various mission areas of workforce development, academic credentialing, transfer preparation, and remediation with the needs of employers. Pathways commonly feature community colleges working in partnership with other educational entities, workforce and economic development agencies, employer and labor groups, and social service providers to ensure investments in education and training pay off for the region's economic vitality. Students entering into adult literacy or college remedial coursework are better able to advance to and succeed in college-level programs, and all students can more readily earn postsecondary credentials and make progress toward a career. Incumbent workers are provided training opportunities that help increase their skills and subsequent wages.

CPI, which began serving clients in fall 2005, seeks to improve the earnings through postsecondary education attainment of Arkansas's low-income "TANF-eligible" adults by enabling them to work in industries of regional importance. Administered by the Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE) with funding from the Division of Workforce Services (DWS), ADHE/CPI provides an opportunity for 25 campuses to develop Career Pathways Initiatives. Through the implementation of WIOA, the State seeks to use lessons learned and the framework created through the CPI to educate and encourage other jobseekers to utilize career pathways as a method for preparing for their eventual career.

CPI's objectives for program participants are:

- - Improve the level of engagement among educators and employers to generate work opportunities for students and serve the workforce needs of the private sector.

- Increased job attainment and job retention in key industries; and
- Increased attainment of college-level certificates and associate degrees;
- Increased enrollment in college-level certificate and associate degree programs;

Finally, Arkansas has become aware that some of the WIOA program partners are currently utilizing a software product that helps job seekers build career plans based upon their individual knowledge, skills, and abilities from previous jobs and education. The product then recommends occupations, career clusters, training programs, and available jobs. The software program is applicable to all types of workforce clients: youth, dislocated workers, TANF or SNAP E&T participants, Veterans, individuals with disabilities, and more.

### **Registered Apprenticeship**

Many of the things that keep Arkansas's many industries operative today were built long ago by trade and craftsmen. Fewer people are choosing a career in the trades, even as demand and unemployment rates continue to escalate. Arkansas, like many states in America, is suffering from a widening skills gap that desperately needs to be filled. That means, for everyone who enjoys modern day necessities like electricity, indoor plumbing, paved roads, air conditioning, homes, and buildings to live and work in, things could take a downward turn, because craftsmen and tradesmen are retiring at an alarming high rate, and not enough people are training to take their place.

Tradesmen and craftsmen are needed now more than ever. For those men and women that do step up to fill the ever-growing expertise gap in Arkansas, big opportunities await. From work-while-you learn apprenticeships to career-elevating college and technical courses, there are hundreds of ways to kick start a craft career in Arkansas.

Support for Registered Apprenticeship continues to grow in the State due to the relationship between the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship, the Arkansas Apprenticeship Coordination Steering Committee (a Governor appointed committee), the Arkansas Apprenticeship Coalition, the Office of Skills Development, the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, and the Arkansas Workforce Development Board who collaborate continuously to address key issues regarding workforce development needs throughout the State of Arkansas.

As a way to attract more workers to Registered Apprenticeship, the Arkansas Apprenticeship Coordination Steering Committee established a website to inform jobseekers who may be interested. <http://arkansasapprenticeship.com/>. This website informs prospective apprentices of the occupations, the training, and what employment opportunities exist.

### **Jobs for Arkansas's Graduates (JAG)**

The Jobs for Arkansas's Graduate (JAG) program is a state affiliate of the national Jobs for America's Graduates. Middle and high school students, who are experiencing barriers to graduation, are provided a comprehensive set of services designed to keep them in school through graduation and improve the rate of success in achieving their education and career goals. Along with the academic support, JAG also provides work-based learning experiences that will assist students to further their education and training in pursuit of a rewarding career.

The JAG model is based on and evaluated by a series of performance measures and standards, which allow the program to report student outcomes. The data collected and reported includes student demographics, contact hours with students, graduation rate, direct work experience, job placement one year after graduation, and employment outcomes.

The former Arkansas Department of Career Education and Arkansas Division of Workforce Services established a strong partnership to ensure Arkansas high students graduate and continue on the path to success either in today's workforce in or postsecondary education.

## **Arkansas Career Coach Program**

The College and Career program is designed to motivate and support Arkansas students to achieve their goals as it relates to college and career planning. Students may begin working with a Career Coach in the 8th grade (7th, if enrolled in Career Orientation) with continued services through high school graduation. Career Coaches work in partnership with the Career Orientation instructors and school counselors to assist with the development and revision of the student's college and career plans. The College and Career Coach program provides assistance and information for resources in the areas of: academic tutoring, career counseling, mentoring, financial guidance, and other supports necessary for postsecondary education/training access, retention, and success.

The Arkansas College and Career Coach Program was introduced as a pilot initiative in January 2010. The program was administered through the former Arkansas Department of Career Education and established partnerships with the Arkansas Department of Education, Arkansas Department of Higher Education, and Arkansas Division of Workforce Services. During the pilot phase, the program was designed to provide college and career planning services and activities to middle/high school students within the twenty-one most economically challenged counties across the state of Arkansas. After the completion of the pilot phase, the program demonstrated a positive impact in the areas of college-going rate, ACT Scores, remediation rates, and financial aid applications and was expanded beyond the initial twenty-one counties.

### **Sector and Regional Planning**

One of the functions of the Arkansas Workforce Development Board found in 20 CFR § 679.130 and under WIOA sec. 101(d) is assisting the Governor in the:

"Development and continuous improvement of the workforce development system, [including the] development and expansion of strategies to meet the needs of employers, workers, and job seekers particularly through industry or sector partnerships related to in-demand industry sectors and occupations.

In a 2019 USDOL Region IV meeting, the USDOL Regional Administrator introduced the State of Colorado Workforce Development Council's Sector Strategies Plan. Arkansas has developed a similar strategy.

On February 9, 2017, - Release of Issuance PY16-10 to Local Workforce Development Boards- "Guidance for Implementation of Sector Strategies under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act".

<https://www.dws.arkansas.gov/src/files/PY16-10-Guidance-for-Implementation-of-Sector-Strategies-under-the-WIOA.pdf>

June 8, 2018 - Release of Issuance PY17-09 to Local Workforce Development Boards- "Applications for Regional Planning and Industry/Sector Partnerships Funding Assistance".

<https://www.dws.arkansas.gov/src/files/PY-17-09-LWDB-Assistance-Proposals-Issuance.pdf>

CURRENT- Planning adjustments to Regional planning fund requirements, including increased allotments (funding permitted) and reporting requirements that would allow Arkansas to report on Sector Strategy implementation.

Finally, a comprehensive review of the Colorado program identified the following areas in which Arkansas can make improvements in the development of its system.

### **Quick GAP between AR and CO information, based on the website:**

Colorado Web Page	Key Content	Currently Available at ADWS	Next Steps and Additional Requirements
Sector Partnerships	Map of Active Sector Partnerships	Not Available	ADWS would require LWDB receiving Sector Planning funds to provide a list of engaged employers in the sector partnerships and how this aligns with local plans.
Sector Partnerships Community of Practice	Webinars by Sector	Not Available	ADWS and LWDBs would need to establish the sector partnerships before this would be feasible, so no change in current strategy.
Sector Partnership Directory	For each Sector Partnership established: POC, Chairs, web pages for the sector, local area, Conveners	Not Available	Currently, ADWS would require LWDB receiving Sector Planning funds to provide a list of engaged employers in the sectors in their reporting. We would need to provide additional support or funding to establish a web page for each sector as a later improvement.
Colorado Web Page	Key Content	Currently Available at ADWS	Next Steps and Additional Requirements
Sector Partnership Technical Assistance	Contact information for TA and resources	Access to Technical Assistance from Staff and other resources could be gathered and provided on a similar web page	
Industry Intermediary	List of engaged Trade		This might not be

Colorado Web Page	Key Content	Currently Available at ADWS	Next Steps and Additional Requirements
Consortium	Associations		necessary at first. ADWS could provide the information in the Sector Partnership page, for each partnership the association is participating. A strategy should be considered for developing and sustaining relationships with industry associations and professional associations (i.e., SHRM, etc.). This provides an opportunity for broadened industry impact across several companies in a region. Currently, ADWS would require LWDBs receiving Sector Planning funds to report Trade Associations similarly to engaged businesses.
Statewide Education Sector Partnership	NA	NA	NA- No similar statewide sector partnerships are in place, but might result from further efforts.
Business Engagement Guide	Overview and Access to a 31 pg document for engagement	TPMA study material and other resources are currently available to share on a similar website	*Could be combined with the Technical Assistance page
Phase I	Phase II	Phase III	Phase IV
Complete	Relatively Administrative	Mostly Administrative	Mostly Administrative
Guidance to LWDBs and Initiation of Sector Planning Funds	Increase Funding Levels Available and allow flexibility for Sector OR Regional Planning	Establish web pages:  Technical Assistance (and resources)  Business Engagement	Add Sector Meeting information on the individual Local WDB pages we have already established, which would mirror the

Colorado Web Page	Key Content	Currently Available at ADWS	Next Steps and Additional Requirements
	Add requirements to engage at least 3 employers, establish chairs, support meetings and conventions, engage trade associations, report participating businesses and associations, and post meeting materials on their website.	Guide Sector Partnerships Sector Partnership Directory to mirror Colorado resources	"community of practice" page in Colorado

2. Center to WIOA is the integration of service delivery amongst multiple workforce and talent development programs. Arkansas has strong partnerships among state agencies, two- and four-year educational institutions, economic development, Registered Apprenticeship, and community-based organizations. A priority of the Arkansas Workforce Development Board and central to the implementation of the strategic plan is to prevent and eliminate duplication across programs and align core programs. Alignment of core and optional programs will be made possible by the following strategies.

**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 Service 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.



TANF and WIOA programs will enter a Memorandum of Understanding to coordinate and establish a common intake, assessment, and client engagement model. A low-income job seeker may qualify for the Medicaid or SNAP program, under their respective eligibility and enrollment rules and be referred to TANF through MOUs with the Arkansas Department of Human Services. TANF staff will be instructed to engage these individuals through a low touch model, and offer referral services to education and workforce partners who could best service them. And, where these job-seekers can be considered TANF eligible, they can then be enrolled in direct TANF services provisioning through TANF funded programs, as well as optimize service provisioning through co-enrollment with partnering programs. TANF and WIOA programs have also agreed in the MOU to leverage their existing IT systems to achieve these objectives and others, such as the development of referral forms to streamline services to these clients.

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.

### **Business Services Teams**

Each of the State's ten (10) Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDAs) are required to have fully functional Business Services Teams (BSTs). These BSTs support their local employers through the leveraging of resources, human capital, technology and market research to connect regional employers to a well-trained, highly qualified workforce. These BSTs are comprised of representatives from the WIOA core-and non-core partner programs in each geographical area.

ADWS is committed to providing resources to the 10 Local Workforce Development Areas which will enhance their delivery of business services throughout the state and foster their relationships with economic development. The ongoing development of the BSTs is led by the ADWS Business Services Manager. This state-level staff convenes the BSTs for regularly scheduled meetings, both training sessions and strategic meetings, that are designed to better assist Arkansas employers. In Arkansas, BST members are expected to be Consultants, Champions, Connectors and Service Providers.

In order to establish a professional presence when approaching businesses, it is imperative that each BST member has an in-depth understanding of the programs offered by the workforce development system. BST members should confidently explain the requirements and benefits of each program; representatives must also provide suggestions on how services can work in concert to maximize positive results for the companies served. Five programs offer the most benefit to employers: WOTC, Federal Bonding, Apprenticeship Assistance Training Grant, Incumbent Worker Training, and the On-the-Job Training Grant. Federal Bonding and WOTC can

be combined and added to any of the training grants listed. BTS members should also be knowledgeable about whether program can co-enroll various workers.

At the onset of the COVID pandemic, a major service offered to Employers by the BSTs was virtual job fairs. These virtual job fairs became a highly requested service due the lack of available workers as well as the need to acquire workers via non-traditional methods.

### **Randolph-Sheppard Program**

The VFP staff provides trainees with classroom and OJT training to obtain a license to become a manager in the Randolph-Sheppard program. The VFP has a training manual the trainee must complete on their own, and pass quizzes included in the manual. OJT is offered by way of licensed managers or experienced workers in the field. Upon successful completion of all requirements, they are licensed.

## **III. OPERATIONAL PLANNING ELEMENTS**

### **A. STATE STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION**

#### **1. STATE BOARD FUNCTIONS**

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 four standing committees, which include the Executive Committee, Strategic Planning Committee, Program and Performance Evaluation Committee, and TANF Oversight 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, including the development of—
- 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).

### **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Oversight Committee**

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Oversight Committee provides oversight of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program and ensures that all program participants are receiving the assistance, information, and the services needed to help these low-income parents prepare for and connect with employment that will lead to a self-sufficient wage.

### **WIOA Roundtable**

The WIOA Roundtable, initially established in 2015 to support the implementation of WIOA, 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 Roundtable operates as a de facto "committee" of the Arkansas Workforce Development Board due to the common members on each body.

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

- Arkansas Workforce Development Board Staff Director
- Arkansas Division of Workforce Services Agency Director (WIOA Titles I & III)
- Arkansas Adult Education Director (WIOA Title II)
- Arkansas Rehabilitative 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 (TANF and SNAP)

## **2. IMPLEMENTATION OF STATE STRATEGY**

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

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.

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

The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services - Adult Education Section shall use funds made available under section 222(a)(2) for the following adult education and literacy activities (Section 203 of WIOA):

- Adult Education
  - Literacy
    - 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 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** 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.

**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. 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.

**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.

**English Language Acquisition** includes adult education and literacy activities for English language learners with an additional skill requirement, comprehension of the English language.

**Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education** will provide Immigrants and English learners access to English language acquisition services and civics education and may include workforce training. 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 civics 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.

**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 in the adult basic education and literacy curriculum, therefore, occurring concurrently with adult basic and literacy skills instruction

**Integrated education and training activities** include concurrent instruction in basic academic skills and/or English language acquisition skills, workforce preparation activities, and workforce training contextualized for specific occupations or occupational clusters. Education will be provided in the context of industry-specific needs that involve employers and is integrated with occupational skills training. Programs will provide work-relevant instruction through career pathways and integrated education and training activities. Instruction will be offered at Educational Functioning Levels appropriate to learners. The purpose of instruction will be education and career advancement. 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 improve economic self-sufficiency for their families.

Funds may not be used for the purpose of supporting or providing programs, services, or activities for individuals who are under the age of 16 and are enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under State law, except for such purpose if such programs, services, or activities are related to family literacy activities. In providing family literacy activities under this title, an eligible provider shall attempt to coordinate with programs and services that are not assisted under this title prior to using funds for adult education and literacy activities under this title for activities other than activities for eligible individuals.

Allowable activities, referred to as vocational rehabilitation (VR) services, are those activities necessary to assist an individual with a disability to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain competitive integrated employment. In general, services can be divided into pre-employment transition, transition, and vocational rehabilitation services. Required pre-employment transition services target students with disabilities to better determine career interests by providing 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 in transitioning from secondary education into postsecondary education and employment. An individualized plan for employment (IPE) is the foundation for vocational rehabilitation services. The IPE, jointly developed by the client and VR counselor, takes into consideration the individual's strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice. It identifies a client's vocational goal, necessary services, and roles and responsibilities related to the achievement of the goal. Services provided could include vocational counseling, vocational training, restoration, assistive technology, on-the-job training, and job placement.

The Division of Services for the Blind engages in activities similar to its partner Arkansas Rehabilitation Services. One hundred percent of DSB-funded services are focused on the significantly disabled, individuals who are blind or severely visually impaired. DSB provides this population with specialized vocational rehabilitation counseling services, which are designed to assist persons who are blind or have visual impairments to prepare for employment that is commensurate within their abilities, interests and informed choice, and is consistent with their strengths, resources, concerns and capabilities. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors in conjunction with their consumers develop employability plans, which outline the barriers, services, and steps to reach their employment goals. Referrals are made to partner programs to provide any additional services necessary to meet or exceed the employment goals in their plans. In addition to vocational counseling, DSB funds transition services; training for careers that are in demand; post-secondary education; placement with employers; accommodations needed for job placement or retaining employment; restorative medical services; internships; paid work experiences; pre-apprenticeship training; vending stand opportunities under the Randolph- Shepherd Act; and business ownership opportunities under the Small Business Program. In recent years, DSB has begun placing more emphasis on the employer as a customer.

### ***Strategic Changes Due to COVID-19***

The core WIOA programs have worked diligently together to align and achieve strategies to support the Governor's vision for the State's workforce development system. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are reassessing our previous strategies to be more responsive to this changing work environment. Below are four major goals that form the basis of this strategic plan.

These goals are to:

**Prepare workers to succeed in the Arkansas economy by increasing skills and education attainment.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted numerous individuals across the state, causing unprecedented increases in unemployment and rapid changes in the way people learn and access information. In a post-pandemic recovery era, Arkansas will need more focus on equity, education, and training, which is crucial to creating more skilled workers, deeper talent pools, and a more resilient workforce. As the skill requirements of jobs increase and change rapidly, businesses need a diverse, highly skilled pipeline of workers ready for the jobs they create, and Arkansans need access to training so they can be equipped for those jobs.

**Create a workforce system that is responsive to the needs of the economy by fostering employer leadership.**

Employer leadership includes an emphasis on increasing the number of employers participating in work-based learning experiences and apprenticeships while also establishing employer champions. These employer champions must include State and Local Workforce Board members.

**Promote replication of creative solutions to challenging workforce problems by supporting local innovation.**

“Local innovation” calls for promoting leadership development opportunities for the state’s workforce professionals, and for funding community-based initiatives that pilot new ideas or replicate proven programs. This goal prioritizes local COVID-19 workforce recovery initiatives leveraging technology to reimagine the talent pipeline.

**Promote workforce system access, alignment, integration, and modernization.**

This goal relates to the coordination of the workforce development system itself, which involves numerous partner agencies. Among other items, the plan calls for enhancing public awareness of the services provided through our workforce system for individuals and businesses, while researching new technological means to serve the system’s customers.

***Coordination Across Programs at the State and Local Level***

Arkansas continues to integrate programs under WIOA. Since the Governor's State Government Transformation effort, all four WIOA core programs are now operated by the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (ADWS). One chief component of this transformation effort was the assembly of the WIOA Roundtable.

The WIOA Roundtable's membership includes high-level representatives of the WIOA core and non-core partners. Additionally, the WIOA Roundtable's membership includes members of the Arkansas Workforce Development Board, to provide an additional level of synergy.

The WIOA Roundtable reviews progress on WIOA implementation and develops strategies for improvement. In addition, the WIOA Roundtable continues to review state policies that may inhibit programs from fully aligning required activities. The WIOA Roundtable provides feedback to the the Arkansas Workforce Development Board regarding challenges and barriers to completing the work and offers suggestions for new policies and procedures.

We have already begun enhancing our referral process guidelines among the core WIOA programs as well as provide guidance and technical assistance to local Arkansas Workforce Centers to develop an integrated referral system for services that meet local needs and ensure nonduplication of services and that provide equal access to all eligible clients.

As the referral processes are improved, based on the guidelines, the WIOA Roundtable will meet to review and assess referral process efficacy. The WIOA Roundtable also reviews current referral policy and strategies to identify ways to strengthen these processes to avoid duplication of services.

**B. ALIGNMENT WITH ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE THE PLAN**



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 Investment 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 Investment 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 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 Roundtable can approach additional partner programs with a united front.

Through the WIOA 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 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.

#### C. COORDINATION, ALIGNMENT AND PROVISION OF SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS

All core partners provide services to individuals within statutory requirements of the programs. Since the implementation of WIOA, leaders from core, mandatory partners, and several optional partners in the workforce development system have been working to better align programming to best serve the people of Arkansas.

Through the forming of the WIOA Roundtable, an interagency team of core and non-core partner programs, opportunities for leveraging resources to better serve the needs of people utilizing the workforce system have been developed and the shared knowledge of programs have led to better coordination of services. This process is continuing to evolve and partners anticipate new systems, policies, and networks to seamlessly and efficiently align services for individuals.

For example, currently Arkansas Rehabilitation Services has counselors that 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 has been proven to be very beneficial for students because it reduces the barriers of transportation and increases the support clients may need to successfully transition.

In addition, both Arkansas Rehabilitation Services and local workforce boards offer on the job training to clients who qualify. Several adult education students have been able to gain valuable work experience as well as a salary while working towards their high school equivalency diploma.

Core, mandatory, and optional partners are meeting on a monthly basis to discuss implementation and service delivery issues. Through this venue, program alignment, performance accountability, policy integration, data integration, infrastructure funding, and streamlined services are discussed. Committees have been established on each of these topics and the workgroups meeting at least monthly, and oftentimes more frequently. The four core

state agencies are jointly developing policy guidance for use across programs to ensure that coordination of services and activities is occurring. This jointly developed guidance is then shared with the Arkansas Workforce Development Board for consideration and adoption statewide. One such jointly developed policy is the Arkansas Workforce Centers Certification Policy, which establishes standards for use by local core, mandatory, and optional partner personnel to ensure a high level of services in the workforce centers and to support the coordination of services delivered by all partners. In order for centers to become certified and eventually meet excellence standards, partners must come together to coordinate activities, align services, and meet the needs of both jobseekers and employers.

The goal of the certification process is to develop a world-class workforce center network that goes well beyond the minimal requirements established by the Federal Workforce Investment Act. It is critical to make the centers user friendly and attractive, creating a public image that is inviting to jobseekers, education seekers, and employers seeking skills and talent in the local labor markets.

The certification policy brings all the tools approved by the Arkansas Workforce Development Board (AWDB) into a single reference for Local Workforce Development Board members and partner programs involved in certifying or recertifying local Arkansas Workforce Centers. It is the intent of the AWDB to provide this instrument as a guide to what is expected, not to provide the means of how it is to be accomplished. Ongoing organizing, implementation, and ensuring continuous improvement of the local certification process are the responsibility of the local boards and partners.

Included are minimum core standards that must be a part of the local certification and recertification process. In a clear, concise manner this guide documents the Arkansas Workforce Board Certification Process needed by the local board when conducting certification site visits. It also reviews the Quality Assurance Process to be used by the Arkansas Workforce Development Board (AWDB) to ensure minimum standards are met and that the Arkansas Workforce Center brand name is protected. It is expected that each local workforce investment area may supplement these core standards with additional locally applicable criteria and performance measures to ensure continuous improvement.

Certification is not just about a one-time designation. It is an ongoing process that keeps all parties involved and achieving at high performance levels. As such, the certification process also allows for achieving excellence standards as continuous improvement planning occurs. This certification process serves as an opportunity to continually re-examine, improve, and revise procedures to ensure that the Arkansas workforce development system is a primary asset in Arkansas's economic growth and subsequent high quality of life.

The local certification process also requires workforce center partners to coordinate their services to employers through the development of business service liaison teams operating under a common message and clear menu of services among all partners.

The excellence standards of the certification criteria require the following higher levels of coordination:

- Coordination with economic development and social service leaders
- Coordinated marketing messages among all workforce center partners
- Coordination with other workforce centers, especially business service liaison teams from other workforce centers

The Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Program. In Arkansas, the Program's Program Operations Manager and Fiscal Staff are located in the Central Office with the remaining staff of three Program Monitors and Workforce Specialists responsible for Case Management of

participants are out-stationed across the state. The TAA Program partners with WIOA staff across the state to provide initial assessments, supporting the Department of Labor's mandated co-enrollment between the two programs. Using the information from the initial assessments, the Workforce Specialists meet individually with the participants providing detailed program information and assisting with services needed to move the participant toward reemployment. Referrals are made to partner programs when participants have needs outside of what TAA can provide. Having TAA staff co-located at the local offices with other partner programs is extremely beneficial in providing supportive services to clients. Having all partners share a common space builds professional relationships and leads to all members of the group being vested in the outcomes for our mutual clients. These relationships also allow staff to identify trends and share information in a way which provides the client with their best chance for success.

### **WIOA Evaluation Recommendations**

The results of the WIOA System Evaluation concluded that more effort must be placed upon developing data collection methods to track and monitor rates of co-enrollment. It is believed that by having accurate and up-to-date information concerning co-enrollment, we can better identify areas for improvement. This recommendation is being addressed by the Arkansas Workforce Development Board as well as the WIOA Roundtable.

The WIOA System Evaluation also identified the need for a collective source of available resources and services. This is being addressed by the newly created "Statewide Community Resource Portal". This portal is a partnership of various state government agencies and provides information on available services in the State.

The portal is searchable by 1. County, 2. Region, and 3. Category. The Statewide Community Resource Portal can be found at this link: <https://adedata.arkansas.gov/scr/>

#### **D. COORDINATION, ALIGNMENT AND PROVISION OF SERVICES TO EMPLOYERS**

Since the passage of WIOA, the Arkansas WIOA 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.

The Division of Workforce Services - Adult Education Section offers a trademarked job readiness program, Workforce Alignment for Growth in the Economy (WAGE™) in which students can earn up to six certificates in industrial, employability, customer service I and II, office technology, and bank teller. Adult Education WAGE Coordinators work with local employers to customize training that meets the needs of their workforce. In order to stay abreast of employers’ needs, the WAGE Advisory Committee is made up of 51% business and industry and chaired by an employer.

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.

#### E. PARTNER ENGAGEMENT WITH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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 streamline 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.

The TANF program funds the Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative that 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.

Service delivery systems for adult education programs are funded through a variety of local administrative entities, including public school systems, colleges, literacy councils, and one correctional institution to name a few. In fact, fifty percent of administrative units for adult education fall under the administration of community colleges. Many local adult education programs work directly with colleges in supporting summer transition bridge programs to college. Others assist in helping students increase their basic academic skills in order to reduce the need for remediation.

The Division of Workforce Services, Adult Education Section (ADWS-AES) has partnered with the Arkansas Community Colleges to offer Accelerating Opportunity to four community colleges and adult education programs in the state. Accelerating Opportunity (AO) is a community college initiative of Jobs for the Future whose goal is to ensure that more workers have the skills needed to earn credentials that lead to family-sustaining careers. The AO programs are transitioning to focus more on Integrated and Education training programs across the state. Both initiatives aim to change how Adult Basic Education is structured and delivered through a collaborative effort in which a basic skills instructor and technical college instructor provide concurrent and contextualized instruction for adults at various levels of education and skills. For the 2018-2019 program year, 343 participants were enrolled in AO and IETs combined. Program Directors continually evaluate these programs to ensure relevance to students and the local workforce needs.

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) actively engages the State's education and training providers including two-year and four-year colleges and career and technical education schools as partners in the workforce development system to create job-driven education and training opportunities for individuals with disabilities. A large portion of the agency's budget is committed to support client enrollment in these types of trainings with a goal of client attainment of competitive integrated employment. ARS's VR counselors and assistive technology staff routinely engage education and training personnel regarding needed accommodations necessary for clients to successfully complete training programs. Agency staff also participate in Ark-AHEAD, the Arkansas affiliate of the Association of Higher Education and Disability.

Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) has a partnership which provides college preparatory classes to blind and low vision students utilizing the campus of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. DSB has arranged for college and technical school tours for blind and low vision students, so that the students and the institutions of higher education can interact and discuss career goals prior to applying for admission.

#### F. PARTNER ENGAGEMENT WITH OTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROVIDERS

The core and non-core partners have a strong partnership with the Arkansas Department of Higher Education, Arkansas Community Colleges, Registered Apprenticeship, and the Arkansas Board of Private Career Education, the licensing board for private education in Arkansas. This partnership will be nurtured under the implementation of this plan and encourage training providers from both public and private institutions to engage with the State's workforce development system and provide feedback for continuous improvement.

For example, one adult education provider partners with the Electrical Apprenticeship program to provide basic skills instruction primarily in math. Apprentices entering the electrical trade are required to be licensed by the Arkansas Department of Labor, Board of Electrical Examiners. This is a four-year program consisting of 640 hours of classroom instruction coinciding with 8,000 hours of on-the-job training. When a student completes the program, he or she will be granted a "release to test" and can submit an application to sit for the journeyman electrician's

exam. The adult education classes are offered through partnership with the Arkansas Construction Education Foundation. In 2018-19, the adult education program served 29 students for 1,669 hours (in basic math as part of the electrical program).

Through partnership with the Arkansas Apprenticeship Coalition, the State has collected necessary data to add all Registered Apprenticeship programs desiring such to the list of approved eligible training providers. The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services has and will continue to work with local workforce development boards to educate training providers on the process to become eligible training providers in an effort to increase the number of providers and customer choice in training.

The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services has partnered with the Arkansas Research Center and the Arkansas Department of Higher Education in an effort to compile required performance data for the continued eligibility of training providers in an effort to offset the administrative burden to the provider. The State anticipates that this assistance will enable many eligible training providers to remain on the list of approved training providers that otherwise would have dropped off due to the significant reporting requirements under WIOA.

#### G. LEVERAGING RESOURCES TO INCREASE EDUCATIONAL ACCESS

Education is the key to successfully implement career pathways programs across the state. The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) federal funds support the advancement of individuals into postsecondary education and work. The grants to eligible providers require states to consider “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” (Section 231(e) (8)). The integration of literacy instruction and occupational skills training is an allowable activity that states can use leadership and federal funds to support.

AEFLA funds may be used to support the portion of an Integrated Education and Training (IET) or career pathways program that provides instruction in reading, writing, mathematics, or English proficiency that is below the postsecondary level. This instruction in basic literacy skills and the English language should be contextualized to support the occupational skills portion of the program. Curriculum for a career pathways program should adequately address basic literacy skills, workforce preparation and the occupational competencies needed for the participant to complete the program successfully. AEFLA funds may be used to plan, develop, and deliver the portions of the curriculum that address basic literacy skills and appropriate workforce preparation.

As part of the state’s Accelerating Opportunity partnership with the Arkansas Community Colleges (ACC), adult education was able to use funds to support instruction, curriculum and development, and training; whereas, the ACC was able to use funds to pay the tuition and fees for students without a high school diploma. Both enrolled college students in a career pathway and participating adult students were able to benefit from having a contextualized and basic skills instructor co-teaching together. For Integrated Education and Training programs, similar support and partnerships are being developed and planned.

Pre-employment transition and transition services are key components of Arkansas Rehabilitation Services’ system of service delivery. Pre-employment transition services help students determine career interests while transition services assist students in transitioning from secondary education into postsecondary education and employment. Roles and responsibilities for providing these types of services are outlined in agreements between the agency and involved education agencies. The individualized plan for employment (IPE) is the foundation for the provision of vocational rehabilitation services. It is intended to outline

shared responsibility between the agency, the client, and other involved parties. The IPE addresses the specific client vocational goal as well as services (including education and training) needed to achieve the goal, and outlines who is responsible for providing the service and how it will be paid.

DSB researches and applies all federal and state comparable services and similar benefits available for educational access at all institutions of higher education, career, community college, and area career and technical schools. Once this is done, DSB provides financial support to the participants individually, based on their goals and needs. We work in conjunction with Arkansas Division of Workforce Services and the Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative to identify training programs that lead to real world employment experiences to match education with obtaining employment.

Through the implementation of a co-enrollment policy for core and non-core programs, opportunities for braided funding will be realized that will essentially “stretch” the funding available through the programs. This is possible by each program contributing what they can instead of one program picking up the entire cost of training and supportive services. Non-core programs will be incorporated into this customer flow and co-enrollment process.

Furthermore, the Arkansas Community Colleges, the association representing all two-year colleges in the State, has been a vital partner in delivering services through several discretionary grants including the Arkansas Apprenticeship Pathway Initiative, the Arkansas Sector Partnership, and the Arkansas Job Driven National Emergency Grant. Their leadership and partnership has assisted the State in better connecting the workforce development center system with the State’s two-year college system.

#### H. IMPROVING ACCESS TO POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIALS

Title I of WIOA allows funds to be provided for adults and dislocated workers who meet WIOA Title I eligibility requirements for occupational skills training, on-the-job training, programs that combine workplace training with related instruction, skills upgrading and retraining, entrepreneurial training, job-readiness training, adult education and literacy activities described in section 134(3) (D) of WIOA. ADCE-AED is collaborating with Title I programs to combine resources, reduce duplication of services, and provide support to Arkansans.

During the state’s administrators’ meeting the program manager from the Office of Apprenticeships does a workshop session on apprenticeship programs across the state and how adult education can be a partner in the process. Apprentices who may need additional academic assistance are often referred to adult education. One of the challenges is the availability of evening classes offered in the adult education centers to accommodate working adults. One of the ways the state is combatting this issue is by increasing the number of distance learning classes being offered to provide around the clock access.

The Arkansas Adult Learning Resource Center (AALRC), adult education’s professional development center, have provided consultation and training for local programs to establish career pathways and Integrated Education Training programs that align with local workforce needs. The AALRC hired consultants, Michelle Carson and Libby Livings-Eassa, to provide over 40 hours of professional development training on Career Pathways to adult education directors, staff, and partners. In addition, trainings on establishing Integrated Education Training programs and developing contextualized instruction have been provided for local program directors and instructors. Adult education directors are aware that career pathways is now one of the 13 considerations that must be met in order to receive federal funds; “whether the eligible provider’s activities coordinate 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 workforce investment boards, one-stop centers, job training programs, and

social service agencies, business, industry, labor organizations, community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, and intermediaries, for the development of career pathways Section 231(e) (8)).

Local adult education providers have been working with community colleges, apprenticeship programs, Title I programs, and health care providers to offer industry-recognized certificates, licenses or certifications, that are portable and stackable. Currently, some providers have offered National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) certifications, Certified Nursing Assistant credentials, Industrial Safety, OSHA training, and Welding to name a few. Other core partners such as Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, TANF, DHS, and DWS assist by either paying for some of these classes and certifications or offering support services such as transportation and childcare.

ARS recognizes the importance of increasing access to industry recognized credentials for its clients. Discussion of the need for credential attainment is a consideration in the development of a client's individualized plan for employment. ARS continues to work to realign resources for training and education as evidenced by the Arkansas Career Training Institute (ACTI), ARS' internal training unit, which focuses on providing training programs that result in industry recognized credentials. With the transition of ACTI to a nonresidential program, consideration is given to partnering with local community rehabilitation programs to replicate credentialed programs in other areas across the state. Plans also include ACTI taking a lead role in ARS's utilization of pre-apprenticeship and registered apprenticeship training for clients.

There are plans for continued expansion of the use of pre-apprenticeship for VR clients in Arkansas. In the second quarter of FFY 2018, 100 students have registered for pre-apprenticeship training.

DSB has traditionally paid tuition for vocational and postsecondary education that will lead to employment. DSB will increase its use of Registered Apprenticeship training opportunities for its consumers and align its resources for training and education resulting in industry-recognized postsecondary credentials.

It is imperative for staff from core and non-core programs to increase engagement with training providers and programs that lead to postsecondary credentials engage to ensure that they apply and are accepted onto the Eligible Training Provider List.

### ***Partnering Efforts***

Arkansas' workforce development system will follow the lead of the Arkansas Division of Higher Education, in accordance with the Governor's vision for higher education.

Building upon the success and lessons of the Closing the Gap 2020 masterplan, the Arkansas Division of Higher Education engaged think tanks from a cross section of experts from within and beyond academia. The collaborative result is a highly targeted, tangible, and data informed plan to move our state to the next phase of post-secondary strategy. By 2030, we aspire to increase the percentage of adult Arkansans with college credentials to 55%. We will take concrete steps to reach measurable outcomes in our new master plan: Align Arkansas 2026.

The entire report can be found at:

[https://static.ark.org/eeuploads/adhe/Align\\_Arkansas\\_2026\\_Final.pdf](https://static.ark.org/eeuploads/adhe/Align_Arkansas_2026_Final.pdf)

Additionally, the Arkansas Economic Security Report Higher Education Planning Guide fulfills the mandate under A.C.A. § 6-60-105 to provide students and families with employment and income information for recent graduates from Arkansas' higher education institutions. The real-world data summarized in this guide will help Arkansans make informed decisions when choosing which college to attend and field-of-study to pursue.



The entire report can be found at:

[https://www.dws.arkansas.gov/src/files/Arkansas\\_Economic\\_Security\\_Report\\_-\\_Higher\\_Education\\_Planning\\_Guide.pdf](https://www.dws.arkansas.gov/src/files/Arkansas_Economic_Security_Report_-_Higher_Education_Planning_Guide.pdf)

## I. COORDINATING WITH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

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 Roundtable, which is the interagency WIOA planning team. Seven of the ten local workforce development boards have administrative and fiscal entities that are also local economic development organizations.

Workforce development is a priority of both the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC) and the Division of Workforce Services (DWS), under the direction of the Department of Commerce. Together, we work with business and industry to meet existing and new workforce needs.

The Arkansas Economic Development Commission representatives sit on both the State and Local Workforce Boards and AEDC staff assist with the formation of local workforce development consortia, formal organizations of businesses and industries that identify common training needs in the community. Consortia – as well as individual companies – are eligible for state-funded training grants.

Additionally, the AEDC has led the development of a number of workforce initiatives, such as Future Fit.

### ***Future Fit***

A study by the Manufacturing Institute showed that nationally 80% of manufacturers report a shortage of qualified applicants for skilled production positions.

The AEDC conducted more than 1,800 face-to-face meetings with local Arkansas companies to evaluate the extent of the skilled worker shortage in Arkansas. We found approximately 10,000 unfilled jobs, of which 26.2 percent require no formal education and 52.5 percent require a high school diploma or GED.

To combat this problem, the AEDC collaborated with 10 companies in western Arkansas to launch a pilot skills gap workforce program called Future Fit. These companies played a significant role in developing and launching Future Fit: Bekaert, Trane, Gerber, International Paper, HSM Solutions, MAHLE, Gerdau, Glatfelter, Rockline Industries, and Rheem.

The Future Fit program will help place qualified individuals directly into well-paying jobs with participating companies throughout Arkansas. Participants of Future Fit will complete a training program that will prepare them for entry-level employment with these companies.

The first course will take approximately 120 hours of combined hands-on and on-line training for the basic skills needed to be successful in a manufacturing position. Two additional courses are under development.

Future Fit is designed to accommodate a diverse group of people, including those WIOA participants with barriers to employment:

- High school graduates that do not plan to enroll in college
- Military veterans

- Unemployed or underemployed
- Non-violent offenders released by law enforcement

There will be no enrollment cost to qualified students during the initial pilot program. Applicants must have a High School Diploma or a GED and have earned a Bronze level ACT National Career Readiness Certificate as a minimum qualification to enroll.

### ***Modern Workplace Program***

The Modern Workplace program was created to bridge the divide between educators and industry representatives.

Educators and industry representatives collaborate to create an education environment that allows our emerging workforce to lead productive lives and satisfy the needs of Arkansas businesses.

Objectives of the program:

- Connecting educators with local/regional employers to gain familiarity with local products and processes utilized in the workplace.
- Linking employers with the local/regional school system to foster ongoing relationships with educators.
- Providing educators with local/regional business contacts they can use to supplement current teaching curriculum.
- Familiarizing educators with career opportunities in local industry and the skills needed to be successful.

### ***Education Economic Report***

The Education Economic Report includes up-to-date statewide data in a quick read with helpful infographics. It includes the top rankings for state college & universities, overviews of tech-based curriculum preparing young Arkansans for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce, professional development programs, and more. This report may be accessed at:

<http://info.arkansasedc.com/download-education-economic-report>

## **B. STATE OPERATING SYSTEMS AND POLICIES**

### **Arkansas Division of Workforce Services**

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 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 Job Link provides:

- One-stop case management, data collection and reporting
- A single-job placement system, which is used by all partner agencies
- Program management and reporting for WIA adult, dislocated worker, youth programs, labor exchange, and Trade Adjustment Assistance
- A staff assisted and a self-service job match system for jobseekers and employers
- An eligibility determination process that leads staff to identify programs for which the individual might be eligible
- Because of this program, jobseekers and business clients receive significant benefits affecting opportunity and success. Impacts are:
  - Entry to the system from multiple locations, including home or office
  - Decreased number of times the client has to provide basic information
  - Access to additional useful information (career preparation, labor market, disabilities resources, support services, etc.)
  - Better-prepared and more timely referrals between partner agencies
  - Jobseeker access to job listings and employer access to resumes.

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>.

Discover Arkansas Labor Market Information Portal Arkansas Labor Market Information (LMI) is posted online using the Discover Arkansas web portal located at [www.discoverarkansas.net](http://www.discoverarkansas.net) and is available to the general public.

#### Adult Education Section

The Adult Education Section Division utilizes the Literacy, Adult and Community Education System (LACES) for reporting purposes. All programs receiving adult education federal and

state funds from the Adult Education Section must report student data for both reportable individuals and participants in LACES, which is an online accessible system that allows the state and local programs to complete reports for the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE). Required information includes demographic measures, participation measures, and follow-up measures. Approved users can access the website at <https://laces.literacypro.com/laces/>.

The Adult Education Section implemented LACES for the 2017-18 program year. Previously, the state used the Adult Education Reporting Information System (AERIS) from the 2005 PY through the 2016 PY.

Data collected on each adult student include demographic data (age, gender, ethnicity), barriers to employment, county residence, entering educational functioning levels as defined by the National Reporting System (NRS), progression through educational functioning levels, employment status at entry, follow-up achievements, test scores, class enrollment, and daily attendance. Data collected on each instructor/tutor include personal data, title, certification, classes, and attendance for each class. Through the data collected above, federal, state, and local reports are generated using any and/or all of the data. In addition, through a memorandum of understanding between the Arkansas Department of Higher Education and the Division of Workforce Services, follow-up measures for exited participants that enter post-secondary education or gain employment can be tracked.

All adults who receive services from adult education and literacy programs are considered reportable individuals. Adults who have received services; and have a completed an Intake Form, should be entered into LACES whether an assessment has been administered. Students who have 12 or more contact hours within a program year (July 1 to June 30) are considered participants by the National Reporting System (NRS) of the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE). Students should be pre-tested before they have acquired 12 instruction contact hours.

All student data must be entered into LACES by the 15th of each month for the previous month's data. All data must be reviewed by the 22nd of each month for the previous month's data. This includes post-test scores in which students do not show educational gains. 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 policy and procedure for data entry that includes checks and balances for data collection steps, personnel responsible for entering data, and personnel who checks and verifies data. The process is the same for all adult education providers regardless of location. Verification of data is checked through desk audits and on-site visits by state program advisors.

According to Assurance 13 of the Adult Education Section 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 Adult Education Section. 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 Adult Education Section 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.

### Arkansas Rehabilitation Services

The Arkansas Rehabilitation Services system of record for Vocational Rehabilitation is System 7™ is a highly configurable and intuitive case management platform. System 7™ has built-in design-for-configurability using an XML and table-driven approach. Custom applications can be

delivered quickly and affordably as well as interface with multiple outside sources. With HTTPS and SSL security, data will remain secure in transit and at rest. System 7™ is web-based, does not require installation on individual user workstations, and can be used anywhere there is an Internet connection. Its use of switch settings and role-based security delivers a secure and flexible solution. System 7™'s Report Control Center and table-driven approach also allows custom data queries and easy ad-hoc reporting. Users can easily view and collect data in real time.

System 7™ offers an intuitive Graphical User Interface (GUI) and contains an existing VR form set for use in implementing the case management functionality. Interactive electronic forms that mirror an agency's paper forms can be used to enter data directly into the system, eliminating time wasted on transcription from paper into traditional information management systems. In addition to providing a form set, another desirable feature of System 7™ is that tools are included that allows the VR agency to maintain and create their own reports and letters. Also, System 7™ supports digital signatures using multiple models of electronic signature pads. In addition, it allows for centralized storage of scanned documents, as well as functionality that allows forms and notes to be sent to other users securely.

Information within System 7™ is separated into modules, each of which is integral to and enhances the functionality of the system as a whole. The case management module tracks consumer information, while the vendor and services module allows participating vendors to be added to the application and linked to the services they offer. An employment module tracks employers and job opportunities. The System 7™ voucher module provides a means for preparing, reviewing, and controlling, and submitting fiscal information to any third party fiscal system. Budget accounts are created and maintained within System 7™. Authorizations and invoices are used to track which vendors provided which services to a consumer or group of consumers.

#### Division of Services for the Blind

The Division of Services for the Blind's (DSB) case management system is known as AWARE from Alliance Enterprises, Inc. This case-management system provides records management software for Vocational Rehabilitation. It provides systems to monitor case progression, program finances, and overall agency performance. It also contains a job bank of employers who have hired blind and visually impaired clients of DSB.

DSB operates as a true web-based system, meaning it has the accessibility of Internet technology coupled with security to provide access to case information on a need-to-know basis. Data can be accessed, collected, and reported on the vocational rehabilitation program for the blind from any workstation within the state's network, or if allowed by agency policy with a secure connection from outside the state network. Staff who works with participants at schools, job sites or other facilities can "check out" a case(s) and use perform case work in the field. Upon returning to the office, staff checks the case back into the central system.

DSB is also pursuing Data Sharing Agreements with the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services and has an agreement with the Arkansas Research Center through the Department of Health and Human Services in order to collect and report on employment outcomes.

#### Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

Arkansas Workforce Integrated Networks System (ARWINS) ARWINS is an information services platform conceived and developed by the Arkansas TANF Digital Transformation Office to support job training and other services for TANF families. With appropriate extensions, this IT system aligns perfectly with the desired outcomes across many unique welfare and workforce development programs like SNAP, Medicaid and WIOA. Just as important, ARWINS is affordable with the ability to be supported by in-house IT staff. It is built using open source software, specifically Ruby on Rails, and it follows the service standards and conventions promoted by the

Whitehall Project, (for the UK Government) U.S. Department of Labor, Instagram and Bloomberg among others. Thus, the software, as open source, has been used, tested, and proven by a variety of other adopters, allowing new projects to benefit from those past experiences allows for wide-spread usage at an affordable cost.

ARWINS is designed for digital use. It is future oriented and geared toward today's end users. In an effort to match the current and future needs of a variety of users, ARWINS is compatible with laptops and mobile devices—any device size or type, enabling usage anytime, anywhere, at the full convenience of the end user.

Because ARWINS was initially developed for managing and reporting TANF programs, it has a wide array of configurable assessments and supports. It is designed to analyze information provided to support staff and consumers in overcoming barriers that prevent long term sustainable employment. It was also designed in a format that could be modified to enable individuals, including vulnerable populations, to use the system as a tool to support their own growth and development, empowering them to be engaged in their own success!

ARWINS is a web-based suite of tools and resources that provides:

Jobseekers:

- A workforce system registration module that integrates structured work readiness assessments to identify employment barriers across a range of factors, such as:
  - - Employment History
    - Education
    - Legal Issues
    - Physical and mental health problems
    - Substance Abuse
    - Transportation
    - Child Care
- Ability to develop a consumer and family-centric career pathway plan that incorporates an employment preparation plan. This plan includes a wrap-around barrier reduction plan that consists of temporary supportive services offered across traditional workforce (core WIOA partners) and welfare reform (TANF) programs as well as social programs like SNAP, Child Care, and Medical Services.

Employers and Providers:

- A workforce system registration module that gives access to a one-stop workforce services experience
- Insight and access to customized labor market information
- Expanded visibility to potential traditional and non-traditional jobseeker candidate databases
- Program administrators and operating partners
- Screening, intake, eligibility determination and benefits issuance (EBT)
- Initial and ongoing case management

- Single view of a consumer where appropriate and feasible vis-à-vis a single individual view that intersects provision of contextual and behavioral consumer data
- Consumer information can be recorded once and shared across multiple programs for integrated work readiness assessment, employment planning, cross-program eligibility determination, and aligning provider services, referrals, and invoicing, with case management tracking.
- An outreach and communication platform that integrates with social media channels to organize events, partnering organizations and entities, as well as active constituent relationship management
- The system looks for and alerts users to indicators of events that need attention prior to, rather than following, an event that may be avoided when identified in time. For example, a TANF case manager may become aware that a participant is nearing sanction early enough to prevent that action.
- Program Performance - Reporting, Fraud, Overpayments and Collections, Quality Assurance

ARWINS tracks payments to education, training and service providers across all programs. Integrated processing and tracking allows partners to share resources for payments, consolidate payment requests, and track payments across multiple programs for each consumer across the entire participant budget. ARWINS tracks and identifies total costs of benefits provided to any consumer. This information can be used to determine total costs per consumer participating in a range of activities as well as provides data on which development paths are most effective and cost efficient enabling outcome and expenditure planning and reporting.

ARWINS also manages the privacy and security that is needed, and within this constraint, allows multiple professionals to record and review appropriate information about the consumers they serve. Security can be configured in a way that allows each participant's service team, whether colocated or not, to stay current on what is being addressed, how, the expected outcomes, and actual results for that participant. This provides each team member, which may include a variety of professionals from different partnering organizations or businesses, a view of the universe of that participant, including needs, barriers, progress, and goals. ARWINS intends to allow communities to configure security in a way that supports the needs of the teams while protecting the privacy of the individual.

The Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) supports the development of, or enhancements to, longitudinal administrative databases that integrate workforce data education data. WDQI also emphasizes promoting improvements and the level of quality of these systems, in addition to increasing the accessibility of performance data, including data reported by employment services and training providers. Education data is being collected under the Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Education to which the WDQI is a parallel effort. The SLDS emphasizes the collection of workforce data and the WDQI was created, in part, to accompany the work being done on the education side to gather longitudinal data. WDQI is a collaborative partnership at the Federal level between the Departments of Labor and of Education. The long-term WDQI and Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems goal for States is to use their longitudinal data systems to follow individuals through school and into and through their work life. WQDI grant recipients are expected to demonstrate similarly established partnerships between state workforce and educational agencies. High quality and consistent data that is available from service providers about services offered, and how well their customers benefited as they enter or re-enter the labor market, are integral to informed consumer choices. In Arkansas, the WDQI is administered by the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services through partnership with the Arkansas Department of Education, Arkansas Department of Higher Education, Department of Human Services, Office of Skills Development and the Arkansas Research Center.

Data made available through the WDQI has been utilized to produce performance outcomes for various workforce development programs and to produce the baseline performance data for the WIOA core performance goals.

A cross agency team has been developed to review the existing data systems and to develop a plan for integrating the data available through these systems. The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services has been identified as the lead state agency and will be responsible for working with the Arkansas Department of Information Systems to develop an Information Technology Plan for implementation.

Arkansas Act 912 of 2017 established a Chief Data Officer and Chief Privacy Officer within the Arkansas Department of Information Systems. This Act supports the state's vision of sharing data across state agencies, while ensuring that all data will be properly protected under the joint leadership of the Chief Privacy Officer, Chief Security Officer, and Chief Data Officer.

It is the hope of the Governor that Arkansas will become the first state in this nation to achieve statewide data sharing and transparency capability.

#### Trade Adjustment Act Program

In addition to paying a portion of the overhead and office expenses of the locations where TAA staff are located the TAA program also provides significant support for the Arkansas Job Link (AJL) system. AJL is our integrated intake, case management, and reporting system and is a part of the America's Job Link Alliance (AJLA).

#### 1. THE STATE OPERATING SYSTEMS THAT WILL SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STATE'S STRATEGIES. THIS MUST INCLUDE A DESCRIPTION OF-

##### WIOA Titles I & III

Arkansas JobLink (AJL) is the state's integrated web-based workforce development management information system (MIS) used by WIOA Titles I and III. 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 Job Link provides:

- One-stop case management, data collection and reporting
  - A single-job placement system, which is used by all partner agencies
    - Program management and reporting for WIA adult, dislocated worker, youth programs, labor exchange, and Trade Adjustment Assistance
  - A staff assisted and a self-service job match system for jobseekers and employers



- An eligibility determination process that leads staff to identify programs for which the individual might be eligible
  - Because of this program, jobseekers and business clients receive significant benefits affecting opportunity and success. Impacts are:
  - Entry to the system from multiple locations, including home or office
  - Decreased number of times the client has to provide basic information
  - Access to additional useful information (career preparation, labor market, disabilities resources, support services, etc.)
  - Better-prepared and more timely referrals between partner agencies
  - Jobseeker access to job listings and employer access to resumes.

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>.

Discover Arkansas Labor Market Information Portal Arkansas Labor Market Information (LMI) is posted online using the Discover Arkansas web portal located at [www.discoverarkansas.net](http://www.discoverarkansas.net) and is available to the general public.

#### WIOA Title II - Adult Education Section

AdultEd uses a student data management system called LACES (Literacy, Adult and Community Education System), developed by Literacy-Pro Systems. LACES allows the collection and reporting of performance data from adult education providers. LACES is designed specifically to report to the National Reporting System for Adult Education (NRS), as required by all states

receiving WIOA Title II funding. LACES is currently utilized by approximately one-third of the states to report to NRS. In addition to meeting the requirements for federal reporting, LACES offers adult education providers a tool to manage student demographic, assessment, and progress data.

Data collected on each adult student include demographic data (age, gender, ethnicity), barriers to employment, county residence, entering educational functioning levels as defined by the National Reporting System (NRS), progression through educational functioning levels, employment status at entry, follow-up achievements, test scores, class enrollment, and daily attendance. Data collected on each instructor/tutor include personal data, title, certification, classes, and attendance for each class. Through the data collected above, federal, state, and local reports are generated using any and/or all of the data. In addition, through a memorandum of understanding between the Arkansas Department of Higher Education and the Division of Workforce Services, follow-up measures for exited participants that enter post-secondary education or gain employment can be tracked.

All adults who receive services from adult education and literacy programs are considered reportable individuals. Adults who have received services; and have a completed an Intake Form, should be entered into LACES whether an assessment has been administered. Students who have 12 or more contact hours within a program year (July 1 to June 30) are considered participants by the National Reporting System (NRS) of the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE). Students should be pre-tested before they have acquired 12 instruction contact hours.

All student data must be entered into LACES by the 15th of each month for the previous month's data. All data must be reviewed by the 22nd of each month for the previous month's data. This includes post-test scores in which students do not show educational gains. 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 policy and procedure for data entry that includes checks and balances for data collection steps, personnel responsible for entering data, and personnel who checks and verifies data. The process is the same for all adult education providers regardless of location. Verification of data is checked through desk audits and on-site visits by state program advisors.

According to Assurance 13 of the Adult Education Section 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 Adult Education Section. 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 Adult Education Section 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.

#### WIOA Title IV - Arkansas Rehabilitation Services

The Arkansas Rehabilitation Services system of record for Vocational Rehabilitation is System 7™ is a highly configurable and intuitive case management platform. System 7™ has built-in design-for-configurability using an XML and table-driven approach. Custom applications can be delivered quickly and affordably as well as interface with multiple outside sources. With HTTPS and SSL security, data will remain secure in transit and at rest. System 7™ is web-based, does not require installation on individual user workstations, and can be used anywhere there is an Internet connection. Its use of switch settings and role-based security delivers a secure and flexible solution. System 7™'s Report Control Center and table-driven approach also allows

custom data queries and easy ad-hoc reporting. Users can easily view and collect data in real time.

System 7™ offers an intuitive Graphical User Interface (GUI) and contains an existing VR form set for use in implementing the case management functionality. Interactive electronic forms that mirror an agency's paper forms can be used to enter data directly into the system, eliminating time wasted on transcription from paper into traditional information management systems. In addition to providing a form set, another desirable feature of System 7™ is that tools are included that allows the VR agency to maintain and create their own reports and letters. Also, System 7™ supports digital signatures using multiple models of electronic signature pads. In addition, it allows for centralized storage of scanned documents, as well as functionality that allows forms and notes to be sent to other users securely.

Information within System 7™ is separated into modules, each of which is integral to and enhances the functionality of the system as a whole. The case management module tracks consumer information, while the vendor and services module allows participating vendors to be added to the application and linked to the services they offer. An employment module tracks employers and job opportunities. The System 7™ voucher module provides a means for preparing, reviewing, and controlling, and submitting fiscal information to any third party fiscal system. Budget accounts are created and maintained within System 7™. Authorizations and invoices are used to track which vendors provided which services to a consumer or group of consumers.

#### WIOA Title IV - Division of Services for the Blind

The Division of Services for the Blind's (DSB) case management system is known as AWARE from Alliance Enterprises, Inc. This case-management system provides records management software for Vocational Rehabilitation. It provides systems to monitor case progression, program finances, and overall agency performance. It also contains a job bank of employers who have hired blind and visually impaired clients of DSB.

DSB operates as a true web-based system, meaning it has the accessibility of Internet technology coupled with security to provide access to case information on a need-to-know basis. Data can be accessed, collected, and reported on the vocational rehabilitation program for the blind from any workstation within the state's network, or if allowed by agency policy with a secure connection from outside the state network. Staff who works with participants at schools, job sites or other facilities can "check out" a case(s) and use perform case work in the field. Upon returning to the office, staff checks the case back into the central system.

DSB is also pursuing Data Sharing Agreements with the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services and has an agreement with the Arkansas Research Center through the Department of Health and Human Services in order to collect and report on employment outcomes.

#### Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

Arkansas Workforce Integrated Networks System (ARWINS) ARWINS is an information services platform conceived and developed by the Arkansas TANF Digital Transformation Office to support job training and other services for TANF families. With appropriate extensions, this IT system aligns perfectly with the desired outcomes across many unique welfare and workforce development programs like SNAP, Medicaid and WIOA. Just as important, ARWINS is affordable with the ability to be supported by in-house IT staff. It is built using open source software, specifically Ruby on Rails, and it follows the service standards and conventions promoted by the Whitehall Project, (for the UK Government) U.S. Department of Labor, Instagram and Bloomberg among others. Thus, the software, as open source, has been used, tested, and proven by a variety of other adopters, allowing new projects to benefit from those past experiences allows for wide-spread usage at an affordable cost.

ARWINS is designed for digital use. It is future oriented and geared toward today's end users. In an effort to match the current and future needs of a variety of users, ARWINS is compatible with laptops and mobile devices—any device size or type, enabling usage anytime, anywhere, at the full convenience of the end user.

Because ARWINS was initially developed for managing and reporting TANF programs, it has a wide array of configurable assessments and supports. It is designed to analyze information provided to support staff and consumers in overcoming barriers that prevent long term sustainable employment. It was also designed in a format that could be modified to enable individuals, including vulnerable populations, to use the system as a tool to support their own growth and development, empowering them to be engaged in their own success!

ARWINS is a web-based suite of tools and resources that provides:

Jobseekers:

- A workforce system registration module that integrates structured work readiness assessments to identify employment barriers across a range of factors, such as:
  - - Employment History
    - Education
    - Legal Issues
    - Physical and mental health problems
    - Substance Abuse
    - Transportation
    - Child Care
- Ability to develop a consumer and family-centric career pathway plan that incorporates an employment preparation plan. This plan includes a wrap-around barrier reduction plan that consists of temporary supportive services offered across traditional workforce (core WIOA partners) and welfare reform (TANF) programs as well as social programs like SNAP, Child Care, and Medical Services.

Employers and Providers:

- A workforce system registration module that gives access to a one-stop workforce services experience
- Insight and access to customized labor market information
- Expanded visibility to potential traditional and non-traditional jobseeker candidate databases
- Program administrators and operating partners
- Screening, intake, eligibility determination and benefits issuance (EBT)
- Initial and ongoing case management
- Single view of a consumer where appropriate and feasible vis-à-vis a single individual view that intersects provision of contextual and behavioral consumer data
- Consumer information can be recorded once and shared across multiple programs for integrated work readiness assessment, employment planning, cross-program eligibility

determination, and aligning provider services, referrals, and invoicing, with case management tracking.

- An outreach and communication platform that integrates with social media channels to organize events, partnering organizations and entities, as well as active constituent relationship management
- The system looks for and alerts users to indicators of events that need attention prior to, rather than following, an event that may be avoided when identified in time. For example, a TANF case manager may become aware that a participant is nearing sanction early enough to prevent that action.
- Program Performance - Reporting, Fraud, Overpayments and Collections, Quality Assurance

ARWINS tracks payments to education, training and service providers across all programs. Integrated processing and tracking allows partners to share resources for payments, consolidate payment requests, and track payments across multiple programs for each consumer across the entire participant budget. ARWINS tracks and identifies total costs of benefits provided to any consumer. This information can be used to determine total costs per consumer participating in a range of activities as well as provides data on which development paths are most effective and cost efficient enabling outcome and expenditure planning and reporting.

ARWINS also manages the privacy and security that is needed, and within this constraint, allows multiple professionals to record and review appropriate information about the consumers they serve. Security can be configured in a way that allows each participant's service team, whether colocated or not, to stay current on what is being addressed, how, the expected outcomes, and actual results for that participant. This provides each team member, which may include a variety of professionals from different partnering organizations or businesses, a view of the universe of that participant, including needs, barriers, progress, and goals. ARWINS intends to allow communities to configure security in a way that supports the needs of the teams while protecting the privacy of the individual.

The Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) supports the development of, or enhancements to, longitudinal administrative databases that integrate workforce data education data. WDQI also emphasizes promoting improvements and the level of quality of these systems, in addition to increasing the accessibility of performance data, including data reported by employment services and training providers. Education data is being collected under the Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Education to which the WDQI is a parallel effort. The SLDS emphasizes the collection of workforce data and the WDQI was created, in part, to accompany the work being done on the education side to gather longitudinal data. WDQI is a collaborative partnership at the Federal level between the Departments of Labor and of Education. The long-term WDQI and Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems goal for States is to use their longitudinal data systems to follow individuals through school and into and through their work life. WDQI grant recipients are expected to demonstrate similarly established partnerships between state workforce and educational agencies. High quality and consistent data that is available from service providers about services offered, and how well their customers benefited as they enter or re-enter the labor market, are integral to informed consumer choices. In Arkansas, the WDQI is administered by the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services through partnership with the Arkansas Department of Education, Arkansas Department of Higher Education, Department of Human Services, Office of Skills Development and the Arkansas Research Center.

Data made available through the WDQI has been utilized to produce performance outcomes for various workforce development programs and to produce the baseline performance data for the WIOA core performance goals.

A cross agency team has been developed to review the existing data systems and to develop a plan for integrating the data available through these systems. The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services has been identified as the lead state agency and will be responsible for working with the Arkansas Department of Information Systems to develop an Information Technology Plan for implementation.

Arkansas Act 912 of 2017 established a Chief Data Officer and Chief Privacy Officer within the Arkansas Department of Information Systems. This Act supports the state's vision of sharing data across state agencies, while ensuring that all data will be properly protected under the joint leadership of the Chief Privacy Officer, Chief Security Officer, and Chief Data Officer.

It is the hope of the Governor that Arkansas will become the first state in this nation to achieve statewide data sharing and transparency capability.

#### Trade Adjustment Act (TAA) Program

The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services utilizes AJL as a staff assisted and self—service tool for the Labor Exchange, Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program beneficiaries and to assist employers when recruiting viable employment candidates.

The State's WIOA Titles I and III utilize the same systems for data collection and reporting. The remaining partners currently utilize independent systems for their program's data collection and reporting activities. Through the direction of the WIOA Roundtable, the core partners are developing a plan to integrate their current, independent systems.

#### 2. THE STATE POLICIES THAT WILL SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STATE'S STRATEGIES (E.G., 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

Representatives from each of core and non-core WIOA partner programs form the WIOA Roundtable. The WIOA Roundtable established committees to focus on critical areas in WIOA implementation to include: finance, IT system integration, policy development, core performance measures, sector strategies, and the development of the state workforce development plan.

The WIOA Roundtable Policy Committee meets routinely and has engaged the use of work groups formed from staff members across all agencies to draft policies for consideration by the policy committee. Each agency has representation on the policy committee in order to coordinate and align activities. After the WIOA Roundtable Policy Committee has reviewed and approved the policy, it goes to the appropriate committee of the Arkansas Workforce Development Board for consideration and adoption.

Our current Co-Enrollment and Co-Funding Policy, WIOA 2.7 is below.

#### **Co-Enrollment and Co-Funding- Policy Number: WIOA I-B- 2.7**

##### **PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this policy is to describe 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).

**REFERENCE:**

WIOA § 134(b)(2)(A)(v)

20 CFR 680.230

20 CFR 680.350

20 CFR 681.430 - 440

TEGL 19-16

A.C.A. 15-4-3711(a)(10)(D)

**POLICY:**

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 non-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 [TEGL 19-16].

**Co-enrollment within WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs**

Individuals who meet the respective program and service eligibility requirements may participate in Adult/Dislocated Worker and Youth programs concurrently. Local programs operators may determine the appropriate level and balance of services under the Youth and Adult/Dislocated Worker programs. This determination depends not only on the eligibility requirements of each program, but also on the services needed by each participant [TEGL 19-16].

Services available under each funding stream will depend on eligibility for services under that funding stream. Local program operators may determine the appropriate level and balance of services for each individual under each program. Local program operators must identify and track the funding streams that pay the costs of services and ensure no duplication of services [20 CFR 681.430]. However, if it is determined that only the Youth or the Adult/Dislocated Worker program array of services is appropriate for an individual aged 18 - 24, then the local program provider may enroll the participant in only one program [20 CFR 681.440].

**Co-enrollment and Co-funding with Other Programs**

WIOA Title I-B program providers are encouraged to work with other Workforce Center partners and other entities to provide a full array of needed services to participants. Not only does this strategy provide more services, it provides more case management to the participant, thus providing greater probability for success.

WIOA funding for training is limited to participants who are unable to obtain grant assistance from other sources to pay the costs of their training or require assistance beyond that available under grant assistance from other sources to pay the costs of such training. WIOA Title I-B Service Providers must not only ensure that participants apply for Pell Grants and other appropriate grants, but they must also coordinate funding with other one-stop partners and other entities for which the participant is eligible [20 CFR 680.230]. In order to appropriately coordinate funding and co-enrollment, case managers must be trained in programs and eligibility requirements of other one-stop partners and other local and state entities providing services needed by their participants so they can leverage the funding of other sources to provide all services needed by WIOA Title I-B participants [A.C.A. 15-4-3711(a)(10)(D)]. DOL

has established a goal of co-enrolling 50% of TAA participants in either WIOA Title I Adult or Dislocated Worker programs. Therefore, co-enrollment of TAA participants into the WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker or Adult program is strongly encouraged if the TAA participant meets eligibility requirements. The specific services provided to these participants will depend on the needs of the participant and funding availability in the local area. Some of these potential entities include, but are not limited to:

- - Career Pathways Initiative for custodial parents attending Arkansas two-year colleges
  - Single Parent Scholarship Funds for each county ([www.aspsf.org/scholarships](http://www.aspsf.org/scholarships))
  - Arkansas Rehabilitation Services and Division of Services for the Blind
  - TEA / Work Pays
  - TAA
  - WIOA Title I-D Dislocated Worker Grants and other Discretionary Grants
  - Veterans' Services
  - State and institutional scholarships
  - Department of Human Services
  - Food Stamp Employment and Training Programs
  - Arkansas Human Development Corporation (National Farmworker Jobs Program)
  - American Indian Center of Arkansas
  - Local housing authority
  - Local homeless shelter(s)
  - Local food banks and distribution centers
  - Local provider of assistance with utilities
  - Local provider of older worker services (Title V of the Older Americans Act of 1965, 42 U.S.C. § 3056 et seq.)
  - Community Service Block Grants
  - Programs funded by the Second Chance Act
  - Other Arkansas Job Center partners, as appropriate

WIOA Title 1-B Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth participants should be referred to and co-enrolled (or co-funded) with these services and other available services as appropriate. Local areas should have policies and procedures in place to ensure that other funds are leveraged [A.C.A. 15-4-3711(a)(10)(D), 20 CFR 680.230(b)].

WIOA Title I-B Adult and Dislocated Worker funds may support adult education and literacy activities of the Adult Education Section, the Arkansas Literacy Council, and other programs providing adult education and literacy activities if the participant is also engaged in one of the following [20 CFR 680.350]:

-



- Occupational skills training, including training for nontraditional employment
- On-the-job training (OJT)
- Incumbent worker training, as described in ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B - 3.6 (Incumbent Worker Training)
- Programs that combined workplace training and related instruction, which may include cooperative education programs
- Training programs operated by the private sector
- Skill upgrading and retraining
- Entrepreneurial training

Local areas must ensure that services are not duplicated for individuals enrolled in multiple programs.

Our current WIOA/TAA Co-Enrollment Policy, WIOA 6.2 is below.

**WIOA / TAA Co-Enrollment - Policy Number: WIOA I-B- 6.2**

**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this policy is to outline the policy and procedures for co-enrollment and joint case management between TAA and WIOA title I-B programs and the role of the One-Stop operator in assisting this process.

**REFERENCES:**

WIOA §§ 3(15)(B); 103; 121(b)(1)(B)(vii); & 134(c)(2)(B)

Reauthorization of the Trade Adjustment Assistance Reauthorization Act (TAARA) of 2015, title IV of the Trade Preferences Extension Act of 2015 (Pub. L. No. 114-27)

20 CFR 618 (TAA Final Rule)

20 CFR 677.150

TEGLs 14-18; 3-20; 4-20; & 10-16, Change 1

ADWS Issuances PY 19-09 & PY 20-01

Most recent versions of:

ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 1.2 (Definitions)

ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 2.1 (Common Eligibility Requirements)

ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 2.4 (Eligibility for Dislocated Worker Program)

ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 3.1 (Services for Adults and Dislocated Workers)

ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 3.3 (Occupational Skills Training)

**BACKGROUND:**

On July 10, 2020, the Employment and Training Administration of the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) issued the Final Rule for the Trade Adjustment Assistance for Workers (TAA) program. The TAA Final Rule became effective on September 21, 2020. As part of this Final Rule, regulations in 20 CFR part 90 and 20 CFR parts 617 and 618 were consolidated into one part: 20 CFR part 618, also referred to as 20 CFR 618 or the TAA Final Rule. The TAA Final Rule aligns

closely with parts of the WIOA title I-B programs, although there are some differences in definition of terms, allowed services and activities, and eligibility requirements.

TAA is a required partner in the Arkansas Workforce Center [*WIOA §121(b)(1)(B)(vii); 20 CFR 618.305*]. As allowed in 20 CFR 677.150(c)(3) and encouraged in TEGL 10-16, Change 1, TAA is one of the programs included in the WIOA Common Exit date for Arkansas [*ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 1.2 (Definition)*]. Many of the performance accountability indicators for the TAA program are now aligned with the performance indicators for WIOA core programs [*TEGL 14-18*].

Although there are some differences in eligibility, almost all individuals who qualify for employment and/or training assistance under TAA, also qualify for assistance under the WIOA title I Dislocated Worker Program (WIOA, for the purposes of this policy, unless otherwise stated). In many cases, the individual is able to become eligible for WIOA before he or she is eligible for TAA.

**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 CFR 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.

## **PROCEDURES:**

**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 the Local Workforce Development Area (both WIOA and ES) knows 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](mailto: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. 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.

**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 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 local requirement or a local 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:

- Is unlikely or unable to obtain or retain employment that leads to economic self-sufficiency, as determined by the LWDB, 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 LWDB, 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.

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.

**After the Company is Certified as Trade-affected:**

1. WIOA 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.

**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.

**GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE**

The Arkansas WIOA grievance procedure went through several changes. The present policy became effective October 1, 2021.

**State of Arkansas Grievance, Complaint, and Appeal Procedures Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title I Activities - Policy Number: WIOA I-B- 6.1, Change 2**

**I. Purpose:**

The purpose of this issuance is to outline the grievance and appeal procedure and to give the guidelines for grievance and appeal procedures required for local areas in accordance with WIOA § 181(c) and 20 CFR 683 .

**II. Reference:**

WIOA §§ 106, 116(g)(2)(A), 121(h), 122(c)(1), 181(c), & 188

2 CFR 200

20 CFR 361, 463, 652.8(j), 653.501(d)(2), 658.411, 658.450(b)(2), 677.225, 678.735, 678.750, 679.290, 680.480, 683, 685.140, 686.470 & 688.500

29 CFR 37.35 29 CFR Part 38

TEGL 37-14

TEN 1-17

Age Discrimination Act of 1975 (42 U.S.C. 6101 et seq.)

Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 794) § 504 H. R. 803—174 Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S.C. 1681 et seq.)

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000d et seq.)

Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978, which amended title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

**III. Background:**

Each State, local area, and direct recipient receiving funds under title I of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA), except for Job Corps, is mandated to establish

and maintain a procedure for grievances and complaints alleging violations of the requirements of WIOA title I from participants and other interested or affected parties [WIOA § 181(c)(1); 20 CFR 683.600(a)]. (The Job Corps procedure for grievances, complaints, and appeals is given in 20 CFR 686.470.)

Although there are some connotations of differences between the terms “grievance” and “complaint,” the two words are used interchangeably in this policy. No inference may be taken concerning the meaning of the two terms, even when only one is used.

**I. Each State, local area, and direct recipient must [20 CFR 683.600(b)]:**

- Provide information about the content of the grievance and complaint procedures to participants and other interested parties affected by the local workforce development system, including Arkansas Job Center partners and service providers;
- Require that every entity to which it awards WIOA title I funds provide information related to these grievance and/or complaint procedures to participants receiving WIOA title I-funded services from such entities; and
- Make reasonable efforts to ensure that the grievance and complaint procedures information is understood by affected participants and other individuals, including youth and those who are limited-English speaking individuals. Such efforts must comply with the requirements of 29 CFR 37.35 regarding the provision of services and information in languages other than English.

**II. Each local procedure must provide:**

- A process for dealing with grievances and complaints from participants and other interested parties affected by the local workforce development system, including Arkansas Job Center partners and service providers [20 CFR 683.600(c)(1)];
- An opportunity for an informal resolution and a hearing to be completed within 60 days of the filing of the grievance or complaint [WIOA § 181(c)(1); 20 CFR 683.600(c)(2)];
- A process that allows an individual alleging a labor standards violation to submit the grievance to binding arbitration procedure if a collective bargaining agreement covering the parties to the grievance so provides [20 CFR 683.600(c)(3)];
- A process for appealing complaint decisions made by local title I program providers to the local Workforce Development Board (LWDB) grievance process [ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 4.3 (Grievance and Complaint Procedures)]; and
- A process for resolving appeals from decisions made through the LWDB process, including an opportunity for an appeal to the State when:
  - No decision is reached within 60 days of the filing of the grievance or complaint; or
  - Either party is dissatisfied with the local hearing decision [20 CFR 683.600(c)(4)].

**III. The Arkansas State Grievance, Complaint, and Appeals Procedure provides:**

- A process for dealing with grievances and complaints from participants and other interested parties affected by the state 3 development system, including the one-stop system [20 CFR 683.600(d)(1)];
- A process for resolving appeals made to the State from the LWDB process [20 CFR 683.600(d)(2)];

- An opportunity for an informal resolution and a hearing to be completed within 60 days of the filing of the grievance or complaint [20 CFR 683.600(d)(4)]; and
- An opportunity for appeal to the Secretary of Labor when:
  - No decision has been reached within 60 days of the receipt of the complaint, grievance, or appeal request and either party wants to extend the complaint to the Secretary of Labor; or
  - A decision has been reached and the party to which the decision is adverse wants to appeal to the Secretary of Labor [WIOA § 181(c)(2)(A); 20 CFR 683.600(d)(5) & 683.610(a)].

#### **IV. Arkansas State Procedures for Grievances, Complaint, and Appeals for WIOA Title I Activities, other than Title I-D Job Corps**

1. **These procedures are applicable only for WIOA title I activities (other than title I-D Job Corps) in Arkansas.** Grievance and complaint procedures for Job Corps, Adult Education and Literacy, Employment Assistance authorized under the Wagner Peyser Act, and Vocational Rehabilitation Services may be obtained from these respective entities. This policy does apply to complaints concerning one-stop delivery systems (WIOA title I-B), but complaints will be referred to appropriate partners and their procedures if the complaint directly affects them.
2. **What guidelines will be followed notifying individuals and entities concerning their right to appeal and the appeal process [20 CFR 683.600]?**
  - The entire grievance procedure, including the DOL Complaint/Apparent Violation Form (ETA 8429), will be posted on the appropriate section of the website of the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (ADWS).
  - Appropriate information from this policy will be included in requests for proposals or qualifications, opportunities for grants, and other applicable announcements.
  - Information from this policy applying to individuals will be displayed in all Arkansas Workforce Centers and must be available to any individual who requests the information. The portion of the policy that applies to applicants and/or participants may be translated into other languages, read to individuals, or produced in other forms as required to be understood by all affected individuals.
3. **What general guidelines apply to all complaints or grievances?**
  1. If a grievance or complaint is filed with the Director of ADWS that, in the opinion of the Director, should first be filed with a local WIOA title I-B program provider, a WIOA partner, or the LWDB, that grievance will be remanded to the appropriate entity to be processed there. Information concerning the appropriate actions will be sent to the complainant or informant with the acknowledgement of the complaint. Contact with an individual complainant may also be made by telephone or email to determine the details of the complaint, to give guidance concerning proper grievance procedures, and/or to attempt to reach an informal decision.
  2. The complainant's statement should be as complete as possible. The complainant should use the DOL Complaint/Apparent Violation Form (ETA 8429) if possible, but the complaint may be in any form. The complaint should include, if possible:
    - a. The full name and contact information (telephone number, email address, and or physical address), of the person making the complaint;
    - b. The full name and address (personal or business) of the person or entity against whom the complaint is made;



c. A clear and concise statement of the facts, including pertinent dates, constituting the alleged violation;

d. The provisions of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), WIOA regulation, grant, agreement, law, state policy, and/or local policy believed to have been violated;

e. A statement of attempts to resolve the issue at the local level, if appropriate; and

f. A statement disclosing whether proceedings involving the subject of the request have been commenced or concluded before any federal, state, or local authority, and if so, the date of the commencement or conclusion and the name and address of the authority.

3. Time limitations of complaints, grievances, and appeals are listed in the sections of each particular type of complaint.

4. Within fourteen (14) calendar days of receipt of the complaint/grievance/appeal, the Director of ADWS or his/her designee will acknowledge receipt of the grievance to all parties by certified mail, return receipt requested. 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; and
- Notify all parties of the right to request a hearing.

5. The following procedures will apply to a hearing, if requested:

- The hearing will be informal. Technical rules of evidence will not apply. Hearsay evidence will be admissible at the discretion of the hearing examiner.
- 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 and documentary evidence.
- The respondent will cooperate by making available any person under his or her control or employ to testify, if appropriate, and to release requested documents relevant to the issue after the requesting party has established that such testimony/documentation is relative and not cumulative.
- 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 or complaint.

6. If a hearing is not requested, 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;

- Interview of principle parties and opportunity for all parties to offer rebuttal to information received; and
- A written decision, to be made by the Director of ADWS or designee within 60 days of receipt of the grievance or complaint.

7. A written decision will be sent by certified mail, return receipt requested, and will contain the following:

- Statement assuring that all steps included in the grievance/complaint procedures have been adhered to;
- Issue(s) being decided;
- Statement of facts;
- Reasons for the decision;
- Remedies to be offered, if appropriate;
- Summary; and
- Advise of the right to appeal the decision, if allowed for the particular type of complaint/grievance/appeal. (Information about appeals is provided for each type of complaint/grievance/appeal.)

8. Nothing in this policy precludes a grievant or complainant from pursuing a remedy authorized under Federal, State, or local law [20 CFR 683.600(h)].

9. Variances to these general guidelines are given as applicable in the portions of this policy concerning particular types of grievances, complaints, and appeals.

**4. What are the most common addresses used in filing a grievance, complaint, or appeal?**

Director of ADWS:

Director

Arkansas Division of Workforce Services

PO Box 2981

Little Rock, AR 72203

Secretary of Labor:

Secretary

U.S. Department of Labor

200 Constitution Ave. NW.

Washington, DC 20210

Attention: ASET

**5. Who may file a grievance, complaint, or appeal; and what are the regulations for filing an appeal under WIOA title I programs, except for Job Corps; and what procedures, policies, and regulations apply?**

1. An individual who has been discriminated against because of race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, childbirth, and related medical conditions; and transgender status, gender identity, and sex stereotyping), national origin (including limited English proficiency), age (except as required by law), disability, political affiliation or belief, citizenship status as a lawfully admitted immigrant authorized to work in the United States, or participation in a WIOA title I-financially assisted program or activity [WIOA § 188; 29 CFR Part 38; 20 CFR 652.8(j), 653.501(d)(2), 658.411, 658.450(b)(2), 683.285, 683.420, 683.410, 683.600(g)(1), 685.140, & 688.500; TEGL 37-14]:
  - WIOA prohibits discrimination or denial of participation on the basis of age under the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 (42 U.S.C. 6101 et seq.); on the basis of disability under section 504 H. R. 803—174 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 794); on the basis of sex under title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S.C. 1681 et seq.) or the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978, which amended title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; or on the basis of race, color, or national origin under title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000d et seq.). Programs and activities funded or otherwise financially assisted in whole or in part under WIOA are considered to be programs and activities receiving Federal financial assistance, even if individuals do not receive assistance in the form of money.
  - Participation in programs and activities or receiving funds under WIOA title I must be available to citizens and nationals of the United States, lawfully admitted permanent resident aliens, refugees, asylees, and parolees, and other immigrants authorized by the Attorney General to work in the United States, using eligibility requirements for each program.
  - No person may discriminate against an individual who is a participant in a WIOA program or activity, with respect to the terms and conditions affecting, or rights provided to, the individual, solely because of the status of the individual as a participant.
  - Participants shall not be employed under WIOA title I to carry out the construction, operation, or maintenance of any part of any facility that is used or to be used for sectarian instruction or as a place for religious worship (except with respect to the maintenance of a facility that is not primarily or inherently devoted to sectarian instruction or religious worship, in a case in which the organization operating the facility is part of a program or activity providing services to participants).
  - Individuals who have experienced discrimination or denied services based on a – d above should follow the procedures in the poster “Equal Opportunity is the Law” posted in each Arkansas Workforce Center.
  - If no such poster is displayed and an employee of the Arkansas Workforce Center cannot provide the poster, contact the WIOA Equal Opportunity Manager of the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (ADWS) at:

WIOA Equal Opportunity Manager

PO Box 2981

Little Rock, AR 72203

Telephone: 501-682-3106

Arkansas Relay Services: 1-800-285-1131

2. A participant or other interested party who has submitted a complaint or grievance at the local level and who has not received a decision within 60 days or is dissatisfied with the local decision [WIOA §181 (c)(1); 20 CFR 683.600, 683.610]:

- The appeal must be sent no later than 30 days after the local decision. If no decision was given at the local level, the appeal must be sent no later than 90 days after the filing of the local complaint. The appeal should be sent by certified mail, return receipt requested to the Director of ADWS at the address in Section IV.D. of this policy.
- An investigation will be done, and an informal resolution will be made within 60 days of receipt of the appeal. If the complainant requests, the resolution procedure will include an informal hearing.
- If a decision has not been reached in 60 days, either party may file an appeal to the Secretary of Labor no later than 120 days after filing the appeal with the State. If one party is dissatisfied with the decision, an appeal may be made to the Secretary of Labor no later than 60 days after receipt of the appeal decision. The Secretary of Labor will make a decision no later than 120 days after receiving the appeal. The appeal must be sent by certified mail, return receipt requested, to the Secretary of Labor at the address in Section D of this policy.

A copy of the appeal must be simultaneously provided to the ETA Regional Administrator and the opposing party. The address for the ETA Regional Administrator for Arkansas is:

Regional Administrator

U.S. Department of Labor/ETA

525 Griffin Street, Room 317

Dallas, TX 75202

3. A participant or other interested party who has a complaint or grievance concerning astatewide WIOA program [WIOA §181 (c)(1); 20 CFR 683.600 & 683.610]:
  - The grievance or complaint must be sent no later than 60 days after the date of the occurrence to the Director of ADWS at the address in Section IV.D. of this policy. DOL complaint/Apparent Violation Form (ETA 8429) should be used for the complaint; and the complaint should be sent by certified mail, return receipt requested, following the guidelines in Section IV.C.2. of this policy.
  - If a grievance or complaint is filed with the State that, in the opinion of the Director of ADWS, should first be filed with the local workforce development board or service provider or with a particular one-stop partner, that grievance or complaint will be remanded to the administrator or director of the appropriate entity to be processed there. This decision will be made within 30 days of receiving the grievance/complaint. Notification of remanding will be sent to the complainant or informant.
  - If the grievance or complaint should properly be addressed at the State level, an investigation will be done, and an informal resolution will be made within 60 days of receipt of the appeal. If the complainant requests, the resolution procedure will include a hearing.
  - If a decision has not been reached in 60 days, either party may file an appeal to the Secretary of Labor no later than 120 days after filing the appeal with the State. If one party is dissatisfied with the decision, an appeal may be made to the Secretary of Labor no later than 60 days after receipt of the state's decision. The Secretary of Labor will make a decision no later than 120 days after receiving the appeal. The appeal must be sent by certified mail, return receipt requested, to the Secretary of Labor at the address in Section D of this policy.

A copy of the appeal must be simultaneously provided to the ETA Regional Administrator and the opposing party. The address for the ETA Regional Administrator for Arkansas is:

Regional Administrator

U.S. Department of Labor/ETA

525 Griffin Street Room 317

Dallas, TX 75202

4. *A unit of local government that has requested designation as a local area but has been denied such designation [Arkansas State Plan § VI.a.1.C.; WIOA § 106; 20 CFR 679.290, 683.630 & 683.640.]*
  - 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)(3), 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 appeal must be sent by certified mail, return receipt requested to: Arkansas Workforce Development Board

Attn: Appeal/Grievance Review

P.O. Box 2981

Little Rock, Arkansas 72202

- The State Board will investigate the appeal, including conducting a hearing in accordance with the rules outlined in Section IV.C.5 of this policy, and the State Board 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 D of this policy.
  - A copy of the appeal must be simultaneously provided to the State Board at the address in Part b above. 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 appeals 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 [WIOA § 106(b)(5); 20 CFR 679.290 & 683.640].
5. *A local area or other grant sub-recipient that does not agree with the findings of a monitoring report or audit [20 CFR 683 Part D]:*
    - The Governor must monitor LWDBs annually for compliance with applicable laws and regulations in accordance with the State monitoring system developed by the Governor in compliance with 20 CFR 683.410(b) [20 CFR 683.400(c)(2)]. Regular monitoring must be on-site reviews to ensure that local areas are achieving the objectives of WIOA, are

following regulations of WIOA, and are in compliance with 2 CFR part 200 [20 CFR 683.410(b)]. Documentation of monitoring, including monitoring reports and audit work papers must be available for review by the Secretary of Labor, the Governor, or a representative of the Federal government authorized to request the information [20 CFR 683.400(d)].

- The Governor must require that prompt corrective action be taken for any substantial violations of the standards and regulations of WIOA and 2 CFR 200 including corrective actions described in 2 CFR 200.207 and 200.338 as well as State laws and policies. The governor must impose sanctions if a local area fails to take the required corrected action [20 CFR 683.410(b), 2 CFR 200]
- The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (ADWS), as the direct grant recipient, is the entity responsible for monitoring subgrant recipients. ADWS is also responsible for resolving findings that arise from the monitoring reviews, investigations, and audits of all funds awarded [20 CRF 683.420(a)].
- The Secretary of Labor is responsible for monitoring grant funds provided to ADWS [20 CRF 683.420(b)].
- The resolution of findings of subgrant recipients, except for non-discrimination findings, will be made in accordance with the procedures outlined by ADWS and provided to local areas.
- If, after repeated attempts at resolving issues, corrective action is determined to be inadequate and findings are unresolved, special conditions or sanctions may be imposed on the local area, as allowed under standards and regulations of WIOA and 2 CFR 200, including corrective actions described in 2 CFR 200.208 for “Specific Conditions” and 200.339 “Remedies for Non-Compliance .”
- Except for determinations involving the revoking of the local plan or reorganization of the local area program providers, the local area or other grant sub-recipient may appeal the final determination report within ten (10) calendar days of receipt of the decision to the Director of ADWS, who will appoint a hearing officer. The appeal must be sent to the Director of DWS at the address in Section IV.D. of this policy.
- h. The following documentation must be included with the appeal:
  - The local area or monitored entity must formally appeal the decision of the monitoring report in writing by submitting an official letter (on letterhead) explaining the purpose for the appeal. The letter must clearly identify each finding being appealed by the local area or monitored entity
  - A copy of the State’s Final Determination
  - Copies of the original supporting documentation provided to ADWS during the monitoring process. The original documentation should demonstrate how the local area or monitored entity met the required federal and/or state regulation(s) inclusive of citations from Federal and/or State Regulations

**Note:** The appeal and the aforementioned documentation must be sent to the Director of DWS at the address in Section IV.D. of this policy and an **electronic** copy to ADWS.WIOAAppeals@arkansas.gov

- The hearing officer will conduct an investigation, including a hearing if requested, and will reach a decision within 60 days. If a decision has not been reached in 60 days or if either party wishes to appeal the decision to the Department of Labor, either party may file an appeal to the Secretary of Labor no later than 60 days after the receipt of the

decision of the hearing officer or time for the hearing officer to make a decision has expired. The appeal must be sent by certified mail, return receipt requested, to the Secretary of Labor at the address in Section IV.D. of this policy. A copy of the appeal must be simultaneously provided to the ETA Regional Administrator at the address in Section IV.E.2. of this policy and to the opposing party. The Secretary must make a final decision on the appeal no later than 120 days after receiving the appeal.

- If the sanctions involve the revoking of the local plan or reorganization of the local area program providers, the procedure in Section IV.6. of this policy must be followed.
  - No later than ten (10) calendar days after the final action on the grievance or the notification of imposed sanctions (if no appeal is made), copies of the report, responses and other related written communication will be mailed to the Local Workforce Development Board Chairperson and Executive Director.
  - Findings arising from investigations or reviews conducted under nondiscrimination laws will be referred to the state EO officer and will be resolved in accordance with WIOA § 188 and the Department of Labor nondiscrimination regulations, codified at 29 CFR 38 [20 CFR 683.420].
6. A local area that has been found in substantial violation of WIOA title I or has failed to meet local performance indicators for 3 consecutive program years, and has received a notice from the Governor that either all or part of the local plan will be revoked or that a reorganization will occur [WIOA §§ 116(g)(2)(A) & 184(b); 20 CFR 361.225, 463.225, 677.225, 683.410, & 683.650]:
- If the local area has been found in substantial violation of WIOA title I and has received notice from the Governor that either all or part of the local plan will be revoked or that a reorganization will occur as described in WIOA §184(b)(1), the local area may appeal the sanctions to the Secretary of Labor at the address in Section IV.D. of this policy. The appeal must be sent by certified mail, return receipt requested, and a copy of the appeal must be simultaneously provided to the Director of ADWS at the address in Section IV.D. of this policy. The appeal must be filed no later than 30 days after receipt of written notification of the revoked plan or imposed reorganization. The Secretary will notify the Governor and the appellant in writing of the Secretary's decision within 45 days after receipt of the appeal. In making the decision, the Secretary may consider any comments submitted by the Governor in response to the appeals. The imposed sanctions do not become effective until either time for the appeal has expired or the Secretary has issued a decision concerning the appeal [20 CFR 683.650(a)].
  - If the local area has failed to meet local performance indicators for three (3) consecutive program years and has received a notice from the Governor or his/her selected designee of intent to impose a reorganization plan, the LWDB and chief elected official(s) for the local area may jointly appeal to the Governor to rescind or revise the reorganization. The appeal must be sent by certified mail, return receipt requested to the Director of ADWS at the in Section IV.D. of this policy no later than 30 days after notice of the reorganization plan. The appeal must be jointly filed by the LWDB and the chief elected official(s). The Governor or designee must make a final decision no later than 30 days after receipt of the appeal. An appeal of the Governor's final decision may be submitted by certified mail, return receipt requested, to the Secretary of Labor at the address in Section IV.D. of this policy, no later than 30 days after receiving the decision of the Governor. A copy of the appeal must be simultaneously sent to the Governor through the Director of ADWS at the address in Section IV.D. of this policy. The decision of the Governor on the appeal becomes effective at the time it is issued and remains effective unless the Secretary of Labor rescinds or revises the reorganization plan under WIOA §116(g)(2)(C). The Secretary of Labor must make a final decision within 30 days

of receipt of the joint appeal. In making the final decision, the Secretary of Labor may consider any comments submitted by the Governor in response to the appeals [20 CFR 683.650(c) & 677.225].

7. 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 [WIOA § 121(h)(2)(E); 20 CFR 361.750, 463.735, 463.738, 463.750, & 678.750]:

- A required One-Stop partner may appeal a determination regarding the portion of funds to be provided to operate the One-Stop 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 days after the determination regarding the infrastructure funding, and must be sent by certified mail, return receipt requested to the Director of ADWS at the address in Section IV.D. of this policy.
- The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services will investigate the appeal, including conducting a hearing in accordance with the rules outlined in Section IV.C.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 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 [20 CFR 361.500, 463.500, & 678.500; Arkansas State Unified Plan § VI.a.1.D.].

8. A training provider (including a provider of on-the-job training) that has been denied eligibility or has had its eligibility terminated [WIOA § 122(c)(1); 20 CFR 680.480 & 683.630(b)]:

- The same procedure is used whether the status as a training provider is denied or terminated by the LWDB or by ADWS or if the status of eligibility as a provider of on-the-job training or customized training provided by a one-stop operator.
- If the determination was made at the local area (such as for violations discussed in 20 CFR 680.480), the local grievance procedure must be followed before the appeal can be made to the State level. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the decision at the local level or if no decision is made within 60 days of the filing of the complaint, an appeal may be made to the State using the procedure in IV.E.2. of this policy.
- If the decision to deny or terminate was made at the State level (such as by ADWS's discovery of inaccurate information submitted or during the biennial review, as discussed in 20 CFR 680.480), the appeal may be sent directly to the State.
- The appeal must be sent by certified mail, return receipt requested to the Director of ADWS at the address in Section IV.D. of this policy.
- The complainant has the opportunity for an informal hearing, using the guidelines in Section IV.C.5. of this policy, with an opportunity for resolution will be completed within 60 days of the filing of the grievance or complaint [20 CFR 683.630(b)(2)].



- Denial or termination of eligibility made by ADWS or upheld by ADWS in an appeal may be appealed to a hearing officer appointed by the Director of ADWS within ten (10) calendar days of receipt of the decision of the ADWS appeal. The appeal must be sent to the Director of ADWS at the address in Section IV.D. of this policy. The hearing officer will conduct an investigation, including a hearing if requested, and will reach a decision within 60 days.
- A decision under this State appeal process may not be appealed to the Secretary of Labor [20 CFR 683.630(b)].
- 9. Anyonewithknowledge of criminal activity, including fraud and abuse, under the WIOA system [20 CFR 683.200 (h) & 683.620; 2 CFR 200.113 & 200.338]:
- Information and complaints involving criminal fraud, waste, abuse, or other criminal activity must be reported immediately through the Department of Labor's Incident Reporting System:

Department of Labor Office of Inspector General

Office of Investigations

Room 55514

200 Constitution Avenue NW

Washington, DC 20210

Or to the corresponding Regional Inspector General for Investigations

Or to the Hotline number at 1-800-347-3756

Or through the Web site: [www.oig.dol.gov/contact.htm](http://www.oig.dol.gov/contact.htm).

- If information is sent to an Inspector General, a copy should be simultaneously sent to:

Employment and Training Administration

US Department of Labor

200 Constitution Avenue NW

Washington, DC 20210

- All recipients of WIOA title I awards must disclose in a timely manner and in writing to the Federal awarding agency or pass-through entity all violations of Federal criminal law involving fraud, bribery, or gratuity violations potentially affecting the Federal award. Failure to make required disclosure can result in any of the remedies described in 2 CFR 200.338, including withholding of funds, suspension or termination of the award, suspension, or disbarment.

### ***FUNDING FOR INFRASTRUCTURE COSTS***

ADWS developed a comprehensive Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) template that detailed the requirements for funding infrastructure costs. This MOU template stated that Boards, with the agreement of CEO's, must develop and enter into memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with statutorily required one-stop partners for operation and funding of a one-stop delivery system in the local area. The One-Stop Operating Budget and Infrastructure Funding

Agreement, attachments to the MOU template, establish a financial plan, including terms and conditions, to fund the services and operating costs of the Local Area Arkansas Workforce Center network.

This MOU template included a Dispute Resolution Process that allows a one-stop partner to file appeals regarding infrastructure costs and the appeal results in a change to the one-stop partner's infrastructure cost contributions, the MOU must be updated to reflect the final one-stop partner infrastructure cost contributions.

During the 92nd General Assembly - Regular Session (2019), the Arkansas General Assembly consolidated the core WIOA programs (Titles I, II, III, IV) under the newly-created Department of Commerce.

State partners have been given technical assistance and guidance throughout the Infrastructure Funding Agreement negotiation process that focused on the various methods of allocating shared costs, distinguishing what costs are and are not required to be in the Memorandum of Understandings/ Infrastructure Funding Agreements among partner programs, and Title I has taken the lead in coordinating the Accounts Payable and Accounts Receivables following the quarterly reconciliation process to ensure that these standards are adhered to on the state-level. Although several basis of allocating infrastructure costs were discussed in each local area, the primary basis for allocation is square footage, which is used to allocate shared costs. Costs are allocated by square footage unless the costs can be directly assigned to a partner or program in accordance with the 2 CFR 200 guidelines that distinguish direct and indirect costs. Following these guidelines, all 10 Local Workforce Development Boards have entered MOUs with their local partners and have implemented cost sharing across the state with partner programs.

### ***STATE FUNDING MECHANISM***

State Infrastructure Funding Mechanism (SFM) Process. One of the hallmarks of WIOA is an increased emphasis on Local WDBs as conveners who are responsible for the MOU negotiation process. Initiating negotiations via a Local Funding Mechanism (LFM) allows for decision making to be kept at the local level.

The Arkansas Workforce Development Board's (AWDB) goal is to provide the support and guidance necessary to help all Local Areas reach agreement under the LFM rather than under the SFM. Local WDBs are urged to seek guidance and support from the state throughout the negotiation process to help prevent the triggering of the SFM. However, if a Local WDB is unable to complete an IFA with all its AJC partners, then the SFM will be triggered and the AWDB, with the Governor's approval, must then determine the required contributions of each AJC partner. If a Local WDB does not believe they will be able to come to an agreement regarding joint infrastructure costs with any of their AJC partners by established deadlines, they must notify the AWDB Director immediately by following the steps prescribed below.

#### **State Infrastructure Funding Mechanism Steps**

##### **Step 1: Written notice of failure to reach consensus given to the AWDB Director.**

If the Local WDB, local one-stop partners, and CEO(s) cannot reach consensus on methods of sufficiently funding a one-stop center's infrastructure costs and the amounts to be contributed by each local partner program, the Local WDB is required to notify the AWDB Director.

##### **Step 2: Local negotiation materials provided to the AWDB Director**

In order to assist the AWDB, Local WDB must provide the appropriate and relevant materials and documents used in the negotiations under the LFM, preferably when notifying AWDB Director of the failure to reach consensus. At a minimum, the Local WDB must give the AWDB Director:

- (1) the local WIOA plan;
- (2) the cost allocation methodology or methodologies proposed by the partners to be used in determining the proportionate share;
- (3) the proposed amounts or budget to fund infrastructure costs and the amount of partner funds included;
- (4) the type of funds (cash, non-cash, and third-party in-kind contributions) available;
- (5) any proposed or agreed upon one-stop center or system budget; and
- (6) any partially agreed upon, proposed, or draft IFAs.

The Local WDBs also may give AWDB Director additional materials that they find to be appropriate.

*Step 3: AWDB reviews the provided one-stop center infrastructure budget(s).*

The AWDB Director will coordinate with the AWDB Chair to arrange a review of the one-stop center infrastructure budget by the AWDB or one of its Committees.

The AWDB or its committee must determine the infrastructure budget(s). Depending on the local delivery system structure, there may be more than one infrastructure budget, each of which is contained in a one-stop operating budget.

*Step 4: AWDB will determine each one-stop partners' proportionate share*

Utilizing the approved budget, the AWDB will calculate each partner's contribution consistent with the cost allocation methodologies contained in the Uniform Guidance. Each one-stop partners' proportionate shares are determined.

The AWDB will inform the Local Board, in writing, of each one-stop partners' proportionate share under the SFM.

*Appeal of the AWDB's Decision*

One-Stop partners have the right to file an appeal of the AWDB's determination regarding the one-stop partner's portion of funds to be provided for one-stop infrastructure costs under the SFM.

Within 5 business days from the written notification of the AWDB's determination of proportionate shares by each one-stop partner under the SFM, appeals may be sent by email to:

Arkansas Appeal Tribunal  
501 Woodlane Avenue, Ste. 261 S  
Little Rock, AR 72201

## **TRAINING PROVIDER ELIGIBILITY PROCEDURE**

### **Eligible Training Provider Initial Eligibility Certification Procedure**

#### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this procedure is to outline the certification process for new eligible training providers in accordance with the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014.

#### **Reference:**

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Section 122.

**Procedure:**

To be included on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL), providers must submit an electronic application to the Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB) for the area where they wish to provide training services. A separate electronic application must be submitted for each training program. Also, if applying for a training program to be offered at different training locations, a separate electronic application is required for each training location. Each training program must be on the current *Projected Employment Opportunities List*.

Providers who may apply to be included on the ETPL include:

- An institution of higher education that provides a program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential;
- Another public or private provider of a program of training services, which may include joint labor-management organizations, and eligible providers of adult education and literacy activities, if such activities are provided in combination with occupational skills training. These providers must have all appropriate licenses to operate in the State of Arkansas and will be required to submit copies of such licenses. The information will then be verified by the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services (ADWS).

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 providers will be required to contact ADWS to make known their desire to be listed and provide documentation that verifies their program is a registered apprenticeship program certified by the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Apprenticeship.

The first step of the process is to determine if a provider is qualified to apply using initial eligibility status. All provider/program combinations that have not been previously eligible under WIOA Section 122 or the Workforce Investment Act Section 122 may apply under these rules.

**Projected Employment Opportunities:**

All training must be directly linked to employment opportunities either in the local area or in an area to which the individual is willing to relocate. If a local area does not have a particular occupation on its projected employment opportunities list, they may send a participant to, or a customer may choose, a training provider/program not approved by their LWDB if that participant agrees in writing that s/he would be willing to relocate or commute to become employed in that occupation.

An occupation is considered an employment opportunity for a local area if it appears on the *Projected Employment Opportunities List* for the State or local area as published by the Labor Market Information (LMI) division of the Arkansas Department of Workforce

Services. 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 Labor Market Information division of the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services to have the occupation added within the Arkansas Consumer Report System 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 the training occupations before the occupations can be added to the Arkansas Consumer Report System.

In an effort to increase access to training for rural areas, training providers may be classroom based, online based, or outside of the state. Providers of all types are required to meet the same eligibility and performance criteria. A provider must be in statutory compliance with Arkansas laws in relation to operation as a training education institution.

#### **Required Information for Initial Eligibility:**

The information to be included on the initial application is described below.

1. A description of the training program to be offered including the costs of tuition, books and fees.
2. The program completion rate for **all** individuals participating in the applicable program to be offered by the provider.

**To calculate:** The number of all participants who completed the program/course during the reporting period divided by the total number of all participants.

3. If the training provider is in a partnership with business/industry and an explanation of the partnership.
4. If the training program leads to a recognized postsecondary credential and a description of the credential.
5. If the program aligns with in-demand industry sectors and occupations.

#### **The Initial Eligibility Certification Process:**

1. Providers eligible to apply under this section will complete an online electronic application for “initial certification” through the automated Arkansas Job Link (AJL) ProviderLink system located at <https://www.arjoblink.arkansas.gov>/Providers must apply for each individual program. If multiple training locations exist, an application must be made for **each location**. Providers may make application to any or all Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs) at the same time.
2. The LWDBs will receive the application via the AJL ProviderLink system if (1) The program’s CIP Code appears on the current *Projected Employment Opportunities List* for the State or Local Workforce Development Area, and (2) Required items are complete and meet minimum qualifications.
3. The LWDB will electronically approve or disapprove each application received via the Internet. The LWDB is responsible for ensuring that the provider’s performance information meets or exceeds the State minimum levels.
4. Upon approval by the LWDB, the provider will be automatically placed on the Eligible Training Provider Information menu of the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (ADWS) 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:

1. Written justification for the missing data, and
2. The process that will be used to track and record the required information for re-certification.

The LWDB may choose to waive the performance documentation requirement in this situation. The LWDB should submit in writing their intentions to do so to the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services LMI division for processing of the application to continue.

**Required Information for Continued Eligibility:**

The information to be included on the continued application is described below.

1. The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program
2. The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program
3. The median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program
4. 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
5. Information on cost of attendance, including cost of tuition and fees, for program participants
6. Information on the program completion rate for program participants
7. A description of how the provider provides access to training services, including to rural areas, including the use of technology
8. 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
9. Any applicable state licensure requirements of training providers
10. A description of training provider's ability to offer industry-recognized certificates and/or credentials through the program
11. A description of training provider's ability to offer programs that lead to post-secondary credentials
12. A description of the quality of the program of training services including a program that leads to a recognized post-secondary credential
13. 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
14. The timeliness and accuracy of the eligible training provider's performance reports
15. Relevant information reported to State agencies on Federal and State training programs other than programs within WIOA Title I.

While we do not intend to 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.

**The Continued Eligibility Certification Process:**

1.
  - a. Providers eligible to apply under this section will complete an online electronic application for "continued certification" through the automated Arkansas Job Link (AJL) ProviderLink system located at

<https://www.arjoblink.arkansas.gov/Providers> must apply for each individual program. If multiple training locations exist, an application must be made for each location. Providers may make application to any or all Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs) at the same time.

- b. The LWDBs will receive the application via the AJL ProviderLink system if (1) The program's CIP Code appears on the current Projected Employment Opportunities List for the State or Local Workforce Development Area, and (2) Required items are complete and meet minimum qualifications.
- c. The LWDB will electronically approve or disapprove each application received via the Internet. The LWDB is responsible for ensuring that the provider's performance information meets or exceeds the State minimum levels.
- d. Upon approval by the LWDB, the provider will be automatically placed on the ACRS website as a WIOA Eligible Training Provider for the applicable program.

### **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 take into account 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.

### **Registered Apprenticeship Programs**

Registered Apprenticeship (RA) programs are an exception to the initial and continued eligibility certification processes. They are exempt from performance and reporting-related requirements. These programs have already gone through a rigorous assessment as part of the registration process with the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Apprenticeship (DOLETA/OA). Inclusion of RA programs on the state Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) enhances participants' awareness of the programs and provides local workforce systems with a mechanism to support this valuable training model. All RA programs listed on the ETPL will automatically be considered as a statewide demand occupation for as long as they have an unfilled opening(s). Local boards may not require additional criteria of RA programs.

To be listed on the state ETPL, a RA program should complete the online ADWS Registered Apprenticeship Form. Once the completed form is received and reviewed for completeness, the RA program will be displayed on the ADWS website at:

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

### **Notification and Appeal Procedures**

If a provider of training services has its eligibility denied, or terminated due to substantial violations, failure to provide requested performance information without reasonable justification, or otherwise are removed for good cause, 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 by following the procedures in ADWS Policy No. WIOA I – 6.1, Change 2 – State of Arkansas Grievance, Complaint, and Appeal Procedures, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title I Activities.

### 3. STATE PROGRAM AND STATE BOARD OVERVIEW

#### A. STATE AGENCY ORGANIZATION

**Arkansas Division of Workforce Services** administers nine of the thirteen 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.

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 director is appointed by the Governor and is a member of the Governor's Workforce Cabinet. The agency has approximately 1,000 employees and has eight divisions which include: Unemployment Insurance, Employment Assistance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Legal Services, Financial Management and Administrative Services, New Hire Registry and Career Readiness Certification, and Field Operations.

Below is a list of programs administered by the Division.

- - - Wagner-Peyser Employment Services
    - Local Veterans Employment Representatives
    - Disabled Veterans Outreach Program
    - WIOA Youth Program
    - WIOA Adult Program
    - WIOA Dislocated Worker Program
    - Rapid Response and Layoff Aversion
    - Trade Adjustment Assistance
    - Alien Labor Certification
    - Workforce Opportunity Tax Credit



- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Transitional Employment Assistance
- Arkansas Work Pays Program
- Labor Market Information
- Unemployment Insurance
- Trade Readjustment Allowance
- New Hire Registry
- Career Readiness Certification
- Discretionary Grants

Note: Effective July 1, 2019, the Division added the Adult Education Section 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. The agency operates the above listed programs through a budget of just over \$1 billion annually and awards funding for WIOA Title services to ten local workforce development boards for delivery of services locally in addition to numerous sub grantees for delivery of services through the TANF program and discretionary grants awarded to the agency from multiple sources.

The **Office of Skills Development (OSD)** is under the authority and leadership of the Career Education and Workforce Development Board. The State Board is appointed by the Governor and is charged with the responsibility for overseeing and directing the work of OSD. The Director for the agency is appointed by the Governor. Their mission is to provide leadership and contribute resources to serve the diverse and changing career educational needs of Arkansas youth, adults, and persons with disabilities.

**Adult Education Section Division (AES)** funds 36 local adult education programs and literacy councils and the Arkansas Adult Learning Resource Center (AALRC), the adult education's professional development training center. The adult education programs are supported with \$5.2 million received under Title II of the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act and \$19 million in state funding.

**Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS)** 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) in order 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 ARS Commissioner and senior management provide leadership to the agency's major components including, Field Services, the Arkansas Career Training Institute (ACTI), Access and Accommodations, and Business Engagement.

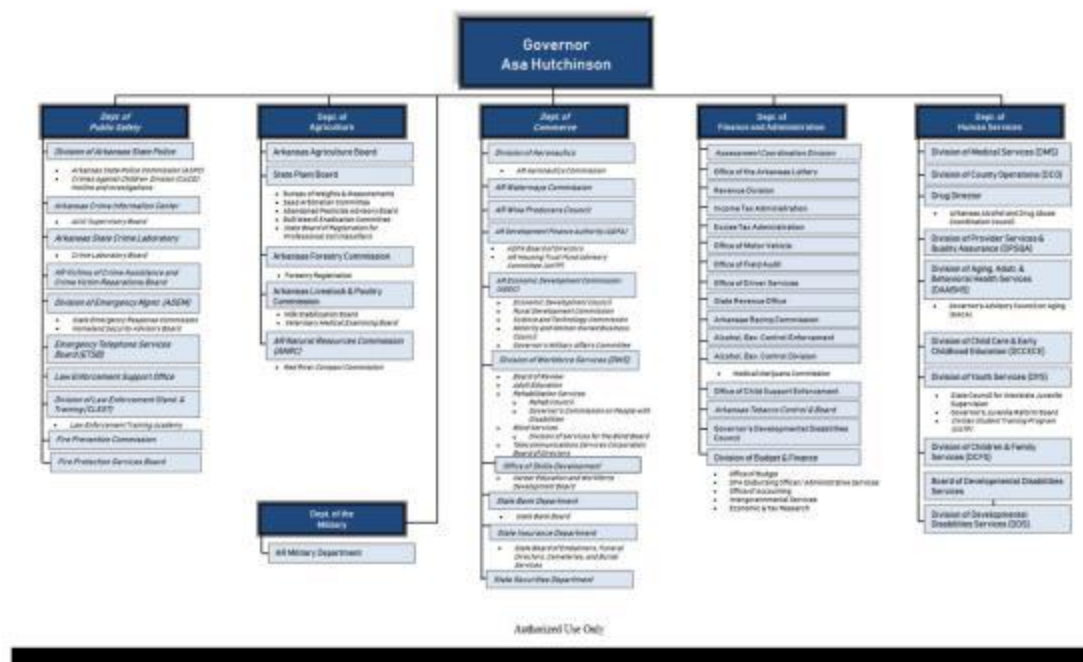
Field Services personnel provide access for clients in need of vocational rehabilitation services. Services provided fall in three primary categories including pre-employment transition, transition, and general vocational rehabilitation services. The VR counselor has primary responsibility for determining eligibility, individualized plan for employment development, case management, vocational rehabilitation counseling, and related job readiness services with a

goal of assisting clients in obtaining or maintaining competitive integrated employment. ACTI, ARS' internal training unit, provides vocational training programs with a focus on industry recognized credentials as well as providing an array of supportive services. Access and Accommodations is organized to address a client's assistive technology needs at school and at work. The Business Engagement unit is ARS' primary link to employers providing information regarding services and supports available to businesses.

The **Division of Services for the Blind** is the designated State Agency to provide services for rehabilitation and social services to blind and severely visually impaired persons age 14 and above in Arkansas. The agency has a director appointed by the Governor, but federal regulations stipulate the vocational rehabilitation designated state unit must utilize a commissioner. The DSB Director and the senior leadership of DSB provide oversight and coordination within the constraints of state and federal laws to fulfill its mission through the following goals:

- Employment - To assist Arkansans who are blind or visually impaired to secure or maintain employment and consistent with their skills, abilities, and interests.
- Rehabilitation - To assist Arkansans who are blind or visually impaired to live as independently as possible through the development of skills, accommodations, or adaptations that are necessary to perform all activities of daily living.
- Prevention of Blindness - To assist in preventing blindness stabilizing vision, and, where possible, restoring vision.
- Field Services personnel provide the local level coordination and facilitation of all general vocational rehabilitation services for individuals with blind or visual impairment issues. This includes, but is not limited to, vocational rehabilitation counseling, vocational case management, eligibility determination, individual employment plan development, transition services, and job placement.
- Business and Technology personnel provide assistance to educate consumers to develop management and business ownership within the Vending Facility Program (VFP). The Vending Facility Program Services are available to eligible blind persons who are interested in and have the necessary skills to manage snack bars

The **Arkansas Economic Development Commission** is under the Arkansas Department of Commerce's umbrella and is a partner of the state's workforce development system. The Commission's mission is to create economic opportunity by attracting higher paying jobs, expanding and diversifying our state and local economies, increasing incomes and investment, and generating positive growth throughout Arkansas.



- Communications, petitions and miscellaneous
- Adjournment

#### **STATE BOARD MEMBERSHIP ROSTER**

1. Mr. Thomas Anderson (Chair), Wellons Land Company/T.A. Holdings - Business Representative
2. Mr. Len Blaylock, General Dynamics - Business Representative
3. Mr. Scott Bull (Vice-Chair), RS Boston Consulting - Business Representative
4. Mr. Charles Johnson, Envirotech Chemicals - Business Representative
5. **\*VACANT - Business Representative**
6. Dr. Julie Roberson, Canfor Southern Pine - Business Representative
7. Mr. George Nunnally, George Nunnally Chevrolet - Business Representative
8. Ms. Abby Houseworth, Holiday Inn - Blytheville - Business Representative
9. Mr. Randy Finegan, D & R Finegan LLC - Business Representative
10. Ms. Rebecca Ives, Lockheed Martin - Business Representative
11. Ms. Holley Little, First Staff, Inc. - Business Representative
12. Ms. Candice Lawrence, AR State Chamber of Commerce - Business Representative
13. **\*VACANT - Business Representative**
14. Mr. Robert Thorne, Robert Thorne LLC - Business Representative
15. Mr. Jeff Griffin, Dassault Falcon Jet - Business Representative
16. Mr. Randy Henderson, Nucor Steel - Business Representative
17. Mr. Miles Crawford, TRAC Staffing - Business Representative
18. Mr. Kelley Sharp, University of Arkansas - Fayetteville - Labor & Apprenticeship
19. **\*VACANT - Organized Labor**
20. **\*VACANT - Organized Labor**
21. Ms. Karen Breashears, National Apprenticeship Training Foundation - Labor & Apprenticeship
22. Mr. Brian Marsh, Goodwill of Arkansas - Community-Based Org.
23. Dr. Maria Markham, AR Department of Higher Education - Train. or Educ. of Eligible Youth
24. Mr. Johnny Key, AR Department of Education - Train. or Educ of Eligible Youth
25. Dr. Trenia Miles, AR Division of Workforce Services - Adult Education Section State Agency Director - WIOA Title II
26. Dr. Charisse Childers, AR Division of Workforce Services State Agency Director - WIOA Titles I & III
27. Mr. Joe Baxter, AR Division of Workforce Services - Rehabilitation Services State Agency Director - WIOA Title IV

28. Ms. Cassondra Williams-Stokes, AR Division of Workforce Services - Division of Services for the Blind State Agency Director - WIOA Title IV
29. Sec. Mike Preston, AR Department of Economic Development Commission - Economic Development
30. James Sanders, City of Blytheville Mayor - Mayor
31. Brandon Ellison - Polk County Judge - Judge
32. Asa Hutchinson Governor

### **i. Membership roster**

Provide a membership roster for the State Board, including members' organizational affiliations.

SEE ABOVE

### **ii. Board Activities**

Provide a description of the activities that will assist State Board members and staff in carrying out State Board functions effectively.

Every new member is provided a thorough orientation that includes information on the following:

- Introduction to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
- Introduction to the Arkansas Workforce System to include the purpose, guiding principles, employer-driven focus, importance of business relationships, and services to employers and jobseekers
- Information regarding the Arkansas Workforce Centers including the hallmarks of excellence, goal of workforce centers, accessing services, operational and functional requirements for a workforce center, partner programs, more detailed info on employer and jobseekers services, employment resources, assessments, job coaching, and building toward excellence
- Information on the workforce board including the board vision, mission, role of the board, strategic planning, using labor market information, oversight responsibilities, evaluation, innovation, collaboration, attracting and involving employers, and targeted industries in the State
- Information regarding how to be a successful board member including areas of responsibility, the appointment process, key characteristics of a successful workforce board member, networking, conflict of interest, Arkansas Freedom of Information Act, and board staff roles

All members receive annual training regarding their roles and responsibility as a board member.

## **I. MEMBERSHIP ROSTER**

### **STATE BOARD MEMBERSHIP ROSTER**

The current Arkansas Workforce Development Board Membership Roster is:

1. Mr. Thomas Anderson (Chair), Wellons Land Company/T.A. Holdings - Business Representative
2. Mr. Len Blaylock, General Dynamics - Business Representative
3. Mr. Scott Bull (Vice-Chair), RS Boston Consulting - Business Representative

4. Mr. Charles Johnson, Envirotech Chemicals - Business Representative
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26. Dr. Charisse Childers, AR Division of Workforce Services State Agency Director - WIOA Titles I & III
27. Mr. Joe Baxter, AR Division of Workforce Services - Rehabilitation Services State Agency Director - WIOA Title IV
28. Ms. Cassandra Williams-Stokes, AR Division of Workforce Services - Division of Services for the Blind State Agency Director - WIOA Title IV
29. Sec. Mike Preston, AR Department of Economic Development Commission - Economic Development
30. James Sanders, City of Blytheville Mayor - Mayor
31. Brandon Ellison - Polk County Judge - Judge
32. Asa Hutchinson Governor

\*Note: Request to fill all of the vacancies listed above have been submitted to the Governor's Office.

The vacancies for representatives from the Arkansas Legislature will be addressed via appointment request submissions to both the House and Senate immediately. Due to the fact that these represent new appointment requests under WIOA, it is unknown when these vacancies will be filled.

### **33. VACANT - Arkansas House of Representatives**

### **34. VACANT - Arkansas Senate**

## **II. BOARD ACTIVITIES**

Provide a description of the activities that will assist State Board members and staff in carrying out State Board functions effectively.

Every new member is provided a thorough orientation that includes information on the following:

- Introduction to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
- Introduction to the Arkansas Workforce System to include the purpose, guiding principles, employer-driven focus, importance of business relationships, and services to employers and jobseekers
- Information regarding the Arkansas Workforce Centers including the hallmarks of excellence, goal of workforce centers, accessing services, operational and functional requirements for a workforce center, partner programs, more detailed info on employer and jobseekers services, employment resources, assessments, job coaching, and building toward excellence
- Information on the workforce board including the board vision, mission, role of the board, strategic planning, using labor market information, oversight responsibilities, evaluation, innovation, collaboration, attracting and involving employers, and targeted industries in the State
- Information regarding how to be a successful board member including areas of responsibility, the appointment process, key characteristics of a successful workforce board member, networking, conflict of interest, Arkansas Freedom of Information Act, and board staff roles

Since its formation in June 2015, newly appointed and experienced members receive annual training regarding their roles and responsibility as a board member. Additionally, the full board and its Strategic Planning, Program and Performance Evaluation, and TANF Oversight Committees conduct quarterly meetings.

### ***Board Training***

On February 3, 2021, the U.S. Department of Labor's contractor, Maher & Maher, conducted a Board Governance training with this Board. This training was designed to illuminate WIOA's vision for State Boards as well as their relationship with the Workforce Development System. Additionally, the training took a "deep dive" into the roles and responsibilities of Board Members, both as members of the Board as well as advocates for the State's workforce development system.

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

### **A. ASSESSMENT OF CORE PROGRAMS**

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. ADWS plans to issue a policy on system assessment to ensure that the current actions are being coordinated in a way that allows core partners to review relevant information and take action to improve the system.

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 and presented to the Board in July 2021.

This evaluation identified a number of 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. For example, many workforce development programs assist job seekers in obtaining basic literacy skills that are needed to obtain further credentials and move towards gainful employment. The success of this program may be measured by referrals to other workforce development programs and continuation in education and training programs, as well as employment.

### **B. ASSESSMENT OF ONE-STOP PARTNER PROGRAMS**

The Arkansas Workforce Development Board (AWDB) and state agency partners continuously assess the performance outcomes of the workforce system in annual performance and benchmark reports. The state agency responsible for each of the core programs outlined in program-specific areas regularly assesses performance accountability measures at the state, regional and local levels as required by each core program. At the completion of each program year, each core WIOA partner presents its annual performance to the State Workforce Board.

To support the effort of ensuring that one-stop program partners are well-positioned to meet the performance accountability requirements of WIOA, the WIOA Roundtable's Program Performance Committee focuses on coordinating core partners to ensure systems have the capacity to collect and report required



new and updated data elements under WIOA, as well as capacity to track aggregate data for performance indicators applicable to all four core partners was established.

The state and local areas are assessed based on a comparison of the actual performance level with the adjusted level of performance each quarter and annually. The following definitions will be utilized to determine if a core program exceeded, met, or failed to meet the negotiated levels of performance.

### C. PREVIOUS ASSESSMENT RESULTS

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.

The overall recommendations from this evaluation concluded:

1. Co-enrollment - While co-enrollments exists, data documenting rates of co-enrollment is not readily available. It was recommended that a system of data collection to effectively track and monitor co-enrollments is developed.
2. Partnering Across Programs - Many partner organizations reported that they do not have information available to adequately partner with the Workforce System. It was recommended that the State and Local Workforce System Partners work more closely together and provide the necessary training and information to assist all potential partners.
3. Business Services - The results of the Business Customer Surveys found that less than half of the businesses surveyed believed that they received all of the needed services. It was recommended that additional training be developed and provided to the Local WIOA Business Services Teams to improve their interactions with business customers. Additionally, it was recommended that training and promotional materials specific to the workforce system be developed and distributed.
4. Customer Services - Many customers felt that customer services training was needed for staff. Some respondents found that staff was either uninformed or inattentive to their needs. It was recommended that additional customer service training for all workforce center staff is provided. Another issue was that the current phone system does not appear suited to surge demand of ADWS or WIOA services. While it is possible that the increased demand on the phone system due to the COVID pandemic is at least partially responsible for the problems reported by customers, the evaluators highly recommend that the phone system be professionally evaluated immediately.
5. High Performing Centers - There existed a significant difference in the quality and success of the services provided across workforce centers. It was highly recommended that methods to identify high performing centers and workforce areas is developed, along with additional training for all workforce centers.

In addition to addressing those recommendations from this evaluation, the State Board's Program and Performance Evaluation committee will continue to focus on partners' performance and eligible training providers. Not only do they establish and monitor partner

performance, they will also look at continuous improvement strategies related to credential, skills gains, and business performance.

### **Adult Education Assessments**

The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, Adult Education Section conducts a several assessments of subgrantees including quarterly desk audits, annual site visits, and cyclic intensive onsite program reviews. The result of this information is used to provided technical assistance and professional development training.

One of the assessments the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, Adult Education Section monitors programs through quarterly reports and data analysis. Through this process, programs enter statistical and performance data that has been collected and reported in the data management information system (LACES) in a spreadsheet to the state office. Some of the information collected include a program's enrollment numbers, measurable skill gains performance, number of high school equivalency diplomas earned, and the demographic data associated with student progress, and much more. For some data, program's performance in the current year is compared to the previous year in hopes of identifying trends. This process ensures that the responsibility is placed on providers to stay current on the program's progress towards performance measures. In addition, this also gives providers an opportunity to make necessary adjustments to program operations as the fiscal year goes on versus waiting until the final quarter, which is oftentimes too late to make necessary changes. At the state level, the information is used to provide targeted technical assistance and professional development training to providers.

Another assessment the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, Adult Education Section uses to monitor and assesses programs is continuous desk audits, which includes items such as average attendance hours, educational functioning level (EFL) gains across demographic groups, number of students post-tested, etc. This allows state staff to review day to day performance of programs to ensure compliance with state and federal policies and guidelines. The desk audits also allow programs to review operational aspects of the program such as the percentage of funds expended, completion of required professional development, and completed personnel activity reports. In addition, like the quarterly reports, desk audits give state staff an opportunity to provide technical assistance and provide targeted professional development training.

Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, Adult Education Section also performs an annual site visit for each adult education and literacy program to ensure that state and federal laws and policies are followed, to review program performance, and to connect with Local Education Agency Administrators. Items included on the site visits may vary year to year and is, oftentimes, based on findings from the more extensive three-day Program Review Monitoring visit. During site visits, the following items may be reviewed by state staff:

1. Accuracy of student records
2. Data collection measures and analysis (performance, student information, SSNs, and manual outcomes)
3. Professional Development trainings of staff
4. Student and staff handbook policies
5. Complete and accurate financial data
6. Program's recruitment and retention plan
7. Development of workplace, digital, and financial literacy skills
8. How distance learning is being integrated in the program

## 9. WIOA partner engagements

Based upon the documentation and discussion during the site visit, regional program advisors provide technical assistance to program directors and staff to ensure continuous improvement. Within 10 days following the site visit, the program receives a summary report of the visit that indicates areas of compliance, recommendations, or commendations. If a program has a repeat site visit finding on an item two years in a row, a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) must be completed. A plan of action must be submitted. In addition, scheduled follow-up meetings are set with their Program Advisor until the PIP has been satisfied. The program director and program advisor work together to ensure that each compliance issue is corrected, at which time the program and Local Education Agency are sent a compliance letter from the State Director.

Additionally, approximately every four years, nine of the 37 providers are selected for an intense three-day Program Review Monitoring visit. When a new Request for Proposal for AEFLA funds is competed and providers are approved for funding, programs are randomly selected for the next four years on which year they will receive a Program Review. Some of the criteria that may be used in the determination of Program Reviews include the region of the state where the program is located, the type of Local Education Administrator including community-based organizations, community colleges, school district, number of findings (for currently funded programs), leadership turnover, amount of grant funds, etc. A team of program advisors conducts an intensive program review through which Division staff assesses each program in the following areas:

1. Program Management and Reporting: Staff manual/continuous program improvement
2. Financials: Timely report submissions and completed audits
3. Advisory Committees: Local Adult Education Advisory Committees
4. Personnel and Professional Development: Ensuring staff meets requirements
5. Student Intake, Documentation, and Orientation: Maintenance of student information and supporting documentation
6. Program Policies: Inclusion of required policies such as anti-bullying and student handbook
7. Instruction: Course offerings and lesson planning based on the College Career Ready Standards
8. Teaching/Classroom Observation: Observation of classroom activities
9. Technology: Maintenance and utilization of adequate technology
10. Recruitment/Retention (Reviewing recruitment and retention plans
11. Collaboration: Partnerships with WIOA partners and other stakeholders to meet the needs of participants
12. Facilities: Safety and adequacy of facilities conducive to learning
13. Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990: Adherence to ADA requirements

The 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. Each program review is accompanied by a full financial review by the state agency's finance department.

The state office requires adult education directors to attend a State Administrators' meeting twice a year. During this time, state staff review policies and procedures, state performance, answer questions, and give providers an opportunity to share best practices.

Additionally, the Adult Education Section annually conducts an Effective and Efficient (E&E) evaluation of each program's performance based on the federal benchmarks. Programs that do not meet the overall benchmark requirement are provided additional technical assistance and monitoring. In the 2019-2020 program year, 18 of the state's 37 programs (48.6%) did not meet the Effective and Efficient requirement. In 2020-2021, that number was reduced to 6 of 37 programs (16.2%). Based on the findings, we conclude that the intense technical assistance that includes the review of data, program processes and procedures, instructional content and methods and the professional development of staff, through which a performance improvement plan is developed, is valuable in improving the effectiveness of programs. Fortunately, in spite of some providers not meeting the federal and state benchmarks, Arkansas exceeded its Measurable Skill Gains performance for the past two years.

One of the most common difficulties identified within the past two years is understanding and developing integrated education and training (IET) programs and timely submission of monthly and annual financial documents. To increase the understanding and the number of IET offerings, professional development has been offered during semiannual Administrator Meetings, and regional Program Advisors have provided one-on-one technical assistance to program administrator as well. Additionally, partnerships with the TANF and SNAP E&T Programs has been helpful in providing options for funding the workforce training portion of the program so that participants can earn industry-specific credentials that along with the workforce preparation and the basic skills prepare them for a new career pathway.

In summary, the Division of Workforce Services, Adult Education Section uses a variety of assessment tools to determine program effectiveness. Desk audits, site visits, and program reviews provide a variety of options to ensure compliance. In addition, this gives state staff an opportunity to provide intense technical assistance and build positive relationships with providers. Lastly, assessments are ongoing and have been very beneficial in the continuous improvement of programs and services to clients in Arkansas.

### **Rehabilitative Services Assessments**

#### **To establish baselines and meet benchmarks for state with respect to the performance accountability measures under section 116 of WIOA.**

In PY19 the number of participants increased to 13,182, with 2,236 successfully employed participants in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter after exit (57.3%) and 1,554 successfully employed participants in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter after exit (38.6%). The credential rate was at 17.5% and the measurable skills gains rate was at 45.5%. During PY20 VR participant numbers reduced slightly to 11,830. The 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter after exit rate rose to 60.4 % with 2,283 exiters. The 4<sup>th</sup> quarter after exit rate climbed to 57.2% with 2,080 participants maintaining steady employment. The credential rate rose to 26.2% and the measurable skills gain rate was at 54.6%.

These steady and increasing baselines paved the way for benchmarks to be set in April 2022.

#### **Increase the availability of Supported Employment (SE) services to youth and adults with significant disabilities.**

ARS increased services to youth and adults with significant disabilities by placing a high priority on Supported Employment outcomes and by partnering with other State of Arkansas agencies, as indicated above. During PY19 the program was implemented, and staff were trained on levels of disability significance for supported employment services. 5,061 or 46.2% were determined significantly disabled Individuals in PY2020 and 642 were most significantly disabled, all qualifying for supported employment services.

### **Improve public relations, marketing, information, outreach, and referrals.**

ARS has launched a marketing campaign to promote the services of the agency through digital platforms, video clips, publications, flyers, and by updating our website materials. ARS has contracted with communications providers to offer materials in alternative languages and in alternative formats. ARS has also begun to host outreach events for special populations, like the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community to meet their unique needs. An electronic referral was developed that can be sent via a hyperlink that takes less than 30 seconds to complete to begin the referral process. This year ARS also embarked on the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment to gather data on the needs of clients to improve services, marketing, and outreach efforts. The data from that survey will be used to develop the goals for PY22, PY23 and beyond.

### **Increase collaboration with business that leads to increased employment outcomes.**

ARS has increased support to businesses by improving the process for On-the-Job Training and Work-Based Learning. The programs support paid work experiences for clients that can result in employment offers upon successful completion of the training. ARS has also successfully partnered with the National Apprenticeship Training Foundation and the Career Technical Education program of local high schools to bring apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs to clients in a supported setting where they are succeeding and becoming gaining employed in the medical field and in transportation/logistics upon completion of the programs.

### **Expand and improve transition services program.**

The transition services programs have expanded to include work-based learning programs throughout the school districts across the State where students are engaged in small business efforts on campus or in work opportunities both on and off campus. Over 6,000 students have participated in transition services since PY17, with the largest increase being in PY19, with 4,290 students participating. Transition includes the Youth Leadership Program, summer Film Camp for careers in the film industry, College Bound Arkansas, the Transition Employment Program, Project Search, and special projects for work-based learning for students in the custody of the State of Arkansas living in juvenile detention facilities.

### **Develop and improve Community Rehabilitation Programs.**

The Arkansas Career Technical Institute (ACTI) has transformed into the Arkansas Career Development Center (ACDC). ACTI was the Community Rehabilitation Program managed by Arkansas Rehabilitation Services. ACDC has moved into a model that provides virtual services, as well as services designed to bring training to students in the areas where they live and work. With pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs, as well as support services that build essential communications and needed resume' writing, interviewing, and technical communication skills. ACDC also trains other Community Rehabilitation Providers on service delivery of hard skills certifications that can be offered to participants in Pre-Employment and Transition programs throughout the State.

### **Improve training, resources, and continuing education.**

ARS is currently partnering with the Rehabilitation Services Administration, the Council for State Administrators of Vocational Education, the Technical Assistance Center on Quality Employment and San Diego State University to offer direct training on vocational rehabilitation service provisions, management of the vocational rehabilitation program, and continuing education units. ARS also offers direct training supports that are approved through the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification for CEU credential training for counselors throughout the year.

### **Improve ARS' ability to act as a resource when assisting individuals with disabilities and employers in addressing accommodation needs.**

ARS has improved its reach to State agencies and to businesses in offering information and assistance on ADA accommodations and technical assistance on ergonomics, technological advances, and how to use ARS assistance to meet accommodation needs for existing employees. Through the Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work program employers are educated and assisted to make modifications and accommodations in the workplace.

**Increase the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery for agency clients.**

ARS is currently implementing a new case management system with enhanced features to improve the efficiency of data entry and to reduce the amount of entry required. ARS has also implemented new counselor training for all staff, created an online database for training, complete with assessments, training guides, and examples for counselor use. Duties that are primarily administrative have been shifted to other staff to increase counselor time with clients. ARS has also increased the number of vendors participating in job placement and work-based learning activities for clients. The Access and Accommodations section was given additional staff to increase psychological assessment output to improve timeframes for counselors to engage clients in plan development. The ACDC staff added a new program that supports counselors that have students in college, to ensure they have a direct contact while in school for retention purposes and job placement assistance upon completion.

**Division of Service for the Blind Assessments**

**To establish baselines and meet benchmarks for state with respect to the performance accountability measures under section 116 of WIOA.** During FFY2020, DSB had 147 successful employment outcomes, and during FFY 2021, DSB had 128 successful employment outcomes. While the overall outcomes are down from FFY 2018, the Covid-19 pandemic greatly impacted the availability of employment options and the safety of accepting work for consumers with a disability. DSB's median income and measurable skill gains performance rates increased from PY2018 to PY2020.

**Increase the availability of Supported Employment (SE) services to youth and adults with significant disabilities.** DSB is working with the VR Technical Assistance Center for Quality Employment to enhance the Supported Employment program. This work includes updated policy, procedures, and training for staff.

**Improve public relations, marketing, information, outreach, and referrals.** DSB has hired an Outreach Manager and Business Engagement Coordinator to assist with conducting outreach across the state. DSB has updated our brochures to provide information about Business Engagement, Pre-Employment Transition Services, Older Individuals Who Are Blind program, and the Vocational Rehabilitation program. DSB has increased membership in local area chamber of commerce organizations.

**Expand and improve transition services program.** DSB has promulgated new Pre-Employment Transition Services policy. Staff continue to receive training on providing these services in the most effective manner possible. DSB is continuing to work with the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: the Collaborative (NTACT:C) to improve forms, processes, and training for staff.

**Improve training, resources, and continuing education.** DSB continued to provide training for staff throughout the year and at the two annual trainings each year. While trainings have been virtual during the Covid-19 pandemic, this also allowed staff to participate in more trainings than in the past. DSB continues to work on finalizing new drafts of policy and procedures with feedback from the Technical Assistance Centers and RSA.

**Increase the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery for agency clients.** DSB provides training to field staff on common errors and concerns in service delivery. New policy was developed and prepared for approval by the DSB Board with the support of WINTAC to

ensure compliance with WIOA. New policy is an ongoing process with chapters being reviewed by all stake holders and then sent for promulgation to improve service delivery.

#### D. EVALUATION

The Arkansas Workforce Development Board (AWDB) has the responsibility for ensuring public accountability by evaluating the effectiveness of the overall workforce development system. For the federal WIOA performance accountability measures and state measures, each core partner will have a monitoring and corrective action process at the state level that assures identified deficiencies, to the extent they occur, are addressed. This process is intended to be based primarily on data analysis but shall also include monitoring tools at the discretion of the core program. If annual performance targets are not met by any core program, the AWDB may request that the core program submit a corrective action plan.

##### ***2021 Workforce System Evaluation***

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 completed and presented to the Board in Fall 2021.

The entire evaluation report can be found at:

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

The Arkansas Workforce Development Board will use the recommendations from this evaluation to address the following major areas:

**Increase Co-Enrollment:** The evaluators recommend that Arkansas Workforce Development Leadership and the Arkansas Workforce Development Board and area managers develop data collection methods to effectively track and monitor rates of co-enrollment.

**Partner Programs and Organizations Data Collection:** The evaluators recommend that Arkansas Workforce Department Leadership and the Arkansas Workforce Development Board work with all workforce areas to identify and engage additional community partners, and to provide training and assistance to those partners in data collection techniques.

**Business Survey Results:** The evaluators recommend that additional professional development training programs be established to improve staff/customer relationships. It is further recommended that training and promotional materials specific to web based job postings be developed and implemented.

**Customer Survey Results:** The evaluators recommend additional training in customer service for all local workforce center staff to improve staff/customer relationships.

**General Recommendations:** The evaluators recommend that ADWS provide incentives for high performing areas to develop training modules (in-person and online) which can be shared with less successful centers. The evaluators further recommend Arkansas Workforce Development Leadership and the Arkansas Workforce Development Board establish a system to ensure ongoing supervision and monitoring of the quality improvement process. This system should include regular formative and summative evaluation on a regular basis.

#### 5. DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS FOR CORE PROGRAMS

##### A. FOR TITLE I PROGRAMS

##### I. YOUTH ACTIVITIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH WIOA SECTION 128(B)(2) OR (B)(3)

The Arkansas Workforce Development Board (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.

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 investment areas for Title I youth activities under the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act will be made using the formula described at Section 128(b)(2)(A)(i), as follows:

- 33 1/3 percent of the funds to the local workforce investment 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 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 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, consistent with WIOA Section 128(b)(2)(A)(ii), 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. 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.



In accordance with WIOA law, Arkansas Workforce Development Board has adopted a funding allocation methodology for those Local Areas with High Concentrations of Eligible Youth. This methodology calculates determines each Local Area's weighted average of "eligible youth" and, if the average exceeds the overall state average, additional funding will be awarded.

## II. ADULT AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH WIOA SECTION 133(B)(2) OR (B)(3)

The in-state allotment of funds to local workforce investment areas for Title I adult activities under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act will be made using the formula described at Section 132(b)(1)(B)(ii), 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 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 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, consistent with 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 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.

## III. DISLOCATED WORKER EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH WIOA SECTION 133(B)(2) AND BASED ON DATA AND WEIGHTS ASSIGNED

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, consistent with WIOA Section 133(b)(2)(B)(iii), a local area will not receive an allocation percentage for fiscal year 2016 or subsequent fiscal year that is less than 90 percent

of the average allocation percentage of the local area for the 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 activities in Arkansas are administered by Arkansas Division of Workforce Services as the lead agency of the Governor's Dislocated Worker Task Force.

## B. FOR TITLE II

### I. DESCRIBE HOW THE ELIGIBLE AGENCY WILL AWARD MULTI-YEAR GRANTS OR CONTRACTS ON A COMPETITIVE BASIS TO ELIGIBLE PROVIDERS IN THE STATE, INCLUDING HOW ELIGIBLE AGENCIES WILL ESTABLISH THAT ELIGIBLE PROVIDERS ARE ORGANIZATIONS OF DEMONSTRATED EFFECTIVENESS

The Division of Workforce Services, Adult Education Section follows the guidelines set forth by the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) in determining applicant eligibility when conducting a state competition for Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Funds (AEFLA). Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires State eligible agencies to award multiyear grants or contracts on a competitive basis to eligible providers within the State or outlying area. These grants or contracts enable eligible providers to develop, implement, and improve adult education and literacy activities within the State. Eligible providers must use AEFLA funds to establish or operate programs that provide adult education and literacy activities, including programs that provide these activities concurrently. Additionally, each State eligible agency must conduct a competition that ensures that all eligible providers have direct and equitable access to apply and compete for AEFLA funds and that the same grant or contract announcement and application process are used for all eligible providers.

The Adult Education Section will award multi-year grants to eligible local providers through a competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) process for the purpose of developing, implementing, and improving adult education and literacy within the state. The time-period for the next Request for Proposal for Title II AEFLA funds is scheduled for July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2028.

Local adult education providers must be organizations that have demonstrated effectiveness in providing adult education and literacy activities and may include: local education agencies such as school districts; community-based organizations, or faith-based organizations; volunteer literacy organizations; institutions of higher education; public or private nonprofit agencies; libraries; public housing authorities; other nonprofit institutions that have the ability to provide literacy services to adults and families; consortia of the agencies, organizations, institutions, libraries or authorities previously described or a partnership between an employer and an agency previously described.

Applications are screened to determine if it is from an eligible provider of demonstrated effectiveness before the application is reviewed, scored, and considered for funding. The same process is used to determine if an application is from an eligible provider of demonstrated effectiveness. Only applications that are determined to be from eligible providers of demonstrated effectiveness are forwarded for review, scoring, and consideration for funding.

The eligibility phase of review is conducted by Adult Education Section staff using the form that precedes the application in the Request for Proposal, which is titled, "Demonstrated Effectiveness: Pre-Screening Requirement". An eligible provider may meet the requirements for eligibility as described below:

1. An applicant that has been previously funded under AEFLA, as amended by WIOA, must submit performance data required under section 116 to demonstrate past effectiveness.
2. An applicant that has not been previously funded under AEFLA, as amended by WIOA must provide performance data to demonstrate its past effectiveness in serving basic skills deficient eligible individuals, including evidence of its success in achieving outcomes for participants related to employment, attainment of secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and transition to postsecondary education and training.
3. Be currently located and providing services within the state of Arkansas. (State requirement)

An applicant(s) must provide three years of performance data on its record of improving the skills of eligible individuals, particularly eligible individuals who have low levels of literacy. This must be demonstrated in the following content domains: reading, writing, mathematics, English Language Acquisition, and other subject areas relevant to the services contained in the State's application for funds. In addition, an applicant must also provide information regarding its outcomes for participants related to employment, attainment of secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and transition to postsecondary education and training.

In the case of applicants applying as a consortium, demonstrated effectiveness data from each member of the consortium is evaluated to determine if each member is an eligible provider of demonstrated effectiveness. All consortium members must be determined to be an eligible provider of demonstrated effectiveness for the consortium application to be forwarded for review, scoring and consideration for funding.

Applications not meeting all pre-screen requirements will not be read. Applications that do not illustrate demonstrated effectiveness will not be considered. Applicants not meeting the pre-screening requirement will be notified along with all declined applicants. In the event an applicant's proposal is not approved, the applicant may send a *Letter of Appeal* to the Director for Adult Education Section providing a justification for the appeal. A response will be mailed to the applicant within five calendar days of the date the appeal letter was received. All appeal decisions will be final.

## 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

The Adult Education Section will ensure that all eligible providers are 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 will be used for all eligible providers and each proposal will be treated the same way in evaluation.

The Request for Proposal (RFP) announcement will be placed in the statewide newspaper for three consecutive days and on the Arkansas Department of Finance and Administration's website as required by the state's Procurement process. In addition, the announcement will be placed on the Adult Education Section's website. Prior to the announcement of an RFP, the Adult Education Section state staff will be provided training on the RFP process by the Adult Education Senior Management Team, which includes the State Director to ensure internal control and standardization. Once the RFP has been publicly announced, no staff member may discuss with any applicant anything regarding the RFP application or process. Any inquiries will need to be e-mailed to [adulted@arkansas.gov](mailto:adulted@arkansas.gov). On a bi-weekly basis the date, name of person,

question, and response will be placed on the website in a cumulative RFP Questions and Answers spreadsheet. This ensures that all eligible applicant has a direct and equitable access to the questions.

All applicants that have shown and met the demonstrated effectiveness requirement will also be evaluated using the 13 Statutory Considerations as found in the law at 231 (e)(1-13). In addition to the RFP application, eligible providers will have a rubric that shows how applications will be evaluated.

A formula method will be used to determine the amount of funding and takes into consideration the literacy rate and the core indicators of performance as outlined in Title II of the 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 list of criteria used to evaluate demonstrated effectiveness and the scoring rubric has 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 or not.

Currently, the adult education providers in the state are divided into five regions and include the Northeast, Southeast, Southwest, Northwest, and Central Regions. Although there may be multiple providers within an area, the state has reconfigured all 75 counties to better align with the 10 Workforce Development Boards (WDB). The purpose of restructuring the state is 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 a 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 indicators of performance as 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

Distribution of funds between the two Vocational Rehabilitation designated state units, (Arkansas Rehabilitation Services and the Division of Services for the Blind) is done under written agreement of the heads of the two DSUs in consideration of the incidence and severity of disability and the historical cost of rehabilitation for the two populations. Such agreement distributes 88% of the VR grant to Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) and 12% to Division

of Services for the Blind (DSB). In accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(i) of the Rehabilitation Act, Arkansas state law designates the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) as the 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.

## 6. PROGRAM DATA

### A. DATA ALIGNMENT AND INTEGRATION

The newly-created 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 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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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 Governor relies upon the various workforce development organizations, including the State Workforce Board, in the implementation of his vision for public-private partnerships across the state that will use the money to bolster training in key industry sectors. This includes support for local and regional economic development efforts designed to help increase workers' wages. Participating in industry-led training efforts is a priority of the Governor in ensuring that industries guide our workforce training and help close skills gaps. His ultimate goal is to create

multiple funding sources in the public and private sectors to support workforce training across Arkansas.

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, current 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, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).
- 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%)

### **B. ASSESSMENT OF PARTICIPANTS' POST-PROGRAM SUCCESS**

While the progress of participants who are exiting from the core programs will be assessed through follow up by the core programs that provided service, the WIOA Roundtable is developing a strategy that determine the progress of participants who exit the core programs. This strategy includes the ability to determine if follow-up services have helped participants complete training and/or maintain employment as well as serve as a continuous link to the workforce system as a whole, including referral networks and partner programs. While there may be some variances in the follow-up, based upon needs of the individual, a consistent message in each follow-up contact will ensure that participants know which services are available to them, even after program exit.

The onset of the COVID-19 has decreased progress in this effort, however, our plan remain intact.

### **C. USE OF UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (UI) WAGE RECORD DATA**

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.

### **D. PRIVACY SAFEGUARDS**



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. 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.

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.

## 7. PRIORITY OF SERVICE FOR VETERANS

Arkansas provides veterans' priority of service as mandated by Veterans Program Letter 07-09., and TEGL 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. Service is provided to ensure veterans and covered persons receive consideration for all opportunities, for which they qualify. This increased focus includes the implementation of strategies and policies designed to ensure veterans and eligible persons of veterans 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. This increased focus includes the implementation of strategies and policies designed to ensure veterans and eligible persons receive the highest level of quality service within the framework of priority of service. 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.

### **Veterans' Priority of Service Policy**

#### *PURPOSE:*

The purpose of this policy is to clarify the priority of service for veterans in WIOA Title I-B programs and services 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).

*REFERENCES:*

WIOA §§ 3(63), & 511  
20 CFR 680.230, 680.610, 680.650 & 683.230  
20 CFR part 1010  
TEGSs 10-09 & 19-16  
38 U.S.C. Sections 101, 4102A, 4213 & 4215 (Veterans' Benefits)  
PL 107-288 (Jobs for Veterans Act)  
Arkansas State Plan  
ADWS Policy WIOA I-B – 1.2 (Definitions)

*POLICY:*

Veterans and eligible spouses, as defined in ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 1.2 (Definitions), WIOA §§ 3(63), 38 U.S.C. Sections 101, PL 107-288, and TEGL 10-09, receive priority of service for all USDOL-funded job training programs, which include WIOA programs [Arkansas State Plan; TEGLs 19-16 & 10-09; 38 U.S.C.4215; PL 107-288;].

A veteran or eligible spouse must meet each program's eligibility criteria to receive services [38 U.S.C. 4215; 38 U.S.C. 4102A(d); WIOA § 511(gg)(2)(A); 20 CFR 680.650 & 683.230; TEGL 19-16]. Additional details concerning priority are given with the eligibility requirements for each program.

Other regulations concerning veteran preference and the status of military-based funds in determining eligibility are:

1. Veterans and eligible spouses should identify themselves at the point of entry into the system or program to take full advantage of the priority of service [TEGL 10-09]. If the veteran or eligible spouse identity is not declared at the point of entry, the status may be identified during the interview and registration process.
2. When an individual is identified as a veteran or eligible spouse, the WIOA Title I-B Service Provider must notify the applicant of his or her priority of service, the full array of employment, training, and placement services available, and the applicable eligibility requirements for programs and services [TEGL 10-09].
3. For income-based eligibility determinations, military pay or allowances paid while on active duty or paid by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for vocational rehabilitation, disability payments, or related VA-funded programs are not to be considered as income. This policy applies for both the "low-income individual" requirement of Youth programs, and for the priority of services for "low-income individuals" for Adult funds. [20 CFR 680.650; 20 CFR 683.230; 38 U.S.C. 4213; TEGs 10-09 & 19-16].
4. VA benefits for education and training services are not included in the category of "other sources of training grants" listed in 20 CFR 680.230(b) [Comments concerning §680.230 in the WIOA Final Rule; TEGLs 10-09 & 19-16 ]. Veterans or spouses who are eligible for the GI Bill or other forms of VA-funded education or training are not required to coordinate these benefits with WIOA-funds for training purposes. VA funds for training do not need to be exhausted before WIOA funds can be used for training for a veteran or eligible spouse [TEGL 19-16].
5. Pension payments, whether or not their retirement was based on disability, are not exempt and are to be included in "low income" calculations [TEGL 10-09].
6. Specific details concerning priority for Adult eligibility are given in ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 2.3 (Eligibility for Adult Program).
7. Veterans priority of services applies to all WIOA Title I-B programs, although each veteran must meet particular eligibility requirements for each program in which he or she is enrolled [20 CFR 680.610 & 680.650; 38 U.S.C. 4215; 20 CFR part 1010; DOL comments concerning 20 CFR 680.610; TEGL 19-16]. In addition, special rules for veterans and their spouses apply in

determining the eligibility of dislocated workers (See ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 2.4 Eligibility for Dislocated Worker Program).

8. Each LWDB must develop policies and procedures to implement priority of service, including priority for veterans [TEGLS 10-08 & 19-16]. Written copies of local priority of service should be maintained at all service delivery points and, to the extent practicable, should be posted in a way that makes it possible for members of the general public to easily access them [TEGL 10-09].

#### 8. ADDRESSING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

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 the development and implementation of a Methods of Administration Policy that outlines all requirements of the system. Reviews are conducted annually to make sure that workforce centers meet requirements. 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.

According to the Arkansas Workforce Center Certification criteria, all Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance requirements must be met before a center is eligible to receive the Arkansas Workforce Center certification or utilize the Arkansas Workforce Center name and logo. Both the Methods of Administration and the Arkansas Workforce Center Certification criteria are being updated to reflect changes in the WIOA law. The original Methods of Administration policy and Arkansas Workforce Center Certification policies are available online at <http://dws.arkansas.gov/AWDB/Information.htm> under the Policies and Procedures section.

Programs that apply for funding from the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services - Adult Education Section have access to the resources, training, and materials available from the Arkansas Adult Learning Resource Center (AALRC). The AALRC is responsible for providing information, materials, resources, and training to local programs to assist in ensuring equitable access to and participation in those programs, including all students, teachers, and other program beneficiaries.

All local programs are required to post public notices that address non-discrimination policies regarding accessibility and participation regardless of gender, race, national origin, age, or religion, in accordance with the Civil Rights Act. In addition, local programs are required to provide on-going information to applicants, participants, beneficiaries, and other interested parties regarding the rights of people under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and Title II applications to their particular programs, services, and activities. Methods of providing information include publication in handbooks, manuals, and enrollment and application materials that are distributed to the public to describe the local program and its activities. Other methods include the display of informational posters in local programs and other public places and/or information broadcast on television or radio. Public notice of ADA

requirements must be made available in alternative formats to meet the diverse communication needs of persons with disabilities.

Since 1995, the AALRC has specifically addressed two major barriers to program access in Arkansas. Steps taken to address barriers to access are listed below:

- Provide in-depth training about learning disabilities to all programs.
- Assist programs in complying with legal requirements as mandated by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the ADA, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Assistance includes providing information, training, and resources.
- Assist programs in coordinating with other state agencies and organizations that provide services and resources for individuals with disabilities, such as the Office for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired (ODHI), Increasing Capabilities Access Network (ICAN), and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS).
- Provide training to a variety of state agencies and organizations about learning disabilities and how to coordinate services, including screening, diagnosis, materials and resources, strategies and accommodations. Provide training and information to all state GED<sup>®</sup> examiners about requesting and receiving accommodations on the GED<sup>®</sup> tests.
- Provide assistance to local programs in the administration of other tests and instructional materials with accommodations.
- Work with publishing companies to ensure test materials used in adult education and literacy programs are available in alternative formats e.g., CD/DVD, Braille, large-print, etc., to accommodate students with disabilities. Also, that the tests have been field-tested and conform to test norms for adults with disabilities populations.
- Continue to coordinate training efforts with University Affiliated Programs to provide training in the ADA for local service providers.
- Create a seamless, statewide system which ensures that any adult education or literacy student with possible undiagnosed learning disabilities will have access to diagnostic assessment; that local programs providing services know how to access the statewide system; and that the system includes an agreed-to protocol regarding gender, race, national origin, color, disability, or age, to ensure equitable accessibility and participation.
- Assist local programs in the provision of instructional materials available in alternative formats, as well as assisting in the implementation of accommodated instruction for students with disabilities.
- Assist local programs in the acquisition of technology devices that assist accommodated instruction and assessment for students with disabilities.

#### 9. ADDRESSING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Arkansas meets the needs of English language learners' need for interpreters due to limited English proficiency in all corners of the state. Staff members are trained to ensure that an interpreter is provided in these situations "in real time" to meet the needs of English Language Learners. Additionally, our Workforce Centers and system partners provide multi-lingual forms, brochures, and other related materials that relate to services, information, and guidance to LEP individuals.

Our Workforce Centers and system partners have effective referral processes to local adult education centers with English as a second language (ESL) classes to provide LEP individuals

language education and other educational services, such as gaining a high school equivalency diploma and employability certificates.

Finally, the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services has contracts with various vendors to provide interpreter services in multiple languages. These interpreter services can be utilized by LEP individuals and staff members in any of the State's workforce centers.

#### IV. COORDINATION WITH STATE PLAN PROGRAMS

Since the implementation of WIOA, our core workforce development system partners participate on the WIOA Roundtable. The WIOA Roundtable meets regularly and its membership includes representatives from Registered Apprenticeship, higher education, secondary education, two- and four-year educational institutions, Carl D. Perkins secondary and post-secondary programs, Career and Technical Education, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, human services, and elected officials to engage in discussions about integration of services provided by a multitude of service providers. The WIOA Roundtable has individual committees that focus on critical areas in WIOA implementation to include: finance, IT system integration, policy development, core performance measures, sector strategies, and the development of the state workforce development plan.

The WIOA Roundtable also develops strategies to best align programs, prevent duplication, and increase access to services for jobseekers and employers.

Each year, the WIOA Roundtable host a Spring and Fall WIOA Statewide Partners meeting. These meetings are attended by approximately 400 individuals representing state and local workforce boards members, core and optional workforce partner programs, secondary and higher education, state and local economic development, community-based organizations, employers, and elected officials.

#### V. COMMON ASSURANCES (FOR ALL CORE PROGRAMS)

The State Plan must include	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	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
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;	
5. The State has established, in accordance with WIOA section 116(i), fiscal control and fund 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;	Yes
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	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA);	
11. Service providers have a referral process in place for directing Veterans with Significant Barriers to Employment (SBE) to DVOP services, when appropriate; and	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

The State of Arkansas consists of ten local workforce development areas and nine planning regions.

The ten local workforce development areas (LWDA) are as follows: Central LWDA, which consists of Faulkner, Lonoke, Monroe, Prairie, Pulaski, Saline counties; the City of Little Rock LWDA, which consists of the city limits of Little Rock, Arkansas; Eastern LWDA, which consists of Cross, Crittenden, Lee, Phillips, Saint Francis counties; North Central LWDA, which consists of Cleburne, Fulton, Jackson, Independence, Izard, Sharp, Stone, Van Buren, White, Woodruff counties; Northeast LWDA, which consists of Clay, Craighead, Greene, Lawrence, Mississippi, Poinsett, Randolph counties; Northwest LWDA, which consists of Baxter, Benton, Boone, Carroll, Madison, Marion, Newton, Searcy, Washington counties; Southeast LWDA, which consists of Arkansas, Ashley, Bradley, Chicot, Cleveland, Desha, Drew, Grant, Jefferson, Lincoln counties; Southwest LWDA, which consists of Calhoun, Columbia, Dallas, Hempstead, Howard, Lafayette, Little River, Miller, Nevada, Ouachita, Sevier, Union counties; West Central LWDA, which consists of Clark, Conway, Garland, Hot Spring, Johnson, Montgomery, Perry, Pike Pope, Yell counties; and Western LWDA, which consists of Crawford, Franklin, Logan, Polk, Scott, Sebastian counties.

For planning purposes, the following nine regions were identified: Central Region, which is made up of the Central LWDA and the City of Little Rock LWDA; Eastern Region, which is made up of the Eastern LWDA; North Central Region, which is made up of the North Central LWDA; Northeast Region, which is made up of the Northeast LWDA; Northwest Region, which is made up of the Northwest LWDA; Southeast Region, which is made up of the Southeast LWDA; Southwest Region, which is made up of the Southwest LWDA; West Central Region, which is made up of the West Central LWDA; and the Western Region, which is made up of the Western LWDA.

A visual depiction of the Local Workforce Development Areas is available at:

<http://dws.arkansas.gov/WorkForcePlan/chart14.html>

#### **Initial Designation of Local Areas**

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. Each of the previous ten local workforce investment areas had sustained fiscal integrity as defined by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and while only one of the ten local areas had met 100 percent of all nine performance targets two years in a row, the local areas did meet performance within 80 percent of targets, which is the measure of success for the State as a whole.

At the June 5, 2015 meeting of the Arkansas Workforce Development Board meeting, the Governor's plan for the initial designation of Local Workforce Areas was discussed by the Board. 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.
- The existence of workforce centers already established and operational on July 1, 2015.
- The existence of contracts already in place to continue operations and the provision of services on July 1, 2015.
- All multi-county local workforce development areas are considered to be regions for the purposes of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act planning. Any local workforce development area that is smaller than two counties will be part of a region for WIOA planning purposes with the local workforce development area(s) that closely aligns with the region's economic development planning district or metropolitan statistical area.

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 structure.

After discussion, the Board voted to approve the Governor's recommendation.

On August 3, 2015, the Governor's Executive Order 15-20 was signed, certifying the ten (10) Local Workforce Development Boards in Arkansas.

### **Subsequent Designation**

Subsequent local area designation is addressed in Arkansas Annotated § 15-4-3708(d) After the period for which a local workforce development area is initially designated under this section, the Governor shall approve a request for subsequent designation as a local workforce development area from the local workforce development area, if the local workforce development area:

1. Performed successfully;
2. Sustained fiscal integrity; and
3. In the case of a local workforce development area in a planning region described in § 15-4-3714, met the requirements of § 15-4-3714.

For purposes of appeal, a unit of general local government (including a combination of such units) or grant recipient that requests but is not granted designation of an area as a local area



may submit an appeal to the Arkansas Workforce Development Board under an appeal process established in the State plan. If the appeal does not result in such a designation, the Secretary of Labor, after receiving a request for review from the unit or grant recipient and on determining that the unit or grant recipient was not accorded procedural rights under the appeals process described in the State plan, may require that the area be designated as a local area.

State Policy 6.1, Change 2, *State of Arkansas Grievance, Complaint, and Appeal Procedures WIOA Activities* outlines the appeals process relating to the designation of local areas, among other program aspects.

**Specifically, Section E-4 states: A unit of local government that has requested designation as a local area but has been denied such designation [Arkansas State Plan § VI.a.1.C.; WIOA § 106; 20 CFR 679.290, 683.630 & 683.640.]**

1. 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.
2. The appeal must be sent by certified mail, return receipt requested to: Arkansas Workforce Development Board

Attn: Appeal/Grievance Review

P.O. Box 2981

Little Rock, Arkansas 72202

3. The State Board will investigate the appeal, including conducting a hearing in accordance with the rules outlined in Section IV.C.5 of this policy, and the State Board will make a decision within 60 days of the receipt of the appeal.
4. 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 D of this policy.
5. A copy of the appeal must be simultaneously provided to the State Board at the address in Part b above. 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 appeals 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 [WIOA § 106(b)(5); 20 CFR 679.290 & 683.640].

In accordance with State Policy 6.1, Change 2, *State of Arkansas Grievance, Complaint, and Appeal Procedures WIOA Activities*, the appeals process related to determinations for infrastructure funding is articulated.

Specifically:

1. 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/WIOA § 121(h)(2)(E); 20 CFR 361.750, 463.735, 463.738, 463.750, & 678.750]:

- a. A required One-Stop partner may appeal a determination regarding the portion of funds to be provided to operate the One-Stop 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).
- b. The appeal must be made no later than 21 days after the determination regarding the infrastructure funding, and must be sent by certified mail, return receipt requested to the Director of ADWS at the address in Section IV.D. of this policy.
- c. The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services will investigate the appeal, including conducting a hearing in accordance with the rules outlined in Section IV.C.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 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 [20 CFR 361.500, 463.500, & 678.500].

## 2. STATEWIDE ACTIVITIES

All policies for use by local workforce development boards in administration of WIOA Title I programs and for information on statewide activity programs are posted online on the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services website at [www.dws.arkansas.gov/wioa.htm](http://www.dws.arkansas.gov/wioa.htm).

State Funds are used for the following required and allowable activities:

Conducting Evaluations, Maintaining all the Eligible Training Providers Lists, Providing Assistance to Local Areas for Coordination Activities, Maintaining Fiscal and Case Management Information Systems, Conducting Monitoring and Oversight, Providing Assistance to Local Areas with High Concentrations of Eligible Youth, Providing funding for Rapid Response Activities, Providing Assistance for Carrying out State Plan activities (Business Outreach Strategies, Outreach to Jobseekers, Skills Gap Analysis, Asset Mapping), Assistance to Local Areas for Regional Planning and Sector Strategy Development, Assistance to Local Areas to Provide Opportunities for Individuals with Barriers to Employment to Enter In-Demand Industry Sectors, Disseminating Labor Market Information, Coordination with Economic Development, Developing Common Intake for Partners, Funding Innovative Programs for Employers, and Funding Administrative Costs.

Arkansas devotes twenty-five (25%) of the Governor's set aside funding to Rapid Response activities on an annual basis. In addition to this funding, the State launched the Arkansas Work-

Based Learning Program (WBLP), also utilizing Governor's set-aside funding. This program was initially designed to meet the needs of Arkansas businesses, provide job opportunities and training to populations with barriers to employment, and to increase the diversity and quality of training methods in Arkansas. The State WBLP can be a potential option to assist as a layoff aversion strategy to maintain incumbent worker employment.

### **Governor's Dislocated Worker Task Force**

The Governor's Dislocated Worker Task Force engages the resources of ADWS, area health services, the U.S. Department of Labor, the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partner programs, and other agencies to meet the needs of dislocated workers and employers.

### **Rapid Response Team**

Arkansas' Business Retention and Workforce Transition Team provides immediate aid to companies and workers affected by layoffs, closures, and workforce reductions due to the economic climate or man-made disasters. This team quickly coordinates with community service providers to offer on-site workshops for employees in transition, job placement assistance, information on unemployment benefits, and more.

### **Layoff Aversion Strategies**

Consult with our experts to discover alternatives, including:

- The Shared Work Program
- Liquidation of excess assets
- Negotiation of municipal rents or utilities abatement
- Grant opportunities

### **Mobile Workforce Centers**

The Mobile Arkansas Workforce Centers provide access to all services available in brick-and-mortar Arkansas Workforce Centers and provides many of those services directly. Each unit has full Internet connectivity and is equipped with computers, printers, copiers, and JAWS (Jobs Application with Speech) software.

The Governor's Dislocated Worker Task Force operates the mobile units and transports them as needed to areas of worker dislocation or emergency response.

Arkansas's Division of Workforce Services Rapid Response protocols are designed to address adverse economic and / or community impacts resulting from actual or imminent natural or manmade crisis or disaster. These protocols include maintaining communications, close coordination and establishment of appropriate partnership arrangements with other entities and resources, including FEMA if necessitated by the situation. Protocols also dictate appropriate oversight arrangements to ensure requisite scope, design speed, monitoring and supervision of emergency operations.

Rapid Response partners with government agencies and with disaster response entities to ensure it fulfills its obligation to deliver services and transition workers to new employment as quickly as possible. In the event of a disaster, Rapid Response will utilize its partnerships with Emergency management organizations (i.e., state emergency management agencies and FEMA); Chief Elected Officials (CEO); Chambers of Commerce; Economic development organizations;

Labor and industry organizations; USDOL, to stay on top of the events as they occur to make sure we are in place to assist areas and workers affected by disaster. In addition, partnerships are in place with the Arkansas Workforce Centers and local workforce development boards. Rapid Response is a key convener to plan a state's response to a disaster and has a role in the delivery of reemployment and transition services to those impacted by a disaster.

Rapid Response will ensure the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services website is updated with needed information, and the team will secure access for affected areas to utilize Mobile Workforce Centers that are ready to be deployed when needed. These units can assist with communications, emergency unemployment, insurance claim assistance, etc. These preparations, combined with flexibility and creativity in responding to the truly unexpected events of a disaster, allow Rapid Response to quickly and effectively respond to major events.

As stated above, Mobile Workforce Centers are part of Rapid Response's resources; the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services maintains a fleet of Mobile Workforce Centers consisting of three RV style vehicles and two 5th wheel trailers which are supported by a 2008 Ford F-350 Pickup. The Mobile Centers contain multiple computer stations (with full internet connectivity), public announcement systems, printers, copiers and fax machines. These units are also equipped with flat-televisions, DVD/VCR players, Smart-boards, JAWS (Jobs Application with Speech) software for visually impaired jobseekers and are handicap accessible. These units supplement local office resources, support opportunity and job fairs, promote employer hiring initiatives and facilitate numerous training endeavors designed to assist jobseekers across the state. Additionally, the Mobile Centers have been utilized for Rapid Response Worker Transition Centers. The Mobile Workforce Centers have become very popular at various Community Outreach events and have been deployed several times to aid in disaster response initiatives both in Arkansas and in neighboring states. These units have been identified as an asset for natural disaster response by the State Arkansas Department of Emergency Management (ADEM).

Due to the COVID pandemic, the Mobile Workforce Centers were deployed to assist Arkansans with Unemployment Insurance claims and WIOA Titles I & III services.

Arkansas's Rapid Response protocols and the partnership with the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Program have been recognized by Department of Labor.

- - - - - If there is the slightest possibility that reduction in workforce is trade affected the necessary info is gathered by Rapid Response personnel and a petition is submitted to the DOL;
        - Once DOL issues a petition number Rapid Response notifies the Company representatives and TAA staff;
        - Petition progress is monitored by both Rapid Response and Trade Program staff on the DOL website;
        - Upon Certification, If the Company is unwilling or unable to provide a workers list then UI data is engaged to establish eligibility for workers;

- Trade Program staff prepares Eligibility Letters which are mailed to every client listed on the workers list (workers list vetted through Rapid Response). Notices of Eligibility may also be placed in local newspapers of general circulation;
- TAA Information Sessions are scheduled and invitation letters are mailed to eligible clients. The purpose of these Information Sessions is to meet with the dislocated workers and convey information about the benefits for which they may be eligible along with important timelines and information on other supportive services that may be available to them.

Arkansas's Rapid Response will continue to utilize its allocated funding to provide services to all companies experiencing a workforce reduction and affected workers including those for whom a Trade Petition is filed with the U.S. DOL. These services include Worker Assistance Workshops, Transition Assistance, Referral Services and Trade Petition preparation and submission. During the DOL's investigation process, Rapid Response serves as the primary point of contact pending certification, at which time Trade Program staff is engaged and continue to partner with Rapid Response staff to facilitate provision of services to identified workers.

ADWS' Rapid Response Unit developed and maintains a Rapid Response Tracking System (RRTS) which is used by Agency personnel to monitor and track all dislocation events including certification status of Companies for whom a Trade Petition was submitted to the U.S. Department of Labor.

## B. ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKERS PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

### 1. WORK-BASED TRAINING MODELS

Arkansas' strategies for implementing work-based training is articulated in **Arkansas' WIOA I-B - 5.1, Work-Based Learning Program Policy and Issuance PY18-07, released on September 25, 2018.**

**This policy may be accessed at:**

<https://dws.arkansas.gov/wp-content/uploads/PY18-07-Arkansas-Work-Based-Learning.pdf>

The partnership between local program providers and the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services (ADWS) will add to existing efforts of local areas to strengthen work-based training options in Arkansas. The program will increase the abilities of local areas to focus on meeting the needs of Arkansas businesses, provide job opportunities and training to populations with barriers to employment, and to increase the diversity and quality of training methods in Arkansas.

The four options available through this partnership are on-the-job training (OJT), paid internships, paid work experience, and incumbent worker training (IWT). ADWS will develop announcements and applications for the Arkansas Work-Based Learning Program. Employers will apply to ADWS for funding for options that meet their needs. To participate in the program, employers will complete ADWS applications proposing work-based training. In each option, ADWS will work with local areas to identify businesses, to develop specifics of contracts, and to fund the programs. Local areas may assist employers in completing applications. Number of grants issued will depend on available State WIOA funding and the amount of each grant.

For some options, LWDBs may need to develop policies to determine guidelines for which employers may be served, the rate of reimbursement, training to be provided, and specific policies

and procedures concerning the provision of services. LWDBs may also adopt the guidelines provided by ADWS to partner with them in providing the training.

In all the options except incumbent worker training, local program providers must determine eligibility, determine service needs, and provide case management for all participants.

There is nothing to prohibit a local area from using this policy as a model for their own program without partnering with ADWS.

All requirements, guidelines, and policies of the Arkansas WIOA Title I-B Policy Manual, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA), the WIOA Final Rule, and Training and Employment Guidance Letters (TEGLs) published by the Employment and Training Administration of the U.S. Department of Labor (ETA) must be followed.

## 2. REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP

The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (ADWS) has a strong partnership with Registered Apprenticeship (RA) and consistently includes Registered Apprenticeship training as a training option in discretionary grant proposals and encourages local workforce development boards to utilize RA as a workforce development tool serving both employers and job seekers. The ADWS is working with local workforce development boards to more fully integrate RA and other work-based learning options into WIOA Title I.

Under the USDOL awarded ApprenticeshipUSA State Accelerator grant, ADWS is working with RA partners and stakeholders to develop a State Plan for RA Expansion and Diversification. A major component in the development of the State Plan for RA Expansion and Diversification includes an asset mapping analysis that will identify assets and funding streams associated with RA and look for opportunities to leverage resources for potential expansion to serve both employers and job seekers within growth industry and occupational fields. The State Plan for RA Expansion and Diversification is due to be completed by May 31, 2018.

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. If a client expresses interest in an Apprenticeship program, they are provided with the appropriate RA program contact information for follow-up purposes to learn more about RA training and employment opportunities.

The partnership between the Workforce system and RA programs will serve to increase options for both youth and adults. The RA “earn while you learn” model provides job seekers with a USDOL recognized skill attainment credential while allowing for an upwardly mobile career pathway. Likewise, RA benefits employers by developing highly skilled employees, reducing turnover rates, increasing productivity, and lowering the cost employee recruitment efforts. Adults, dislocated workers and youth have opportunities under RA to increase their earnings, skill sets, and will receive training in a high demand industry. Apprentices in Arkansas Registered Apprenticeships are co-enrolled in Title-I programs, when appropriate. ITAs and supportive services will be provided as wrap around support to participants in Registered Apprenticeships. On-the-Job-Training (OJT) contracts may be written with registered apprenticeship providers for the training portion of the program. Registered Apprenticeship program, OJT contracts must follow the State and local policies on OJT and depending on the length of the program, these funds may cover some or all of the registered apprenticeship training. Attainment of a credential, employment, retention of employment and wages of apprentices will be counted in performance measures for those who meet program eligibility requirements.

The Arkansas Apprenticeship Pathway Initiative (AAPI) provides \$4,000,000 of grant funds from the U.S. Department of Labor to create and expand registered apprenticeships in targeted H-1B growth industries, strengthen employer and service provider partnerships, as well as provide an opportunity for participants to learn occupational specific skills as well as good wages while gaining college credit.

The industries of focus for this grant include advanced manufacturing and the construction trades with opportunities for expansion into other industry growth sectors based on employer demand. A primary goal under the AAPI is to enroll 600 RA's over the life the grant. The grant has an end date of September 30, 2020.

Arkansas Expands Apprenticeship (AREA) provides \$900,000 of grant funds from the U.S. Department of Labor to create, expand, and diversify registered apprenticeships in growth industries. The industries of focus for this grant include advanced manufacturing, construction trades, and transportation with opportunities for expansion into other industry growth sectors based on employer demand. A primary goal under the AREA is to enroll 100 RA's and 100 pre-apprentices over the life the grant. The grant has an end date of April 30, 2019.

### 3. TRAINING PROVIDER ELIGIBILITY PROCEDURE

#### **Eligible Training Provider Initial Eligibility Certification Procedure**

##### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this procedure is to outline the certification process for new eligible training providers in accordance with the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014.

##### **Reference:**

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Section 122.

##### **Procedure:**

To be included on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL), providers must submit an electronic application to the Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB) for the area where they wish to provide training services. A separate electronic application must be submitted for each training program. Also, if applying for a training program to be offered at different training locations, a separate electronic application is required for each training location. Each training program must be on the current *Projected Employment Opportunities List*.

Providers who may apply to be included on the ETPL include:

- An institution of higher education that provides a program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential;
- Another public or private provider of a program of training services, which may include joint labor-management organizations, and eligible providers of adult education and literacy activities, if such activities are provided in combination with occupational skills training. These providers must have all appropriate licenses to operate in the State of Arkansas and will be required to submit copies of such licenses. The information will then be verified by the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services (ADWS).

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 providers will be required to provide documentation that verifies their program is a registered apprenticeship program certified by the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Apprenticeship.

The first step of the process is to determine if a provider is qualified to apply using initial eligibility status. All provider/program combinations that have not been previously eligible under WIOA Section 122 or the Workforce Investment Act Section 122 may apply under these rules.

#### **Required Information for Initial Eligibility:**

The information to be included on the initial application is described below.

1. A description of the training program to be offered including the costs of tuition, books and fees.
2. The program completion rate for **all** individuals participating in the applicable program to be offered by the provider.

**To calculate:** The number of all participants who completed the program/course during the reporting period divided by the total number of all participants.

3. If the training provider is in a partnership with business/industry and an explanation of the partnership.
4. If the training program leads to a recognized postsecondary credential and a description of the credential.
5. If the program aligns with in-demand industry sectors and occupations.

#### **The Initial Eligibility Certification Process:**

1. Providers eligible to apply under this section will complete an online electronic application for “initial certification” through the automated Arkansas Job Link (AJL) ProviderLink system located at **<https://www.arjoblink.arkansas.gov/>**.

Providers must apply for each individual program. If multiple training locations exist, an application must be made for **each location**. Providers may make application to any or all Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs) at the same time.

2. The LWDBs will receive the application via the AJL ProviderLink system if (1) The program’s CIP Code appears on the current *Projected Employment Opportunities List* for the State or Local Workforce Development Area, and (2) Required items are complete and meet minimum qualifications.

3. The LWDB will electronically approve or disapprove each application received via the Internet. The LWDB is responsible for ensuring that the provider’s performance information meets or exceeds the State minimum levels.

4. Upon approval by the LWDB, the provider will be automatically placed on the Eligible Training Provider Information menu of the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (ADWS) 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:

1. Written justification for the missing data, and
2. The process that will be used to track and record the required information for re-certification.



The LWDB may choose to waive the performance documentation requirement in this situation. The LWDB should submit in writing their intentions to do so to the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services LMI division for processing of the application to continue.

**Required Information for Continued Eligibility:**

The information to be included on the continued application is described below.

1. The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program
2. The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program
3. The median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program
4. 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
5. Information on cost of attendance, including cost of tuition and fees, for program participants
6. Information on the program completion rate for program participants
7. A description of how the provider provides access to training services, including to rural areas, including the use of technology
8. 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
9. Any applicable state licensure requirements of training providers
10. A description of training provider's ability to offer industry-recognized certificates and/or credentials through the program
11. A description of training provider's ability to offer programs that lead to post-secondary credentials
12. A description of the quality of the program of training services including a program that leads to a recognized post-secondary credential
13. 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
14. The timeliness and accuracy of the eligible training provider's performance reports
15. Relevant information reported to State agencies on Federal and State training programs other than programs within WIOA Title I.

While we do not intend to 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.

**The Continued Eligibility Certification Process:**

1. Providers eligible to apply under this section will complete an online electronic application for "continued certification" through the Arkansas Job Link (AJL)

ProviderLink system located at <https://www.arjoblink.arkansas.gov/>. Providers must apply for each individual program. If multiple training locations exist, an application must be made for each location. Providers may make application to any or all Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs) at the same time.

2. The LWDBs will receive the application via the AJL ProviderLink system if (1) The program's CIP Code appears on the current Projected Employment Opportunities List for the State or Local Workforce Development Area, and (2) Required items are complete and meet minimum qualifications.
3. The LWDB will electronically approve or disapprove each application received via the Internet. The LWDB is responsible for ensuring that the provider's performance information meets or exceeds the State minimum levels.
4. Upon approval by the LWDB, the provider will be automatically placed on the ACRS website as a WIOA Eligible Training Provider for the applicable program.

### **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 take into account 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.

### **Registered Apprenticeship Programs**

Registered Apprenticeship (RA) programs are an exception to the initial and continued eligibility certification processes. They are exempt from performance and reporting-related requirements. These programs have already gone through a rigorous assessment as part of the registration process with the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Apprenticeship (DOLETA/OA). Inclusion of RA programs on the state Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) enhances participants' awareness of the programs and provides local workforce systems with a mechanism to support this valuable training model. All RA programs listed on the ETPL will automatically be considered as a statewide demand occupation for as long as they have an unfilled opening(s). Local boards may not require additional criteria of RA programs.

To be listed on the state ETPL, a RA program should complete the online ADWS Registered Apprenticeship Form. Once the completed form is received and reviewed for completeness, the RA program will be displayed on the ADWS website at:  
<https://www.dws.arkansas.gov/programs/workforce-innovation/workforce-initiative/>.

### **Denial and Eligibility Termination Appeal Procedures**

A training provider that has been denied or has had its eligibility terminated may file an appeal in accordance with ADWS Policy No. WIOA I – 6.1, Change 2 (State of Arkansas Grievance, Complaint, and Appeal Procedures, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title I Activities).

The same procedure is used whether the status as a training provider is denied or terminated by the LWDB or by ADWS or if the status of eligibility as a provider of on-the- job training or customized training provided by a one-stop operator.

1. If the determination was made at the local area (such as for violations discussed in 20 CFR 680.480), the local grievance procedure must be followed before the appeal can be made to the State level. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the decision at the local level or if no decision is made within 60 days of the filing of the complaint, an appeal may be made to the State using the procedure in IV.E.2. of this policy.
2. If the decision to deny or terminate was made at the State level (such as by ADWS's discovery of inaccurate information submitted or during the biennial review, as discussed in 20 CFR 680.480), the appeal may be sent directly to the State.
3. The appeal must be sent by certified mail, return receipt requested to the Director of ADWS at the address in Section IV.D. of this policy.
4. The complainant has the opportunity for an informal hearing, using the guidelines in Section IV.C.5. of this policy, with an opportunity for resolution will be completed within 60 days of the filing of the grievance or complaint [20 CFR 683.630(b)(2)].
5. Denial or termination of eligibility made by ADWS or upheld by ADWS in an appeal may be appealed to a hearing officer appointed by the Director of ADWS within ten (10) calendar days of receipt of the decision of the ADWS appeal. The appeal must be sent to the Director of ADWS at the address in Section IV.D. of this policy. The hearing officer will conduct an investigation, including a hearing if requested, and will reach a decision within 60 days.
6. A decision under this State appeal process may not be appealed to the Secretary of Labor [20 CFR 683.630(b)].

**4. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR THE PRIORITY FOR PUBLIC ASSISTANCE RECIPIENTS, OTHER LOW-INCOME INDIVIDUALS, AND INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE BASIC SKILLS DEFICIENT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF WIOA SEC. 134(C)(3)(E), WHICH APPLIES TO INDIVIDUALIZED CAREER SERVICES AND TRAINING SERVICES FUNDED BY THE ADULT FORMULA PROGRAM**

The State adopted a policy, WIOA I-B-2.8 – Priority for Individuals with Barriers to Employment. This policy applies to the Adult Program's individualized career services and training services. Each local area was required to develop policies and procedures to ensure priority access to services for individuals with barriers to employment. Local Areas may identify other populations who should be included as "individuals with barriers to employment" and include in their Local policy. The Local Policy must be approved by the Local Board.

As part of our monitoring protocols, we conduct a review of general eligibility as well as priority of service based upon this policy. We verify all local areas have established written policies and procedures to ensure priority for public assistance recipients, other low-income individuals, individuals who are basic skills deficient and veterans.

Our Unit conducts on-site or virtual programmatic and fiscal monitoring of all local areas at least once annually.

This policy and accompanying checklist may be accessed below:

<https://dws.arkansas.gov/wp-content/uploads/PY17-06-WIOA-Barriers-to-Employment-Issuance-.pdf>

## 5. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S CRITERIA REGARDING LOCAL AREA TRANSFER OF FUNDS BETWEEN THE ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKER PROGRAMS

A local board may transfer, up to and including 100 percent of the funds allocated to the local area for a fiscal year between the adult employment and training activities and the dislocated worker employment and training activities. Under the Workforce Investment Act, the State had a waiver that increased the level of transfer between the adult and dislocated worker funding streams. The waiver provided greater flexibility in the design of local area adult and dislocated worker service delivery plans and enhanced the ability of local boards to respond to changing workforce and economic dynamics. Local boards were able to provide targeted assistance in response to customer needs.

In order to transfer funds between programs, the local workforce development board shall submit a funds transfer request to the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, stating the amount of the requested transfer, the percentage of funds the transfer represents, the reason for the transfer, and an assurance that adequate funds still remain in the contributing program to support existing and future enrollments. The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, as the Governor's Administrative Entity, will review the transfer request and issue a determination on the request.

### C. WITH RESPECT TO YOUTH WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES AUTHORIZED IN SECTION 129 OF WIOA—

#### 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 IN AWARDING SUCH GRANTS OR CONTRACTS.[11]

Arkansas's strategy for providing comprehensive services for youth calls for a collaborative approach with local boards to prepare youth for success in a global, demand-driven economy. The state will issue policy guidance regarding the competitive sub-grant award process for youth workforce investment activities. In an effort to meet the needs specific to the local area, local boards will develop a process of review to determine if providers are able to meet performance accountability measures based on the criteria below. Consequently, state monitors will review local area policies and processes so as to ensure compliance.

1. Vision, Mission and Philosophy
2. Management Plan
3. Financial Plan
4. Employer Services
5. Individual Customers
6. Marketing
7. Partner Coordination Service Plan
8. Site/Location Plan
9. Organizational Qualifications

## 10. Performance/Experience

### 11. Anticipated Program Deliverables

### 12. Anticipated Program Outcomes

### 13. Budget Procedures

## 2. DESCRIBE THE STRATEGIES THE STATE WILL USE TO ACHIEVE IMPROVED OUTCOMES FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH AS DESCRIBED IN 129(A)(1)(B), INCLUDING HOW IT WILL LEVERAGE AND 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.

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.

As part of the State's overarching outreach strategy, we have hired a Targeted Populations Advisor devoted to developing our comprehensive outreach plan to reach certain populations, including Out-of-School youth. This staff creates synergy and alignment among WIOA core and non-core partners. During the COVID pandemic, the intensity of these efforts lessened, however, Arkansas' vision remains to establish and maintain a workforce system that is equitable and inclusive for all Arkansans.

## 3. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL ENSURE THAT ALL 14 PROGRAM ELEMENTS DESCRIBED IN WIOA SECTION 129(C)(2) ARE MADE AVAILABLE AND EFFECTIVELY IMPLEMENTED, INCLUDING QUALITY PRE-APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS UNDER THE WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAM ELEMENT. [12]

State WIOA Policy 3.2, *Services for Youth*, describes and defines the required and permitted services for Youth in accordance with WIOA. This policy also states that WIOA eligible youth must participate in at least one of the program elements as required for program participation. Program elements should be selected based on the youth's objective assessment and individual need.

State WIOA Policy 3.2, *Services for Youth* may be found at:

<https://www.dws.arkansas.gov/src/files/3.2-Services-for-Youth-Updated-8-27-18.pdf>

### 14 Program Elements

Fourteen program elements must be available to all Youth participants. WIOA Youth funds are not required to be spent on these services. Local programs are encouraged to partner with existing local, state, and national entities that can provide program elements at no cost to the local Youth program [20 CFR 681.460(c); 20 CFR 681.470]. The local area, however, must ensure that if a program element is not funded with WIOA title I Youth funds, the local program has an agreement in place with a partner organization to ensure that the program element will be offered. The LWDB must ensure that program

elements provided by other entities are closely connected and coordinated with the WIOA Youth program [20 CFR 681.470].

Local programs have the discretion to determine what specific program services a youth participant receives based on each participant's objective assessment and individual service strategy. Local programs are not required to provide all program services to each participant [20 CFR 681.460(b)].

Local programs must make each of the following 14 program elements available to Youth participants who need such services [WIOA § 129(c)(2); 20 CFR 681.460(a); TEGL 23-14; TEGL 21-16]. Local area Youth programs should ensure that services received are reported in AJL. Documenting receipt of program elements is critical to ensure that youth who are actively participating in programs do not get unintentionally exited due to 90 days of no services. Note that case management (the act of connecting youth to appropriate services) is not a program element, and should not be reported as one of the 14 Youth program elements [TEGL 21-16].

Program Element 1: Tutoring, study skills training, instruction, and dropout prevention services that lead to completion of the requirements for a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent (including a recognized certificate of attendance or similar document for individuals with disabilities) or for a recognized postsecondary credential [20 CFR 681.460(a)(1); TEGL 21-16].

The following services and activities are reported under Program Element 1 [TEGL 21-16]:

- a. Tutoring, study skills training, and instruction that lead to a high school diploma. Such services focus on providing academic support, helping a youth identify areas of academic concern, assisting with overcoming learning obstacles, and providing tools and resources to develop learning strategies. Tutoring, study skills training, and instruction can be provided one-on-one, in a group setting, through resources and workshops.
- b. Secondary school dropout prevention intended to lead to a high school diploma. Such services include services and activities that keep a young person in school and engaged in a formal learning and/or training setting. Strategies include, but are not limited to, tutoring, literacy development, active learning experiences, after-school opportunities, and individualized instruction.

The following strategies are listed in 20 CFR 681.460(a)(1), (Program Element 1), but they overlap with other program elements and are reported under other program elements [TEGL 21-16]:

- a. Dropout recovery strategies that are aimed at getting a youth who has dropped out of secondary education back into a secondary school or alternative secondary/high school equivalency program and preparing them for high school equivalency attainment are reported in Program Element 2.
- b. Services, including training services, leading to recognized postsecondary credentials are reported in Program Element 4.

Program Element 2: Alternative secondary school services or dropout recovery services [20 CFR 681.460(a)(2); TEGL 21-16]. Alternative secondary school services, such as basic education skills training, individualized academic instruction, and English as a Second Language training, are those that assist youth who have struggled in traditional secondary education. Dropout recovery services, such as credit recovery, counseling, and educational plan development, are those that assist youth who have dropped out of school [TEGL 21-16].

Program Element 3: Paid and unpaid work experiences that have academic and occupational education as a component of the work experience. Work experience as a planned, structured learning experience that takes place in a workplace for a limited period of time. The types of work experiences may include the categories of [20 CFR 681.460(a)(3) & 681.600(c)]:

- a. Summer employment opportunities and other employment opportunities available throughout the school year;
- b. Pre-apprenticeship programs;

- c. Internships and job shadowing; and
- d. On-the-job training opportunities.

A pre-apprenticeship is a program designed to prepare individuals to enter and succeed in a registered apprenticeship program. It includes all of the following elements [20 CFR 681.480; TEGL 21-16]:

- a. Training and curriculum that aligns with the skill needs of employers in the economy of the state or region involved
- b. Access to educational and career counseling and other supportive services, directly or indirectly
- c. Hands-on, meaningful learning activities that are connected to education and training activities, such as exploring career options and understanding how the skills acquired through coursework can be applied toward a future career
- d. Opportunities to attain at least one industry-recognized credential
- e. A partnership with one or more registered apprenticeship programs that assists in placing individuals who complete the pre-apprenticeship program in a registered apprenticeship program

Job shadowing is a work experience option where youth learn about a job by walking through the work day as a shadow to a competent worker. It is a temporary, unpaid exposure to the workplace in an occupational area of interest to the participant, where the youth experiences firsthand the work environment, occupational skills in practice, the value of professional training, and potential career options. It is designed to increase career awareness, help model youth behavior through examples, and reinforce in the youth the link between academic classroom learning and occupational work requirements [TEGL 21-16].

Although OJT is a training service for Adults/Dislocated Workers and a work experience for Youth, the guidelines and policies for both are the same [20 CFR 681.600(c)(4)]. Each youth who has been determined eligible either as an In-school Youth or an Out-of-school Youth may receive OJT if appropriate, as determined by the local area. The appropriateness of this program element for a eligible youth is established through the participant's objective assessment and individual service strategy [20 CFR 681.460(b)]. Out-of-school Youth may participate in Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RA) [TEGL 13-16]. RAs provide the required occupational and academic component required for Program Element 3 [TEGL 21-16].

A work experience may take place in the private for-profit sector, the non-profit sector, or the public sector. Labor standards apply in any work experience where an employee/employer relationship, as defined by the Fair Labor Standards Act or applicable State law, exists [20 CFR 681.600(a)]. Additional information on the employer/employee relationship may be found on DOL's Wage and Hour Division website [TEGL 21-16]. For additional guidance concerning work experience regulations in general, see ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 3.8 (Work Experience). For additional guidance concerning on-the-job training, see ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 3.4 (On-the-Job Training).

Not less than 20% of the youth funds allocated to a local area (minus area administrative costs) must be spent to provide ISY and OSY with paid and unpaid work experiences. Local youth programs must track program funds spent on paid and unpaid work experiences, including wages and staff costs for the development and management of work expenses, and report such expenditures as part of the local youth financial reporting. The percentage of funds spent on work experience is calculated as the total amount spent on ISY and OSY work experience divided by the total allocated youth funds (minus administrative costs) [WIOA § 129(c)(4); 20 CFR 681.590; TEGL 23-14; TEGL 21-16]. Leveraged resources cannot be used to fulfill any part of the 20% minimum [TEGL 21-16].

Allowable work experience expenditures that may be included in the 20% minimum are [TEGLs 23-14, 8-15, & 21-16]:

- a. Wages/stipends paid for participation in a work experience (including employment costs

such as FICA match and workers' compensation insurance)

- b. Staff time working to identify and develop a work experience opportunity, including staff time spent working with employers to identify and develop the work experience
- c. Staff time spent working with employers to ensure a successful work experience, including staff time spent managing the work experience
- d. Staff time spent evaluating the work experience
- e. Participant work experience orientation sessions
- f. Employer work experience orientation sessions
- g. Classroom training or the required academic education component directly related to the work experience
- h. Incentive payments directly tied to the completion of work experience
- i. Employability skills/job readiness training to prepare youth for a work experience

Supportive services are a separate program element, and funds spent for supportive services cannot be counted toward the 20% work experience work expenditure requirement, even if supportive services assist the youth in participating in the work experience [TEGL 21-16].

The academic and occupational education component that must be included with work experiences refers to contextual learning that accompanies a work experience. It includes the information necessary to understand and work in specific industries and/or occupations. The component may include learning the general duties of workers in the occupation, specific knowledge related to the occupation, specific skills needed to work in the occupation, or such. The component is not general

education, such as GED® classes. The component may occur concurrently or sequentially with the work experience, inside or outside the work site. The work experience employer may provide the academic and occupational component, or such components may be provided separately in the classroom or through other means [20 CFR 681.600(b); TEGL 21-16].

Program Element 4: Occupational skill training, which includes priority consideration for training programs that lead to recognized postsecondary credentials that align with in-demand industry sectors or occupations in the local area involved, if the LWDB determines that the programs meet the quality criteria for eligible providers of Youth workforce investment activities described in WIOA § 123 [20 CFR 681.460(a)(4) & 681.540(b); TEGL 21-16].

Occupational skills training is defined as an organized program of study that provides specific vocational skills that lead to proficiency in performing actual tasks and technical functions required by certain occupational fields at entry, intermediate, or advanced levels. Local areas must give priority consideration to training programs that lead to recognized postsecondary credentials that align with in-demand industry sectors or occupations in the local area [20 CFR 681.540].

Occupational skills training for youth must meet all of the following requirements [20 CFR 681.540(a); TEGL 21-16]:

- a. Be outcome-oriented and focused on an occupational goal specified in the individual service strategy
- b. Be of sufficient duration to impart the skills needed to meet the occupational goal
- c. Lead to the attainment of a recognized postsecondary credential Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) may be provided to Out-of-School Youth (OSY) ages 16 to 24 with Youth funds [20 CFR 681.550; TEGL 21-16]. Youth funds may not be used to provide ITAs to In-School Youth (ISY), but ISY between the ages of 18 and 21 may co-enroll in the WIOA Adult program if the youth's needs, knowledge, skills, and interests align with the WIOA adult program, the youth meets priority requirements, and the ITA is funded by the Adult program [TEGL 21-16]. More information may be found in ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 2.3 (Eligibility for Adult Program), ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 2.7 (Co-enrollment), and ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 3.3 (Occupational Skills Training).



Program Element 5: Education offered concurrently with workforce preparation and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster [20 CFR 681.460(a)(50); TEGL 21-16]. This program element reflects an integrated education and training model that describes how workforce preparation activities, basic academic skills, and hands-on occupational skills training are to be taught within the same time frame and connected to training in a specific occupation, occupational cluster, or pathway [20 CFR 681.630].

Program Element 5 is the concurrent delivery of Program Element 2, Program Element 3, and Program Element 4 to create an integrated education and training model. When the program elements occur concurrently to train for a particular occupation, occupational cluster, or career pathways, the services are reported in Program Element 5. When the activities occur separately and at different times, they are reported in the Program Element 2, 3, or 4, as appropriate [TEGL 21-16].

Program Element 6: Leadership development opportunities, including community service and peer-centered activities encouraging responsibility and other positive social and civic behaviors [20 CFR 681.460(a)(6)]. Leadership development opportunities are opportunities that encourage responsibility, confidence, employability, self-determination, and other positive social behaviors, such as [20 CFR 681.520; TEGL 21-16]:

- a. Exposure to postsecondary educational possibilities
- b. Community and service learning projects
- c. Peer-centered activities, including peer mentoring and tutoring
- d. Organizational and team work training, including team leadership training
- e. Training in decision-making, including determining priorities and problem solving
- f. Citizenship training, including life skills training, such as parenting and work behavior training
- g. Civic engagement activities that promote the quality of life in a community
- h. Other leadership activities that place youth in leadership roles, such as serving on youth leadership committees, such as a Standing Youth Committee

Program Element 7: Supportive services that are necessary to enable an individual to participate in Youth activities [WIOA 3(59); 20 CFR 681.460], including, but not limited to [20 CFR 681.460(a)(7) & 681.570; TEGL 21-16]:

- a. Linkages to community services
  - b. Assistance with transportation
  - c. Assistance with child care and dependent care
  - d. Assistance with housing
  - e. Assistance with educational testing
  - f. Reasonable accommodations for youth with disabilities
  - g. Legal aid services
  - h. Referrals to health care
  - i. Assistance with uniforms or other appropriate work attire and work-related tools, including such items as eyeglasses and protective eye gear
  - j. Assistance with books, fees, school supplies, and other necessary items for students enrolled in postsecondary education classes
  - k. Payments and fees for employment and training-related applications, tests, and certifications
- For more information concerning supportive services, see ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 3.9 (Supportive Services).

Program Element 8: Adult mentoring for a duration of at least 12 months, which may occur both during and following exit from the program. It must be a formal relationship between a youth participant and an adult mentor. There must be structured activities where the mentor offers guidance, support, and encouragement to develop the competence and character of the mentee. Group mentoring and mentoring through electronic means are allowed as part of the mentoring activities, the local youth program must match the youth with an individual mentor with whom the youth interacts on a face-to-face basis. Mentoring may include workplace mentoring where

the local program matches a youth participant with an employer or employee of a company [20 CFR 681.460(a)(8) & 681.490; TEGL 21-16]. Local programs should ensure appropriate policies and processes are in place to adequately screen and select mentors [TEGL 21-16]. DOL strongly prefers that case managers not serve as mentors, but case managers may serve as mentors in areas where adult mentors are sparse [TEGL 21-16].

Program Element 9: Follow-up services for not less than 12 months after completion of participation [20 CFR 681.460(a)(9)], to ensure the youth is successful in employment and/or postsecondary education and training. Follow-up services may include, as appropriate [20 CFR 681.580]:

- a. Regular contact with a youth participant's employer
- b. Assistance in addressing work-related problems that arise
- c. Supportive services, as described in Program Element 7
- d. Adult mentoring, as described in Program Element 8
- e. Financial literacy education, as described in Program Element 11
- f. Services that provide labor market and employment information about in-demand industry sectors or occupations available in the local area, such as career awareness, career counseling, and career exploration services
- g. Activities that help youth prepare for and transition to postsecondary education and training

When these services are given as follow-up services (after the expected exit date), they should be coded in AJL as follow-up services, as opposed to program services provided prior to exit. In addition, follow-up services should be documented in case files that they were provided as followup services post exit [TEGL 21-16].

Follow-up services may begin immediately following the last expected date of service in the programs included in the Common Exit date, when no future services are scheduled [TEGL 21-16].

Once 90 days of no services, other than follow-up services, self-service, and information-only services and activities, has elapsed and the participant has an official exit date applied retroactively to the last date of service, the program continues to provide follow-up services for the remaining 275 days of the 12-month follow-up requirement. The 12-month follow-up requirement is completed upon one year from the date of exit [TEGL 21-16].

All youth participants must be offered an opportunity to receive follow-up services that align with their individual service strategies. Follow-up services do not have to be provided if the participant declines to receive services or if the participant cannot be located or contacted. Follow-up services may be provided beyond 12 months at the discretion of the LWDB and the program provider. The types of services provided and the duration of the services must be determined based on the needs of the individual. Follow-up services must include more than only a contact attempted or made for securing documentation in order to report a performance outcome [20 CFR 681.580(c)]. Youth should be informed at the time of enrollment that follow-up services will be provided for 12 months following exit. Local programs should have policies in place to establish how to document and record when a participant cannot be located or contacted. Documentation must be placed in the case file if a youth requests not to receive or continue follow-up services [TEGL 21-16].

Program Element 10: Comprehensive guidance and counseling, which may include drug and alcohol abuse counseling, mental health counseling, and referral to partner programs, as appropriate to the needs of the individual youth. When referring participants to necessary counseling that cannot be provided by the local youth program or its program providers, the local youth program must coordinate with the organization it refers to in order to ensure continuity of service [20 CFR 681.510]. When resources exist within the local program or its service providers, it is allowable to provide counseling services directly to participants rather than refer youth to partner programs [TEGL 21-16].

Program Element 11: Financial literacy education, which may include the following activities [20 CFR 681.460(a)(11) & 681.500; TEGL 21-16]:

- a. Support the ability of participants to create budgets, initiate checking and savings accounts at banks, and make informed financial decisions
- b. Support participants in learning how to effectively manage spending, credit, and debt, including student loans, consumer credit, and credit cards
- c. Teach participants about the significance of credit reports and credit scores, what their rights are regarding their credit and financial information, how to determine the accuracy of a credit report and how to correct inaccuracies, and how to improve or maintain good credit
- d. Support a participant's ability to understand, evaluate, and compare financial products, services, and opportunities and to make informed financial decisions
- e. Educate participants about identity theft, ways to protect themselves from identity theft, and how to resolve cases of identity theft and in other ways understand their rights and protection related to personal identity and financial data
- f. Support activities that address the particular financial literacy needs of non-English speakers, including providing the support through the development and distribution of multilingual financial literacy and education materials
- g. Support activities that address the particular financial literacy needs of youth with disabilities, including connecting them to benefits planning and work incentives counseling
- h. Provide financial education that is age appropriate, timely, and provides opportunities to put lessons into practice, such as by access to safe and affordable financial products that enable money management and savings
- i. Implement other approaches to help participants gain the knowledge, skills, and confidence to make informed financial decisions that enable them to attain greater financial health and stability by using high quality, age-appropriate, and relevant strategies and channels, including, where possible, timely and customized information, guidance, tools, and instruction.

Program Element 12: Entrepreneurial skills training [20 CFR 681.460(a)(12)], which is training that develops the skills associated of starting and operating a small business. Such skills may include, but are not limited to, the ability to [20 CFR 681.560(a)]:

- a. Take initiative
- b. Creatively seek out and identify business opportunities
- c. Develop budgets and forecast resource needs
- d. Understand various options for acquiring capital and the trade-offs associated with each option
- e. Communicate effectively and market oneself and one's ideas

Approaches to teaching youth entrepreneurial skills include, but are not limited to [20 CFR 681.560(b); TEGL 21-16]:

- a. Entrepreneurship education that provides an introduction to the values and basics of starting and running a business. Entrepreneurship education programs often guide youth through the development of a business plan and may also include simulations of business start-up and operation.
- b. Enterprise development, which provides support and services that incubate and help youth develop their own businesses. Enterprise development programs go beyond entrepreneurship education by helping youth access small loans or grants needed to begin business operation and by providing individualized attention to the development of viable business ideas.
- c. Experiential programs that provide youth with experience in the day-to-day operation of a business. Some of these programs may involve the development of a youth-run business that young people participating in the program work in and manage. Other experiential programs may facilitate placement in apprentice or internship positions with adult entrepreneurs in the community.

Program Element 13: Services that provide labor market and employment information about in-demand industry sectors or occupations available in the local area, such as career awareness,

career counseling, and career exploration services [20 CFR 681.460(a)(13)]. Workforce and labor market information is the body of knowledge that describes the relationship between labor demand and supply [20 CFR 651.10]. Youth program providers should be familiar with state Labor market information (LMI) tools. LMI tools identify in-demand industries and occupations and employment opportunities and provide knowledge of job market expectations. LMI also provides information about education, skill requirements, and potential earnings. Such information can help youth make appropriate decisions about education and careers [TEGL 21-16].

Career awareness begins the process of developing knowledge of the variety of careers and occupations available, their skill requirements, working conditions, training prerequisites, and job opportunities across a wide range of industry sectors. Career exploration is the process in which youth choose an educational path and training or a job that fits their interests, skills and abilities.

Career counseling or guidance provides advice and support in making decisions about what career paths to take. Career counseling services may include providing information about resume preparation, interview skills, potential opportunities for job shadowing, and the long-term benefits of postsecondary education and training [TEGL 21-16].

Program Element 14: Postsecondary preparation and transition activities [20 CFR 681.460(a)(14)]. Postsecondary preparation and transition activities and services prepare youth for advancement to postsecondary education after attaining a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent, although the services may be given before a youth earns the diploma or GED®.

These services include exploring postsecondary education options, such as technical schools, two-year colleges, four-year colleges and universities, and registered apprenticeships. Additional services include, but are not limited to, assisting youth to prepare for SAT/ACT tests, assisting with college admission applications, searching and applying for scholarships and grants (including the FAFSA), and connecting youth to postsecondary education programs [TEGL 21-16].

Our Monitoring process includes reviewing each local areas' implementation of all 14 program elements annually.

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.

State WIOA Policy 2.5, *Eligibility for In-School Youth Program*, defines the criterion as:

1. An individual who requires additional assistance to complete an educational program or secure or hold employment, as defined by the LWDB in the Local Plan approved by the State Board [20 CFR 681.310(a)] (limited to 5% of the ISY participants [WIOA § 129(a)(3)(B)]; 20 CFR 681.310(b)). The definition in the Local Plan must include required documentation to establish eligibility for this barrier [20 CFR 681.310(a)].

State WIOA Policy 2.6, *Eligibility for Out-of-School Youth Program*, defines the criterion as:

1. 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 LWDB in the

Local Plan [20 CFR 681.300]. The definition in the Local Plan must include required documentation to establish eligibility for this barrier [20 CFR 681.300].

5. INCLUDE THE STATE DEFINITION, AS DEFINED IN LAW, FOR NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL AND ATTENDING SCHOOL AS SPECIFIED IN WIOA SECTION 129(A)(1)(B)(I) AND SECTION 129(A)(1)(C)(I). IF STATE LAW DOES NOT DEFINE “NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL” OR “ATTENDING SCHOOL,” INDICATE THAT IS THE CASE AND PROVIDE THE STATE POLICY FOR DETERMINING WHETHER A YOUTH IS ATTENDING OR NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL.

Mandatory school attendance is required for individuals between the age of five and 17. The statute requires enrollment in an approved school including private, public, parochial or home school that meets the requirements for legal operation. The individual must attend school each day the school is open unless:

- The child has received a high school diploma or its equivalent,
- A child 16 years of age or older who is enrolled in a post-secondary vocational-technical institution, a community college, or two-year or four-year institution of higher education, or
- Any child 16 years of age or older who is enrolled in an adult education program.

A specific definition for “not attending school” is not available other than an individual who does not comply with the above.

6. IF USING THE BASIC SKILLS DEFICIENT DEFINITION CONTAINED IN WIOA SECTION 3(5)(B), INCLUDE THE STATE DEFINITION WHICH MUST FURTHER DEFINE HOW TO DETERMINE IF AN INDIVIDUAL IS UNABLE TO COMPUTE OR SOLVE PROBLEMS, OR READ, WRITE, OR SPEAK ENGLISH, AT A LEVEL NECESSARY TO FUNCTION ON THE JOB, IN THE INDIVIDUAL’S FAMILY, OR IN SOCIETY. IF NOT USING THE PORTION OF THE DEFINITION CONTAINED IN WIOA SECTION 3(5)(B), INDICATE THAT IS THE CASE.

**Arkansas defines “unable to compute or solve problems, or read, write, or speaking English at a level necessary to function on the job, in the individual’s family, or in society” as meeting one of the following conditions:**

- - **Unable to speak English well enough to conduct a normal conversation with or follow the instructions of an English-speaker**
  - **Unable to read English well enough to follow written instructions, including a manual or a recipe**
  - **Unable to read and write well enough to read and appropriately complete an application for services or an application for employment**
  - **Unable to pass a driver’s license test written in English**
  - **Unable to make change or determine if correct change was given from a clerk**
  - **An adult who lacks the basic academic skills needed to obtain a job at above minimum wage, as evidenced by the adult’s employment history**
  - **A high-school dropout who had no education past the eighth grade**

#### D. SINGLE-AREA STATE REQUIREMENTS

1. ANY COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD THAT REPRESENT DISAGREEMENT WITH THE PLAN. (WIOA SECTION 108(D)(3).)

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).)
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).)

NOT APPLICABLE

4. A DESCRIPTION OF THE ROLES AND RESOURCE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE ONE-STOP PARTNERS.

NOT APPLICABLE

5. THE COMPETITIVE PROCESS USED TO AWARD THE SUBGRANTS AND CONTRACTS FOR TITLE I ACTIVITIES.

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.

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.

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.

NOT APPLICABLE

#### E. WAIVER REQUESTS (OPTIONAL)

Arkansas is not requesting waivers at this time.

#### TITLE I-B ASSURANCES

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 veterans with significant barriers to employment to career services provided by the JVSG	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
program's Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist;	
3. The State established a written policy and procedure that set forth criteria to be used by chief elected officials for the appointment of local workforce investment board members;	Yes
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 equitably throughout the State, and no local area suffers significant shifts in funding from year-to-year during the period covered by this plan;	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
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	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
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);	

#### ADULT PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	83.0	83.0	83.0	83.0
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	82.0	82.0	82.0	82.0
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	6,389	6,649.00	6,389	6,649.00
Credential Attainment Rate	81.0	81.0	81.0	81.0
Measurable Skill Gains	71.0	71.0	71.0	71.0
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>

*“Effectiveness in Serving Employers” is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.*

#### DISLOCATED PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	89.0	83.0	89.0	83.0
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	87.0	85.0	87.0	85.0
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	6,900	7,227.00	6,900	7,227.00
Credential Attainment Rate	79.0	79.0	79.0	79.0



Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Measurable Skill Gains	70.2	68.5	70.2	68.5
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>

*“Effectiveness in Serving Employers” is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.*

#### YOUTH PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	77.0	73.0	77.0	73.0
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	77.0	76.0	77.0	76.0
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	3,200	3,700	3,200	3,700
Credential Attainment Rate	68.0	62.0	68.0	62.0
Measurable Skill Gains	57.0	59.0	57.0	59.0
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>

*“Effectiveness in Serving Employers” is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.*

#### 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.

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 may decide to implement other available options.

## **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**

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.

## **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**

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 resolve UI eligibility issues or when required refer those issues to UI staff for investigation. Training the Employment Services staff on identifying UI issues, resolving 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.

Similar methods of training will be provided for other required partners under WIOA, through live and pre-recorded webinars, job aids, and in-person training sessions as needed.

## **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**

Due the rural nature of Arkansas and the employee turnover due to the pandemic, keeping well trained UI staff in each and every local office, is challenging. Due to the variation in the numbers of claims in different offices, for example Mena (very rural) may only have 1 claim in a week, while Little Rock, may have 400.

To enable the ability to maintain well-trained and seasoned staff to provide quality UI assistance consistently to all Arkansas claimants, we are utilizing a service center approach. Claimants call the UI service center from anywhere in the state, and are able to speak with a well-trained UI merit staff member, who specializes UI claims, and therefore is able to provide a higher quality of service reducing the contact required with staff.

This has the additional benefit of reducing trips to the local office. This is especially meaningful in our rural areas, and the expense associated with the travel times; in some instances over an hour.

## **C. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S STRATEGY FOR PROVIDING REEMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE TO UI CLAIMANTS AND OTHER UNEMPLOYED INDIVIDUALS**

The Arkansas Reemployment Services (RES) department manages the Reemployment Services Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program, which uses claimant demographic data to mathematically identify Unemployment Insurance (UI) claimants that are most at risk of exhausting benefits before finding employment. The Division of Workforce Services, through the Arkansas Workforce Centers, provides additional assistance to these participants, and requires completion of a job search workshop as well as a one-on-one assessment to maintain their UI benefits.

A job search workshop that lasts two to four hours is held once a month in a virtual setting or in person in a designated location. The workshop provides:

- An orientation to the Arkansas Workforce Center system
- Partner Program training and resources
- An overview of program requirements
- Labor market information
- Reemployment Plan
- Career Readiness Certification information
- Job search assistance
- Proper resume and application preparation
- Interviewing skills

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.

One-on-one assessment appointments are scheduled to assist with as applicable:

Individual Employment Plan Creation (IEP)	Employment Searches and Opportunities
Resume Review	WIOA Referrals
Arkansas Joblink (AJL)	Veteran's Services
Labor Market Information	Interview
Good Grid	CRC/WAGE
Barriers	Applicable Partner Referrals
UI Review	

The RESEA program covers all local offices in all WIOA regions.

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:

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. 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 the Arkansas JobLink system within the week their claim was filed.

Per Ark. Code Ann. 11-10-507 and Regulation 14, 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. The filing of an initial, additional or reopened claim for unemployment insurance benefits through ADWS' EZARC system creates a unique "AJL" registration for all applicants. These registrations are then monitored and utilized by Employment Service staff to provide job finding and placement services.

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 the Arkansas JobLink system within the week their claim was filed.

UI claimants must submit weekly certifications through ArkNet (Internet) 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 contacting a specific number of employers each week based on their labor market. 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.

Currently jobseekers are provided information on the Wagner-Peyser services available at the Workforce centers. Customers needing further information about training are referred to register in the Arkansas JobLink system to begin self-service activities by using resources such as computers and phones to conduct job searches, create a resume, and respond to employment opportunities through Arkansas JobLink system. Jobseekers can manage their UI claim through the ArkNet website. In addition, to self-service options, claimants can also receive staff-assisted services, such as job search workshops, assistance with access and navigating the Arkansas JobLink system, referral to veteran services, and referral to education, and training.

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.

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 49,346 farms

statewide and 97 percent of Arkansas' farms are family-owned. A mere 16 percent of Arkansas' farms account for a whopping 92 percent of production.

### **Arkansas Landscape**

Agriculture and Forestry use more than 95 percent of Arkansas' land resources.

- 14.5 million acres of farmland
- 6.2 million acres of crops
- 8.3 million acres of livestock and hay
- 18.8 million acres of forest

### **Farming Facts - The Average Arkansas Farm**

- Acres: 308
- Farmer's Age: 57
- Value of Land and Buildings: \$658,732
- Value of Equipment: \$90,822
- Yearly farm expenses: \$124,324
- Yearly farm revenue: \$160,270

### **Aquaculture**

- Around 11,000 acres are devoted to catfish production in Arkansas.
- The value of catfish production peaked at \$78.1 million in 2007 with 166 farms.

### **Beef Cattle**

- Arkansas' cattle inventory exceeds 1.7 million head, with 28,292 farms in Arkansas producing cattle.
- Arkansas ranks 12th nationally in beef cows on farms.

### **Cotton**

- Arkansas ranks 3rd in production, with around 7 percent of the U.S. crop
- Arkansas has the 4th highest yield per acre behind only California, Arizona, and Missouri.

### **Horticulture**

- Almost \$50 million of horticulture products come from nursery and greenhouse products.
- More than 3 million pounds of tomatoes, the state's top vegetable crop, are produced annually.
- Peach production, Arkansas' largest fruit crop, annually tops 10 million pounds.

### **Pork**

- More than 1.8 million pigs are produced in Arkansas annually.
- The total value of Arkansas pork production exceeds \$80 million per year.

## **Poultry**

- Arkansas is 2nd in the nation in broiler production,
- About 2,500 farms in Arkansas produce chickens.

## **Rice**

- Arkansas ranks 1st in the nation in rice production, producing close to 50 percent of the nation's rice.
- More than 60 percent of the rice produced in Arkansas is exported.

## **Soybeans**

- Arkansas is the 10th largest soybean producing state
- Approximately 50 percent of Arkansas's crop is exported. The remainder is processed into oil and meal.

## **Wheat**

- In Arkansas, wheat is a winter crop that is planted in the fall and harvested in the spring. It is the green fields you see in January.
- Arkansas produces soft red wheat, which is used in many confectionery products and for blending for bread products.

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 MSFWs pass through Arkansas for seasonal work and continue to other states, looking at Arkansas as merely a "stopover".

In 2022, we redoubled our efforts to create and strengthen relationships with other State agencies, such as the Arkansas Department of Agriculture. This partnership has already yielded benefits in our ability to identify the needs of our State's agricultural employers. Additionally, we have reached out to 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 MSFs 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 when they are not working. The needed information must be brought to the MSFW 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

The main agricultural crops in Arkansas are soybeans, rice, corn, cotton, and sweet potatoes, with an estimated projected harvest of five and a half million acres that were harvested in program year 2020. Most of these main agricultural crops are concentrated in Central, Eastern, and Northeastern Arkansas.

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 over two 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 and the next highest percentage of workers are traveling from South Africa. Free housing is included for these workers and any domestic worker than 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 COVID-19 pandemic and pursuing variants continue to impact the agriculture community including MSFW's and Agricultural Employers. The tightened labor market has created job opportunities with increased pay rates and additional incentives that lure farmworkers from seasonal and temporary farm labor. Fears and uncertainties tied to COVID-19 have also had an impact on migrant farmworker populations who travel to Arkansas to harvest a variety of crops. Agricultural employers had began increasing their utilization of the H-2A program annually in Arkansas and that has increase has grown constant during the pandemic.

There are estimated to be approximately 4,500 migrant and seasonal farmworkers (MSFWs) in the state at any time, the overall majority of H2-A workers enter from Mexico and Spanish is the native language spoken. Over the past few years, the number of new agricultural jobs entered into the Arkansas JobLink system has more than tripled.

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 2020**

<b>CROPS</b>	<b>ACRES HARVESTED</b>  Harvested 2020	<b>PRODUCTION</b>	<b>DURATION OF HARVEST</b>	<b>GEOGRAPHIC AREA/CNTY</b>
<b>SOYBEANS</b>	<b>2,820,000</b>	<b>144,200,000 BU</b>	<b>July 15 Thru November 15</b>	<b>Lee, Phillips, St. Francis, Cross</b>
<b>RICE</b>	<b>1,461,000</b>	<b>108,107,000 CWT</b>	<b>August 10 Thru October 1</b>	<b>Arkansas, Monroe, Prairie</b>
<b>CORN</b>	<b>620,000</b>	<b>111,320 BU</b>	<b>June 25 Thru August 31</b>	<b>Lee, Phillips, Cross</b>
<b>COTTON</b>	<b>525,000</b>	<b>1,277,000 BALES</b>	<b>August 15 Thru October 21</b>	<b>Mississippi, Craighead, Crittenden</b>
<b>WINTER WHEAT</b>	<b>145,000</b>	<b>4,125,000 BU</b>	<b>November 30 Thru March 1</b>	<b>Lonoke, Prairie, Lee, St. Francis</b>

3. 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

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 4, 500 MSFWs in the State during peak season and approximately 1,500 during low season. This means that approximately 70% of these workers



are migrant workers, approximately 20% are seasonal, and the remaining 10% are year-round farmworkers.

We believe that 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. We will continue our partnership in our ongoing effort to serve MSFWs.

In 2021, employers indicated that the unpredictable season & weather played a large role in seasonal prep, planting, maintaining, harvesting and finishing of all crops, frequently changing numbers of workers needed onsite from day to day. This unseasonal weather also resulted in long periods waiting on the weather to break, resulting in short bursts of high activity, mostly being completed by local and available workers.

#### 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 our experiences, those 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
- Limited access to medical services

#### 4. OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

Arkansas strives to continue improvement interacting with and providing assistance to our MSFW community. Arkansas is not designated as a significant MSFW state due to the low percentage of MSFWs identified. Previously, most contact with MSFWs is through our National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) grantee.

As we continue our efforts to identify and hire Local Office Outreach staff, we will move towards conducting outreach activities year round. These outreach activities will be revisited a minimum of once a year to review data collected and determine if the number of outreach workers or their locations need to be adjusted.

Our Targeted Populations Advisor and State Monitor Advocate have been developing additional partnerships which will provide more sources for dissemination of information about the Arkansas Workforce System and available partners services, training opportunities, and MSFW rights, health and safety information. Additional resources for potential outreach activities include the Arkansas Department of Human Services, the Arkansas Department of Education, Legal Aid of Arkansas, the Mexican Consulate, HOLA Arkansas, Catholic Charities, and various regional and local health, medical and charitable organizations which serve the MSFWs.

Finally, we have reached out to regional Agricultural Employer Groups and Associations and begun attending their meetings to provide program information that can be shared with MSFWs.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we coordinated with our NFJP grantee as well as other community service organizations to share COVID prevention and safety information with our

Agricultural employers and workers. Additionally, we participated in career fairs with our WIOA and Employment Services staff in the geographical areas where the majority of MSFWs reside.

While Arkansas is not a significant MSFW state, the state has 3 significant MSFW centers for PY 2021. We will acquire dedicated Outreach Workers for these three Local Offices to ensure that an appropriate level of outreach is conducted.

We have advertised for temporary, bi-lingual outreach workers located in areas with high concentrations of MSFWs. These temporary workers will provide MSFWs with the full array of employment and training services offered at our Arkansas Workforce Centers.

Additionally, we have trained Local Workforce Center staff who meet the required qualifications for an outreach worker and deploy them in the geographical areas with high concentrations of MSFWs. Upon completion of training, the outreach workers identify MSFW populations, including their locations to provide outreach activities as the first order of priority.

Pandemic related travel restrictions have affected our in-person outreach efforts as well as worker staffing.

Additionally, our Targeted Populations Outreach Coordinator has also contacted other relevant agencies, including Arkansas Department of Agriculture, Legal Aid of Arkansas, the Mexican Consulate and various other organizations for the express purpose of identifying other available services for Arkansas' MSFW population. This information will be incorporated into the training that is provided to our Local Office Outreach staff.

We have incorporated the use of appearances at Laundromats and Grocery Stores as these are areas where MSFWs congregate. Additionally, we will place information, in Spanish, in area churches and local community buildings to expand our reach beyond our normal employment services offices.

Collectively, the Targeted Populations Outreach Coordinator and State Monitor Advocate developed training began providing to our Local Office Outreach staff. This training included WIOA Titles I & III, including the ES Complaint system.

In calendar 2021, we conducted our initial One-Stop Center monitoring and technical assistance reviews. These reviews were conducted virtually and provided an opportunity to make One-Stop Center staff aware of various service gaps as well as provide technical assistance regarding the provision of services to MSFWs and the Complaint System.

Additionally, these reviews provided an opportunity to reiterate the components of State Policy 19-05, *Serving Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers*. This policy can be found at: [https://www.dws.arkansas.gov/src/files/PY\\_19-05\\_Serving\\_Migrant\\_and\\_Seasonal\\_Farmworkers-2.pdf](https://www.dws.arkansas.gov/src/files/PY_19-05_Serving_Migrant_and_Seasonal_Farmworkers-2.pdf).

Finally, ADWS has coordinated with the WIOA Section 167 NFJP recipient with regard to MSFW needs, and to facilitate or provide intensive services and training services. ADWS has engaged with other agricultural groups, associations and organizations for the purpose of identifying available services and referral opportunities to assist MSFWs. Similarly, ADWS has developed a relationship with the Arkansas Department of Agriculture due to this agency's close working relationship with the State's agricultural employers.

A common practice of the state is to share this type of information during state-led and local-led WIOA partners meeting. State Directors and local leaders from each core and required programs, present relevant and pertinent information to a system of workforce partners in a minimum of six training/partner meeting platforms.

Additionally, state merit staff members are very familiar with the WIOA Title I, Title III, and UI Programs, which is embedded into their regular job duties. However, as part of the outreach worker training, we have incorporated the core elements of partner programs, including the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program and UI eligibility. This training is addressed items such as eligibility, program services and benefits, resources for additional or more detailed information, application and contact information.

For the continuing training and development of outreach workers, state or national professional development opportunities are attended by State merit staff. While limited resources prevent attendance by Local Office outreach staff, this information is shared with them.

Several partners on the state and local level have adopted practices in which various programs present at partner staff meetings, designed to reach front-line staff. Arkansas most recently, has been exploring the need to provide customer service and marketing training to WIOA partners, in hopes to increase enrollments and more effectively recruit and serve jobseekers as well as employers.

The Workforce GPS trainings are a key component of our professional development activity for state merit staff.

Similar to other states, ADWS entered into a statewide memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Arkansas Human Development Corporation (AHDC), the State's 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.

The State Monitor Advocate will meet quarterly with AHDC to discuss improving coordination and the administration of employment and training services offered to MSFWs. Additionally, the State Monitor Advocate will meet with Arkansas Workforce Center staff to discuss the efforts of AHDC and to improve shared responsibility of the outreach efforts.

Additionally, our State Targeted Populations Outreach Coordinator has been regularly inviting AHDC and other state and local organizations' staff to various outreach events in an effort to foster more collaboration in our outreach efforts.

## **5. SERVICES PROVIDED TO FARMWORKERS AND AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS THROUGH THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM**

### **Employment and Training Services**

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. Temporary agricultural 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
- Develop strategies to facilitate and coordinate the engagement of the agricultural industry into the workforce development system
- Assist agricultural employers in creating year-round, permanent jobs

Perhaps our most important change will be engaging 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.

### **Business Services Teams (BSTs)**

Each of the State's ten (10) Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDAs) have fully functioning BSTs. These BSTs conduct outreach to their local employers regarding available services from the workforce development system. We have included our Agricultural Employers to this outreach effort to ensure that they are aware of services to assist in both the acquisition of workers as well as the services available to those workers.

The Statewide Employment Service Complaint System has been re-developed and modernized. The State Monitor Advocate and MSFW Outreach Staff promote the newly revised 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.

In calendar 2021, all Local Offices have been trained and began using the USDOL's Complaint/Apparent Violation Form.

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 to provide 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.

## 6. OTHER REQUIREMENTS

### A. COLLABORATION

Arkansas has continued its collaborative agreement with the Arkansas Human Development Corporation and other agencies in the state, such as the Arkansas Farm Bureau, OSHA, Wage & Hour and the Department of Labor's Office of Foreign Labor Certification. Additionally, a relationship with the Arkansas Department of Agriculture has been developed in 2022.

Collectively, the Targeted Populations Outreach Advisor and the State Monitor Advocate have developed partnerships with organizations such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). LULAC has five (5) local councils in Central and Northwest Arkansas which are provide advocacy for and services to the Latino population in Arkansas.

As previously mentioned, the Targeted Populations Outreach Coordinator is forming a partnership with Arkansas Department of Education's Migrant Education Program (ARMEP). Other partnerships will be established with the Hispanic Community Services, El Centro Hispano, and the Hispanic Women's Organization of Arkansas. It is expected that these relationship building efforts will result in the development of collaborative agreements in the near future. While the onset of the COVID pandemic hampered these partnership efforts, we anticipate enhancing these efforts moving forward.

### B. REVIEW AND PUBLIC COMMENT

In developing the AOP, the State solicited comments from the State Monitor Advocate and the NFJP grantee, AHDC. Other appropriate MSFW groups, public agencies, and interested organizations were provided the opportunity to review and provide comment during the required State Plan Public Notice period.

#### **Arkansas Human Development Corporation Comments.**

AHDC's management team has reviewed the AOP and concurs.

#### **Arkansas State Monitor Advocate Comments**

I have reviewed the AOP and have no comments.

### C. DATA ASSESSMENT

During the past couple of years, Arkansas has improved in providing quantitatively proportionate services as compared to the general population and continues to meet the MSFW equity ratio indicators and minimum service level indicators as required by the US DOL at 20 CFR 653.109.

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, 2021 through September 30, 2021 showed improvement.

- Received Basic Career Services - Non-MSFW = 98.0%, MSFW = 97.7%
- Received Individual Career Services - Non-MSFW = 28.9%, MSFW = 39.5%
- Received Staff Assisted Job Search Activities - Non-MSFW = 4.2%, MSFW = 11.6%
- Referred to Employment - Non-MSFW = 13.2%, MSFW = 25.6%
- Individuals Placed in a Job - Non-MSFW = 61.44%, MSFW = 53.97%

#### D. ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS

The State Workforce Agency and State Monitor Advocate have worked collaboratively to train and monitor staff to ensure that the requirements of WIOA and the Wagner-Peyser Act 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. While increased outreach activities are being conducted in certain areas, we are still seeking additional part-time MSFW outreach staff who are bilingual in English/Spanish.

In the last four years, H-2A Foreign Labor Certification program activities have more than tripled. The increase 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.
- Improved partnership and developing a new MOU with our NFJP partner; and
- Identification of community based events related to MSFWs or their communities is ongoing.

#### E. STATE MONITOR ADVOCATE

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

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; 4) Approve corrective action plans; 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

**WAGNER PEYSER PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	72.0	69.5	72.0	69.5
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	73.0	69.5	73.0	69.5
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	5,400	5,477	5,400	5,477
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 <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>

*"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.*

## PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAMS

### A. ALIGNING OF CONTENT STANDARDS

The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, Adult Education Section (ADWS-AES) 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 during program year 2014-2015, but was not fully implemented until the fall of 2016. Adult education's content standards are aligned with K-12 Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which were adopted by the Arkansas Department of Education for K-12 schools during the 2013-2014 year, through the adoption of the Career and College Readiness (CCR) standards. The CCR standards were adopted due to its rigorous research and scientific evidence of effectiveness and applicability to Adult Education. Additionally, the standards are designed to prepare learners for postsecondary education and training and/or unsubsidized employment.

The CCR standards used the CCSS to "identify a manageable set of the CCSS most indispensable for college and career readiness and important to adult students". The CCR Standards then are translated into curriculum and lessons for teaching within the content of the standards to students. Classroom activities, assignments, and a range of formative and summative assessments all help determine whether or not students are absorbing the essential skills and knowledge included in the standards.

The Arkansas CCR Framework encompasses language, math, reading, science, social studies and writing and contains a list of references and all materials utilized in the document in addition to a key of all terms used. The framework provides content standards, sample classroom activities and various learning materials to facilitate learning for all learning styles: visual, auditory and kinesthetic. Instructors can utilize the framework to build their own curriculum and lesson plans to further impact student learning. The framework is designed as a living document, changing over time as do resources and student needs.

Trainings related to CCR standards not only relate to fidelity of instruction using the CCR Standards in content areas, but also address using the CCRS in a contextualized and integrated way to better meet the intentions of WIOA. Additionally, trainings have provided guidance in the use of CCRS with an academic subject focus. For example, the *Superior Social Studies and Science* workshop provided training on close reading, scientific method and other skills measured by the Social Studies and Science GED® tests using the CCR standards. To ensure adult education instructors are able to have access to content related trainings, the state provides professional development opportunities in the evening, regionally, online, face-to-face, and by request, on weekends.

Statewide software purchased by the state for academic learning must also be aligned to content standards. In addition, at the local level, textbooks and other supportive learning tools must be aligned to the college and career readiness standards before being approved to purchase. Adult education instructors are expected to identify the CCR standards in lesson plans. During program reviews and technical site visits, lesson plans and/or syllabi are reviewed to ensure compliance.

Over the past two years, professional development has been focused on helping teachers to align the CCR framework into the curriculum and integrate employability, digital, and financial literacy standards within lesson plans. In addition, improving the quality of instruction is also a professional development goal. Therefore, ongoing professional development using evidence-based practices in core subject areas is a key area of focus for teacher development.

To improve student pass rate and outcomes on the high school equivalency assessment, the state office provided adult education center directors with direct access to analytical documents



from high school equivalency testing site. This enables the directors to have constant access to data useful in determining the effectiveness of classroom instruction. The expectation is that student scores should be on the increase in tandem with the increased focus on teaching CCR standards. Directors may discern which content areas show strength and which show weakness by researching group data, rather than being totally dependent upon annual or quarterly reports.

## B. LOCAL ACTIVITIES

### ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY ACTIVITIES (SECTION 203 OF WIOA)

The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, Adult Education Section 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. Using the thirteen considerations, eligible programs will be funded as stated in “Distribution of Funds for Core Programs” using the previously stated competitive processes. 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. In addition, adult education and literacy providers work collaboratively with other agencies to enhance services. For example, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services use federal funding to provide services to individuals with disabilities. The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services provides funds to those individuals seeking to enter or retain employment or receive specialized training after completing basic skills acquisition through Arkansas Adult Education.

All providers receiving state and/or federal funding from the Division of Workforce Services, Adult Education Section are required to provide the following services: adult education and literacy activities and workforce preparation (state requirement). Integrated education and training programs are a state requirement. 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, financial and digital literacy, a state requirement, shall be integrated into the curriculum.

**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 improve economic self-sufficiency for their families.

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 outlines 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 civics 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 performing the integrated English literacy and civics education in combination 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 in the adult basic education and literacy curriculum, therefore, occurring 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 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:** Local providers must align the IET with the local workforce development plan and have in place or be in progress of establishing an integrated education and training program by July 1, 2020. Providers will offer Integrated Education and Training Activities in a career pathways model. Failure to meet this requirement may result in a loss or reduction of funding for a provider. [State Requirement]

**7b. Organization:** Integrated Education and Training Activities will follow the state's Adult Education Policies, the Assessment Policy and Distance Learning Guidelines, which outlines enrollment, orientation, assessment, instruction, and test taking. ADWS-AES has used its experience with Accelerating Opportunities as the focus has moved to IETs, continuing to

utilize the various methods of team teaching of basic and technical skills to ensure student success. Programs shall provide expanded transition services including Career Service Providers to assist with this process.

**8. Financial Literacy Activities (State Required)** 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 Required)

**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 Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, Adult Education Section has encouraged 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, ASE 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 someone trained as a 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 students in transitioning to the workforce. Career Service Providers are trained to study each local job market and review data from the Workforce Development office to communicate high demand openings and career options to students as they choose a career pathway. CSPs play in key role in a number of programs and services offered through ADWS-AES including the workforce-focused WAGE™ program, and services provided in partnership with SNAP E&T, and TANF.

Programs also invite representatives from business and industry to present to students and assist with their transition 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. Each of these activities and goals are incorporated into adult education and literacy activities, family literacy classes, English language acquisition classes, workplace adult education and literacy classes, integrated English language classes as well as workforce preparation activities. This makes the relationship between Adult Education and the workforce that 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.

## C. CORRECTIONS EDUCATION AND OTHER EDUCATION OF INSTITUTIONALIZED INDIVIDUALS

Providers serving individuals in a correctional facility are required to offer adult education and literacy activities and transition to re-entry initiatives and other post-release services with the goal of reducing recidivism. Although not required, providers who receive correctional education funding are encouraged to offer integrated education and training and develop career pathways. Integrated education and training will include more job skills training. Career pathways will include apprenticeship opportunities. In addition, 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. Special education, as determined through the intake process, will provide appropriate and effective instructional and testing accommodations for students who are identified as having a disability. Peer tutoring is a

tutoring arrangement in which students work in pairs to help one another learn material or practice an academic task.

For programs serving criminal offenders in a correctional institution, priority shall be given to serving individuals who are likely to leave these institutions within five years of participation in the program. Eligible providers who offer classes for incarcerated adults must consult with facility staff about expected release dates of potential students to assess eligibility and to determine class locations. Programs are asked to address this requirement in their applications, and the Adult Education Section monitors compliance.

A correctional institution includes any prison; jail; reformatory; work farm; detention center; halfway house; community-based rehabilitation center; or any other similar institution designed for confinement or rehabilitation of criminal offenders. A criminal offender is any individual who is charged with or convicted of any criminal offense.

Funds will be distributed on a competitive basis that is direct and equitable 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, and process will be used for all proposals and treated the same way in evaluation. The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, Adult Education Section, shall use not 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.

Each eligible provider seeking federal funds must submit and meet the requirements of the grant. Allocation of the available funds is based on each eligible provider's enrollment, performance, and demonstrated effectiveness. Funds available under section 225 (a) (1) of the WIOA will be a multi-year grant cycle. However, the ADWS-AES state office will review the performance levels of providers each year to ensure continuous improvement of outcomes.

In addition to any reports required by Adult Education, each eligible correctional institution receiving funds under this section shall annually prepare and submit a report of progress. Reports of progress shall include, but not limited to, activities carried out under this section, 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

**(d) Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education Program. Describe how the State will establish and operate Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education programs under Section 243 of WIOA, for English language learners who are adults, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries, including how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will be delivered in combination with integrated education and training activities**

d. The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, Adult Education Section (ADWS-AES) operates Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IEL/CE) 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. IEL/CE program providers are established through an open and competitive process that is direct and equitable as outlined in section III "Distribution of Funds for Core Programs". Integrated Education and Training activities are required for all funded local programs to meet the requirements of section 243. Local programs will offer at least one IET that is aligned with the Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB) identified employment needs and availability of educators and trainers in the area. Local programs will recruit IEL/CE participants to enroll in IET programs and provide additional civics, language and academic support as needed by ELLs. ADWS-AES will provide technical assistance and monitor local programs offering relevant IET programs, have effective IET

recruitment and retention activities aimed at IEL/CE participants; and provide adequate language support in addition to concurrent and contextualized, Literacy, ESL, and workforce preparation activities.

To meet the needs of ELLs who have degrees or professional licenses in other countries, ADWS-AES is expanding its use of educational software designed to upskill English language learners. In addition, ADWS-AES has built a relationship with Arkansas United (AU) a non-profit organization that provides diverse service to immigrants through its Immigration Resource Centers. This partnership will allow ADWS-AES to assist ELLs with professional credentials in their home countries in understanding their options through the legal and other services provided by AU. The organization also offers community-level access to enable ADWS-AES to more clearly identify ELLs and their specific barriers and needs.

***(d2) Describe how the State will fund, in accordance with the requirements of title II, subtitle C, an Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program and how the funds will be used for the program.***

(d2) As in previous years, IEL/CE funds will be allocated to providers based on a direct and equitable, competitive process. Funds will be distributed on a competitive basis that is direct and equitable through the RFP process. Funds available under section 243 of the WIOA will be for a four-year cycle. The state will provide technical assistance to section 243 funded programs to ensure compliance and monitor performance. If it is deemed that a funded program is under-performing after technical assistance has been provided, ADWS-AES may suspend section 243 funding and find alternatives to ensure services are continued in the local areas by increasing funding to other section 243 funded providers or hold a targeted competition. Funds will be allocated using a model that references adult ELL demographics and immigration patterns for the state. During the 2021-22 year, the state has recalibrated ELL data and demographics to align with the 2020 Census. This resulted in an increase of programs expected to serve ELLs based on the previous RFP. It is anticipated that the Adult Education Section of the Division of Workforce Services will receive at least the established and historical minimum of \$200,000 per year. In accordance with the requirements of Title II, programs requesting IEL/CE grant-based funds through the RFP process will be awarded based on a local program's ELL enrolled population; ELL enrolled population growth; performance in educational gains and outcomes; and, availability of Integrated and Education Training programs. Programs requesting funds through the RFP will include a budget and narrative describing the program's plans for funds; the ELL population enrolled for the previous fiscal year; and actual or anticipated ELL population growth based on the Department of Labor statistics. Each RFP will be evaluated based on a rubric provided by the state and funds will be distributed based on need and services provided.

The providers who meet the criteria and demonstrate effectiveness in performing the integrated English literacy and civics education in combination with integrated education and training activities will be awarded. Services will include instruction in the following areas: literacy, English language acquisition, rights and responsibilities of citizenship, civic participation, and workforce training.

***(d3) 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.***

(d3) In order to prepare and place adult ELLs in employment and integrate with the local workforce, IEL/CE courses must provide content-based and integrated instruction on topics proposed by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS), local workforce/employer needs and requests as well as ELL needs within Arkansas. Programs are highly encouraged to involve students in activities. The topics are as follows:

1. *English Language Instruction:*

- a) Reading, b) Writing, c) Listening, d) Speaking

2. *Civics activities:*

**Four Pillars of Civics:**

- a) Naturalization & Citizenship; b) Civic Participation; c) US History; d) Government

3. *Workforce Training:*

- a. Soft Skills: Completing Employment Applications, Interview Techniques, Computer Literacy, Workplace Culture
- b. Employability Certificates: Career Readiness Certificate, WAGE™ Level I
- c. Training Programs: Apprenticeships, Employer requested Training, WAGE™ Level II

Over the past few years, the Adult Education Section has reorganized all workforce activities under the state's Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy (WAGE™) program. This includes all integrated education and training programs, workplace classes, etc. The WAGE™ program provides a path for participants to identify and prepare for a chosen field using career pathways. Through the program, participants are able to earn a WAGE™ Level I Workforce Preparation certificate, the curriculum for which includes working with a Career Service Provider to determine a pathway that considers the individual's interests and aptitude, increasing basic skills, soft skills, and financial and digital literacy, within the context of a career pathway. The Level I certificate is designed to prepare ensure that students are prepared for the workforce and to move into the next step forward in their careers.

Those who complete the WAGE™ Level I Certificate can then work toward a Level II certificate, working to complete entry-level credentials that align with the participant's chosen field. IEL/CE programs will operate in combination with integrated education and training activities through Career Pathways, including partnerships with business and industry and other educational institutions, and language instruction to address local needs. Partnerships provide opportunities for students to participate in employment training through WAGE™, internships, and apprenticeships. IEL/CE programs can 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.

IEL/CE programs will provide English language instruction within a content-based Civics curriculum based on topics and guidelines provided by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) as well as the English Language Proficiency Standards. In addition to English language instruction, digital literacy and financial literacy, workforce skills will be emphasized and integrated. Workforce skills include soft skills development; industry recognized credentials; and, training opportunities, such as apprenticeships and national programs such as WAGE™. In addition to partnerships with workforce agencies, local programs will foster employers and vocational training service providers. The IEL/CE content and activities are aimed to be delivered through effective practices that enable ELLs to increase their English language proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening in combination with civics and workforce education in order to better understand and navigate governmental, educational, and workplace systems and key American institutions. In addition to classroom instruction, programs are encouraged to involve students in activities supported by IEL/CE funds, such as field trips to civic or historic related venues; guest speakers to expand and enhance classroom instruction; and organized visits to local workplaces. Emphasis is being placed on contextualized, concurrent instruction, with multiple trainings provided during the 2020-21 and 2021-22 years, and plans to expand in future years.

Along with explicit content-based classroom instruction, partnerships with other agencies, such as the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (ADWS) and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS), as well as business and industry, should aim for ELLs to obtain, retain, and/or upgrade employment. Workforce training should be developed based on student and local employment needs. These may include, but are not limited to, soft skill development internships, apprenticeships, or employer on-site training for employment and language skills.

The State has developed a prescribed list of topics and objectives based on USCIS guidelines and suggestions for Civics Education. Employment was added in accordance with WIOA guidelines regarding IEL/CE. Programs that are supported with IEL/CE grant funds should cover the following topics and objectives. Programs are encouraged to add or further develop these topics and objectives. Distance Learning offerings for English Language Learners have increased dramatically during the pandemic. Workforce training remote options have become a tool for local programs to reach ELLs who have not yet felt comfortable returning to the classroom.

Topic	Objective
<b>Consumer Economics</b>	<p>Banking/Finance: types of accounts, budgeting, check cashing, paychecks, taxes, banking applications, recognizing scams</p> <p>Consumer Rights: filing complaints</p> <p>Housing: types of housing, lease/rent, housing assistance, tenant rights, utility providers</p>
<b>Community Resources</b>	<p>Advocacy: civic- oriented organizations, community issues</p> <p>Directory: career services, important places and services available in the city, county, state, and national level (library, city hall, DMV)</p> <p>Education: post-secondary institutions, K-12 school system, parent involvement, organizations, job work training opportunities</p> <p>Family: childcare, parenting, senior services, family activities and resources in the community</p> <p>Immigrant Resources: rights, organizations, and services</p> <p>Safety/Security: emergency services, personal safety, household safety, victim rights, workplace safety</p>
<b>Health</b>	<p>Emergencies: emergency services, procedures</p> <p>Healthcare: nutrition, resources, providers, cost, insurance, drugstores, pharmacies, mental illness, substance abuse, patient rights</p>



Topic	Objective
<b>Employment</b>	<p>Employment Services: career centers, ADWS, requirements, certifications/licenses, WAGE™</p> <p>Workplace Skills: job applications and interviews, job training programs, workplace culture, computer skills</p> <p>Rights: worker rights, safety</p>
<b>Government and Law</b>	<p>Citizenship Preparation: structure and role of government on local, state, and federal levels, voting laws and rights</p> <p>Enforcement: role of police, how to speak and behave when interacting with police</p> <p>Identifications: obtaining a driver's license, state identification, permanent resident card</p> <p>Laws: domestic violence laws, child abuse laws, right to a lawyer</p>

Programs that receive IEL/CE grant funds must complete an annual report that includes the number of students served with funds (both ESL and ABE/ASE) and the lessons and materials used in the following areas:

- \*US History and government
- \*Agency Partnerships and Business & Industry
- \*Language instruction
- \*Rights and Responsibilities of citizenship
- \*Civic participation
- \*Naturalization procedures
- \*Employability skills

**(d4) 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.**

(d4) Arkansas IEL/CE grant awardees are expected to reference the local Workforce Development Boards' plans to identify the high demand industries and skills in each of the program's area/region. Local Program Directors regularly attend local Workforce Development Board meetings in order to be aware of local business needs, changes, and challenges in the area/region and how they may impact program design and instruction. Grant awardees select relevant workforce preparation content that is aligned with local needs and the available Integrated and Education Training program.

Each month an IEL/CE Committee meets to discuss policy, strategies, trends, and changes in the fluidity of activities designed to administer to the needs within this program. Committee members research succeeding program practices, developing trends in the workplace, local and state industry needs, and discuss goals best suited for Adult Education participants. Committee members stay on top of barriers local workforce and IEL/CE programs have and may foresee in recruiting, retaining and expanding the opportunities for participants.

IEL/CE staff help identify local and state trainings to help gain insight and opportunities into developing instruction and services to better equip and prepare IEL/CE participants. One area of focus has been to include trainings to target areas of distance learning as the pandemic has forced many ELL learners from the classroom and face-to-face into unfamiliar distance learning modes.

One area the IEL/CE program plans to integrate with the workforce is through improving the digital literacy skills through utilizing the distance educational tools of Voxy EnGen, Burlington English, and the WAGE™ program. Beyond the educational modes, these programs focus on the workforce educational entry points of using technology in career education.

The recruitment and enrollment of students into IEL/CE will continue to be a focus in this grant application process as the pandemic has shifted the economy and shuffled many potential participants in the current workplace. To help meet some of the barriers of clients in travel and language, digital learning equipment and software will be a vital tool in continuing to reach them. Interest, language ability and cost are the specific barriers to many students, and recipients of IEL/CE funds are expected to connect with other programs such as Title I and Title III to identify participants and provide additional supportive services.

Beyond recruitment and retention, the IEL/CE program will continue to address and readdress the barriers of integrating IEL/CE program participants into the workforce programs and successful career clusters to enable them to take advantage of combined opportunities there. The WAGE™ program has addressed two main areas IEL/CE participants have utilized the Manufacturing and Hospitality clusters and helped expound on these career pathways through using the software in Burlington English.

#### E. STATE LEADERSHIP

##### 1. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE THE FUNDS TO CARRY OUT THE REQUIRED STATE LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES UNDER SECTION 223 OF WIOA

(E) The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, Adult Education Section will use no more than 12.5% of federal funds for the following adult education and literacy activities to develop or enhance the adult education system of the state. The four required activities are included below along with how the state will use leadership funds to carry out activities under section 223 of WIOA.

*A. Alignment of adult education and literacy activities with other one-stop required partners to implement the strategies in the Unified or Combined State Plan as described in section 223(1)(a).*

A. Since Fall 2015, a WIOA Executive Committee comprised of key core partners that include representatives from Title I, Title II, Title III, and Title IV was created to develop the State Plan and address the needs of employers and the workforce. Some partners include Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, Division for Services for the Blind, and the Division of Workforce Services. Leadership meet regularly as the WIOA Executive Committee where plans are made for meeting the needs of clients and students, as well as completing the recent state plan modifications. Subcommittees on policy, information technology, finance, core measures, sector strategies, and transition also meet to ensure continued progress in these areas. State-level and local core partners statewide meet semi-annually to share progress in various initiatives, highlight collaborative efforts and conduct activities geared toward improving collaboration between the partners. 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, some adult education programs are located within workforce centers or have a satellite program located there, and all of the adult education programs across the state provide services to one-stop participants.

Collaboration between ADWS-AES and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services allows adult education students to receive a diagnosis of disabilities and receive services, if eligible, through Arkansas Rehabilitation Services. Additionally, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services refers participants in need of additional basic and other skills to ADWS-AES for services.

Adult education providers have collaborated with other core partners to offer career pathways opportunities for students. For example, ADWS-AES has worked with Title IV, Arkansas Career Development Center, to provide Servsafe and other certifications for students, especially those who choose to enter the hospitality industry. This is a great example of how a career pathway has been developed for an entry level position to meet a common objective.

Adult education also provides Career Readiness Certificate (CRC) testing for Title I and Title III participants. The Arkansas Career Readiness Certificate involves collaboration between ADWS-AES, the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, Arkansas Workforce Centers, the Arkansas Division of Higher Education, the Arkansas Community Colleges, the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, and the Arkansas Department of Education, with the Governor signing the official Arkansas CRC certificates. Adult education programs provide basic skills improvement through regular adult education services when test takers fail the CRC twice.

In recent years, this initiative has begun offering the Platinum CRC, which requires higher skill levels to earn, creating an greater need for Adult Education services. The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, Adult Education Section will continue its partnership with the Arkansas Community Colleges (ACC) to support Integrated Education and Training programs to adults without a high school diploma. ACC supports the 22 community colleges in Arkansas and supports individuals on their pathway to a better career. In addition, ACC has links to all of the community colleges in Arkansas, which also contains the degree and career pathways offered. Community colleges serve as the fiduciary agency for 22 of the 37 adult education and literacy providers.

Adult education provides support to students who need developmental studies as they enter college, through its transition/bridge program. For example, during the summer Northwest Arkansas Community College adult education program provides a Transition to College course for both adult education students and those recently accepted into college. Adult education provides instruction in basic skills such as reading, math, and English. In addition, providers also integrate financial literacy, digital literacy, employability skills, time management, test taking strategies, and study skills into the course. The class is designed to not only give students' academic support, but also to provide an overview of what to expect in college once enrolled. Ultimately, the bridge class can help improve the retention and success rate of students.

The Adult Education Section works with the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services as well as the Arkansas Division of Higher Education to match employment and postsecondary data for its students, providing information essential for reporting.

The Division of Workforce Services, Adult Education Section (ADWS-AES) partnered with the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS) to provide services to Able Bodied Adults without Dependents (ABAWDs) enrolled in the Employment and Training (E&T) Program of DHS's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Through this partnership, ADWS-AES monitors the progress of ABAWDs referred to the E&T program and provides Adult Basic Education, workplace skills, certification opportunities through the office's WAGE™ and Integrated and Education Training (IET) programs, to assist the participant in meeting educational and vocational goals. In addition to those referred by DHS, ADWS-AES works to identify and serve current Adult Education students who may also benefit from SNAP E&T services. The partnership currently services 74 of the state's 75 counties, with the last county being serviced by a Local Education Agency that provides adult education services.

In summary, the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, Adult Education Section (ADWS-AES) has worked in close collaboration with its partners to ensure success in implementation of the state plan and thereby, meeting the needs of Arkansans.

2. *Establishment or operation of a high-quality professional development programs as described in section 223(1) (a).*

2. Arkansas has its own professional development resource center, The Arkansas Adult Learning Resource Center (AALRC). The AALRC is funded through the Southeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative by the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, Adult Education Section (ADWS-AES). It was established in 1990 to provide a source for identification, evaluation, and dissemination of 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 ADWS-AES, 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 Adult Education Section by supporting statewide program administrators' meetings, numerous committee meetings, publishing a directory of literacy services, and maintaining a website (<http://www.aalrc.org>).

One of the state's initiatives over the years has been to intensely focus professional development training on teacher instruction. ADWS-AES has adopted the College and Career Readiness (CCR) Standards set forth by the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education. State staff along with teachers and directors from the field examined each CCR standard in order 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.

ADWS/AES participated in the first Teaching Skills That Matter pilot in which Arkansas instructors received intense training on integrating the nine skills that matter to adult students using three approaches to be used in five critical topic areas. Instructors who participated in this national training provided training to other teachers in the state through a three-part series, each part focusing on one of the three approaches: integrated and contextualized learning, problem-based learning, and project-based learning.

During the 2017 legislative session, the Arkansas General Assembly passed Act 1063 (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 the knowledge and practice of 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 are required to have a current Arkansas teacher's license, they will also have to meet the Department of Education requirements in order to maintain their license. ADWS-AES has participated in the Student Achievement in Reading (STAR) training for local programs to assist in preparing instructors. The AALRC also offers professional development training in other content areas such as math, science, and social studies. Additionally, the AALRC has worked with ADWS-AES and Arkansas Educational Television Network to record professional development trainings on diversity and

distance learning to increase instructor access, with plans to produce additional and varied recordings.

The AALRC supports practitioners and trainers through professional development opportunities at state and national conferences. Those include: 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 program directors explaining each training event, and event information is included on the AALRC website ([www.aalrc.org](http://www.aalrc.org)) under the professional development heading. Information regarding training activities is also placed 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, national conference).

In order to assess the quality of its professional development programs, the AALRC uses the AALRC Universal Survey Form. Evaluations are aggregated and evaluated to determine quality of training and adjustments are made according to the results in order to improve effectiveness of the professional development program and the impact on student learning outcomes.

To support local programs and instructors, a combination of methods are used to assess the effectiveness of professional development training. Classroom observations, student educational gains of teacher participants, focus groups, and overall self-reporting tools are used to determine professional development effectiveness. Data from the adult education information system are utilized to evaluate and determine if and how the professional development activities impact student learning outcomes.

3. *Provision of technical assistance to funded eligible providers as described in section 223(1)(c).*

The Adult Education Section will continue to offer technical assistance to eligible providers. Many program directors 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. 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.

The Adult Education Section staff provides technical training on the state's data management system (LACES). 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' Meeting. 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.

ADWS-AES provides over ten data management information systems trainings per year regionally, as well as during administrators' meetings and conferences. ADWS-AES also offers 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.

2020-21 Development of specific topics in the use of LACES continue and are provided at a distance to improve access. The AALRC provides technical assistance through email and telephone contact as well as face-to-face meetings with providers. The AALRC IT Specialist provides software and hardware support to all programs .

4. *Monitoring and evaluation of the quality and improvement of adult education activities as described in section 223 (1)(d).*

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.

ADWS-AES 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 37 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, ADWS-AES requests a full financial audit review by the state agency's finance department.

ADWS-AES 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, ADWS-AES makes a recommendation to the Arkansas Workforce Development Board as to whether or not 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

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.

(4) Developing content and models for integrated education and training and career pathways.

(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.

(8) Activities to promote workplace adult education and literacy activities.

(9) Identifying the curriculum frameworks and aligning rigorous content standards that—

1. specify what adult learners should know and be able to do in the areas of reading and language arts, mathematics, and English language acquisition; and
2. take into consideration the following:
  - a. State adopted academic standards.
  - b. The current adult skills and literacy assessments used in the State or outlying areas.
  - c. The primary indicators of performance described in section 116 of WIOA.
  - d. Standards and academic requirements for enrollment in non-remedial, for-credit courses in postsecondary educational institutions or institutions of higher education supported by the state or outlying area.
  - e. Where appropriate, the content of occupational and industry skill standards widely used by business and industry in the State or outlying area.

(10) Developing and piloting strategies for improving teacher quality and retention.

## F. ASSESSING QUALITY

The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, Adult Education Section monitors programs quarterly through a desk audit process in which measures such as average attendance hours, measurable skill gains (MSG), GED® performance, percentage of students post-tested, etc. are

reported and reviewed. The desk audits also allow programs to review operational aspects of the program such as the percentage of funds expended, completion of required professional development, and completed personnel activity reports.

Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, Adult Education Section also performs an annual site visit for each adult education and literacy program 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, approximately every four years, a team of program advisors conducts an intensive program review through which Division staff assesses each program in the following areas:

1. Program Management and Reporting
2. Financials
3. Advisory Committees
4. Personnel and Professional Development
5. Student Intake, Documentation, and Orientation
6. Program Policies
7. Instruction
8. Teaching/Classroom Observation
9. Technology
10. Recruitment/Retention
11. Collaboration
12. Facilities
13. Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

The 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. Each program review is accompanied by a full financial review by the state agency's finance department.

Once each program is reviewed, the program receives a report which indicates all findings, recommendations, and commendations. The program then develops and submits a Corrective Action Plan (CAP), if applicable, which details how each finding will be remedied. The program director and program advisor work together to ensure that each finding is corrected, at which time the program and Local Education Agency are notified.

The state office requires adult education directors to attend a State Administrators' meeting twice a year. During this time, state staff review policies and procedures, state performance, answer questions, and give providers an opportunity to share best practices.

### Evaluating Professional Development

In addition to the technical assistance provided through the evaluation processes, The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, Adult Education Section provides varied professional development through the efforts of the Arkansas Adult Learning Resource Center (AALRC).

Through the AALRC, program directors, faculty and staff have access to training in educational technology, student assessments, and assisting students with disabilities along with many other



topics. The AALRC uses a state-wide assessment of professional development needs of educators to plan professional development for the field in order to improve instructional and programmatic practices.

The establishment or operation of professional development programs to improve the quality of instruction pursuant to local activities will continue to be a top priority for the state in order to increase the success of student outcomes. Training will continue for local adult education/literacy providers on the use of resources available electronically, for accessing curricula and for sharing locally produced curricula with other providers. In addition, a stronger emphasis will be placed on ensuring that materials and training will incorporate the research-based components of phonemic awareness, system phonics, fluency, and reading comprehension.

In order to promote continuous improvement of professional development activities and the impact on student learning outcomes, The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, Adult Education Section through the AALRC will include ongoing and systematic needs assessment and evaluation processes to not only provide information about the impact of professional development, but to provide data for refining and adjusting professional development activities.

1. Participant evaluations/surveys will be collected for all professional development activities. These evaluations will reflect the response of participants to the objectives, material, presentation and the trainer providers.
2. Evaluations/surveys will be aggregated and evaluated to determine quality of training and adjustments will be made according to the results. These results will be analyzed for areas in need of improvement and changes will be made accordingly.

To support local programs and instructors, a combination of methods is used to assess the effectiveness of professional development training. Classroom observations, student educational gains of teacher participants, focus groups, and overall self-reporting tools is utilized to determine professional development effectiveness. Data from the adult education management information system is utilized to evaluate and determine if the professional development activities impact student learning outcomes. This is an area that the state continues to revisit and make modifications as needed.

The AALRC currently uses the Universal Survey Form to evaluate professional development offerings. The data from the evaluations is used to analyze the effectiveness of the professional development program and the impact on student learning outcomes.

#### ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAM CERTIFICATIONS

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	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
receive, hold, and disburse Federal funds made available under the plan;	
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**

<b>APPLICANT'S ORGANIZATION</b>	<b>Enter information in this column</b>
Applicant's Organization	Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, Adult Education Section
<b>PRINTED NAME AND TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE</b>	<b>Enter information in this column</b>
First Name	Dr. Trenia
Last Name	Miles
Title	Director
Email	trenia.miles@arkansas.gov

#### SECTION 427 OF THE GENERAL EDUCATION PROVISIONS ACT (GEPA)

The Adult Education Section of the Division of Workforce Services (ADWS-AES) 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). ADWS-AES will provide training on and access to tools that addresses the barriers to education, including gender, race, national origin, color, disability, or age. These trainings are focused on particular issues and topics related to each of the barriers. For example, ADWS-AES has and will continue to provide training on Learning Disabilities that includes assessment tools, accommodations, and instructional materials; Diversity Awareness on various topics, such as age, socio-economic status, gender, sexual orientation, and race; trainings 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.

ADWS-AES is committed to implementing strategies for ensuring equitable access and participation in the program. 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 special 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 that will address the identified special access needs indicated by participants prior to events: conferences, seminars, workshops, focus groups, regional trainings, etc. All program-related events will be held in ADA accessible facilities.
3. Offer culturally sensitivity 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 enable assistive computer devices to interpret the materials.
5. Continue to monitor for program effectiveness to ensure that the proposed strategies are met, target audience(s) are being reached, and goals and objectives are achieved.

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 in order to overcome barriers to equitable participation, including barriers based on gender, race, color, national origin, disability and age.

#### ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	42.0%	42.0%	43.0%	43.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	22.0%	27.8%	23.0%	30.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$4,500	\$4,500	\$4,600	\$4,600
Credential Attainment Rate	46.0%	46.0%	47.0%	47.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	50.0%	52.0%	51.0%	53.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>

*"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.*

#### PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (COMBINED OR GENERAL)

##### A. INPUT OF STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

1. INPUT PROVIDED BY THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL, INCLUDING INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN, RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COUNCIL'S REPORT, THE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER SATISFACTION, AND OTHER COUNCIL REPORTS THAT MAY HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED AS PART OF THE COUNCIL'S FUNCTIONS;

The Arkansas State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is a citizen advisory council appointed by the Governor that partners with the Arkansas Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Services, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) to develop and to carry out the VR State Plan and ARS' goals and priorities. The SRC assists in shaping and reviewing policy, engages in strategic planning, evaluates the effectiveness of the VR Program, analyzes consumer satisfaction data, and provides guidance when developing and reviewing cooperative agreements.

Because of COVID-19, the SRC utilized virtual meeting applications to conduct quarterly and called meetings. The SRC provided input on the following initiatives:

- ARS Field Policy Manual updates regarding rates of payment for medically directed services, the ARS Small Business Program, and WIOA common performance measures

- The preliminary planning for the 2021-2022 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)

The SRC also participated in the Rehabilitation Services Administration's (RSA) monitoring of ARS providing input regarding the services ARS provides and its relationship with ARS.

At the request of the SRC, ARS provides a consumer satisfactory survey at case closure. Survey results are tabulated and are included in the SRC's annual report, which is reviewed at the December SRC meeting each year.

## 2. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S RESPONSE TO THE COUNCIL'S INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS; AND

ARS appreciates its relationship with the Council, and values the input and recommendations provided by SRC members. During the December 2020 quarterly meeting the SRC provided input regarding changes to the Field Services Policies and Procedures Manual. The SRC provided additional input regarding the Field Services Policies and Procedures Manual during the March 2021 meeting as well as the 2021 RSA monitoring activity. During the June 2021 meeting the SRC provided input for determining vendor qualifications and the scope of the upcoming triannual comprehensive statewide needs assessment.

## 3. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S EXPLANATIONS FOR REJECTING ANY OF THE COUNCIL'S INPUT OR RECOMMENDATIONS.

No input or recommendation from the SRC was rejected by ARS.

## B. REQUEST FOR WAIVER OF STATEWIDENESS

### 1. A LOCAL PUBLIC AGENCY WILL PROVIDE THE NON-FEDERAL SHARE OF COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE WAIVER REQUEST;

Not applicable to ARS.

### 2. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WILL APPROVE EACH PROPOSED SERVICE BEFORE IT IS PUT INTO EFFECT; AND

Not applicable to ARS.

### 3. REQUIREMENTS OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN WILL APPLY TO THE SERVICES APPROVED UNDER THE WAIVER.

Not applicable to ARS.

## C. COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH AGENCIES NOT CARRYING OUT ACTIVITIES UNDER THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

### 1. FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS;

ARS collaborates and coordinates services with federal, state, and local agencies that contribute to the vocational rehabilitation and independent living of Arkansans with disabilities.

Collaborating agencies include:

- Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education – Arkansas Transition Services
- Arkansas Governor's Employment First Taskforce
- Centers for Independent Living
- Community Rehabilitation Programs

- Developmental Disability Providers
- Department of Human Services - Division of Adult, Aging and Behavioral Health Services, Working Disabled Medicaid Program, and Division of Developmental Disabilities Services.
- Supported Employment Vendors
- Social Security Administration Ticket to Work
- Arkansas Spinal Cord Commission

## 2. STATE PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT UNDER SECTION 4 OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998;

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. ARS also has administrative responsibility for the Alternative Financing Program (AFP) that provides low interest rate, extended term loans for the purchase of assistive technology.

## 3. PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT BY THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE;

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. Additionally, ARS field offices collaborate with local SNAP liaisons to provide updates to field staff on SNAP processes.

## 4. NON-EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES SERVING OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH; AND

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
- SoundStARt
- The Arkansas Independent Living Council
- The Governor's Commission on People with Disabilities
- Arkansas Trauma Rehabilitation Program
- Arkansas Apprenticeship Coalition
- Disability:IN – Arkansas

## 5. STATE USE CONTRACTING PROGRAMS.

ARS has no state use contracting programs.

## D. COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS

### 1. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S PLANS, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES FOR COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS TO FACILITATE THE TRANSITION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM SCHOOL TO THE RECEIPT OF VR SERVICES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, AS WELL AS PROCEDURES FOR THE TIMELY

## DEVELOPMENT AND APPROVAL OF INDIVIDUALIZED PLANS FOR EMPLOYMENT FOR THE STUDENTS

A pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) counselor and a Transition counselor are assigned to high schools in the state. Counselors provide direct services to students in the school setting under the core service categories for Pre-ETS, and they provide counseling and guidance on moving into transition services, fully affording students both knowledge and the means to enter into the vocational rehabilitation program.

In order for Pre-ETS to be provided in the school setting, an application for services must be completed by the entity proposing to provide services. The application must be reviewed and approved by a selection committee. Next, an agreement to operate within the school system is developed and approved by all parties. Pre-ETS require monthly reporting by the vendor, prior approval of the curriculum, and monitoring by ARS and the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) with collaboration and input from the local school officials.

Additionally, ARS has developed a plan to partner with school systems to provide Work-based Learning Opportunities Leading to Future Employment (WOLF). 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.

The following are the responsibilities of ARS and DSB regarding transition planning and vocational rehabilitation services for eligible and potentially eligible youth:

1. Designate vocational rehabilitation personnel to be responsible for the provision of technical assistance, consultation, and the development of statewide program strategies and procedures applicable for youth with disabilities and those eligible for 504 plans.
2. Facilitate the identification of youth with disabilities who may benefit from vocational rehabilitation services as early as possible, but no later than the academic year in which the student turns 16.
3. Make relevant data available about eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services and track information about employment outcomes for youth with disabilities.
4. Assign vocational rehabilitation counseling personnel to develop relationships with LEAs to formalize collaborative approaches to student outreach and transition planning and referral development and tracking.
5. Make LEA personnel, students, and their families aware of the vocational rehabilitation program, including VR eligibility requirements (in accordance with 34 CFR 361.42), and the application procedures and scope of services (in accordance with 34 CFR 361.48) that are provided to all eligible or potentially eligible individuals.
6. Provide the core Pre-ETS to eligible and potentially eligible students with signed parent/guardian consent beginning at age 16 for both ARS and DSB.

### **Procedures for Timely Development and Approval of Individualized Plans for Employment for Transition Students**

The process for moving students into transition for the development and approval of an Individualized Plan for Employment includes having the Pre-Employment Transition Counselor first identify the students that want to participate along with the parents/guardians that have given their approval. The Participation Agreement Form captures who would like to move forward with signatures of the student and the parent/guardian. These forms will be made available to students with disabilities beginning at age 16, for those students who express an interest in pursuing competitive, integrated employment.

Next, a meeting is scheduled by the Pre-ETS Counselor for the Transition Counselor, Pre-ETS Counselor, Parent/Guardian, Student, and School staff. The IEP is reviewed along with the student's progress in Pre-ETS services. This meeting is to explain the process, services, and the documents required in order for the student to apply for VR Transition services.

The party responsible for the student (parent/guardian/student) will be provided with a flyer that describes the steps of the VR process and the documentation needed to initiate the process. The Pre-Employment Transition Counselor will facilitate a seamless referral to the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for Transition.

In order for the Vocational Rehabilitation Transition Counselor to move forward with an application, certain documentation is needed. The Pre-Employment Transition Counselor assists in providing a smooth referral process by giving clear copies of the following documents to the receiving counselor:

1. Demographic Form
2. Driver's License or State Identification Card, if available
3. Disability Information (IEP, 504, or medical record)
4. Social Security Benefits Awards Letter (if available)
5. Income information (if available)

These items along with the complete referral packet is given to the receiving counselor. The Pre-Employment Transition Counselor then documents the date of referral.

### **Pre-ETS Students and Section 511**

ARS has developed forms and processes to delineate that the required services and documentation are provided prior to entry into a subminimum wage situation.

Counselors contact each school they are assigned to at the beginning of the school year (1st semester of school) to inquire if any families or educators have identified their students as a potential candidate for sub-minimum wage/sheltered work. If a student is seeking subminimum wage, or if it is unknown whether or not the student could benefit from competitive integrated employment, the Pre-Employment Transition Counselor meets with the student and parent or guardian to provide informed choice and career counseling.

The counselors work with the high school transition team, the student, and their family to gather documentation of the transition services the student receives while participating in high school. This documentation will demonstrate the student's ability to participate in competitive integrated employment.

If the VR counselor cannot make an eligibility determination due to the significance of a student's disability, the counselor may request trial work experiences to determine if the disability is too significant for the student to benefit from VR services in terms of an employment outcome under 34 CFR 361.42(e).

If a student has participated in Pre-Employment Transition with ARS and/or through transition services offered by the school, and there is clear and convincing evidence that the student is not a candidate for competitive integrated employment as determined by the student's participation in trial work, the counselor will gather the documentation (Individualized Education Plan, Transition Plan, Pre-employment Services Progress Reports, and/or the ARS Work Experience Progress Reports) and the appropriate forms will be signed and disseminated.

ARS forms require clear and convincing supporting documentation regarding a decision on the student's ability to benefit in competitive integrated employment, signatures be obtained of all parties involved, all documents are presented at least 45 days after completion, that the method



of transmission is documented, and that career counseling is again provided within 30 days of case closure.

### **Age for Pre-Employment Transition Services**

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services and the Division of Services for the Blind Arkansas have agreed to begin Pre-Employment Transition Services at age 16 through age 21.

## **2. INFORMATION ON THE FORMAL INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT WITH THE STATE EDUCATIONAL AGENCY WITH RESPECT TO:**

### **A. CONSULTATION AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO ASSIST EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES IN PLANNING FOR THE TRANSITION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM SCHOOL TO POST-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING VR SERVICES;**

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, taking applications, determining eligibility, and providing vocational rehabilitation services for individuals determined eligible for transition services. The Memorandum of Understanding between the agencies was signed by the Department of Education, Special Education Unit on 12/13/17, by the Commissioner of ARS on 1/11/18, and the Division of Services for the Blind on 1/30/18. It went into effect on 1/30/18 when the last party signed.

ARS participates in the state level Arkansas Interagency Transition Partnership (AITP). AITP is a task-force made up of representatives of state agencies, including ARS, DSB, Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education – Arkansas Transition Services, the Arkansas Workforce Development Board, DHS-Division of Adult, Aging and Behavioral Health Services, and parent advocates.

#### **Consultation and Technical Assistance**

In order 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:

1. 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.
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.
4. Expanding Pre-ETS in schools throughout the State and at the Arkansas Career Development Center (ACDC). ARS transformed the Arkansas Career Training Institute (ACTI) to a new service delivery model, ACDC. This model focuses as a hub for training

and services to support VR consumers and/or students with disabilities to successfully reach the milestones of their individual plans for employment.

ARS, LEAs, ADE, and VR service providers receive intensive 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.

**B. TRANSITION PLANNING BY PERSONNEL OF THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND EDUCATIONAL AGENCY THAT FACILITATES THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THEIR INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS;**

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 Individualized Education Program (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 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.

**C. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES, INCLUDING FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES, OF EACH AGENCY, INCLUDING PROVISIONS FOR DETERMINING STATE LEAD AGENCIES AND QUALIFIED PERSONNEL RESPONSIBLE FOR TRANSITION SERVICES;**

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 with regard to ensuring 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:

1. 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).
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 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.

3. 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.
4. ARS is financially responsible for providing Pre-ETS to students who meet the definition of students with a disabilities 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 vocation training and employment, and completing an IPE before leaving the school setting. ARS agrees the student and/or designated party has choice in the development of the IPE.

#### **D. PROCEDURES FOR OUTREACH TO AND IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WHO NEED TRANSITION SERVICES.**

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 Inclusion Film Camp, the Transition Employment Program, and the Work-based Learning Opportunities Leading to Future Employment in order to identify students and get them interested in work and in participating in the full array of transition services. Additionally, ARS goes directly to educational settings in Department of Youth Services facilities, where youth who are at-risk are identified and provided Pre-ETS, as well as given an opportunity to apply for full vocational rehabilitation services. ARS also provides brochures and introductory meetings to explain what Project SEARCH can offer youth seeking permanent employment outcomes. ARS shares information on ARS programs and services with students, parents, and educators at Arkansas Transition Services' annual program, College Bound Arkansas.

ARS works directly with the schools and community partners to provide education on Pre-ETS and Section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act.

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.

#### **Referral Process and Parental Consent**

Pre-ETS counselors directly assigned to the school provide Pre-ETS referral packets to all students and schools. Students who are interested complete the referral packet with their parent/guardian with assistance from the Pre-ETS counselor. The Referral packet includes:

1. Cover Letter
2. Pre-ETS Referral Form
3. Informed Consent/Release of Information – This form is required to be signed and uploaded in the electronic case file prior to the initiation of services.
4. Benefits Planning Consent Form (if applicable)
5. Social Security Administration 3288 Consent Form (if applicable)

### **Number of Potentially Eligible in the State**

Each year in September ARS requests a data pull from the Arkansas Office of Information Technology, which provides a total count of students aged 16-21 in the state on Individual Education Plans and on 504 plans within the public school system.

### **Set-aside Process for Authorized Activities**

Each state fiscal year, ARS utilizes the WINTAC guidance formula 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 coordination 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 product is subtracted from the amount of 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. ARS provides state-wide services by providing core services directly from counselors assigned to the public high schools in each school district to provide direct services and by providing fee-for-service vendors throughout the state to offering core services.

### **E. COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH PRIVATE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS**

ARS requires potential vendors to complete an application process and provide required credentialing to become an approved vendor. ARS contracts with Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) utilizing Purchased Service Agreements. All vendors are required to meet standards to ensure VR clients achieve acceptable employment outcomes, and vendors are compensated based on performance outcomes.

The CRP contract outlines the specific employment services to be provided and the available compensation, which is outcome based fees per service with the total funding available. The service component varies per vendor dependent on their ability to provide the service. CRPs may provide only job placement services (Referral, Job Development/Placement and Closure.) Others may provide Employment First services (Discovery, Employment Path, Job Development/Placement, and Closure), Supported Employment (Referral, Job Development/Placement, Stabilization and Closure) and Individual Job Coaching Services. The contract describes the objectives/scope of the service(s), and performance standards for

competitive integrated employment. The contract has separate attachments related to service description, outcome per service, funding grid, and an attachment identifying the performance deliverables and the performance indicators requiring expansion of employment opportunities and successful outcomes to individuals with disabilities. The contract defines continued funding may be based on successful outcomes.

#### F. ARRANGEMENTS AND COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

ARS maintains cooperative agreements/contracts with private non-profit and for profit CRPs, which define the requirements for the provision of supported employment (SE) services and extended services. The cooperative agreements/contracts include commitments by the CRP to fund extended services for a period of time as needed by the client and the employer for successful employment.

ARS maintains a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Department of Human Services - Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS) in which DDS agrees to pay for extended services for clients who receive Medicaid waiver services after ARS has closed the case as successfully employed.

#### G. COORDINATION WITH EMPLOYERS

##### 1. VR SERVICES; AND

The Business Engagement Unit (BEU) is responsible for employer outreach. The BEU builds relationships with employers 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. The BEU 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 works with Career Workforce and Local Workforce Boards to identify potential skill deficits that may act as barriers to employment, and identifies the most appropriate training to assist clients in obtaining employment.

ARS provides presentations, evaluation, expertise, and assistance to counselors, their clients, employers, and employees with disabilities in the provision of accommodations to facilitate successful vocational outcomes through the AT@Work and Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work (SAW/RTW) programs.

The AT@Work program is 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, competitively 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, as well as 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.

## 2. TRANSITION SERVICES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, FOR STUDENTS AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES.

ARS provides and/or procures transition services including Pre-ETS for students and youth with disabilities through community rehabilitation programs that place students into paid work experiences with a variety of employers throughout the state or directly with employers, depending on the vocational interests of the student or youth. Employers facilitate opportunities in group settings and individually with job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, and workplace readiness training. Employers are also 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 or to vocational training or to work.

## H. INTERAGENCY COOPERATION

### 1. THE STATE MEDICAID PLAN UNDER TITLE XIX OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT;

The Arkansas Department of Human Services operates the State Medicaid program. ARS, the State Medicaid program, and other agencies have in place an interagency agreement that delineates roles and responsibilities related to sequential funding for combined waiver programs for individuals participating in employment related activities under WIOA. ARS, the State Medicaid program, and the other agencies collaborate on the Arkansas' Employment First and State Agency Model Employer initiatives.

ARS, along with DHS – Medicaid, Developmental Disabilities Services, and Aging, Adult and Behavioral Health Services, through a Memorandum of Understanding and collaborative efforts have received technical assistance through EconoSys (Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Program) to enhance employment opportunities since 2015. Most recently the technical assistance has orchestrated Subject Matter Experts (SME) to assist with State Agency as Model Employer (SAME), to begin planning for the expansion of Employment First, and to enhance supported employment for individuals with behavioral health concerns.

Since 2019, the SME for SAME has assisted this partnership in hosting training sessions with state human resource managers educating them on SAME and by helping them to see that individuals with disabilities can be a part of the talent pool of job seekers. Ten individuals with developmental disabilities remain employed from the 2018 pilot in extra help positions working within state agencies. Two individuals have been employed permanently with the State. The DHS/Developmental Disabilities Services created the process for using extra help positions with

services provided through ARS supported employment for on-the-job supports, stabilization in their positions, and extended services funded by Medicaid. In 2020, the SAME technical assistance plan is to create a Round Table of State Directors to develop a strategic plan for changing the state HR hiring practices for individuals with disabilities to become employed either through permanent state positions or extra help. The state unit has received support from the Governor's Office and the state Office of Personnel Management. The SME will continue to provide training opportunities through PowerPoints, webinars, and onsite visits.

The Arkansas state team collaborated with the SME to show solidarity for Employment First, to identify employment as a choice for all individuals with disabilities with a focus primarily on individuals with behavioral health concerns. In 2019, the technical assistance plan focused on educating the state leaders in the behavioral health agency on employment/supported employment as part of the recovery plan for individuals with behavioral health concerns through evidence based practices called Individual Placement and Supports (IPS.) As Arkansas transitioned the Medicaid Waiver services from DHS to organized care through the Arkansas Provider-led Shared Savings Entities, referred to as the PASSE, the efforts related to moving this initiative forward slowed. The SME and team trained the PASSE supervisor on supported employment for individuals with behavioral health concerns in late summer of 2019, who supports these new services. In 2020, the technical assistance plan focus is on identifying the types of services to be offered to individuals with behavioral health concerns, and the continued education of the PASSE staff, vocational rehabilitation staff, and behavioral health entities with the desired outcome of initiating one pilot program.

## 2. THE STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING SERVICES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES; AND

The Department of Human Services – Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS) is responsible for providing services to individuals with developmental disabilities. ARS, DDS, and other agencies collaborate on Arkansas' Employment First and State Agency Model Employer initiatives. ARS, DDS, and the other agencies have in place an interagency agreement that delineates roles and responsibilities related to sequential funding for combined waiver programs for individuals participating in employment related activities under WIOA.

## 3. THE STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES.

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 an interagency agreement that delineates roles and responsibilities related to sequential funding for combined waiver programs for individuals participating in employment related activities under WIOA. ARS, DAABHS and the other agencies collaborate on Arkansas' Employment First and State Agency Model Employer initiatives.

### I. COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT; DATA SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

#### 1. SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

##### A. QUALIFIED PERSONNEL NEEDS

##### I. THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL WHO ARE EMPLOYED BY THE STATE AGENCY IN THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES IN RELATION TO THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS SERVED, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY;

ARS currently is serving 9,857 clients and employs a total of 258 staff. For Federal Fiscal Year 2022, the average number of individuals on a VR counselor's case load is 103 per counselor.

### **Access and Accommodation – (Total 21)**

Administration – 3  
Evaluation (RIDAC and LEC) – 12  
Administrative Support – 1  
Extra Help – 0  
Vacant positions - 5 (Psychological Examiners - 4, Psychologist - 1)

**ACDC – (Total 29)**

Administration – 3  
Counseling – 2  
Training – 3  
Evaluation – 2  
Other (Maintenance, Engineering, Security Skilled Trade, Equipment Tech) – 1  
Administrative Support – 3  
Extra Help – 0  
Vacant positions - 15 (Instructors - 7, Counselors - 4, Administrative Support -2, Administration - 2)

**Field Services – (Total 212)**

Managers – 16  
Counselors – 75  
BERs – 10  
Administrative Support – 65  
Extra Help – 1  
Vacant positions - 45 (BERs - 3, Counselors - 20, Administrative Support - 22)

**Central Office – (Total 71)**

Commissioner's Office – 5  
Field Administration – 3  
PPD&E – 12  
IT – 10  
Finance – 11  
Communication – 4  
HR – 6  
Administrative Support – 6  
Extra Help – 2  
Vacant positions - 12 (HR - 4, Finance - 5, IT - 3)

**II. THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL CURRENTLY NEEDED BY THE STATE AGENCY TO PROVIDE  
VR SERVICES, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY; AND**

**Access and Accommodation - (Total 18)**

Administration - 3  
Evaluation (RIDAC and LEC) - 11  
Administrative Support - 4  
Extra Help - 0

**ACDC – (Total 29)**

Administration – 6  
Counseling – 3  
Training – 8  
Evaluation – 3  
Other (Maintenance, Engineering, Security Skilled Trade, Equipment Tech) – 3  
Administrative Support – 4  
Extra Help – 2



**Field Services – (Total 173)**

Managers – 14  
Counselors – 85  
BERs – 10  
Administrative Support – 64  
Extra Help – 0

**Central Office – (Total 56)**

Commissioner's Office – 6  
Field Administration – 4  
PPD&E – 10  
IT – 3  
Finance – 12  
Communication – 3  
HR – 7  
Administrative Support – 5  
Extra Help – 4

III. PROJECTIONS OF THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY, WHO WILL BE NEEDED BY THE STATE 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.

**Access and Accommodation – (30)**

Administration – 4  
Evaluation (RIDAC & LEC) – 13  
Administrative Support – 5  
Extra Help – 1  
Vacant positions - 7

**ACDC – (Total 63)**

Administration – 7  
Counseling – 7  
Training – 18  
Evaluation – 3  
Other (Maintenance, Engineering, Security Skilled Trade, Equipment Tech) – 4  
Administrative Support – 5  
Extra Help – 0  
Vacant positions - 19

**Field Services – (Total 238)**

Managers – 14  
Counselors – 95  
BERs – 13  
Administrative Support – 80  
Extra Help – 3  
Vacant positions - 33

**Central Office – (Total 86)**

Commissioner's Office – 6  
Field Administration – 9  
PPD&E – 12  
IT – 3  
Finance – 15  
Communications – 5

HR – 9  
Administrative Support – 8  
Extra Help – 10  
Vacant positions - 9

## B. PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

### I. A LIST OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE STATE THAT ARE PREPARING VR PROFESSIONALS, BY TYPE OF PROGRAM;

Currently, the University of Arkansas – Fayetteville and the University of Arkansas – Little Rock provide degrees in rehabilitation counseling. ARS monitors student enrollment in vocational rehabilitation and related programs at each institution by category, the number of students currently enrolled, the number of students graduating the previous year, and certification or licensure. ARS works with the institutions to provide internship and practicum opportunities, and notifies the universities when job openings become available.

### II. THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED AT EACH OF THOSE INSTITUTIONS, BROKEN DOWN BY TYPE OF PROGRAM; AND

#### FY2020

- University of Arkansas – Fayetteville MRC — 15 (FT) and 2 (PT)
- University of Arkansas – Little Rock MRC — 66 (FT) and 60 (PT)

#### FY2021

- University of Arkansas - Fayetteville MRC - 19 (FT) and 3 (PT)
- University of Arkansas - Little Rock MRC - 43 (FT) and 92 (PT)

### III. 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.

#### FY2020

- University of Arkansas – Fayetteville MRC — 9 (FT)
- University of Arkansas – Little Rock MRC — 9 (FT) and 10 (PT)

### 2. PLAN FOR RECRUITMENT, PREPARATION AND RETENTION OF QUALIFIED PERSONNEL

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 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.

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. 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.

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.

### 3. PERSONNEL STANDARDS

#### 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

The State of Arkansas has no established standards that apply to the VR counselor position. However, 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 first 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 or doctoral 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 one year 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 are provided ongoing training to prepare for the CRC and/or MRC.

#### 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.

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. STAFF DEVELOPMENT

#### A. A SYSTEM OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT FOR PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS WITHIN THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, 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

Staff is provided training opportunities through the Arkansas Rehabilitation Association Training Conference, Special Topics Training, Administrative Assistants Training Conference, online training, and webinars. Training is also available through the state Interagency Training Agency, the University of Arkansas CURRENTS program, CRC training, CEU training for purposes of certification or licensure in the professions, and training provided internally by the agency in case management and policy and procedures compliance.

Employees have opportunities to complete the Facilitating Career Development program through the National Career Development Association, which provides relevant skills and knowledge to assist clients in planning careers and obtaining meaningful work.

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.

#### **B. PROCEDURES FOR THE ACQUISITION AND DISSEMINATION OF SIGNIFICANT KNOWLEDGE FROM RESEARCH AND OTHER SOURCES TO DESIGNATED STATE UNIT PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS.**

While findings from the 2019 CSNA indicated the leadership team is very well-trained and boasts an excellent core group of field counselors, there is a need for training throughout the organization, but in particular for counselors in the areas of serious mental health issues and autism. The survey team recommended ARS give a higher level of concentration to training needs, and use survey methods to identify training needs for each employee level. The CSNA also indicated employees feel the agency leadership could do a better job of communicating with rank and file staff. Staff was often unaware of changes even when those changes affected their work directly.

The agency enables employees to attend classes, seminars, and conferences, and disseminates information through newsletters, in-service training, workshops, and conferences. The field program conducts monthly area meetings. Topics include the latest techniques for providing services to clients, updates on statewide performance measures, and guidance on other WIOA initiatives. The field program has outlined four regional trainings to address chronic mental illness and autism topics, which will enable counselors to increase their knowledge and better understand mental health identifiers, treatment, and medications, and better understand support systems for individuals with autism. Additionally, field staff will have access to seminars, conferences, and in-service training on mental health and autism topics.

### **5. PERSONNEL TO ADDRESS INDIVIDUAL COMMUNICATION NEEDS**

ARS provides access and contracts as needed to employ personnel 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 telecommunications 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 or hearing impaired. Sign language skills are included as a minimum qualification for positions providing services to persons who are deaf or hearing impaired.

### **6. COORDINATION OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT UNDER THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT**

ARS staff participates in state, regional, and national transition meetings and conferences. ARS Field Program staff serves on the Arkansas Interagency Transition Partnership (AITP) Team and 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. AITP promotes personnel development through online training for teachers, students, and families, and through an annual Summer Agency Connection, which includes ARS rehab area managers, ACDC, Access and Accommodations personnel, and representatives from high schools. AITP maintains a directory of services provided by ARS and other stakeholders.

#### **J. STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT**

1. PROVIDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE REHABILITATION NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES RESIDING WITHIN THE STATE, PARTICULARLY THE VR SERVICES NEEDS OF THOSE:

A. WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THEIR NEED FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;

The most recent Arkansas Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment was completed in April 2019. ARS contracted with the University of Arkansas – Fayetteville who worked collaboratively with the State Rehabilitation Council, key stakeholders, and ARS to survey the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities in Arkansas. Multiple data gathering strategies were used including focus group discussions with clients and participants from ARS, SRC, key stakeholders, vendors, employers, and ACDC administrators and staff, and structured surveys were sent to all ARS counselors, a random sample of clients, employers, and ARS leadership.

Findings

Individuals with the most significant disabilities were the largest underserved group, and supported employment and transition services were consistently listed as most needed services.

Recommendations

- ARS should continue to work across departments and agencies to increase funding for the provision of supported employment and transition services.
- ARS should increase training for CRPs, specifically to address the fear families have about the loss of benefits when individuals achieve competitive integrated employment.
- ARS should explore ways for CRPs to play a more vital role in providing supported employment services across the state.

B. WHO ARE MINORITIES;

Findings

Hispanic/Latino clients who do not speak English as a first language were identified as needing interpreters provided by ARS, in order to ensure that counselor-client communications are effective.

Recommendation

- ARS must make stronger efforts to locate interpreters who will be available for applicants who do not use English as their primary language.

C. WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR PROGRAM;

Findings

Data collected through focus groups as well as online surveys revealed that racial and ethnic minorities experienced barriers when seeking VR services. Certain geographic areas were considered underserved, including the Delta Region counties, the Southeast quadrant of the state, and some counties in Northeast Arkansas.

Recommendations

- ARS must pursue the expansion of services to geographically underserved areas of the state as well as the underserved populations.
- ARS must expand its outreach to these populations to overcome a lack of trust in state government, which is common in the underserved geographic regions.

### Findings regarding Center for Independent Living

Arkansas' Centers for Independent Living (CILs) are required to provide five core services: peer support, information and referral, individual and systems advocacy, independent living skills training, and transition. There are four CILs operating in the state located in Fayetteville (SOURCES), Little Rock (Mainstream Living), Whitehall (Delta Resources), and Hot Springs (SAILS). CILs work hard to provide outreach and to serve individuals from outlying areas who are most in need, but they only cover 25 of the 75 counties in Arkansas.

The CILs work cooperatively and maintain courteous relationships, but have very few collaborative programs. The CILs advocate strongly for their clients; however, there is little intentional integration between CILs and the VR system. For example, counselors were unaware that one Center provides transition services in public schools in their service area, and both counselors and rehab area managers were unaware that SOURCES manages the Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) grant and employs five Community Work Incentive Coordinators throughout the state to provide benefits counseling.

The CILs provide excellent services and embrace the philosophy people with disabilities are the 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 more closely together to advocate for expanded IL services in Arkansas.

### Recommendations

- CILs should work with the VR system and specifically with ARS to become a fully integrated and intentional partner with the agency. There are a number of valuable services provided by the CILs not fully understood by the agency; when there is understanding and collaboration, it is too often centered with senior management and is not known or understood by the rank and file counselors and staff across the state.
- A CIL representative should be a member of the State Rehabilitation Council. It is not enough to have a SILC representative on the council, since the CILs and SILC are separate and distinct entities.
- CILs should work closely with ARS and act as advocates for additional funding to operationalize a fifth CIL in the state. It is not acceptable to have the majority of Arkansas' counties located outside of a CIL service area.

#### **D. WHO HAVE BEEN SERVED THROUGH OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM; AND**

### Findings

ARS has taken a leadership role in developing and maintaining partnerships with WIOA partners. The creation and ongoing review of the WIOA state plan is one example of the collaboration and cooperation among the partners. However, the most frequently stated concern with the Workforce/ARS partnership revolves around the "no wrong door" concept, which hinges on the development of a common intake system. Workforce applicants with disabilities, who are transferred to co-located ARS counselors, provide duplicative information to initiate the ARS application, since the two agencies have not developed a common intake system. The ARS IT staff continue to work for a better system.

### Recommendations

- ARS leadership should continue to take a leadership role in the WIOA partnership efforts.

- ARS should push for the development of a shared database to eliminate the significant workload added to ARS counselors and support staff to duplicate information already provided by the consumer to a WIOA partner.

E. WHO ARE YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING, AS APPROPRIATE, THEIR NEED FOR PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES OR OTHER TRANSITION SERVICES.

Findings

ARS provides transition and Pre-ETS services across the state, and meets the WIOA requirement to utilize at least 15% of the state's VR funding to provide Pre-ETS to support youth with disabilities in transition from secondary school to postsecondary school and employment. ARS recruits and contracts with CRPs and willing public school districts.

Recommendations

- ARS must take a leadership role in bringing Transition partners fully on board.
2. IDENTIFY THE NEED TO ESTABLISH, DEVELOP, OR IMPROVE COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE; AND

Findings

It has taken several years for Community Rehabilitation Programs in Arkansas to accept and embrace the need to meet federal and state guidelines as outlined in Section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act; however, they now are working to become compliant by providing access to mandated career counseling and information and referral services to their program participants, and by working with the ARS monitoring unit.

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. The agency has done a good job of communicating the new requirements and of setting deadlines for their implementation, but this is just the first step in the process. Initiating the second step in the transformation of the CRP network is no less important to the provision of needed services. It is imperative for ARS to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and support within the CRP network.

Recommendations

- ARS and representatives from the CRPs should meet and work together to create a path forward for these programs. Potential service additions and changes must meet the expanding needs of Arkansas' citizens with disabilities as defined by ARS, while providing an expanded array of services and funding options for CRPs. Opportunities for CRPs include:
- Expanded Supported Employment services for individuals with significant disabilities. ARS can assume a more active role in the development of additional funding sources for initial Supported Employment services as well as long-term supports when needed. Possible partnerships with DDS should be sought.
- Expanded School to Work Transition and Pre-ETS opportunities. ARS' challenge is to explore ways to utilize CRPs to expand these services. One example is for CRPs to partner in the WOLF program.
- Partnering with the Arkansas Career Development Center (ACDC) to provide training and certification programs in local communities. ACDC staff would be responsible for maintaining certifications for existing programs, as well as expanding those offerings as resources warrant, and for monitoring the training services provided in the

communities. CRP staff could provide the hands-on, day-to-day supports to help clients master the training ACDC provides.

- Additional training programs for CRP staff. ARS should work with CRPs to identify specific training needs and then develop and make available training presentations in affordable and accessible formats in local communities.

#### Findings regarding Arkansas Career Training Institute

ACTI had a dedicated staff who worked hard to seek and earn national certifications for their program offerings. ACTI leadership actively explored apprenticeship opportunities for individuals with disabilities. In addition, ACTI staff established and provided innovative programs for transition-aged youth including the Transition Employment Program (TEP). This comprehensive pre-employment training service provided Arkansas high school students with disabilities who have completed the 11th grade with job exploration counseling, work-based learning opportunities, counseling on postsecondary opportunities, and instruction in self-advocacy. In just a few short years, the enrollment in the TEP has grown and has proven to be an excellent tool for motivating students to think more broadly about their options after high school.

However, downsides to operating ACTI under a twenty-four hour, residential model were identified: the distance clients travelled from most areas of the state to attend ACTI; the long waiting periods for acceptance and enrollment; the perception in the local communities that ACTI did not accept referrals who have significant disabilities; and ACTI's annual budget, which was approximately one-third of the total ARS services budget.

#### Recommendations regarding Arkansas Career Training Institute

In response to these findings, ACTI began transformation into ACDC. One of the major changes with this transformation was the elimination of the residential component and consolidating of central services away from the main campus located at 105 Reserve Street in Hot Springs to 200 Reserve Street in Hot Springs. The consolidation of equipment, personnel, and other resources necessitated the need for some renovation of the Armory Building located at 200 Reserve Street along with the construction of a structure to support welding training.

The new model used at ACDC is focused on four program areas:

- *Vocational Rehabilitation Support Services*
- *Career and Technical Education Programs*
- *Pre-Employment Career Development and Transition Services*
- *Pre-Apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship*

**Vocational Rehabilitation Support Services:** These services are needed to provide evaluation of students to ensure their educational goals are attainable. In addition, staff members will provide detailed information to students with disabilities about training, education, and career opportunities. This will assist the students and their VR counselors across the state to develop better individual plans for employment. In addition, it will assist with referrals for individuals with disabilities that are currently working in sub-minimum wage, with training, education, and career options available that lead to competitive integrated employment.

**Career and Technical Education Programs:** The programs are needed to provide skills and knowledge to people with disabilities to help them achieve competitive integrated employment. A brief description of the training area is listed below:

- **Customer Service and Retail.** This program covers the basic aspect of careers in retail with a focus on customer service. In addition, there is a retail lab and externship



developed jointly with CVS pharmacy. Students completing this program will be prepared for jobs in retail and those requiring high levels of customer service. Also, it gives them access to industry specific training for jobs under the corporate umbrella of CVS. It should be noted CVS is one of the largest health care/retail organizations in the world.

- **Construction Technology.** Home Repair and Maintenance: covers basic skills and techniques used in carpentry, plumbing, electricity, and other building trades. The optional module on electrical construction is a complete orientation to the electrical trade, giving students a competitive edge as an apprentice electrician.
- **Welding.** This program has two eight-week modules, which allow students to learn in-demand skills that lead to jobs in the construction and manufacturing sectors.
- **Environmental Services.** This three-week program provides fundamental training in environmental services and prepares students with the skills needed for entry level jobs in environmental services. Also, by stacking other training, they will be able to move from diverse careers in multiple industry sectors.
- **Automotive Maintenance Technology.** This eight-week program focuses on safety and routine maintenance items, tire repair, oil and filter service, belts, hoses and the like. It has been designed to allow students to enter the automotive workplace quickly and build skills on the job.
- **Culinary Arts.** This eight-week course is designed to train students as food service workers in cafeterias, hospitals, restaurants or other food service facilities. Students will follow a scheduled rotation that provides training in Food Safety, Personal Hygiene, Food Preparation, Ingredients, Dishwashing, and Proper Food Storage. This increases opportunities for competitive integrated employment of students with significant disabilities, as well as opens the door for internships and other employer-based training opportunities across the state.
- **Certified Nursing Assistant Training.** There are three, six and seven week options for this program depending on the classes. The classes provide students with the practical application of basic care skills and the required theory training for nursing assistants, per the rules and regulations of the Office of Long Term Care of Arkansas. In addition, the course articulates with a registered apprenticeship program, which provides an additional learn as you earn opportunity.

**Pre-Employment Career Development and Transition Services:** These services are needed to enhance knowledge of competitive integrated employment opportunities in the state and develop skills needed for employment or to further post-secondary education and training. With the passage of the WIOA, Pre-Employment Transition Services for students with disabilities is a required service to be coordinated with and provided to all high schools.

ACDC will provide and facilitate pre-employment transition services including career exploration and work-based learning. The areas include:

- ServSafe Food Handler Program
- Professional Guest Services
- Certified Production Technician
- Certified Logistics Technician
- OSHA 10-hour Outreach

- Security Guard

**Pre-apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship:** ACDC has been working with several registered apprenticeship programs that are related to current career and technical education provided on campus. The property allows adequate space and opportunity to conduct pre-apprenticeship training for students to prepare for registered apprenticeship and careers in trades that are in demand in the state. The partnership with registered apprenticeship allows for greater opportunities for the students served on the property while limiting redundant education and training provided by local educational entities. This also has the added benefit of helping registered apprenticeship programs meet the requirement of 29 CFR 30.7, which requires programs to recruit and include people with disabilities.

ARS ceased operation of ACTI as a residential program to which selected individuals are referred, and adopted a different business model to provide an array of supports to individuals throughout the state that is fiscally sustainable. The new model is known as the Arkansas Career Development Center (ACDC).

ACTI transformed from a residential program housing a variety of training programs in one central location, to a team of experts facilitating training and credentialing programs across the state through CRPs, High Schools, and Core Workforce Partners. This “hub and spoke” model retains the core group of training staff and credentialing experts. By establishing the “hub and spoke” model, ACDC will provide an effective response to the three major negative viewpoints cited in this study. First, since these programs would be offered closer to home, individuals will no longer be forced to travel long distances and live in a residential setting to participate in ACDC certification programs. Second, the long waiting periods for acceptance and enrollment in ACTI programs would be eliminated. There should be an exponential increase in the number of individuals served by these certification programs through partnerships with the network of CRPs, High Schools and Core Workforce Partners, thereby reducing the waiting time for enrollment. Finally, the addition of hands-on support from well-trained CRP staffers to provide assistance to individuals enrolled in the local programs would make completion and certification accessible to individuals with more significant disabilities.

ACDC is seeking out and developing partnerships with existing CRPs throughout the state to create specific training programs similar to those currently being offered at the residential facility.

ACDC continues to develop and expand ancillary programs like TEP, and aggressively pursue apprenticeship programs that could be incorporated into the CRP, High School, and Core Workforce partnership model.

### 3. 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 THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT

#### Findings

ARS has worked diligently to provide transition and Pre-ETS services across the state, and has met the WIOA requirement that at least 15% of the state’s vocational rehabilitation funding be used to provide Pre-ETS to support youth with disabilities in transition from secondary school to postsecondary school and employment. ARS management and field staff have worked tirelessly to recruit CRPs and willing public school districts with whom to contract in order to meet the requirement. However, to meet the 15% benchmark quickly, ARS allowed some Pre-ETS providers to pay students for “work experience” placements for as much as 20 hours per week. While this incentive worked well in terms of recruiting employers and providers, based on the estimated 17,700 individuals with disabilities who received supports in 2018 is not sustainable for the long term unless the total number of individuals served is reduced.

## Recommendations

- ARS leadership, in consultation with providers and school personnel, should set a lower number of hours for work experience. ARS must make some significant changes in order to continue an acceptable level of services. ARS partners, CRPs and school districts, have allowed some students to work as much as 20 hours per week, with ARS paying those wages, which is not sustainable, nor in line with best practices. The purpose of the Pre-ETS program is to provide paid work experience. It is not to create long term jobs for these students. A series of work site experiences, averaging eight hours per week, for an expanded number of students, would provide the desired workplace exposure. Adjustments must be made to the structure of the program to ensure its sustainability, and the sustainability and viability of the existing VR program.
- ARS must take a leadership role in bringing Transition partners fully on board.
- ARS should continue to negotiate with public schools and the Department of Education to increase the portion of transition costs paid through IDEA.

### K. ANNUAL ESTIMATES

#### 1. THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS IN THE STATE WHO ARE ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES

Based on the latest Social Security Administration Data from 2020 in Arkansas, there are 278,569 individuals receiving SSI (148,933) and SSDI (129,636) benefits. Over the last four years, ARS has averaged 12,964 clients served per year. We anticipate based on these numbers that there are 291,533 individuals who are eligible for services.

#### 2. THE NUMBER OF ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS WHO WILL RECEIVE SERVICES UNDER:

##### A. THE VR PROGRAM;

ARS estimates 11,200 eligible individuals with disabilities will receive vocational rehabilitation services.

##### B. THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM; AND

ARS estimates 360 eligible individuals with disabilities will receive supported employment services.

#### C. EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY, IF UNDER AN ORDER OF SELECTION.

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services is not under an Order of Selection.

#### 3. THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE ELIGIBLE FOR VR SERVICES, BUT ARE NOT RECEIVING SUCH SERVICES DUE TO AN ORDER OF SELECTION; AND

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services is not under an Order of Selection.

#### 4. THE COST OF SERVICES FOR THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS ESTIMATED TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES. IF UNDER AN ORDER OF SELECTION, IDENTIFY THE COST OF SERVICES FOR EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY.

ARS estimates the annual cost of services for the number of individuals estimated to be eligible for services is \$15.8 million for VR services. Arkansas Rehabilitation Services is not under an Order of Selection.

### L. STATE GOALS AND PRIORITIES

#### 1. IDENTIFY IF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES WERE JOINTLY DEVELOPED AND AGREED TO BY THE STATE VR AGENCY AND THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL, IF THE STATE HAS A COUNCIL, AND JOINTLY AGREED TO ANY REVISIONS

ARS and the State Rehabilitation Council developed and agreed upon goals and priorities based on the 2019 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment for PY2020-2021.

## **2. IDENTIFY THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES IN CARRYING OUT THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS**

The purpose of Arkansas Rehabilitation Services is to assist Arkansans with disabilities in achieving competitive integrated employment. The goals and priorities identified to support this purpose are:

### **Goal 1: ARS will meet performance accountability measures as outlined in WIOA.**

Priorities:

- ARS will monitor established performance accountability measures.
- ARS will provide career counseling to 14(c) program participants to meet Section 511 requirements.
- ARS will strengthen data verification procedures.

### **Goal 2: ARS will provide pre-employment transition and transition services as outlined in WIOA.**

Priorities

- ARS will expand and improve Pre-ETS.
- ARS will provide Pre-ETS and ensure students with employment and training goals are moved into Vocational Rehabilitation prior to the second semester of the senior year of high school.
- ARS will expand and improve Pre-ETS utilizing the resources at ACDC. The new model focuses resources to serve students with disabilities to prepare and guide them toward achieving competitive integrated employment.
- ARS will increase the number of Transition students that enter employment by having students work-ready upon graduation from high school or postsecondary training.

### **Goal 3: ARS will create effective partnerships to advance employment for Arkansans with disabilities.**

Priorities:

- ARS will focus on public and private sector employers and increase business and industry awareness of ARS' services.
- ARS will develop and strengthen partnerships with business, workforce development partners, economic development agencies, and community organizations to meet the needs of existing and new business customers.
- ARS will increase services provided to public and private sector employers by leveraging Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work (SAW/RTW) programs to assist employers in keeping the employees with disabilities on the job.

### **Goal 4: ARS will increase effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery.**

Priorities:

- ARS will determine effective methods to serve the underserved/unserved populations.

- ARS will strengthen relationships with WIOA partners and business and industry.
- ARS will improve service delivery to job seekers and businesses by consistently providing services that meet individual needs.
- Staff will receive comprehensive training to improve service delivery.
- ARS will ensure clients have access to assistive technology services by evaluating the need for assistive technology throughout the rehabilitation process, and by making the proper referrals when assistive technology is appropriate.

**Goal 5: ARS will increase the utilization of Community Rehabilitation and Supported Employment providers to achieve employment outcomes.**

**Priorities:**

- ARS will increase the effectiveness of current and new external Employment/Supported Employment providers.
- ARS will expand the availability of community employment providers and partner services that meet the needs of Arkansans with disabilities, including those requiring supported employment.
- ARS transformed ACTI to a new service delivery model, ACDC. This model focuses as a hub for training and services to support VR consumers and/or students with disabilities to successfully reach the milestones of their individual plans for employment.

**3. ENSURE THAT THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES ARE BASED ON AN ANALYSIS OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS:**

**A. THE MOST RECENT COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT, INCLUDING ANY UPDATES;**

Using data from the 2019 CSNA, ARS and the SRC developed the goals and priorities listed in Section L.2 above. A CSNA for publication in Federal Fiscal Year 2022 is currently in development.

**B. THE STATE'S PERFORMANCE UNDER THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES OF SECTION 116 OF WIOA; AND**

The performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA are addressed in Goal 1: ARS will meet performance requirements, under the priorities: ARS will monitor established performance accountability measures, and ARS will strengthen data verification procedures.

**C. OTHER AVAILABLE INFORMATION ON THE OPERATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE VR PROGRAM, INCLUDING ANY REPORTS RECEIVED FROM THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL AND FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM MONITORING ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED UNDER SECTION 107.**

Input provided by the State Rehabilitation Council contributed to the development of Goals and Priorities as outlined previously. ARS' existing strategic plan was also utilized.

**M. ORDER OF SELECTION**

**1. WHETHER THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WILL IMPLEMENT AND ORDER OF SELECTION. IF SO, DESCRIBE:**

**A. THE ORDER TO BE FOLLOWED IN SELECTING ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS TO BE PROVIDED VR SERVICES**

ARS does not currently follow an Order of Selection. However, in the event that available vocational rehabilitation funding cannot support the full range of services for all eligible individuals, the ARS Commissioner will initiate a structured process to move to an Order of Selection. This process will include public participation and comment, notification to the Rehabilitation Services Administration, and input from the State Rehabilitation Council.

An Order of Selection requires that priority be given to individuals with the most significant disabilities in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services. Therefore, after determining eligibility, ARS counselors will determine the client's priority for services based on the significance of the client's disability using the categories defined below. Where indicated, these categories will be modified according to RSA's comments in the Federal Fiscal Year 2021 Report on the Review of the VR and Supported Employment Programs administered by ARS.

#### Priority Category I – Most Significantly Disabled

An individual with a most significant disability is defined as one who has a physical or mental impairment that seriously limits at least four functional capacity areas (mobility, communication, self-direction, self-care, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills) in terms of an employment outcome, and whose vocational rehabilitation is expected to require multiple services over an extended period of time.

#### Priority Category II – Significantly Disabled

An individual with a significant disability is defined as one who has a physical or mental impairment that seriously limits three functional capacity areas (mobility, communication, self-direction, self-care, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills) in terms of an employment outcome and whose vocational rehabilitation is expected to require multiple services over an extended period of time.

ARS will pursue policy changes to reflect the requirement from 34 C.F.R. § 361.5(c)(30), which defines individual with a significant disability as an individual with a severe physical or mental impairment that seriously limits one or more functional capacities in terms of an employment outcome.

#### Priority Category III – Non-Significantly Disabled

An individual with a non-significant disability is defined as one who has a physical or mental impairment that seriously limits one or two functional capacity areas (mobility, communication, self-direction, self-care, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills) in terms of an employment outcome and whose vocation rehabilitation is expected to require multiple services over an extended period of time.

ARS will pursue policy changes to reflect the requirement from 34 C.F.R. § 361.5(c)(27), which defines individual with a disability as an individual:

- (i) Who has a physical or mental impairment;
- (ii) Whose impairment constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to employment; and
- (iii) Who can benefit in terms of an employment outcome from the provision of vocational rehabilitation services.

If an Order of Selection becomes necessary, ARS anticipates that individuals who are receiving services under Individualized Plans for Employment at the time the Order is implemented will continue to receive services through closure of their cases.

### B. THE JUSTIFICATION FOR THE ORDER

Because ARS does not currently follow an Order of Selection, this subsection does not apply.

### C. THE SERVICE AND OUTCOME GOALS

Because ARS does not currently follow an Order of Selection, this subsection does not apply.

D. TIME WITHIN WHICH THESE GOALS MAY BE ACHIEVED FOR INDIVIDUALS IN EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY WITHIN THE ORDER; AND

Because ARS does not currently follow an Order of Selection, this subsection does not apply.

E. HOW INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES ARE SELECTED FOR SERVICES BEFORE ALL OTHER INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Because ARS does not currently follow an Order of Selection, this subsection does not apply.

2. IF THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT HAS ELECTED TO SERVE ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS, REGARDLESS OF ANY ESTABLISHED ORDER OF SELECTION, WHO REQUIRE SPECIFIC SERVICES OR EQUIPMENT TO MAINTAIN EMPLOYMENT

If an Order of Selection becomes necessary, ARS anticipates serving all eligible individuals requiring specific services or equipment to maintain employment.

N. GOALS AND PLANS FOR DISTRIBUTION OF TITLE VI FUNDS

1. SPECIFY THE STATE'S GOALS AND PRIORITIES FOR FUNDS RECEIVED UNDER SECTION 603 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

ARS addresses the provision of supported employment services in Goal 5: ARS will increase the utilization of Community Rehabilitation and Supported Employment providers to achieve employment outcomes.

Priority – ARS will increase the effectiveness of current and new external Employment/Supported Employment providers.

Strategies – ARS will:

- Target individuals with the most significant disabilities to provide customized employment, supported employment, and other individualized services.
- Collaborate with qualified vendors, community partners, and employers to expand supported employment initiatives.
- Continue to partner with other state agencies to provide collaborative services to individuals with the most significant disabilities.

Priority – ARS will expand the availability of community employment providers and partner services that meet the needs of Arkansans with disabilities, including those requiring supported employment.

Strategies - ARS will:

- Develop a community employment advisory committee.
- Develop partnership resources with other state agencies, provider associations and advocacy organizations to expand employment opportunities, transportation access, funding for extended services, and/or wrap around services for individuals not on Medicaid waiver.

2. DESCRIBE THE ACTIVITIES TO BE CONDUCTED, WITH FUNDS RESERVED PURSUANT TO SECTION 603(D), FOR YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING:

A. THE PROVISION OF EXTENDED SERVICES FOR A PERIOD NOT TO EXCEED 4 YEARS; AND

ARS sets aside 50 percent of supported employment funds specifically for youth programs that support competitive integrated employment. Title VI funds are only used to provide supported employment services after job placement (e.g., after the individual's employment start date). Prior to job placement, Title I funds are used to provide VR services, as appropriate to the individual's unique needs and informed choice. Youth extended services include ongoing services such as individual job coaching after job placement; on-site contact with individuals and employers (once per month at a minimum) to ensure job stabilization; and other services to ensure longevity of employment.

ARS can provide extended services to youth with most significant disabilities for up to four years or until the youth is age 25, whichever occurs first. ARS may be the extended services provider to a youth with a most significant disability but can not be the extended services provider to an adult. Once an individual reaches age 25, ARS ensures that resources for extended services are available through other programs and providers.

#### B. HOW THE STATE WILL LEVERAGE OTHER PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FUNDS TO INCREASE RESOURCES FOR EXTENDED SERVICES AND EXPANDED SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES.

Strategies – ARS will:

- Determine methods for funding extended services for youth with disabilities not to exceed four years through the Employment First Vendors (CRPs, SE providers, and other external employment).
- Develop new service components or agreements with partners of state agencies for sequential funding of extended services to assure youth with disabilities have successful employment opportunities.
- Provide education and instruction of WIOA expectations to providers, and will establish Memorandums of Understanding or contract services to providers to initiate services to potentially eligible clients.

#### O. STATE'S STRATEGIES

##### 1. THE METHODS TO BE USED TO EXPAND AND IMPROVE SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

ARS addresses the methods to be used to expand/improve services in **Goal 4: ARS will increase effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery.**

**Priority – ARS will determine effective methods to serve the underserved/unserved populations.**

Strategies – ARS will:

- Work with WIOA partners to establish a common intake process that streamlines client application for services across partner programs.
- Collaborate with WIOA partners' field staff statewide to provide information and awareness about vocational rehabilitation services.
- Host partners' training conferences to provide education and resources available for potential clients.
- Partner with local Hispanic and Marshallese communities to increase awareness and availability of services.



- Collaborate with other partners to more effectively reach the deaf/hard of hearing community.
- Partner with the Centers for Independent Living to provide information about ARS services in the geographically underserved areas.

## 2. HOW A BROAD RANGE OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SERVICES AND DEVICES WILL BE PROVIDED TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES AT EACH STAGE OF THE REHABILITATION PROCESS AND ON A STATEWIDE BASIS

Field Services staff receives training to determine whether a client would benefit from the provision of assistive technology services and devices at each stage of the rehabilitation process. As appropriate, counselors refer clients to ARS' Assistive Technology at Work (AT@Work) and Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work (SAW/RTW) programs for assessment and consultation regarding the need for assistive technology as it relates to the achievement of their vocational goals. Counselors are also aware of services addressing the Assistive Technology Act of 1998 offered by ICAN and the associated AFP.

ARS addresses the provision of assistive technology services for individuals with disabilities at each stage of the rehabilitation process in **Goal 4: ARS will increase effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery.**

**Priority – ARS will ensure clients have access to assistive technology services by evaluating the need for assistive technology throughout the rehabilitation process, and make the proper referrals when assistive technology is appropriate.**

Strategies – ARS will:

- Make the assistive technology/AT@Work referral available in the CMS at the time of intake, plan development, placement, and post-employment checks.
- Train staff on the assistive technology services available to clients.
- Make application forms for various community service programs dealing with assistive technology available in the CMS.

ARS also addresses this provision in **Goal 3: ARS will create effective partnerships to advance employment for Arkansans with disabilities.**

**Priority – ARS will increase services provided to public and private sector employers by leveraging Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work (SAW/RTW) programs to assist employers in keeping employees with disabilities on the job.**

Strategies – ARS will:

- Increase the overall number of SAW/RTW and Job Retention clients.
- Increase the number of employer referrals for SAW/RTW services.
- Incorporate SAW/RTW services when business engagement staff interacts with businesses.

## 3. THE OUTREACH PROCEDURES THAT WILL BE USED TO IDENTIFY AND SERVE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO ARE MINORITIES, INCLUDING THOSE WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, AS WELL AS THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR PROGRAM

ARS will address outreach procedures in **Goal 4: ARS will increase effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery.**

**Priority – ARS will determine effective methods to serve the underserved/unserved populations.**

Strategies – ARS will:

- Partner with local Hispanic and Marshallese communities to increase awareness and availability of services.
- Collaborate with other partners to more effectively reach the deaf/hard of hearing community.
- Partner with the Centers for Independent Living to provide information about ARS services in the geographically underserved areas.

**4. THE METHODS TO BE USED TO 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, POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES)**

ARS addresses pre-employment transition services in **Goal 2: ARS will provide pre-employment transition and transition services as outlined in WIOA.**

**Priority – ARS will expand and improve Pre-ETS.**

Strategies – ARS will:

- Create internships in competitive integrated settings that could lead to on-the-job training and/or job placement.
- Identify industry recognized curriculums and train counselors to utilize it with students.
- Develop partnerships by contacting Special Education personnel in schools and by attending school board meetings.
- Create and implement marketing campaigns.
- Create standards and benchmarks evaluation criteria for each core service for vendors, schools, and counselors to use in identifying the knowledge/skills/abilities gained by students in the program.
- Increase awareness of viable work options in the areas where students live.
- Create a peer mentorship program including mentoring with CILS.
- Create a Professional Advisors Learning Series (PALS) where professionals in a field provide hands-on demonstrations to students on the work in that field, offer job shadowing opportunities, and informational interviews on the job duties.
- Promote and track employment outcomes directly from Pre-ETS services.

**Priority – ARS will provide pre-employment transition services and ensure students with employment and training goals are moved into vocational rehabilitation prior to the second semester of the senior year of high school.**

Strategies – ARS will:

- Spend at least 15% of VR grant on Pre-ETS.

- Direct students with disabilities into classes leading to certifications in Career and Technical Education and concurrent enrollment postsecondary training while in high school.
- Provide students in Pre-ETS with paid and unpaid work experiences.
- Provide students participating in Pre-ETS with career portfolios upon exiting high school.
- Provide Pre-ETS core services internally or by utilizing external contractors.
- Develop and implement a process for Pre-ETS students to become traditional VR services clients and monitor results.

**Priority – ARS will increase the number of Transition students that enter employment by having students work ready upon graduation from high school or postsecondary training.**

Strategies – ARS will:

- Develop and support apprenticeships for students prior to graduation.
- Increase credential attainments in high school by moving Pre-ETS-VR ready students to VR services prior to graduation.
- Develop and support on-the-job trainings/direct job placement and supported employment with businesses that have Pre-ETS internship sites.

#### 5. IF APPLICABLE, PLANS FOR ESTABLISHING, DEVELOPING, OR IMPROVING COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE

ARS will transform ACTI from a residential program to a new service delivery model. ACDC's continual operation will be critical for ARS to meet needs of potentially eligible and eligible individuals with disabilities who live in the rural and other parts of the State. ACDC will provide skilled training and other coordination services for individuals with disabilities that lead to competitive integrated employment. The continual maintenance and improvement of ACDC will be necessary to maintain its operation in the most efficient and cost effective manner possible.

**Priority – ARS will transform ACTI from a residential program to a new service delivery model, ACDC.**

Strategies – Through ACDC, ARS will:

- Develop a new organizational structure consistent with meeting the demands of the new model, which will address:
  1. Career and Technical Education training programs to meet the needs of students and labor market demands.
  2. Pre-apprenticeship training programs to facilitate placement in USDOL approved registered apprenticeship programs.
  3. Registered apprenticeships.
  4. Pre-employment transition and career development services to assist students in transitioning to postsecondary education and employment.
  5. Talent development for Pre-ETS and Transition customers.

6. Co-developing programming with Field Services to assist students in achieving career goals including identifying needed accommodations in postsecondary education and employment.
- Obtain resources to support direct and facilitated provision of training and vocational rehabilitation services at the central location in Hot Springs and with partners across the state.
- Develop a new plan for marketing and branding the new program model.

**Priority - ARS will provide career counseling to 14(c) program participants to meet Section 511 requirements.**

Strategy – Through ACDC, ARS will:

- Transition career counseling services from a contracted external provider to internal provision.

**6. STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF THE STATE WITH RESPECT TO THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA**

The Quality Assurance (QA) team ensures statewide consistency in state and federal vocational rehabilitation compliance issues by providing information to support the delivery of comprehensive services in order to prepare individuals with disabilities to enter and to remain in the workforce. The QA team monitors and reviews the field program for policy compliance by randomly selecting cases from specific categories for on-site review. Throughout the year, the QA team provides case management training during new counselor orientation training, and financial resources training.

ARS addresses performance accountability measures in **Goal 1: ARS will meet performance accountability measures as outlined in WIOA.**

**Priority – ARS will monitor established performance accountability measures.**

Strategies – ARS will:

- Utilize all available data to monitor performance outcomes.
- ARS Field staff will receive ongoing performance accountability measurement training.

**Priority – ARS will strengthen data verification procedures.**

Strategies – ARS will:

- (The QA team will) monitor and review randomly selected cases from specific categories for on-site review.
- Train personnel on acceptable data verification criteria and acceptable documentation.
- Collaborate with DSB to establish consistent documentation practices for data verification.

**7. STRATEGIES FOR ASSISTING OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM IN ASSISTING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES**

ARS addresses assisting the workforce development system in **Goal 3: ARS will create effective partnerships to advance employment for Arkansans with disabilities.**

**Priority – ARS will focus on public and private sector employers and increase business and industry awareness of ARS' services.**

Strategies – ARS will:

- Continue to market to employers how ARS can be an effective resource as it relates to the hiring of individuals with disabilities and assisting them in remaining in the workforce.
- Maintain its partnership with Disability: IN - Arkansas, and assist in membership recruitment by leveraging partnerships with existing business customers.
- Work with employers to identify opportunities for pre-apprenticeship, Registered Apprenticeship, and On-the-Job programs.

**Priority – ARS will develop and strengthen partnerships with business, workforce development partners, economic development agencies, and community organizations to meet the needs of existing and new business customers.**

Strategies – ARS will:

- Utilize state agency transformation to expand relationships with partner agencies within the Department of Commerce.
- Continue to advance relationships with other WIOA partners at both the state and local levels.
- Conduct joint business service team meetings with all Workforce Development Boards.
- Develop products and services that meet individual business customer needs.
- Work with local workforce boards to identify local in demand occupations.
- Work with business and industry to establish on-the-job training, work-based learning opportunities, and apprenticeships.

ARS also addresses assisting the workforce development system in **Goal 4: ARS will increase effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery.**

**Priority – ARS will improve service delivery to job seekers and businesses by consistently providing services that meet individual needs.**

Strategies – ARS will:

- Develop and implement a Job Club initiative and collaborate with counselors to support clients in honing soft skills to enhance job readiness.
- Assist counselors and clients in IPE development by providing local labor market information so clients are trained for employment with in-demand industries in order to create opportunities for sustainable employment.
- Work with counselors to develop a mechanism to determine when referral for job placement is appropriate.
- Develop career pathways with input from private industries and educational training providers in the state.

**Priority – Staff will receive comprehensive training to improve service delivery.**

Strategies – ARS will:

- Assist counselors and clients in IPE development by providing local labor market information and regional sector strategies.

- Train counselors to determine when referral for job placement is appropriate.
- Host statewide training to insure understanding of policy and procedures.
- Provide training on special populations to include those with serious mental illness and autism spectrum disorders.

**Priority – ARS will strengthen relationships with WIOA partners and business and industry.**

Strategies – ARS will:

- Conduct partner meetings with educational training providers on a quarterly basis to foster stronger relationships.
- Participate in business and industry Expo/Chamber events with other workforce partners.
- Participate in monthly “Core-Four” partner’s meetings with other WIOA partners.
- Seek opportunities for rehab area managers and counselors to collaborate with BEU staff through joint business customer visits to meet employer needs.
- Train field personnel on apprenticeships/pre-apprenticeships, on-the-job training opportunities, and paid work experiences available for students and youth.
- (Rehab area managers will) access local workforce board funding and resources to utilize as a similar benefit in service delivery.

**Priority – ARS will improve service delivery to Arkansas businesses by consistently providing services that meet the employers’ needs.**

Strategies – Business Engagement will:

- Utilize Salesforce CRM as licenses are issued to share information with partner agencies to more effectively serve business customers.
- Implement a customer satisfaction survey to measure the effectiveness of services offered to business customers.

**8. HOW THE AGENCY'S STRATEGIES WILL BE USED TO:**

**A. ACHIEVE GOALS AND PRIORITIES BY THE STATE, CONSISTENT WITH THE COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT;**

ARS and the SRC jointly developed the goals, priorities, and strategies based on input provided by the most recent CSNA and input from key stakeholders. ARS has developed a strategic plan that supports the goals, priorities, and strategies. The strategies are intended to position ARS to successfully meet WIOA performance requirements, to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of services provided to agency clients including those who are unserved or underserved, and to create opportunities to enhance relationships with employers, community organizations, and WIOA partners.

**B. SUPPORT INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES; AND**

As required, 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. The provision of transition/pre-employment transition services is anticipated to be a targeted area. Establishing more effective and efficient ways to serve the unserved and underserved, another. ARS will continue to utilize innovation and expansion

funds to support the State Rehabilitation Council as well as the State Independent Living Council.

**C. OVERCOME IDENTIFIED BARRIERS RELATING TO EQUITABLE ACCESS TO AND PARTICIPATION OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE STATE VR SERVICES PROGRAM AND THE STATE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM.**

ARS recognizes that providing Arkansans with disabilities equitable access and the opportunity to fully participate in its programs and services is and has been an ongoing issue as evidenced by results from the most recent CSNA where the unserved/underserved populations of Hispanics and the deaf/hard of hearing were specifically mentioned. In addition, ARS recognizes, geographically, a significant part of the state is rural and the availability of services is limited including supported employment. ARS believes the following goals will address this issue: Goal 3: ARS will create effective partnerships to advance employment for Arkansans with disabilities; Goal 4: ARS will increase the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery; and Goal 5: ARS will increase the utilization of community rehabilitation and supported employment providers to achieve employment outcomes. The intent is to provide more opportunities for these populations to participate in services provided or sponsored by ARS.

**P. EVALUATION AND REPORTS OF PROGRESS: VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT GOALS**

**1. AN EVALUATION OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE VR PROGRAM GOALS DESCRIBED IN THE APPROVED VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN FOR THE MOST RECENTLY COMPLETED PROGRAM YEAR WERE ACHIEVED. THE EVALUATION MUST:**

**A. IDENTIFY THE STRATEGIES THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS**

**Goal 1: ARS will meet performance accountability measures as outlined in WIOA.**

**Priorities:**

- ARS will monitor established performance accountability measures.
- ARS will provide career counseling to 14(c) program participants to meet Section 511 requirements.
- ARS will strengthen data verification procedures.

**Goal 1: Evaluation and Progress**

**Priority 1: ARS will monitor established performance accountability measures.**

ARS set the strategy to utilize all available data (supporting documents) to monitor performance outcomes. IWAGE was utilized to verify employment of clients. ARS used direct unemployment insurance (UI) wage match using IWAGE (applies to status 26 and status 28 closures); federal or military employment records; paystubs; W2 or tax records; written verification using an agency form or a letter from the client, signed and dated from the client and counselor; verification using an agency out-of-state wage form; verification from the employer on letterhead with employment start date and justification; verification form for Self-Employment Income and Expenses. For MSG/Credential attainment counselors routinely obtained students' grades, copies of degrees attained, and progress reports to provide documentation for reporting purposes.

ARS set the strategy ARS Field staff will receive ongoing performance accountability measurement training. Performance accountability training was completed state-wide and is ongoing. This training helped reduce errors in the case management system to ensure more accurate reporting. A monitoring tool for all performance measures is in development and is anticipated to be in full production within this state plan period.

**Priority 2: ARS will provide career counseling to 14(c) program participants to meet Section 511 requirements.**

ACDC and the University of Arkansas hosted virtual sessions on career counseling and referral. Five-hundred-thirty-three individuals stated they wanted to go to work. CCIR individuals were referred to the ARS Field for services. The Field created a MS Team for real time updates on referrals. PPD&E Community Program Development took the lead on assuring the MS Team tools are utilized. There were 2,272 individuals who received CCIR.

**Priority 3: ARS will strengthen data verification procedures.**

ARS set the strategy the QA team will monitor and review randomly selected cases from specific categories for on-site review. During PY 20, ARS developed and implemented a monitoring tool utilized by the QA team to assist in determining whether performance accountability measure data entered in the case management system is accurate and complete. Utilization of this tool will continue and be adjusted as necessary.

ARS set the strategy to train personnel on acceptable data verification criteria and documentation. Training is provided to personnel on acceptable data verification criteria and documentation.

ARS set the strategy to collaborate with DSB to establish consistent documentation practices for data verification. ARS and DSB jointly formed a data verification committee to write policy outlining acceptable data verification procedures and documentation.

**Goal 2: ARS will provide pre-employment transition and transition services as outlined in WIOA.**

**Priorities**

- ARS will expand and improve Pre-ETS.
- ARS will provide Pre-ETS and ensure students with employment and training goals are moved into Vocational Rehabilitation prior to the second semester of the senior year of high school.
- ARS will expand and improve Pre-ETS utilizing the resources at ACDC. The new model focuses resources to serve students with disabilities to prepare and guide them toward achieving competitive integrated employment.
- ARS will increase the number of Transition students that enter employment by having students work-ready upon graduation from high school or postsecondary training.

**Goal 2: Evaluation and Progress**

**Priority 1: ARS will expand and improve Pre-ETS.**

ARS set the strategy to create internships in competitive integrated settings that could lead to on-the-job training and/or job placement. The WOLF, WIN and vendor programs all support paid internships up to 40 hours per school year. As a result of the pandemic, only ten high schools and two juvenile justice partners were able to participate.

ARS set the strategy to identify industry recognized curriculums and train counselors to utilize it with students. This is a work in progress. There are several mechanisms of access to industry recognized credentials. ACDC is working closely with field services to integrate training and services that lead to credentials. Examples include Fayetteville and Alma high schools.



ARS set the strategy to develop partnerships by contacting Special Education personnel in schools and by attending school board meetings. This is actively being done. Transition counselors routinely attend board meetings as well as parent planning meetings.

ARS set the strategy to create and implement marketing campaigns. Pre-ETS marketing efforts have been limited as a result of the COVID pandemic. Those that did occur were virtual.

ARS set the strategy to create standards and benchmarks evaluation criteria for each core service for vendors, schools, and counselors to use in identifying the knowledge/skills/abilities gained by students in the program. The standards and benchmarks evaluation criteria have been developed and incorporated into the Pre-ETS manual. Monthly report forms are utilized to evaluate student progress.

ARS set the strategy to increase awareness of viable work options in the areas where students live. Because of the COVID pandemic this strategy was not addressed during PY 20.

ARS set the strategy to create a peer mentorship program including mentoring with CILS. Because of the COVID pandemic this strategy was not addressed during PY 20.

ARS set the strategy to create a Professional Advisors Learning Series (PALS) where professionals in a field provide hands-on demonstrations to students on the work in that field, offer job shadowing opportunities, and informational interviews on the job duties. Because of the COVID pandemic this strategy was not implemented during PY 20.

ARS set the strategy to promote and track employment outcomes directly from Pre-ETS services. ARS is in the process of implementing new case management software that will allow tracking of employment outcomes directly from Pre-ETS services. The anticipated go-live date of the system is October 2022.

**Priority 2: ARS will provide Pre-ETS and ensure students with employment and training goals are moved into Vocational Rehabilitation prior to the second semester of the senior year of high school.**

ARS is required to spend 15% of VR case services budget on Pre-ETS. This requirement is being met.

ARS set the strategy to direct students with disabilities into classes leading to certifications in Career and Technical Education and concurrent enrollment postsecondary training while in high school. This is being done routinely through ACDC programming. ACDC students are provided information regarding CTE classes and encouraged to participate. High schools involved include Magnet Cove, Lake Hamilton, Cutter Morning Star, and Fountain Lake.

ARS is required to provide students in Pre-ETS with paid and unpaid work experiences. This is occurring in Pre-ETS through the OWL and WINS programs at participating programs.

ARS set the strategy to provide students participating in Pre-ETS with career portfolios upon exiting high school. Because of the COVID pandemic and associated staffing issues this strategy will be implemented at a later date.

ARS set the strategy to provide Pre-ETS core services internally or by utilizing external contractors. This is occurring but not all school districts have as many options. Where possible, ACDC provides internal core services to participating schools.

ARS set the strategy to develop and implement a process for Pre-ETS students to become traditional VR services clients and monitor results. This is a work in progress. It is happening but needs to be streamlined. ARS recognizes it is an individual's choice to apply for VR services. An application to determine those clients who receive Pre-ETS services and then apply for VR service will be included as part of the new case management system.

**Priority 3: ARS will expand and improve Pre-ETS utilizing the resources at ACDC. The new model focuses resources to serve students with disabilities to prepare and guide them toward achieving competitive integrated employment.**

ACDC dedicated staff helped facilitate the creation of mentorship program working with juvenile justice clients and Pre-ETS students a pre-apprenticeship program for Pre-ETS students.

**Priority 4: ARS will increase the number of Transition students that enter employment by having students work-ready upon graduation from high school or postsecondary training.**

ARS set the strategy to develop and support apprenticeships for students prior to graduation. Pilots have been initiated and are showing success.

ARS set the strategy to increase credential attainments in high school by moving Pre-ETS-VR ready students to VR services prior to graduation. Pilots have been initiated and are showing success.

ARS set the strategy to develop and support on-the-job trainings/direct job placement and supported employment with businesses that have Pre-ETS internship sites. This is happening and is an integral part of OWL, WOLF, WIN, and ACDC Pre-ETS services.

**Goal 3: ARS will create effective partnerships to advance employment for Arkansans with disabilities.**

Priorities:

- ARS will focus on public and private sector employers and increase business and industry awareness of ARS' services.
- ARS will develop and strengthen partnerships with business, workforce development partners, economic development agencies, and community organizations to meet the needs of existing and new business customers.
- ARS will increase services provided to public and private sector employers by leveraging Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work (SAW/RTW) programs to assist employers in keeping the employees with disabilities on the job.

### Goal 3: Evaluation and Progress

**Priority 1: ARS will focus on public and private sector employers and increase business and industry awareness of ARS' services.**

ARS set the strategy to market to employers how ARS can be an effective resource as it relates to the hiring of individuals with disabilities and assisting them in remaining in the workforce. The Business Engagement Unit (BEU) addressed this strategy by using face-to-face contact as their primary source in communicating with customers; however, because of the pandemic contact was adjusted to phone and email to maintain customer relations. Virtual and drive through job fairs along with Chamber of Commerce business expo events were utilized. These efforts increased awareness and hiring. There were 1,159 personal visits and 2,829 phone contacts made.

ARS set the strategy to maintain its partnership with Disability:IN-Arkansas and assist in membership recruitment by leveraging partnerships with existing business customers. The 2020 face-to-face business summit was cancelled due to the pandemic; however, two virtual business summits in collaboration with Disability:IN-Arkansas and the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities were held in the spring and fall of 2021. There were more than 250 attendees and 90 viewed the NDEAM Summit. This resulted in increased awareness of inclusion

among Arkansas employers. In total 412 people attended both the business summit and NDEAM Summit.

ARS set the strategy to work with employers to identify opportunities for pre-apprenticeship, Registered Apprenticeship, and On-the-Job programs. This strategy is ongoing with options remaining available through ACDC and Registered Apprenticeship Providers. Greater emphasis on this will become a part of the SASS program provided by ACDC.

**Priority 2: ARS will develop and strengthen partnerships with business, workforce development partners, economic development agencies, and community organizations to meet the needs of existing and new business customers.**

ARS set a strategy to utilize state agency transformation to expand relationships with partner agencies within the Department of Commerce. Prior to the COVID pandemic, the BEU was involved with WIOA partnerships consisting of monthly partner meetings, and bi-annual workforce partner summits. Because of COVID ARS and other partners were limited to virtual state-wide partners meeting in April 2021.

ARS set a strategy to advance relationships with other WIOA partners at both the state and local levels. The BEU continued its efforts to collaborate with other WIOA stakeholders through scheduled meetings, events, and partnership opportunities. The BEU increased collaboration education of partner services in expansion of employment opportunities for ARS clients.

Field managers are members of local WIOA boards. ARS provided presentations of available services to partners. Senior management is part of the Executive Board. To increase wrap-around services and reduce duplication of services, ARS has co-located with other Workforce Services partners in Jonesboro, Hot Springs, Searcy, and Harrison with plans underway to do the same with other field offices when opportunities allow.

ARS set the strategy to conduct joint business service team meetings with all Workforce Development Boards. This strategy remains ongoing but limited because of the pandemic. Prior to COVID, ARS representatives attended meetings in person but now only attend virtually.

ARS set the strategy to develop products and services that meet individual business customer needs. ARS will utilize results of the comprehensive statewide needs assessment conducted in PY 21 to address this strategy.

ARS set the strategy to work with local workforce boards to identify local in-demand occupations. BEU staff attend monthly meetings of WIOA partners, Chambers of Commerce and business partner events to help determine local/regional labor market information and sector strategies communicating finds to ARS Counselors and clients.

ARS set the strategy to work with business and industry to establish on-the-job training, work-based learning opportunities, and apprenticeships. Initial training for apprenticeships and OJT were completed in fall 2019. However, the 2020 pandemic impacted the BEU's ability to pursue and implement this initiative with business customers. The BEU is revisiting this service and plan to offer it to our customers.

**Priority 3: ARS will increase services provided to public and private sector employers by leveraging Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work (SAW/RTW) programs to assist employers in keeping the employees with disabilities on the job.**

ARS set a strategy to increase overall number of SAW/RTW and Job Retention clients. With the pandemic still in place many civic and industry liaison groups are still not allowing individuals to present to them in person or are not meeting at all. This has hampered the ability to market SAW/RTW to employers across the state. With that ARS has increased SAW/RTW case closures from 0 in 2019 to 9 in 2020 and maintained at 9 in 2021. ARS served 65 total clients for job retention in 2021 compared to 72 in 2020.

ARS set a strategy to increase the number of employer referrals for SAW/RTW. ARS increased the number of employers served in 2021 to 43 from 35 in 2020. Access and Accommodations currently has the largest number of active cases from outside employers with 14.

A final strategy set was to incorporate SAW/RTW services when business engagement staff interacts with businesses. There have been no client referrals from business engagement staff this reporting period. SAW/RTW staff have been included in three business engagement meetings and two employer meetings facilitated by business engagement in this reporting period.

**Goal 4: ARS will increase effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery.**

**Priorities:**

- ARS will determine effective methods to serve the underserved/unserved populations.
- ARS will strengthen relationships with WIOA partners and business and industry.
- ARS will improve service delivery to job seekers and businesses by consistently providing services that meet individual needs.
- Staff will receive comprehensive training to improve service delivery.
- ARS will ensure clients have access to assistive technology services by evaluating the need for assistive technology throughout the rehabilitation process, and by making the proper referrals when assistive technology is appropriate.

**Goal 4: Evaluation and Progress**

**Priority 1: ARS will determine effective methods to serve the underserved/unserved populations.**

ARS set the strategy to work with WIOA partners to establish a common intake process that streamlines client application for services across partner programs. ARS and other WIOA partners are currently working on an IT solution to implement a common intake process. The anticipated completion of the project is unknown.

ARS set the strategy to collaborate with WIOA partners' field staff statewide to provide information and awareness about vocational rehabilitation services. ARS field managers are members of local WIOA boards and provided presentations about available services to other core agencies. To increase wrap-around services and reduce duplication of services ARS has co-located with other Workforce Services partners in Jonesboro, Hot Springs, Searcy, and Harrison with plans underway to do the same with other field offices when opportunities allow.

ARS set a strategy to host partners' training conferences to provide education and resources available for potential clients. This routinely occurs through the ACDC SASS program. All participants are referred to DWS and Adult Education for comparable benefits. ARS participated in WIOA core partners state-wide meetings in April and September 2021.

ARS set the strategy to partner with local Hispanic and Marshallese communities to increase awareness and availability of services. This action is still in progress. Regions are in the process of establishing itinerary points for applicable populations.

ARS set the strategy to collaborate with other partners to more effectively reach the deaf/hard of hearing community. This action is ongoing. In PY 20 ARS participated in a Job Fair at the Arkansas School for the Deaf.

ARS set the strategy to partner with Centers for Independent Living to provide information about ARS services in the geographically underserved areas. This action is still in progress. ARS

assigned counselors to serve as liaisons with the CILS and partnered with CILS across the state in resource fairs. ARS utilizes the CILS to provide information to Pre-ETS regarding Social Security benefits.

ARS set a strategy to provide training on special populations to include those with serious mental illness and autism spectrum disorders. Because of COVID this strategy was not addressed in PY 20. ARS anticipates utilizing the Arkansas Rehabilitation Association, UALR, UAMS, and Partners for Inclusive Communities to provide such training in the future.

**Priority 2: ARS will strengthen relationships with WIOA partners and business and industry.**

ARS set the strategy to participate in business and industry Expo/Chamber events with other workforce partners. Prior to Covid, the BEU participated in these events in person, but they continue virtually to maintain relationships with workforce partners. EXPO/Chamber and workforce partners meetings were completed which promotes sustained and productive collaborations. Field managers participated in local business expos and job fairs.

ARS set a strategy to participate in monthly “Core Four” partner’s meetings with other WIOA partners. Core-Four partner meetings were not consistently held across the state. The outcome of this strategy was to engage WIOA partners and expand Core Four relationships. This is ongoing.

ARS set the strategy to seek opportunities for rehab area managers and counselors to collaborate with BEU staff through joint business customer visits to meet employer needs. Because of COVID activities around this strategy did not occur. ARS anticipates reinstituting such activities once the pandemic subsides.

ARS set the strategy for rehab area managers to access local workforce board funding and resources to utilize as a similar benefit in service delivery. This remains ongoing. Field managers are members of local WIOA boards and attend meetings to determine programs funded at the local level. Information is passed on the Counselors as a resource for similar benefits.

ARS set the strategy to conduct partner meetings with educational training providers on a quarterly basis to foster stronger relationships. Because of COVID, educational providers were able to be invited to monthly regional area manager meetings and local field office staff meetings on a limited basis with the majority attending virtually.

**Priority 3: ARS will improve service delivery to job seekers and businesses by consistently providing services that meet individual needs.**

ARS set the strategy to develop and implement a Job Club initiative and collaborate with counselors to support clients in honing soft skills to enhance job readiness. There were 354 referrals made to job club in PY20; 115 attended and 67 completed the job clubs either virtually or in-person. There were 38 participants who received direct job placement assistance through job club. Clients attended from all regions of the state with the highest concentrations in Little Rock and Fayetteville.

ARS set the strategy to assist counselors and clients in IPE development by providing local labor market information and regional sector strategies. The BEU is providing ongoing labor market information to VR counselors when available regarding employment vacancies and trends. LMI assists VR counselors in guiding ARS clients in career choices to promote the achieving of WIOA employment standards. There were 453 referrals.

ARS set the strategy to train counselors to determine when referral for job recruitment is appropriate. The BEU provided job readiness training to all VR staff to promote achieving competitive integrated employment for ARS clients. As a result of the combined efforts of VR

counselors and Business Engagement Representative in 2020-2021, 205 ARS clients achieved employment.

ARS set the strategy to develop career pathways with input from private industries and educational training providers in the state. ARS developed a model for career pathways for healthcare, logistics, and manufacturing with input from DWS and the local boards; however, funding for implementation of the complete plan was not approved. ARS can support the pathways as offered throughout the State in existing educational institutions.

**Priority 4: Staff will receive comprehensive training to improve service delivery.**

ARS set the strategy to train field personnel on apprenticeships/pre-apprenticeships, on-the-job training opportunities, and paid work experiences available for students and youth. The BEU took no action. ACDC provided presentations and training on accessing registered apprenticeship. The process is on-going.

**Priority 5: ARS will ensure clients have access to assistive technology services by evaluating the need for assistive technology throughout the rehabilitation process, and by making the proper referrals when assistive technology is appropriate.**

Access and Accommodations set the strategy to make the assistive technology/AT@Work referral available in the CMS at the time of intake, plan development, placement, and post-employment checks. ARS is currently in the middle of transitioning to a new CMS. The referral will be available once the new system is fully implemented. This strategy is delayed until the CMS is implemented. This is ongoing.

Access and Accommodations also set the strategy to train staff on the assistive technology services available to clients. Access and Accommodations staff presented to field offices across the state and have participated in two conferences in which a large portion of ARS staff are present. This will continue to be an ongoing process. This is ongoing.

Finally, Access and Accommodation set the strategy to make application forms for various community service programs dealing with assistive technology available in the CMS. ARS is currently in the middle of transitioning to a new CMS. The referral will be available once the new system is fully implemented. This strategy is delayed until the CMS is implemented. This is ongoing.

**Goal 5: ARS will increase the utilization of Community Rehabilitation and Supported Employment providers to achieve employment outcomes.**

Priorities:

- ARS will increase the effectiveness of current and new external Employment/Supported Employment providers.
- ARS will expand the availability of community employment providers and partner services that meet the needs of Arkansans with disabilities, including those requiring supported employment.
- ARS will transform ACTI to a new service delivery model, ACDC. This model focuses as a hub for training and services to support VR consumers and/or students with disabilities to successfully reach the milestones of their individual plans for employment.

Goal 5: Evaluation and Progress

**Priority 1: ARS will increase the effectiveness of current and new external Employment/Supported Employment providers.**

ARS set the strategy to target individuals with the most significant disabilities to provide customized employment, supported employment, and other individualized services. This action is still in progress. ARS is partnering with SE vendors to serve 511 clients.

ARS set the strategy to collaborate with qualified vendors, community partners, and employers to expand supported employment initiatives. The agency provides ongoing training for vendors that partner with the agency to provide job placement assistance, supported employment services, career counseling, and customized employment. A Business Engagement Representative is assigned to each region or field office to build relationships with employers in the community and serve as liaisons for connecting clients to employers. Field Staff are trained to utilize tools such as the Labor Market Index to assist clients with identifying a vocational goal and exploring that goal for the purpose of providing VR services and assisting the client with necessary training leading to competitive employment. The Covid-19 pandemic has been the biggest challenge for the agency for employment and it correlates to the increased rates of unemployment due to safety and the decrease in employers.

ARS:

- Participated on a radio show for outreach.
- Created online YouTube training related to ARS External Employment Services for providers and ARS staff.
- Created an External Employment Services Provider manual for qualified vendors.

In addition, Community Rehabilitation Program staff received training opportunities about ARS requirements and forms.

ARS set the strategy to continue to partner with other state agencies to provide collaborative services to individuals with the most significant disabilities. This is ongoing. ARS participates in partner meetings with DDS and Adult Education to determine collaborative ways to streamline delivery across multiple WIOA partners to serve individuals with the most significant disabilities.

ARS partnered with the Department of Human Services Medicaid, developmental Disabilities Services, and Division of Adult, Aging, and Behavioral Health Services, and the Division of Medical Services to connect with the Provider-led Arkansas Shared Savings (PASSE). The PASSE is a managed care organization for Medicaid Waiver Services. The goal was to build the PASSE's to prioritize Community Employment Services. ARS had two meetings with the PASSEs educating them on individuals with behavioral health disabilities and work as part of recovery. The meetings were held virtually due to the COVID pandemic.

ARS participated on the Children and Youth with Sensory and other disabilities (CAYSI), Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), Special Education Unit, Deaf Blind Transition Interagency Team enhancing opportunities for Deaf/Blind individuals (transition students and adults) to seek Supported Employment. The list of team members is: AR School for the Deaf, Arkansas School for the Blind, AR Dept of Blind, Arkansas Dept of Education, Division of Services for the Blind, Arkansas Deaf/Blind Community, AR National Federation for the Blind, AR Dept of Human Services/Development Disabilities Services, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, Department of Workforce Services/Veteran Affairs, World Services for the Blind, South Central Helen Keller National Center, Goodwill, Community Advocates. CAYSI began a Pilot Program in PY2020 to establish policies, procedures, and processes. ARS and DSB have created a dual process. ARS provided opportunities for VR counselors and Community Rehabilitation Programs to receive free trainings from the Helen Keller National Center.

ARS updated a Memorandum of Understanding and pursued signatures with the Division of State Services for the Blind, Arkansas Department of Human Services, through the Division of

Developmental Disabilities Services, which is responsible for administering the Home and Community-Based Services program; the Division of Adult, Aging, and Behavioral Health Services; and the Division of Medical Services; Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Special Education; and Arkansas Division of Workforce Services. The Department of Human Services agencies have not signed the updated MOU despite multiple attempts including outreach by the ARS Commissioner.

**Priority 2: ARS will expand the availability of community employment providers and partner services that meet the needs of Arkansans with disabilities, including those requiring supported employment.**

ARS set the strategy to develop a community employment advisory committee.

ARS assisted Summit Community Care, a PASSE, and its community initiative for outreach to employment vendors. ARS participated with Summit Community Care to develop a cadre of providers for training on Employment First and to participate in the APSE Arkansas Regional Collaborative monthly meeting and a quarterly meeting in employment support development.

ARS set the strategy to develop partnership resources with other state agencies, provider associations and advocacy organizations to expand employment opportunities, transportation access, funding for extended services, and/or wrap around services for individuals not on Medicaid waiver.

ARS assisted Summit Community Care and the National APSE with outreach to providers for their Community Initiative of Employment First Bootcamp and the employment monthly meetings. A Summit Community Care contractor developed updated professional development webinars on employment services held in November and December 2021. The webinars are continuing in FY2022.

**Priority 3: ARS will transform ACTI to a new service delivery model, ACDC. This model focuses as a hub for training and services to support VR consumers and/or students with disabilities to successfully reach the milestones of their individual plans for employment.**

ACDC set the strategy to address Career and Technical Education training programs to meet the needs of students and labor market demands. ACDC narrowed the focus of CTE programming and continues to develop options in conjunction with educational services cooperatives. There were eight programs with 48 students enrolled and 43 who completed.

ACDC set the strategy to address pre-apprenticeship training programs to facilitate placement in USDOL approved registered apprenticeship programs. Pilots were completed. ACDC worked with the NW Arkansas regional office, NATF, and Fayetteville High School to provide Certified Nursing Pre- and Registered Apprenticeships. There were 17 participants who completed the CNA program and eight who completed the area grant program.

ACDC set the strategy to address pre-employment transition and career development services to assist students in transitioning to postsecondary education and employment. This continues to be an option for students on the ACDC campus in Hot Springs and those served in the community. There are 187 currently enrolled in training targeted for placement in registered apprenticeships.

ACDC set the strategy to address talent development for pre-ETS and Transition customers. OSHA, ServSafe, Guest Services training are available for all students with disabilities served by ARS.

ACDC set the strategy to address co-developing programming with Field Services to assist students in achieving career goals including identifying needed accommodations in postsecondary education and employment. Initial stages of development are completed for the



SASS Program. To date there are over 60 students with disabilities receiving services primarily targeted for those attending two-year colleges.

ACDC set the strategy to address to obtain resources to support direct and facilitated provision of training and vocational rehabilitation services at the central location in Hot Springs and with partners across the state. This is a work in progress. Efforts are underway to develop contracts to partner with Educational Service Cooperatives to facilitate CTE/WBL to students with disabilities while still in high school.

ACDC set the strategy to address to develop a new plan for marketing and branding the new program model. This is a work in progress. Currently, ACDC is working with ARS Communications on a final product.

### **Outreach: Strategy**

ARS provides outreach activities to individuals from minority backgrounds, individuals with the most significant disabilities, and others who are unserved or underserved. For PY 2018, ARS' focus is to provide training to improve outreach activities, and to utilize its network of CRPs to identify individuals with disabilities who are minorities and/or have the most significant disability. These individuals, who because of rural living, a lack of transportation, or English as a second language, can be referred to ARS and other support service networks needed to reach employment.

### **Outreach: Evaluation and Progress**

ARS:

- Implemented training for counselors and professional assessment staff to learn the cultural values of the state's Hispanic community and ways to break down cultural and language barriers to accessing VR services.
- Worked with the state's Hispanic transition clients to encourage them to consider VR counseling as a career.
- Developed alternative strategies including use of virtual technology to connect with the Hispanic and Marshallese communities.
- Continued to partner with the Centers for Independent Living to provide awareness about ARS' services for individuals with disabilities.
- Continued to work with WIOA partners to more effectively provide services to individuals with disabilities throughout the state.

## **B. DESCRIBE THE FACTORS THAT IMPEDED THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES**

The Covid-19 pandemic had a direct impact on ARS' ability to achieve its goals and priorities because of the restrictions imposed for in person meetings, restricted training, business closures, decreased staffing due to Covid exposures and quarantines, and health concerns for individuals with disabilities.

## **2. AN EVALUATION OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM GOALS DESCRIBED IN THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SUPPLEMENT FOR THE MOST RECENT PROGRAM YEAR WERE ACHIEVED. THE EVALUATION MUST:**

### **A. IDENTIFY THE STRATEGIES THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS**

ARS increased the availability of supported employment services to clients by providing training and technical assistance to vendors and vocational rehabilitation counselors. ARS placed a greater emphasis on proven and innovative supported employment outcomes related to competitive integrated employment performance-based outcomes. ARS created a new monitoring process to track the number of vendors in each area, number of clients served by each vendor, milestone payments made, and expenditures. Successful closure data is shared with CRPs.

#### Supported Employment: Evaluation and Progress

- During PY2020, the COVID pandemic had a major impact on individuals with the most significant disabilities who were seeking service. SE referrals decreased from 267 in PY 19 to 187 in PY20. The SE successful employment outcomes decreased from 88 in PY19 to 74 in PY20. Based on all 26 closures, SE successful employment outcomes decreased from five percent to three percent.

#### ARS:

- Ensured the quality of SE services by monitoring data related to expenditures, through ongoing communication with the counselors, and by monitoring CRPs, who received specific funding amounts, through vendor case review.
- Hosted two trainings provided by DOL ODEP Subject Matter Experts that targeted the Arkansas waiver managed care entities referred to as Provider-led Arkansas Shared Savings Entities (PAASE) and focused on supported employment for individuals with significant behavioral health concerns.
- Trained field staff by region using virtual training on External Employment Services 101.
- Developed YouTube an External Employment Services training, which included Supported Employment for service providers and ARS Field staff.
- Revised a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), with Division of Workforce Services, Division of Services for the Blind, Arkansas Department of Education – Special Education Unit, and the Department of Human Services: Division of Developmental Disabilities Services and Division of Adult, Aging, and Behavioral Health Services. The MOU defines the partnership, the roles and responsibilities between the agencies, and successful employment as competitive integrated employment for individuals with the most significant disabilities.
- Participated in AR APSE Chapter meetings bimonthly, which focused on best models of service provision for supported employment, customized employment, and provider transformation.
- ARS provided transition from employment to extended services beginning when individuals reach a point of stabilization on the job and for the next 90 days towards successful closure. After ARS closes the cases as successful, extended services is transitioned to the provider responsible for funding. If the individual is on waiver, originally funding has been through the Department of Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities Services Waiver Program. In PY2018, this funding transferred to the Provider-led Arkansas Shared Savings Entity (PASSE), a model of organized care created by Act 775 of 2017. Each PASSE is made up of governing providers who have entered a partnership with an experienced program administration organization. If the individual is not on waiver, providers must generate funding to provide extended services.

## B. DESCRIBE THE FACTORS THAT IMPEDED THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES

The Covid-19 pandemic had a direct impact on ARS' ability to achieve its goals and priorities because of the restrictions imposed for in person meetings, restricted training, business closures, decreased staffing due to Covid exposures and quarantines, and health concerns for individuals with disabilities.

### 3. THE VR PROGRAM'S PERFORMANCE ON THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY INDICATORS UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA

In PY2020, ARS achieved the following levels on the performance measures as reported on the ETA-9169.

Employment Rate Second Quarter After Exit	64.10%
Employment Rate Fourth Quarter After Exit	62.90%
Median Earnings	\$5,648.03
Credential Rate	26.40%
Measurable Skills Gain	55.10%

### 4. HOW THE FUNDS RESERVED FOR INNOVATION AND EXPANSION (I&E) ACTIVITIES WERE UTILIZED

During PY2020, ARS utilized I&E funds to support activities of the State Rehabilitation Council and to fund a portion of the State Independent Living Council's (SILC) budget as outlined in the SILC's resource plan. Traditionally, ARS uses I&E funds to support outreach activities to unserved and underserved Arkansans with disabilities and to strengthen relationships with our business partners. Due to Covid-19, these activities did not occur.

## Q. QUALITY, SCOPE, AND EXTENT OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

### 1. 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

#### Quality

ARS refers individuals for Supported Employment services to one of 63 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, 90 days to successful employment and extended services funded by other entities or by ARS for a youth under 25. Supported Employment is a "place then train" model.

#### Scope of Services

ARS determines eligibility for SE services and CRPs bill based on meeting the Milestone requirements. Where indicated, funding for these milestones will be modified according to RSA's comments in the Federal Fiscal Year 2021 Report on the Review of the VR and Supported Employment Programs administered by ARS.

**Milestone 1 – Referral/Job Development:** CRPs accept the referral and provide assistance with career readiness activities (seeking employment, filling out applications, and interviewing skills, etc.) and assistance in the development, creation, or identification of paid integrated work in a community business or self-employment setting.

ARS will pursue policy changes to ensure that Title I VR funds, rather than Title VI SE funds, are used for this milestone.

**Milestone 2 – Job Placement:** 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, and is compensated commensurate with others in the same position at minimum wage or above.

ARS will pursue policy changes to ensure that Title I VR funds, rather than Title VI SE funds, are used for this milestone.

**Milestone 3 – Stabilization:** This service time frame assures an individual has learned his/her job with supports to meet the demands of the integrated work environment 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.

The individual must remain on the job 90 days or more to be considered stable, at which time the Job Coach reduces support to less than 20 percent of the individual's working hours. Extended services begin in stabilization with the identification of the funding source. ARS may be the extended services provider to a youth with a most significant disability until the youth reach 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, another service provider will continue the services. ARS can not act as the extended services provider to anyone who is not a youth with a most significant disability.

ARS only uses support employment (Title VI) funds to provide supported employment services after job placement. Prior to job placement, ARS uses Title I funds to provide services on the participant's IPE.

## 2. THE TIMING OF TRANSITION TO EXTENDED SERVICES

ARS provides time-limited services needed to support an individual in employment. Vocational Rehabilitation can fund a maximum of 24 months of job coaching and follow-along services unless the IPE indicates more than 24 months of services are necessary for the individual to achieve job stability before transitioning to extended services. Prior to the purchase of supported employment services, the counselor determines the need for services, the appropriate funding stream for extended services, and the selected CRP through informed choice and identified on the IPE.

The transition to the extended services occurs after the individual has been employed for the maximum number of hours stated in the Individualized Plan for Employment, consistent with the individual's abilities and informed choice. ARS will revise its policies on the transition to extended services, where those policies refer to a minimum number of hours that an individual must work per week before extended services are considered.

After the determination of funding for extended services, the individual must maintain employment for at least 90 days before the individual's case is a successful closure and before he/she is transitioned to extended services. This transition would be completed within a 24-month time frame of supported employment services, including job coaching. If a determination

is made based that the individual needs more than 24 months of services to achieve job stability and the time-limited services of job coaching, ARS will obtain justification from the CRP.

ARS developed the Youth Extended Services policy for individuals under the age of 25. This policy allows ARS to pay for youth extended services if no other resources are available up to four years or age 25. Youth Extended Services may be available through Individualized Job Coaching Services on an as needed basis after job placement. Youth Extended Services is available for up to 200 hours per year not to exceed four years during the execution of the IPE. The service supports youth to ensure job longevity and includes onsite visits to both the individual and the employer. The Extended Services requirement for onsite contact is a minimum requirement for monthly onsite contact. Once the individual reaches the age of 25, ARS must assure extended service funding resources 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), this service is transitioned to the provider responsible for funding, which may include payment through the individual's community employment services waiver plan funded by the Provider-led Shared Savings Entity (PASSE), a model of organized care created by Act 775 of 2017. Each PASSE is made up of governing providers who have entered into a partnership with an experienced program administration organization. If the individual is not on waiver, providers must generate funding to provide extended services.

**Priority: ARS will leverage other public and private funds to increase resources for extended services and expanded supported employment opportunities for youth with the most significant disabilities.**

ARS set the strategy to determine methods for funding extended services for youth with disabilities not to exceed four years through the Employment First Vendors (CRPs, SE providers, and other external employment). No action was taken because of Covid-19.

ARS created the Youth Extended Services (YES) policy for fee payments by ARS that was promulgated in 2019. ARS Field staff were trained on the policy during PY2020. Providers received training related to ARS' Youth Extended Services policy and fee for service.

ARS set the strategy to develop new service components or agreements with partners of state agencies for sequential funding of extended services to assure youth with disabilities have successful employment opportunities. ARS has not pursued this strategy due to the COVID pandemic.

ARS set the strategy to provide education and instruction of WIOA expectations to providers and will establish Memorandums of Understanding or contract services to providers to initiate services to potentially eligible clients. This is ongoing. MOUs are renewed annually. ARS has partnered with vendors to provide Pre-ETS services to potentially eligible and eligible students.

#### VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (COMBINED OR GENERAL) 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 WIOA[14], AND ITS SUPPLEMENT UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT[15];

ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPROPRIATE

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services

2. AS A CONDITION FOR THE RECEIPT OF FEDERAL FUNDS UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES, THE (ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY)[16] AGREES TO OPERATE AND ADMINISTER THE STATE VR SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN[17] , THE REHABILITATION ACT, AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[18] , POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED BY THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION. FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER SECTION 111 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

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 AGREES TO OPERATE AND ADMINISTER THE STATE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN[19] , THE REHABILITATION ACT, AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[20] , 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 AGENCY AND/OR THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT 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;

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

Joseph Baxter

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

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

Signatory information	Enter Signatory information in this column
Name of Signatory	Joseph Baxter
Title of Signatory	Commissioner, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services
Date Signed	03/14/2022

### ASSURANCES

The State Plan must include	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 plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140.	
3. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to: Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan:	
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. The establishment of either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as applicable (A or B must be selected):	
3.b.(A) "is an independent State commission" (Yes/No)	No

The State Plan must include	Include
3.b.(B) "has established a State Rehabilitation Council" (Yes/No)	Yes
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. 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. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the local administration of VR funds (Yes/No)	No
3.f. The shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the shared funding and administration of joint programs (Yes/No)	No
3.g. Statewide and waivers of statewide requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act. Is the designated State agency requesting or maintaining a waiver of statewide for one or more services provided under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan? (Yes/No) See Section 2 of this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan	No
3.h. The descriptions 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,	



The State Plan must include	Include
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	
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)(D) 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 in accordance with section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act? (Yes/No)	Yes
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 requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) 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	

The State Plan must include	Include
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 section 101(a)(14) 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.I. Strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and	
4.j.i.II. 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) and 101(a)(25))	
5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement:	
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	

The State Plan must include	Include
5.c. The designated state unit will coordinate activities with any other State agency that is functioning as an employment network under the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency program under Section 1148 of the Social Security Act	
6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program:	
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)(G) and (H) 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:	Yes
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:	
7.b.i. 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	

The State Plan must include	Include
606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act	
7.b.ii. 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)(6)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act	

#### VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	58.9	60.5	60.0	61.5
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	47.9	57.3	49.0	57.9
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	5,317.7	5697.0	5,400.0	5787.0
Credential Attainment Rate	21.9	28.9	23.0	30.9
Measurable Skill Gains	50.0	55.6	51.0	57.6
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>

*"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.*

#### PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (BLIND)

##### A. INPUT OF STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

1. INPUT PROVIDED BY THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL, INCLUDING INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN, RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COUNCIL'S REPORT, THE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER SATISFACTION, AND OTHER COUNCIL REPORTS THAT MAY HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED AS PART OF THE COUNCIL'S FUNCTIONS;

The Division of Services for the Blind is an independent consumer-controlled commission. Hence, this section is not applicable.

2. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S RESPONSE TO THE COUNCIL'S INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS; AND

This agency is an independent commission.

3. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S EXPLANATIONS FOR REJECTING ANY OF THE COUNCIL'S INPUT OR RECOMMENDATIONS.

The Division of Services for the Blind is an independent consumer-controlled commission. Hence, this section is not applicable.

B. REQUEST FOR WAIVER OF STATEWIDENESS

1. A LOCAL PUBLIC AGENCY WILL PROVIDE THE NON-FEDERAL SHARE OF COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE WAIVER REQUEST;

The Division of Services for the Blind has not requested a waiver of statewideness. Hence this section is not applicable.

2. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WILL APPROVE EACH PROPOSED SERVICE BEFORE IT IS PUT INTO EFFECT; AND

The Division of Services for the Blind has not requested a waiver of statewideness. Hence, this section is not applicable.

3. REQUIREMENTS OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN WILL APPLY TO THE SERVICES APPROVED UNDER THE WAIVER.

This agency has not requested a waiver of statewideness. Hence this section is not applicable.

C. COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH AGENCIES NOT CARRYING OUT ACTIVITIES UNDER THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

1. FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS;

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 a cooperative agreement with the following DHS agencies DHS Division of Aging and Adult Services; DHS Division of Behavioral Health (DBHS); DHS Division of Children and Family Services; DHS Division of County Operations; DHS Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS); and DHS Division of Youth Services. There are also the following interagency and non-profit agreements between Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS), DDS, DBHS, Arkansas Department of Education Special Education Unit (ADE SEU), and DSB for increasing the number of individuals in competitive employment and expanding Supported Employment. An agreement between ADE SEU, ARS, and DSB regarding Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS).

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.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB and ARS are working with the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) and the Children and Youth with Sensory Impairments (CAYSI) on two Deafblind projects. DSB has also signed an MOU with the American Indian Center of Arkansas.

## 2. STATE PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT UNDER SECTION 4 OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998;

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.

The Division of Services for the Blind Director sits on the ICAN Board. ICAN also attends DSB's annual meetings to provide onsite equipment updates and share information with DSB staff.

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 continues to coordinate with the Division of Workforce Services (DWS) Office of Information and Technology to ensure its Data Loss Protection (DLP) project does not take any action that would affect access to adaptive software and accommodations by DWS employees who are blind or visually impaired.

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.

DSB has formed partnerships with businesses that will train counselors on new assistive technology. DSB is among the agencies and organizations tasked with implementing the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act in Arkansas. Its partner World Services for the Blind has been designated to distribute technology equipment under the federal legislation. Through the Act, participants will be exposed to more technology available to assist them in their daily lives, job searches and workplaces.

DSB continues to collaborate with the Arkansas Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (ALBPH) and maintains several digital recorders to be used by staff to teach participants how to access digital talking books, both by standard mail distribution and through

the Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD) website. Additionally, available technology services can be offered and augmented by DSB's technology staff and lab.

Each year DSB coordinates with the Governor's Office, the Department of Education, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services Office of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and related consumer groups to proclaim and celebrate the last week of June as Helen Keller Deaf-Blind Awareness Week and observe her birthdate June 27. A deaf-blind consumer is chosen to accept the proclamation from the Governor at the State Capitol.

### 3. PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT BY THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE;

DSB makes referrals of participants to commodity programs and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which are under the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

### 4. NON-EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES SERVING OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH; AND

DSB maintains an active presence on numerous councils and committees, including: Arkansas Interagency Transition Partnership, Arkansas Workforce Development Board, Interagency Steering Committee on Integrated Employment, Behavioral Health Planning and Advisory Council, 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, Youth Leadership Forum, Accessible Parking Taskforce, Local Workforce Development Boards across the state.

### 5. STATE USE CONTRACTING PROGRAMS.

DSB has no state use contracting programs.

## D. COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS

### 1. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S PLANS, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES FOR COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS TO FACILITATE THE TRANSITION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM SCHOOL TO THE RECEIPT OF VR SERVICES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, AS WELL AS PROCEDURES FOR THE TIMELY DEVELOPMENT AND APPROVAL OF INDIVIDUALIZED PLANS FOR EMPLOYMENT FOR THE STUDENTS

The designated state unit's plans, policies, and procedures for coordination with education officials to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of VR services, including pre-employment transition services, as well as procedures for the timely development and approval of individualized plans for employment for the students.

DSB has agreed with Arkansas Rehabilitation Services to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services for students with a disability beginning at age 16 through the age of 21. Students with a disability who are eligible for VR services will receive their Pre ETS services through their Individualized Plan for Employment. The interagency agreement between DSB and ARS reflects the agreed upon age for providing Pre-Employment Transition Services.

DSB has a cooperative agreement with the Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education, regarding transition services to students who are blind or severely visually impaired and are in public schools, including Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ASBVI). The interagency agreement with the Department of Education outlines the roles and responsibilities, financial responsibility, determination of lead agency, and qualified personnel.

DSB also has cooperative agreements with Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Arkansas School for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired, Educational Services for the Visually Impaired (ESVI), and 33 Institutions of Higher Education.

DSB is a charter member in the Arkansas Interagency Transition Partnership (AITP), which coordinates transition services and discusses related issues. AITP has representatives from agencies and organizations including, but not limited to, Arkansas Transition Services (ATS), Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS), Arkansas Transition Program (ATP), Department of Human Services (DHS), DHS Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS), DSB, parent centers, the private sector, and public and private schools. AITP involves transition agencies and organizations at a state level through quarterly meetings and shares information through its website. AITP held a Summer Agency Connections conference in the summer of 2018 in Little Rock and sponsors bi-annual Transition Summits.

DSB sends representatives to these conferences and will continue to participate in 2020-2023. As a part of AITP at the local level, DSB reaches out to Local Education Area Supervisors in the school districts across the State to strengthen the relationship between the Department of Special Education and DSB. Each DSB regional office maintains a contact list for all secondary schools in its service area and regularly sends information by mail and email to contacts on the list. As part of AITP and the initiative to reach as many participants as possible under Pre-Employment Transition Services, DSB is reaching out to each Local Education Area Supervisor in the school districts across the State and each high school across the State to give presentations/information on services available under Pre-Employment Transition Services. DSB has seven designated pre-employment transition services counselors and one Pre-ETS Area Manager to reach participants throughout the state.

DSB Transition Counselors assist participants in developing Individual Plans for Employment (IPE's) before students determined to be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services leave the school setting.

In regard to the development and approval of IPE's, all DSB participants, including transition students, receive services based upon their IPE. The counselor and the participant and/or a representative, as appropriate, develop the IPE jointly and mutually approve its contents. The IPE must be designed to achieve the specific employment outcome chosen by the individual and be consistent with the individual's unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, career interests, and informed choice. The services, service providers, and all activities selected by the participant must be necessary to meet the employment outcome goal. The VR Counselor communicates with the participant and other service providers, such as ARS, to avoid duplication of services and to ensure consideration of comparable benefits, where applicable.

Potentially Eligible consumers are those students with a disability that have not applied and been determined eligible for the VR program. Once a student has been determined ineligible for VR services, they no longer qualify to receive Pre-ETS because they are no longer considered potentially eligible. A consumer who is determined eligible for VR services would receive their Pre-ETS services under the VR Case Type.

Secondary schools invite DSB to their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings to be part of the planning team to assist education agencies in preparing students who are blind or severely visually impaired for transition from school to post-school activities, such as employment, training, supported employment, and other VR services. The IEP outlines the roles and responsibilities of DSB, the student, the school, and any other agency/organization involved in providing transition services.

In June of each year, DSB conducts Jump Start, a statewide career development program for high school students aged 16 to graduation who are blind or severely visually impaired. Thirty (30) students from across the state are accepted into the program each year. DSB coordinates with the Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ASBVI) in the planning and operation of Jump Start. ASBVI holds its summer learning program for youth under age 16 at the same time that DSB has Jump Start for high school students, so the two agencies share cafeteria staff,



infirmary nurses, and security guards, and at least one ASBVI staff member is assigned to assist during Jump Start. DSB houses the students at ASBVI during the week (students go home on weekends). This three-week program exposes Jump Start students to the world of work and assists them in transitioning from high school to competitive integrated employment or post-secondary education. Students were placed in part-time jobs appropriate for their skills, abilities, and interests. They worked in the mornings and during the afternoons and evenings participate in educational and recreational activities. Students learned independent living and job readiness skills; computer technology; and, if needed, orientation and mobility skills. Jump Start increases the students' confidence, social skills, and self—esteem. It also strengthens DSB's relationship with ASBVI.

DSB has an RSA-approved agreement with the Department of Education/Special Education, which provides information on financial responsibilities, the lead agency, and qualified personnel. DSB participates in monthly conference calls with Arkansas Rehabilitation Services to ensure transparent fiscal monitoring and oversight of the Pre-ETS funds allocated to the State of Arkansas.

Each DSB regional office maintains a contact list for all secondary schools in its service area and sends letters, emails and information to contacts on the list. This process gives schools a pathway for increased communications with DSB. DSB Pre-ETS counselors continue to make face to face visits to all schools across the state in their areas throughout the school year, including Arkansas School for the Blind and Visionally Impaired. DSB Pre-ETS counselors also present and visit schools during transition fairs, open houses, parent nights, school staff meetings, and any other school functions they can attend to discuss available Pre-ETS services. DSB Pre-ETS counselors mail out letters annually to all schools across the state regarding the DSB Pre-ETS Jump Start program. The letters sent to the schools, provide information about DSB for potential referrals. Counselors have also hosted transition fairs for schools.

## 2. INFORMATION ON THE FORMAL INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT WITH THE STATE EDUCATIONAL AGENCY WITH RESPECT TO:

### A. CONSULTATION AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO ASSIST EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES IN PLANNING FOR THE TRANSITION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM SCHOOL TO POST-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING VR SERVICES;

DSB is working cooperatively with the Educational Services for the Visually Impaired, Department of Education, Special Education Teachers for the Visually Impaired, and local education areas to identify the technology needs, independent living needs, and educational training needs of identified students beginning at age 16 in the school system and through IEP meetings and planning meetings for those meeting the 504 regulations. Monthly meetings are held with our VR and Pre-ETS counselors and the school consultants to determine goals and objectives for students. Quarterly visits to schools are conducted to provide labor market information, university application and scholarship information, and technical school opportunities available within the key labor market sectors of the State. DSB begins providing Pre-ETS services to eligible and potentially eligible students with a disability at age 16.

An updated agreement with the Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education, regarding transition services to students who are blind or severely visually impaired, including Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ASBVI) was developed to address the Section 113 Pre-employment transition activities that are authorized under WIOA and the requirements of Section 511. This MOU was created in conjunction with the Arkansas Rehabilitation Service Agency. The agreement was signed in January 2018. The interagency agreement outlines the roles and responsibilities, financial responsibility, determination of lead agency, and qualified personnel. DSB has reached out to each Local Education Area Supervisor in the school districts across the State and each high school across the State to give presentations/information on services available under pre-employment transition services.

DSB has seven designated pre-employment transition services counselors that provide information to eligible and potentially eligible students with visual impairments both in large print and electronically through the school system.

Pre-ETS services include five core areas: Job exploration counseling: these are services to assist the student in exploring the world of work and learning more about their interests, abilities and future career goals. Work-based learning experiences, which may include in-school or after school opportunities, experience outside the traditional school setting including internships, that are provided in an integrated environment; Counseling on opportunities in comprehensive transition or enrollment in postsecondary educational programs; Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living; and Instruction in self-advocacy/peer mentoring. DSB works to ensure our Pre-ETS transition counselors have a strong relationship with the local school districts and the local Work Force Development Boards. Summer work experiences, workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living, and other work-based learning experiences have been implemented and will continue to expand as the population of high school students we serve increases.

For youth with a disability age 14 through 21 who are VR eligible, DSB Pre ETS counselors provide VR services. If a VR eligible youth with a disability also meets the definition of a student with a disability (beginning at age 16), DSB Pre ETS counselors will provide Pre ETS services to that consumer alongside their other VR services on their IPE. For students with a disability aged 16 through 21, who have not applied and been determined eligible for VR services and are therefore potentially eligible, they will receive Pre-ETS services as described above as soon as possible, but the time shall not exceed 90 days after the enrollment. Potentially Eligible consumers are those students with a disability that have not applied and been determined eligible for the VR program. Once a student has been determined ineligible for VR services, they no longer qualify to receive Pre-ETS because they are no longer considered potentially eligible. DSB, in collaboration with the local education agency, will provide services to assist the student in developing and successfully achieving their Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) goal. On a statewide basis, DSB has seven designated Pre-ETS high school transition staff and one Pre-ETS Manager to provide leadership, information and referral, advocacy, technical assistance, and to promote collaboration among consumers, parents, adult service providers, and other service agencies. DSB will continue to have counselors assigned to each school district and high school. It is the role of the assigned counselors to provide outreach, technical assistance, information and referrals to the secondary education officials in their assigned schools and districts as well as to assure the provision of direct services to eligible youth.

Section 511 of WIOA intends that individuals with disabilities, especially youth with disabilities, must be afforded an opportunity to prepare for, obtain, maintain, advance in, or re-enter competitive integrated employment. The Division of Services for the Blind, Division of Developmental Disabilities, the Division of Medical Services, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, Division of Behavioral Health Services and the Arkansas Department of Education are working together to identify students that are blind and visually impaired that have been provided services in a sub-minimum wage setting. We have plans to collaborate on expanding services to mutual consumers including a systematic approach to better identify consumers who could benefit from supported employment services (in an integrated setting, achieving at least the minimum wage) and are not receiving them at this time. A Memorandum of Agreement was developed and signed in 2017 through the team effort known as Vision Quest, which is an extension of Governor Asa Hutchinson's Employment First Taskforce. Vision Quest includes the following agencies: The Division of Services for the Blind, Division of Developmental Disabilities, the Division of Medical Services, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, Division of Behavioral Health Services and the Arkansas Department of Education. The proposal includes provisions for use of joint agency resources to ensure quality service delivery and long term supports for supported employment. With the cooperation of the partner agencies DSB will contact blind and visually impaired individuals every 6 months who are in sub-minimum wage situations to provide

career counseling and information and referral services, designed to promote opportunities for competitive integrated employment. DSB understands that all MOU's with Education must include a statement preventing prohibiting the State education agency from contracting with facilities that compensate students with disabilities at subminimum wages and ensures that this is included in all agreements.

DSB's Director joined the other Vision Quest Directors in the official signing of the Super MOU in winter of 2018. DSB currently does not serve any individuals in a sub-minimum wage or 511 situation.

**B. TRANSITION PLANNING BY PERSONNEL OF THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND EDUCATIONAL AGENCY THAT FACILITATES THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THEIR INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS;**

DSB counselors assist participants in developing Individual Plans for Employment (IPE's) at age 14. The IPE is developed no later than 90 days after eligibility is determined. DSB works to develop IPEs at age 14 and every year until the student transitions out of high school. Secondary schools invite DSB's counselors to Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings, to be part of the planning team to assist education agencies in preparing students who are blind or severely visually impaired for transition from school to post-school activities, (such as employment, training, supported employment, and other VR services). DSB conducts independent living, technology and vocational assessments after the determination of eligibility in order to address planning needs. This information is shared with the education staff in determining career goals and objectives. DSB will provide accommodations according to the IPE that are not the responsibility of the Local Education Area (LEA) pursuant to FAPE regulations. Peer support and mentoring is arranged for the duration of transition services. The IEP and the IPE outline the roles and responsibilities of DSB, the student, the school, and any other agency/organization involved in providing transition services. DSB is working cooperatively with the Educational Services for the Visually Impaired, Department of Education, Special Education Teachers for the Visually Impaired, and local education areas to coordinate Pre-Employment Transition Services. New federal mandates require that DSB, in collaboration with local educational agencies, offer to transition age high school students with disabilities (ages 16-22) Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) using 15% of our federal allocation on an annual basis.

Pre-ETS services include: Job exploration counseling; Work-based learning experiences, which may include in-school or after school opportunities and experiences outside the traditional school setting including internships that are provided in an integrated environment; Counseling on opportunities in comprehensive transition or enrollment in postsecondary educational programs; Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living; and, Instruction in self-advocacy/peer mentoring.

In order to reach our goals, DSB is ensuring our seven Pre-ETS transition counselors and Pre-ETS Area Manager have a strong relationship with the local school districts and the local Workforce Development Boards. Summer work experiences, work place readiness training to develop social skills and independent living, and other work-based learning experiences have been implemented and will continue to expand as the population of high school students we serve increases.

Pre-employment transition services as described above will be arranged throughout the school year and in the summer. Planning and implementation begin as soon as possible, and shall not exceed 90 days after the enrollment. On a statewide basis, DSB has designated high school transition staff to provide leadership, information and referral, advocacy, technical assistance, and to promote collaboration among consumers, parents, adult service providers, and other service agencies. DSB continues to have counselors assigned to each school district and high school. It is the role of the assigned counselors to provide outreach, technical assistance,

information and referral to the secondary education officials in their assigned schools and districts as well as to assure the provision of direct services to eligible youth.

Transition in regards to Section 511 of WIOA intends that individuals with disabilities, especially youth with disabilities, must be afforded a full opportunity to prepare for, obtain, maintain, advance in, or reenter competitive integrated employment. The Division of Services for the Blind, Division of Developmental Disabilities, the Division of Medical Services, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, Division of Behavioral Health Services and the Arkansas Department of Education are working together to identify students that are blind and visually impaired that have been provided services in a sub-minimum wage setting. We are collaborating on plans to expand services to mutual consumers that includes a systematic approach to better identifying consumers who could benefit from supported employment services (in an integrated setting, earning at least the minimum wage) and are not receiving them at this time. A new Memorandum of Agreement was developed through the team effort known as Vision Quest, which is an extension of Governor Asa Hutchinson's Employment First Taskforce. Vision Quest includes the following agencies: The Division of Services for the Blind, Division of Developmental Disabilities, the Division of Medical Services, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, Division of Behavioral Health Services and the Arkansas Department of Education. The Agreement includes provisions for use of joint agency resources to ensure quality service delivery and long term supports for supported employment. With the cooperation of the partner agencies DSB will contact blind and visually impaired individuals every 6 months who are in sub-minimum wage situations to provide career counseling and information and referral services, designed to promote opportunities for competitive integrated employment. DSB's Director joined the other agencies Directors at the official signing of the MOU in the winter of 2018. DSB does not have any consumers employed in a 511 or less than minimum wage situation.

**C. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES, INCLUDING FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES, OF EACH AGENCY, INCLUDING PROVISIONS FOR DETERMINING STATE LEAD AGENCIES AND QUALIFIED PERSONNEL RESPONSIBLE FOR TRANSITION SERVICES;**

VR services delivered under WIOA do not remove, reduce, or change the school district's responsibility to deliver a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for students served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. VR services supplement, but do not supplant services delivered through the school districts.

The roles and responsibilities for each partner agency as required by federal and state regulations are as follows: 1. Local education agencies provide a Free and Appropriate Public Education for students with visual impairment and those with low or no vision, including preparation for transition from school to work or other postsecondary activities. 2. DSB and the Department of Education, Special Education, ESVI and Teachers for the Visually Impaired assist with student transition from secondary school to work through postsecondary training, education, or direct placement services necessary to achieve a successful employment outcome. The Division of Services for the Blind and the Department of Education, Special Education share the financial responsibility of ensuring that the provision of pre-employment transition services are planned and implemented within the school system. 3. The Division of Developmental Disabilities Services in collaboration with the Division of Services for the Blind and the Department of Education, Special Education work to reduce the number of sheltered workshop placements by promoting competitive employment in an integrated setting to all low vision and blind participants. In order to promote independence and self-sufficiency, the agency shall provide support and services, within available resources, to assist customers enrolled in Medicaid waivers who choose to pursue gainful employment. DSB and the Department of Education, Special Education, ARS, and the Division of Developmental Disabilities Services are committed to meeting financial responsibilities as required by law. Agency/Division heads for the organizations will periodically identify areas for improved programmatic and financial

efficiencies and develop strategies to meet financial responsibilities, including joint appropriations requests from the state legislature and negotiations with federal agencies. Each party is financially responsible for the services it provides under its own laws and rules.

#### D. PROCEDURES FOR OUTREACH TO AND IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WHO NEED TRANSITION SERVICES.

For outreach and identification of students who are blind or severely visually impaired, DSB continues to coordinate with Local Education Area (LEA) Supervisors and Regional Certified Vision Consultants of Educational Services for the Visually Impaired (ESVI). A collaborative data base of lists of transition students is maintained.

DSB Counselors will continue to make face to face visits to LEA Supervisors in their territories and will contact them at least twice a year by sending information by mail and emails. Counselors and their assistants serve as agency contacts. DSB Staff will continue to make presentations at school assemblies, parent—teacher organization meetings, and open houses to provide information on pre-employment transition services and how to access these services. DSB will continue outreach efforts to private, home, and accredited virtual schools. DSB's Pre-ETS team hosts a parent summit annually in August before school starts to inform students and parents of available resources. DSB brings in speakers to discuss assistive technology, college, workplace readiness, etc. DSB Pre-ETS team also hosts and attend transition fairs and parent summits around the state for students and parents to gather available resources from vendors participating in the events such as colleges, disability rights, community rehabilitation facilities. ARS, Arkansas Transition Services, etc. DSB has hosted transition fairs/parent summits in the cities of El Dorado, Dumas, Little Rock, Pine Bluff and Magnolia. DSB has attended transition fairs in the cities of Dumas, Dewitt, Lake Village, Greenwood, North Little Rock, Little Rock, Pine Bluff, Dermott, Cedar Ridge, Monticello and the counties of Crawford and Washington. DSB Pre-ETS staff will continue to host and attend these events around the state.

DSB will continue its system of mailouts and emails twice a year to area ESVI Consultants. In addition to the local outreach efforts, the Pre-ETS Area Manager will reach out to ESVI at a state level to discover any transition students that need services and should be referred to DSB. DSB will refer participants under age 14 to ESVI and solicit referrals from ages 14 and older from ESVI to DSB.

As a charter member in the Arkansas Interagency Transition Partnership (AITP), DSB is able to coordinate transition services and discuss related issues with AITP representatives from agencies and organizations, including, but not limited to Arkansas Transition Services (ATS), Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS), Arkansas Transition Program (ATP), Department of Human Services (DHS), DHS Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS), DSB, parent centers, the private sector, and public and private schools. AITP involves transition agencies and organizations at a state level through quarterly meetings and shares information through its website. AITP holds a Summer Agency Connections conference annually, and sponsors bi-annual Transition Summits. DSB sends representatives to these conferences.

As a part of AITP at the local level, DSB reaches out to Local Education Area Supervisors in the school districts across the State to strengthen the relationship between the Department of Education and DSB. Each DSB regional office maintains a contact list for all secondary schools in its service area and regularly sends information by mail and email to contacts on the list. As part of AITP and the initiative to reach as many participants as possible. DSB reaches out to each Local Education Area Supervisor in the school districts across the State and each high school across the State to give presentations/information on services available under Pre-ETS. DSB has seven designated Pre-ETS counselors and one Area Manager that do outreach to participants throughout the state.

Each DSB regional office maintains a contact list for all secondary schools in its service area and sends letters, emails and information to contacts on the list semi-annually. This process gives schools a pathway for increased communications with DSB. Outreach for the Pre-ETS and WIOA required activities that include: Job exploration counseling. Work-based learning experiences, which may include in-school or after school opportunities or experience outside the traditional school setting (including internships) that is provided in an integrated environment to the maximum extent possible. Counseling and guidance on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs at institutions of higher education. Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living. Instruction in self-advocacy, which may include peer mentoring.

The procedures for outreach and identifying students who would benefit from these services are as follows: 1. All transition counselors engage with the LEA staff on a monthly basis to provide literature in large print and digitally by electronic means to be then provided to special education teachers throughout the state on the referral process, the core services provided under Pre-ETS, and how to access DSB services to engage in exploration of competitive integrated employment settings. 2. All DSB transition counselor staff make face-to-face visits with the nursing staff, school counselor staff, and special and regular education staff within each high school on at least a monthly basis to offer this information and to provide further clarification and to answer questions on the process, what the core services are under Pre-ETS and how to access those services. Referrals are taken both digitally and by paper referral process. 3. All DSB transition counselor staff along with the Statewide Field Administrator attend monthly meetings with ESVI and Teacher for the Blind meetings to discuss upcoming events and to identify students currently in sub-minimum wage situations that need information and counseling on how to access DSB services to work towards competitive integrated employment.

The Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) reported that there are approximately 40 students in secondary education who are blind, visually impaired, or Deafblind between the ages of 16 through 21 to include 2 Deafblind students. DSB has identified 70 post-secondary students on the caseloads and 78 secondary students to include 2 secondary Deafblind students which is a total of the 148 students that DSB Pre-ETS counselors are currently serving. There are 92 VR eligible students and 56 potentially eligible students. Currently being served by DSB.

For the FFY 2019 grant DSB set aside \$989,572.65. Of this DSB has committed \$342, 657.03 to paying for staff time and associated expenses as allowed. DSB expects to spend \$620,000 on providing the 5 required Pre-ETS activities. This will allow DSB to spend \$26,915.62 on authorized services.

#### E. COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH PRIVATE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

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 to improve services for those consumers who are deaf-blind and to provide training for DSB staff. 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).

## F. ARRANGEMENTS AND COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

DSB maintains contractual agreements with private non-profit and for-profit agencies in the state to provide supported employment and extended services as applicable to our consumers with most significant disabilities, including youth with most significant disabilities. These services have been provided by World Services for the Blind, Easter Seals, Job Connections, Goodwill Industries, Ed Davis Inc. Team Academy, Building Bridges, S.W. Chance, and Arkansas Support Network. A new vendor application is being utilized to improve client and vendor service delivery.

DSB continued to utilize a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, Division of Workforce Services, Arkansas Department of Education-Special Education Unit, Transition Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities Services, Division of Adult Services and Behavior Health Services. This MOU defines each agency's roles and responsibilities toward competitive integrated employment for individuals with most significant disabilities. This partnership also supports on-going Employment First activities for the state.

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 state grant must be used to support youth with the most significant disabilities.

## G. COORDINATION WITH EMPLOYERS

### 1. VR SERVICES; AND

DSB has designated a minimum of 26% of the workday of each counselor to be devoted to developing competitive integrated employment, internships, on-the-job training, job shadowing, and volunteer job site opportunities for all participants. DSB counselors serve as business consultants, because they are most familiar with the skills, training, and capabilities of their clients. 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. This way more territory is covered and the counselors can match potential careers to the individuals they directly support. DSB currently has 26 VR counselors performing this function. Counselors conduct outreach to businesses and provide information and demonstrations on accommodations and technology to employers. DSB tracks all business contacts and is working on a common system in conjunction with all the workforce partners to have a shared platform of business leads. DSB counselors play a significant role in sharing the business needs with other partners and, in turn, have access to other business leads developed by workforce partners.

DSB is in the process recruiting for a Business Engagement Coordinator position. The anticipated date for the position to be filled is April 2020. The addition of the Business Engagement Coordinator will strengthen existing and new partnerships with businesses and corporations to allow DSB clients more job opportunities in competitive wage industries.

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.

Additionally, DSB has reached out to larger businesses to develop job site training placements and direct hire opportunities for DSB participants. DSB is currently working with Children's Hospital and Verizon Wireless on expedited interviews for candidates that meet the education and skill needs of these companies for current vacancies. Candidates are given an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, and once selected on-the-job training is arranged. DSB has also arranged for internship opportunities within state government and will continue to expand this project.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB currently has 22 VR counselor positions working to provide services. DSB's Business Engagement Coordinator started in November of 2020. DSB also has an Outreach Manager in place in place to coordinate the outreach activities in this section.

## 2. TRANSITION SERVICES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, FOR STUDENTS AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES.

In regards to pre-employment transition services, tours and informational interviews of large employers like Fed—Ex, Heifer International, Wal-Mart Distribution Centers and JB Hunt have been arranged to expose students and youth to real world opportunities within the State.

Through local business and industry, pre-employment transition students and youth are exposed to work experiences within a call center environment, a manufacturing environment, and computer applications.

## H. INTERAGENCY COOPERATION

### 1. THE STATE MEDICAID PLAN UNDER TITLE XIX OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT;

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 Behavioral Health Services (DBHS). 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 DBHS, DMS, and the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences.

### 2. THE STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING SERVICES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES; AND

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 Behavioral Health Services (DBHS). 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 DBHS. 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 DBHS, 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.

### 3. THE STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES.

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 Behavioral Health Services (DBHS). 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 DBHS have worked with DOL ODEP consultants to improve supported employment services for individuals with mental health issues. DSB coordinates services with DBHS, DMS, and the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences.

I. COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT; DATA SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

1. SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

A. QUALIFIED PERSONNEL NEEDS

I. THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL WHO ARE EMPLOYED BY THE STATE AGENCY IN THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES IN RELATION TO THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS SERVED, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY;

DSB is currently serving 856 consumers and employs a total of 57 staff:

Field Services – (Total 37)

Field Administration – 3

Managers – 5

Counselors – 18

Administrative Support – 11

Central Office – (Total 20)

Director's Office – 1

Finance – 4

Administrative Support – 8

Business and Technology - 7

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB is currently serving 730 VR consumers and employs a total of 58 staff. DSB counselors have an average caseload size of 34 consumers.

Field Services – (Total 39 filled, 7 vacancies)

Field Administration – 4 filled, 1 Vacancy

Managers – 5 filled, 0 Vacancy

Counselors – 18 filled, 3 vacancies

Administrative Support – 12 filled, 3 vacancies

Central Office – (Total 19 filled, 3 vacancies)

Director's Office – 5 filled

Finance – 1 filled, 2 vacancies

Quality Assurance - 4 filled, 0 vacancy

Administrative Support – 1 vacancy

Business and Technology – 8 filled, 0 vacancy

II. THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL CURRENTLY NEEDED BY THE STATE AGENCY TO PROVIDE VR SERVICES, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY; AND

Field Services – (Total 56)  
Field Administration – 4  
Managers – 5  
Counselors – 28  
Administrative Support – 19

Central Office – (Total 22)  
Director’s Office – 2  
Finance – 4  
Administrative Support – 8  
Business and Technology - 8

III. PROJECTIONS OF THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY, WHO WILL BE NEEDED BY THE STATE 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.

Field Services – (Total 56)  
Field Administration – 4  
Managers – 5  
Counselors – 28  
Administrative Support – 19

Central Office – (Total 22)  
Director’s Office – 2  
Finance – 4  
Administrative Support – 8  
Business and Technology - 8

Currently DSB has 5 staff eligible for retirement. DSB has also faced a turnover of approximately 5 staff per year in the last few years.

#### B. PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

##### I. A LIST OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE STATE THAT ARE PREPARING VR PROFESSIONALS, BY TYPE OF PROGRAM;

The Staff Development Coordinator maintains contact with the institutions of higher education and gathers data. The Coordinator reports this data to the Field Services Administrator and the Assistant Director. Below is the most recent information available from the institutions of higher education that have programs preparing vocational rehabilitation professionals:

The University of Arkansas at Fayetteville (U of A) offers a Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling through the Rehabilitation Education and Research Program housed in the Department of Rehabilitation, Human Resources and Communication Disorders. The Spring 2018-2019 has 26 students enrolled, there are 23 full—time students, 3 part—time students, and 20 students who graduated.

The University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) offers a Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling Education (RCE) with an Emphasis in Rehabilitation Counseling. The Masters in Rehabilitation Teaching (MRT) program has been dissolved, but the Orientation and Mobility (O&M) program will continue. Both the RCE and O&M programs are housed in the Counseling, Adult and Rehabilitation Education (CARE) degree Master of Arts. The Spring 2018-2019 has 80 students enrolled. Of these students there are 78 full—time students, 2 part—time students, and 32 graduates.

The University of Wisconsin-Stout Department of Counseling Psychology is primarily a graduate department, offers a master's degree (M.S.) in counseling specializing in community counseling. The department emphasizes the integration of multiculturalism and diversity into counseling psychology and is committed to multiculturalism broadly-defined in teaching, research, practice, and service. The Spring 2018-2019 has 38 students enrolled, there are 27 full—time students, 11 part—time students, and 19 graduates.

#### **Update PY2022-2023**

The University of Arkansas at Fayetteville (U of A) offers a Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling through the Rehabilitation Education and Research Program housed in the Department of Rehabilitation, Human Resources and Communication Disorders. The Spring 2020-2021 23 has students enrolled, 5 students who graduated.

The University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) offers a Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling Education (RCE) with an Emphasis in Rehabilitation Counseling. The Masters in Rehabilitation Teaching (MRT) program has been dissolved, but the Orientation and Mobility (O&M) program will continue. Both the RCE and O&M programs are housed in the Counseling, Adult and Rehabilitation Education (CARE) degree Master of Arts. The Spring 2021-2022 semester has 53 students enrolled, and 20 students graduated.

The University of Wisconsin-Stout Department of Counseling Psychology is primarily a graduate department, offers a master's degree (M.S.) in counseling specializing in community counseling. The department emphasizes the integration of multiculturalism and diversity into counseling psychology and is committed to multiculturalism broadly defined in teaching, research, practice, and service. The Spring 2021-2022 has 67 students enrolled, and 26 graduates.

DSB has 5 students enrolled, and 3 who have graduated online at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR). DSB has 1 student who graduated at the University of Wisconsin-Stout through Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) grant received in 2021 with the agreement UNT would fund a limited number of VR Counselors outside of Texas. However, DSB does not currently have any counselors enrolled in the UNT program.

#### **II. THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED AT EACH OF THOSE INSTITUTIONS, BROKEN DOWN BY TYPE OF PROGRAM; AND**

University of Arkansas at Fayetteville – 23 Full Time, 3 Part Time

University of Arkansas at Little Rock – 78 Full Time, 2 Part Time

University of Wisconsin-Stout – 27 Full Time, 11 Part Time

#### **Update PY2022-2023**

University of Arkansas at Fayetteville – 11 admitted, 23 enrolled

University of Arkansas at Little Rock – 14 admitted, 23 enrolled

University of Wisconsin-Stout – 25 admitted, 67 enrolled

III. 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.

Below is the most recent information available from the institutions of higher education that have programs preparing vocational rehabilitation professionals:

The University of Arkansas at Fayetteville (U of A) offers a Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling through the Rehabilitation Education and Research Program housed in the Department of Rehabilitation, Human Resources and Communication Disorders. The Spring 2018-2019 has 26 students enrolled, there are 23 full—time students, 3 part—time students, and 20 students who graduated.

The University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) offers a Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling Education (RCE) with an Emphasis in Rehabilitation Counseling. The Masters in Rehabilitation Teaching (MRT) program has been dissolved, but the Orientation and Mobility (O&M) program will continue. Both the RCE and O&M programs are housed in the Counseling, Adult and Rehabilitation Education (CARE) degree Master of Arts. The Spring 2018-2019 has 80 students enrolled. Of these students there are 78 full—time students, 2 part—time students, and 32 graduates.

The University of Wisconsin-Stout Department of Counseling Psychology is primarily a graduate department, offers a master's degree (M.S.) in counseling specializing in community counseling. The department emphasizes the integration of multiculturalism and diversity into counseling psychology and is committed to multiculturalism broadly-defined in teaching, research, practice, and service. The Spring 2018-2019 has 38 students enrolled, there are 27 full—time students, 11 part—time students, and 19 graduates.

DSB has had students enrolled online at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) and The University of Wisconsin-Stout through a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) grant that UNT received in 2009 with the agreement that it would fund a limited number of VR Counselors outside of Texas. DSB does not currently have any counselors enrolled in the UNT program.

**Update PY2022-2023**

University of Arkansas at Fayetteville (U of A) – 23 students enrolled, 5 graduated

University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) – 53 enrolled, 20 graduated

University of Wisconsin-Stout – 67 enrolled, 26 graduates

DSB has 5 students enrolled, and 3 who have graduated online at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR). DSB has 1 student who graduated at the University of Wisconsin-Stout through a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) grant received in 2021 with the agreement UNT would fund a limited number of VR Counselors outside of Texas. However, DSB does not currently have any counselors enrolled in the UNT program.

2. PLAN FOR RECRUITMENT, PREPARATION AND RETENTION OF QUALIFIED PERSONNEL

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](http://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.

Universities in Arkansas with Rehabilitation Counseling Programs include:

Institution: University of Arkansas at Fayetteville (U of A) Location: Fayetteville Programs: Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling and doctoral degrees in Rehabilitation and in Counseling Education.

Institution: University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) Location: Little Rock Programs: Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling Education (RCE) with Emphasis in Rehabilitation Counseling.

Institution: The University of Wisconsin-Stout Department of Counseling Psychology is primarily a graduate department, offers a master's degree (M.S.) in counseling specializing in community counseling.

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)

Master's in Rehabilitation Counseling (MRC)/CRC — L098C Certified Vocational Rehab Counselor/GS08 — \$45,009.95 (annual) — \$21.6394 (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. In addition, DSB will plan to meet quarterly with the universities to provide updates within the vocational rehabilitation field to give practitioner input, and to receive first—hand information regarding graduates from the MRC programs.

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. Additionally, leadership is reviewing training and development opportunities to help with retention of counselors.

**Update PY2022-2023** Effective July 1, 2021, 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)

Master's in Rehabilitation Counseling (MRC)/CRC — L098C Certified Vocational Rehab Counselor/GS08 — \$45,009.95 (annual) — \$21.6394 (hourly)

### 3. PERSONNEL STANDARDS

#### 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

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 did not have any interns in FY 2019.

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.

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. Internships are available to students in the rehabilitation programs across the State. DSB did not have any interns in FY 2019.

As of the December 2019 DSB Board meeting, the CSPD status is as follows: Field Services Administrator-Non certified; 5 VR Counselors with CRC. 1 VR Counselor anticipating taking CRC exam Spring 2020. 1 VR Counselor with LPC. 4 currently enrolled in CRC Master's level program. 6 pending enrollment in a CRC Master's level program. 5 Supervisors with CRC.

**Update PY2022-2023** As of the December 2021 DSB Board meeting, the CSPD status is as follows: Field Services Administrator-Noncertified; 7 VR Counselors with CRC; 1 VR Counselor anticipating taking CRC exam FFY2022; 4 currently enrolled in CRC Master's level program; 5 pending enrollments in a CRC Master's level program; and 4 Supervisors with CRC.

**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.**

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.

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.

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. Internships are available to students in the rehabilitation programs across the State. DSB did not have any interns in FY 2019.

As of the December 2019 DSB Board meeting, the CSPD status is as follows: Field Services Administrator-Non certified; 5 VR Counselors with CRC. 1 VR Counselor anticipating taking CRC exam Spring 2020. 1 VR Counselors with LPC. 4 currently enrolled in CRC Master's level program. 6 pending enrollment in a CRC Master's level program and 5 Area Managers with CRC.

**Update PY2022-2023** The spring 2021 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.

As of the December 2021 DSB Board meeting, the CSPD status is as follows: Field Services Administrator-Noncertified; 7 VR Counselors with CRC; 1 VR Counselor anticipating taking CRC exam FFY2022; 4 currently enrolled in CRC Master's level program; 5 pending enrollments in a CRC Master's level program; and 4 Supervisors with CRC.

DSB sends staff to trainings with CSAVR, NCSAB, Mississippi State University, Helen Keller National Center, and through the Technical Assistance Centers to enhance their knowledge of supporting individuals with disabilities. DSB Field Services Staff received an in person training on Labor Market Information and how to access it in July 2019. In addition, DSB staff are registered in and have access to the Talent Acquisition Portal. Additional trainings are being scheduled for staff on these topics to ensure knowledge stays up to date.

#### 4. STAFF DEVELOPMENT

A. A SYSTEM OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT FOR PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS WITHIN THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, 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

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.

The Division of Services for the Blind works with ICAN to provide training on rehabilitation technology to staff. ICAN attends DSB's annual meeting each year. While at this meeting ICAN offers demonstrations and a chance for counselors to view new technology and talk with them about the technology. ICAN also offers trainings on this technology to staff. DSB participates in the ICAN trainings from NanoPac that occur each year on technology and software available for consumers who are blind.

Leadership development and capacity—building opportunities are offered through a wide variety of methods:

- U of A CURRENTS periodically surveys rehabilitation staff regarding training needs and develops courses and conferences based on the results or on requests by DSB and other agencies. In the last fiscal year, CURRENTS offered face-to-face trainings and teleconferences on topics including: Writing and Marketing Your Business Plan; All Paths Lead to Adult Life: Important Partnerships and Components of Quality Transition Planning for Students with Intellectual Disabilities Sessions 1 and 2; Making Ethical Decisions in the Vocational Rehabilitation Process; Psychological Evaluations: Not Just for Eligibility; Using the DSM—5 Assessment Tools and International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) As Training Tools for Rehabilitation Counselors; Therapeutic Interventions with Aggressive Clients; Evaluating Vocational Communication Skills of Persons Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing; Multiculturalism and Disabilities; Using the Updated CRC Code of Ethics to Make Ethical Decisions in Everyday Tasks; Putting Together Your Business's Winning Team; Transition to Success for Individuals with Autism; Using Social Media to Plan Careers and Find Employment; Working with Multiple Chemical Sensitivities (MCS); Resources: You Got 'Em, Now Use 'Em; Job Success with Young Adults Diagnosed with DSM 5 Neurodevelopmental Disorders; The

Use of Interest Inventories and Other Techniques with People Who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing; Changing Nature of Disability in the 21st Century; The Medical and Psychosocial



Aspects of Multiple Sclerosis Parts 1 and 2; Rehabilitation of Persons with Bipolar Disorders; Rehabilitation of Persons with Depressive Disorders; Flipping the Script: Viewing Our Work Through a Social Model Lens; Working With Justice—Involved VR Clients; Using Qualitative Tools in Career Counseling; and Backs in a Flash.

- 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.

- 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.

#### **B. PROCEDURES FOR THE ACQUISITION AND DISSEMINATION OF SIGNIFICANT KNOWLEDGE FROM RESEARCH AND OTHER SOURCES TO DESIGNATED STATE UNIT PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS.**

Procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to designated State unit professionals and paraprofessionals.

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.

- In-house training is provided through DSB's Quality Assurance Coordinator Database Administrator, 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, the agency website. Training is also purchased from outside sources.

- 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.

#### **5. PERSONNEL TO ADDRESS INDIVIDUAL COMMUNICATION NEEDS**

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.

DSB has accepted an invitation from the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) to become a member of its National Community of Practice, formerly known as state affiliates. The group is currently composed of 38 organizations and agencies, with more being added as responses are received from invitations that were sent out by HKNC.

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. DHS has an in—house, certified Spanish interpreter in Miller County. These communication resources can be utilized as needed to serve participants.

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.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB is no longer part of DHS, but still provides interpreter services for any persons who need these services on a contractual basis.

#### 6. COORDINATION OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT UNDER THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT

DSB is a charter member in the Arkansas Interagency Transition Partnership (AITP), which coordinates transition services and discusses education—related issues. AITP has representatives from agencies and organizations, including, but not limited to Arkansas Transition Services (ATS), Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS), Arkansas Transition Program (ATP), Department of Human Services (DHS), DHS Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS), DSB, parent centers, the private sector, and public and private schools. AITP involves transition agencies and organizations at a state level through quarterly meetings and shares information through its website.

Through the AITP, local issues are addressed by local teams. The local teams provide oversight to ensure that transition goals and services are in place by the time a child becomes eligible, as mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

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. STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT

**1. PROVIDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE REHABILITATION NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES RESIDING WITHIN THE STATE, PARTICULARLY THE VR SERVICES NEEDS OF THOSE:**

**A. WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THEIR NEED FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;**

In December 2019, DSB conducted a statewide needs assessment to measure the effectiveness in providing services, and assess possible needs. The DSB Quality Assurance team used email, and traditional postal mail to send surveys to DSB consumers, DSB staff, DSB partners, and employers. In cases for which email addresses were available, an email with a brief description of the needs assessment, instructions for completing the online survey, and a direct link to the survey were provided to recipients. In total 451 surveys were emailed: 377 consumer surveys, 52 staff surveys, and 22 partner surveys. In cases for which email addresses were not available, surveys were sent by traditional postal mail. In total, 1,676 surveys were mailed. 1,313 employer surveys and 363 consumer surveys. Surveys were completed in January 2020.

To ensure that outlined needs are being addressed, DSB plans to focus more extensively on conducting assessments via various research methodologies, implementing strategic action plans, and facilitating systematic progress reviews to measure effectiveness.

Based on the needs assessment results, it is recommended that DSB partners more consistently with employers, the Workforce Development System, and various other community rehabilitation programs in an effort to provide more job services and training opportunities to those who are most significantly disabled and those who are underserved.

Because the needs assessment results suggest that those who require long-term support and extended services to maintain employment, those who reside in rural communities, and Veterans are the most underserved, it is recommended that DSB create more outreach initiatives to engage with these populations.

Additional considerations may be given to identifying, coordinating and providing transition career services and pre-employment transition services to youth and students with disabilities.

Needs Assessment results suggest that those with the most significant disabilities are most in need a job services, with 33% of respondents stating “job development and placement” as an essential service, 27% stating “employment preparation” as an essential service, 23% stating that “on-the-job training” as an essential service, and 17% stating “soft skills development” as an essential service.

**B. WHO ARE MINORITIES;**

Needs Assessment results suggest that 38% of consumers served are of a racial/ethnic minority group, with 29% reporting as Black or African-American, 7% reporting as Hispanic/Latino, 1% reporting as a Mix of two or more races, and 1% reporting as Asian. Overall, transportation, job services, and training present the greatest barriers to employment for this group.

**C. WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR PROGRAM;**

Needs Assessment results suggest that those who require long-term support and extended services to maintain employment, those who reside in rural communities, and Veterans are the most underserved, with 53%, 43% and 43% respectively reporting these categories. In particular, job placement and transportation were listed most frequently as barriers to employment for this population. Specifically, one consumer, who identified as residing in a rural area stated that, “living outside of the city limits” and not having adequate transportation impeded upon employment opportunities while another consumer, who expressed a need for extended services, stated that there is a “lack of employer confidence” when hiring those with disabilities. As such, outreach initiatives to engage those who require long-term support and

extended services to maintain employment, those who reside in rural communities, and Veterans are imperative. In detail, such initiatives should center on providing information about the job services and transportation services provided through the VR program.

**D. WHO HAVE BEEN SERVED THROUGH OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM; AND**

Needs Assessment results suggest that at least 50% of respondents have worked with individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Similar to results collected for the minority population as well as results for those who are unserved or underserved by the VR program, assessment results suggest that job services are the most essential needs for those who are served through the workforce development system. Specifically, more than 71% of the respondents noted job placement, work-place readiness skills, and on-the-job training as recurring barriers to employment for those who have been served through the workforce development system in some capacity.

**E. WHO ARE YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING, AS APPROPRIATE, THEIR NEED FOR PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES OR OTHER TRANSITION SERVICES.**

Needs Assessment results suggest 24% of consumers who responded are students or youth with disabilities who may be able to benefit from pre-employment transition services or other transition services. Of this population, the majority cites training, transportation, and job services as the most significant barriers to employment. Because approximately 50% of those who were identified as youth with disabilities referenced a need for training and job services, specifically, a strong consideration of expanding pre-employment transitions services such as work-place readiness skills, work-based learning experiences, counseling on post-secondary enrollment opportunities, and career exploration will be imperative moving forward.

**2. IDENTIFY THE NEED TO ESTABLISH, DEVELOP, OR IMPROVE COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE; AND**

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, with 57% and 29% respectively reporting these categories. Consistently, among multiple populations of consumers, partners, businesses, and staff, 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.

**3. 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 THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT**

Needs Assessment results suggest that additional research is needed in this area. Although the need assessment results suggest that those who are classified as youth with disabilities, including student with disabilities, cite training, job services and transportation among their greatest barriers to employment, the assessment did not measure how such transition and pre-employment transition services are coordinated with external agencies as outlined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Currently, the agency is still receiving guidance, through training and technical assistance, on what's allowable for pre-employment transition services as outlined under WIOA. For this reason, additional guidance and research is needed to properly assess the extent and effectiveness of coordinated efforts.

## K. ANNUAL ESTIMATES

### 1. THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS IN THE STATE WHO ARE ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES

DSB used the disability compendium report, population growth, the incidence of blindness, and historical data as the basis to project the number of individuals to be served through Title I and the number of supported employment cases to be served through Title VI.

Estimates for Title I:

In the Department of Human Services Annual Report for State Fiscal Year 2019, DSB reported 856 participants had been served by the vocational rehabilitation program. Of the 856 participants 390 participants were minorities. Therefore, DSB estimates it will serve a projected total of 1,000 participants at a total cost of \$4,516,818 (\$4,516 per participant) beginning in FFY 2021. Of this number, it is projected that 400 will be minorities.

In addition to a growing Hispanic population, Arkansas has one of the highest Marshallese populations in the United States. In the 2010 Census count for Arkansas, 4,324 people identified themselves as Marshallese, placing the state as having the highest Marshallese population in the continental United States and the second highest overall (with Hawaii having 7,412). The Compact of Free Association (COFA), which allows the Marshallese to live and travel freely and at—will between the Marshall Islands and the United States, will end in 2023.

Update PY2022-2023: DSB served 731 participants in the VR program. Of the 731 participants, 362 were minorities. Therefore DSB estimates it will serve a projected total of 800 participants at a total cost of \$4,516,818 (\$5,313.90 per participant) in FFY2023. Of this number it is projected 350 will be minorities.

Estimates for Title VI:

As an agency DSB is working to emphasize and prioritize supported employment with participants. Therefore, DSB estimates it will serve 5 participants in supported employment. While working with the VRTAC-QM and VRTAC-QE, DSB is developing updated rates and fee schedules as well as support plans for these consumers.

Estimates of Eligible Participants:

Based on statistical reporting derived from the American Community Survey, an overall rate of 2.9% for visual disability for the Arkansas population aged 16 to 64 showed approximately 18,000 persons in Arkansas might be eligible for and could receive vocational rehabilitation services from DSB.

### 2. THE NUMBER OF ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS WHO WILL RECEIVE SERVICES UNDER:

#### A. THE VR PROGRAM;

DSB conducted annual estimates for Federal Fiscal Year 2021. Needs Assessment results suggest 38% of consumers served are of a racial/ethnic minority group, with 29% reporting as Black or African-American, 7% reporting as Hispanic/Latino, 1% reporting as a Mix of two or more races, and 1% reporting as Asian. Based on the internal reports that DSB prepares, DSB served 856 participants during the State Fiscal Year of which 390 were minorities or 45%. Therefore, DSB estimates it will serve a projected total of 1,000 participants of which it is projected that 400 or 40% will be minorities. Note: In addition to a growing Hispanic population, Arkansas has one of the highest Marshallese populations in the United States. In the 2010 Census count for Arkansas, 4,324 people identified themselves as Marshallese, placing the state as having the highest Marshallese population in the continental United States and the second highest overall (with Hawaii having 7,412). The Compact of Free Association (COFA), which allows the Marshallese to live and travel freely and at—will between the Marshall Islands and the United States, will end in 2023.

Update PY2022-2023: DSB's internal reports show that in State Fiscal Year 2021, DSB served 731 participants of which 362 were minorities or 49.5%. Therefore DSB estimates that it will serve a projected 800 participants of which 44% or 350 will be minorities in FFY2023.

#### B. THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM; AND

DSB conducted annual estimates for Federal Fiscal Year 2021. Needs Assessment results show that participants most needed job development and placement. These services are part of the Supported Employment contracts that DSB maintains with vendors and can be used to provide the essential services to DSB consumers as indicated in the needs assessment. DSB estimates it will serve 15 participants in supported employment, at a total cost of \$120,000 (\$8,000 per participant).

Update PY2022-2023: DSB estimates it will serve 5 participants in Supported Employment. DSB is working with the VRTAC-QE to develop training and guidance for staff to enhance the Supported Employment Program.

#### C. EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY, IF UNDER AN ORDER OF SELECTION.

NA

##### 3. THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE ELIGIBLE FOR VR SERVICES, BUT ARE NOT RECEIVING SUCH SERVICES DUE TO AN ORDER OF SELECTION; AND

NA

##### 4. THE COST OF SERVICES FOR THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS ESTIMATED TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES. IF UNDER AN ORDER OF SELECTION, IDENTIFY THE COST OF SERVICES FOR EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY.

DSB is not currently under an order of selection. DSB conducted an annual assessment for Federal Fiscal Year 2021. DSB estimates it will serve a projected total of 1,000 participants at a total cost of \$4,516,818 (\$4,516 per participant). This comes from the estimated clients served using DSB's internal reports and the total grant award that DSB receives. Of this number, it is projected that 400 will be minorities. DSB estimates it will serve 15 participants in supported employment, at a total cost of \$120,000 (\$8,000 per participant).

Update PY2022-2023: DSB estimates it will serve 805 participants at a total cost of \$4,516,818 (\$5,610.95 per participant). Of this number it is projected that 350 will be minorities. DSB estimates it will serve 5 participants in supported employment while working with the VRTAC-QE.

#### L. STATE GOALS AND PRIORITIES

##### 1. IDENTIFY IF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES WERE JOINTLY DEVELOPED AND AGREED TO BY THE STATE VR AGENCY AND THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL, IF THE STATE HAS A COUNCIL, AND JOINTLY AGREED TO ANY REVISIONS

The DSB Board, an independent commission, approved the goals and priorities.

##### 2. IDENTIFY THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES IN CARRYING OUT THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

DSB developed the following goals, strategies, and performance measures for PY 2020 and 2021, based on WIOA, RSA guidance, recommendations by the DSB Board, and the most recent comprehensive, statewide needs assessment. Below are the goals, as approved by the DSB Board: Goal 1: Increase the employment opportunities for people who are blind or severely visually impaired. This goal addresses the identified needs in our CSNA to include job services,

job development and placement, on-the-job training, and soft skills development. Goal 2: Increase Pre-Employment Transition Services to high school students; and increase transition services to out-of-school youth. This goal addresses the need for Pre-ETS to include training and job services. Goal 3: Expand outreach efforts to include the general public, as well as those who are unserved, underserved, minorities, and stakeholders. Goal 4: Increase coordination with employers. Goals 3 and 4 address the need for job placement and training.

Goal 1: DSB will increase the employment opportunities for people who are blind or severely visually impaired.

Strategy: VR Counselors will schedule and attend face-to-face job exploration meetings to interview human resource professionals regarding the types of jobs they have, and the skills needed to do those jobs.

Performance Measure:

- A minimum of two employer job exploration meetings will be scheduled per month.

PY 2020-2021:

- Counselors will make 2 contacts per month for each client in job-readiness status.
- DSB will conduct training for staff on conducting outreach.
- Quality Assurance will develop a new method of tracking employer contacts in AWARE and Salesforce.

**Update: PY2022-2023** Staff no longer have AWARE employer access and employer contacts are entered by Business Engagement allowing for consistent and accurate tracking. Counselors made 43 employer contacts for Program Year 2020, and 35 employer contacts in the first 2 Quarters of Program Year 2021. While contacts have been made more challenging due to the pandemic, DSB continues to work to increase contacts with employers and to provide staff training and support to improve outreach.

Strategy: VR Counselors will ensure that participants in job ready status are actively seeking employment.

Performance Measures:

- VR Counselors will require three job contacts per week
- Assist job ready participants with registration at Workforce Services
- Assist job ready participants with registering and applying for careers available through the Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP)
- Assist participants with registering and applying for jobs through employer internet accessible application processes with private, federal, state and non-profit employers.

PY 2020-2021:

- All employer contacts will be entered in the employer module in AWARE.
- DSB will implement a more effective use of the employer module.
- DSB will utilize the Salesforce program for tracking employer contacts.

**Update: PY2022-2023** DSB Staff received training and guidance on required supports and expectations for consumers in Job Ready Status. Staff also received training on how to identify consumers who should be placed in Job Ready Status. This training was at the July 2021 Field Services Meeting.

Strategy: DSB will encourage and support viable self-employment.

Performance Measures:

- Through the DSB Small Business program, participants will be provided access to Small Business Association trainings and the Arkansas Secretary of State's trainings on small business enterprises.
- The counselors will schedule job shadowing experiences with participants who are blind/visually impaired that have maintained successful businesses.
- Each self-employment proposal submitted by a participant will be reviewed by a team composed of the Field Services Administrator, the Small Business Coordinator, and the participant's VR Counselor to ensure that the proposal is realistic and sustainable before it is approved and any funds are provided.
- A brochure will be developed to provide interested consumers with information about DSB's small business self-employment program.

PY 2020-2021:

- DSB will coordinate a Small Business team to review proposals.
- Provide training for VR counselors on what is needed to complete a small business proposal.
- Revise the policy and procedures for funding small businesses.

**Update: PY2022-2023** DSB has developed a Small Business Committee and is working to update our policy on Small Business. In addition, DSB is designing a Small Business Brochure to share with consumers. So far in PY2021, DSB has reviewed 1 Small Business proposal and provided feedback to 1 consumer considering a small business.

Strategy: DSB will work in conjunction with provider agencies to provide work appropriate skills and training to blind and low vision participants.

Performance Measure:

- DSB will refer participants to World Services for the Blind, Alpha Pointe, the Louisiana Center for the Blind, Sources, Goodwill and other providers as necessary for additional skills training, including, but not limited to soft skills and work readiness training to assist participants in improving their probability of securing competitive integrated employment.

PY 2020-2021:

- DSB will work with provider agencies to develop more trainings for high in demand jobs for the blind and visually impaired participants.
- DSB will refer participants to Apprenticeship programs across the state.
- DSB will ensure that appropriate guidelines are in place to monitor the providers and trainings.

**Update: PY2022-2023** DSB continues to work with provider agencies to assist consumers. DSB is working with the Quality Employment Technical Assistance Center to provide training and support to staff on providing apprenticeships to consumers.

Strategy: DSB will provide detailed benefits counseling information to each participant on SSI and SSDI.



Performance Measures:

- DSB will provide benefits counseling for 100% of clients, adults, students and youth on SSI and SSDI and conduct a one-on-one benefits analysis.
- Area Supervisors will monitor caseloads to ensure that VR Counselors are providing all SSI and SSDI VR participants with benefits counseling.
- Counselors will make participants aware of benefits counseling at the time of application, at the time of IPE's, and at the time of closure.

PY 2020-2021:

- All new counselors will receive benefits counseling training.
- Current counselors will receive benefits counseling updates.

Strategy: DSB will continue to refer Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) and interested in employment to VR services.

Performance Measure:

- DSB will refer 100% of older blind individuals who are interested in employment to VR services.

PY 2020-2021:

- Counselors will refer 100% of OIB that are interested in employment to VR services.
- VR counselors will make contact with agencies that serve older individuals such as Green Thumb, AAA to seek referrals, and to educate these agencies about DSB services.

**Update: PY2022-2023** 100% of clients who express interest in work will be referred to VR. DSB will work to develop a tracking mechanism for those clients who start as OIB but decide they wish to work. Clients who express interest in work at the beginning are immediately referred to VR. DSB staff work with local agencies to provide needed services to consumers. DSB also invites agencies to participate in the Older Blind Advisory Committee. Staff have connected with local assisted living centers and town hall meetings to educate communities on our services. In PY2020, DSB received 212 applications for OIB services. In PY2021, DSB has received 123 OIB applications so far.

Strategy: DSB will continue to recognize successful participants and their employers.

Performance Measure:

- Each year, each counselor will select one individual from his/her caseload as an area Consumer of the Year (COY) and nominate the individual as a candidate for the overall state Consumer of the Year.
- DSB will award area COY's and their employers with trophies/framed certificates and related publicity.

PY 2020-2021:

- Counselors will recognize a COY in each area and nominate them for the state COY.
- DSB will honor the state COY and employer at their annual meeting in December.

**Update: PY2022-2023** All Pre-ETS caseloads submitted nominations for Student of the Year, and one overall winner was chosen. DSB had 20 VR caseloads submit a COY nomination, and DSB honored all COYs at the virtual December meeting in PY20 and PY21.

Strategy: DSB will continue to expand its assistive technology services and improve access to these services and equipment.

Performance Measures:

- DSB will provide trainings on the use and function of common assistive technology devices for the blind and visually impaired.

PY 2020-2021:

- The Assistive Technology staff will develop trainings that can be modified for small and large employers.
- DSB will provide outreach and training to community organizations on technological advances in low vision and blindness.
- DSB will continue to provide training to new Workforce Services staff as vacancies occur to increase their knowledge of accessible technology and the needs of participants.
- DSB staff will continue to meet participants at Workforce Services offices, including DSB sponsored accessible kiosks, to assist participants in their job searches and in becoming more comfortable interacting with the public in an employment setting.

**Update: PY2022-2023** DSB recorded 41 Outreach contacts by counselors during Program Year 2020. DSB staff are now located in Workforce Centers and will work with outreach coordinator to ensure community awareness of programs available.

Strategy: DSB will increase the skills, credentials and professional affiliations of its novice Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors as they move to assume senior counseling responsibilities in connection with DSB overall succession planning.

Performance Measures:

- Novice counselors will attend a specific orientation to VR issues and will participate in specialized training through the Arkansas Rehabilitation Association or other qualified sources.
- Novice counselors will be exposed to professional organizations each year, as documented in their professional development plans.

PY 2020-2021:

- Novice counselors will attend Immersion training during their first six months.
- Counselors will attend specialized training with Louisiana Center for the Blind, Mississippi State University and other training opportunities.
- DSB will utilize UofA Currents for professional trainings.
- DSB will utilize on-line training opportunities.

**Update: PY2022-2023** Due to Covid 19 and travel restrictions no in person training has taken place. DSB Staff were provided the opportunity to participate in numerous virtual trainings through NRTC, Mississippi State University, University of Arkansas Currents, Helen Keller National Center, CSAVR, NFB, ACB, and the Technical Assistance Centers. DSB had staff participate in AER Pre-ETS trainings, Lead VR, and the Virginia Commonwealth University Supported Employment course.

Strategy: To augment the efforts of DSB staff, DSB will use peer mentoring in transition and job ready exploration to allow experienced participants to provide information, advice, and support to less experienced participants.

Performance Measures:

- Peer mentoring will be used to connect participants interested in self-employment with individuals who have owned small businesses and can offer advice and support.
- Area Consumers of the Year will be encouraged to provide peer mentoring to other individuals who are blind and severely visually impaired that are trying to manage their rehabilitation plans, gain marketable skills, and secure good jobs.

PY 2020-2021:

- Peer Mentoring program will be implemented with our Pre-ETS program.
- COY's will provide mentoring.
- Participants will be connected to DSB Vendor Operators
- Peer mentoring will be provided during DSB's Jump Start Pre-ETS program.
- Information will be provided on NFB and ACB organizations and utilize their members as mentors.

**Update: PY2022-2023** Due to Covid 19 and restrictions we have not been able to implement these strategies. All DSB counselors, supervisors, and Field Administrator attended the NFB and ACB conferences.

Strategy: DSB will support training and the exchange of information among the core partners of WIOA.

Performance Measure:

- DSB staff will be active members of the Workforce Investment Boards and WIOA planning committees throughout the State.

PY 2020-2021:

- DSB staff will continue to be active members on the local Workforce Investment Boards
- DSB executive staff will be active members of the State Workforce Investment Board and participate on committees.
- DSB executive staff will participate with the WIOA Executive Roundtable with all partners and serve on sub-committees to coordinate services
- DSB staff will attend bi-annual partner trainings.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB Staff serve on all WIOA Executive Roundtable Subcommittees. DSB Counselors and Supervisors sit on the WIOA local boards. All DSB counselors, supervisors, and some administrative staff attend the WIOA Partner's meetings each year. Both meetings were virtual in PY2020 and PY2021.

Strategy: DSB will ensure that all job ready participants receive career exploration activities in their chosen career field at training settings.

Performance Measures:

- DSB will arrange for and accompany job ready adult participants to college, vocational/technical, or university campus visits.
- DSB will assist participants with reviewing entrance requirements to college, vocational/technical, or universities.

PY 2020-2021:

- Counselors will connect participants to campus tours
- Counselors will assist students with FAFSA and college applications
- Counselors will assist students with campus acclimation and introduce them to campus disability services.

**Update: PY2022-2023** DSB staff are available to assist consumers with necessary applications. Counselors arrange for O&M as well as introductions for consumers going to college.

Goal 2: Increase Pre-Employment Transition Services to students; increase transition services to out-of-school youth.

Strategy: DSB will ensure that all Pre-ETS students and youth receive exposure to work experiences and career exploration activities.

Performance Measures:

- DSB will arrange for tours of local businesses for Pre-ETS students to explore potential career opportunities.
- DSB will arrange for job shadowing opportunities for Pre-ETS students.
- DSB will arrange for informational interviews for Pre-ETS students to explore job opportunities.
- DSB will arrange volunteer opportunities for Pre-ETS students to explore career fields.
- DSB will accompany Pre-ETS students to career seminars and career fairs.
- DSB will arrange for and accompany Pre-ETS students to college, vocational/technical, or university campus visits.

PY 2020-2021:

- DSB will work with more vendors and businesses around the state to develop work experience, job shadowing, informational interviews, and career exploration opportunities.
- Pre-ETS counselors will explore career options with students and set up work experience and volunteer opportunities for students to gain “real experiences”.
- DSB will provide a three-weeks “Jump Start” program in which students will hear from company representatives, explore careers and gain work experience.
- Pre-ETS students will participate in job shadowing opportunities and informational interviews.
- DSB will conduct transition fairs and accompany students to other transition/career fairs.

**Update: PY2022-2023** Students were still able to participate in virtual work-based learning experiences. Pre-ETS students were able to attend a virtual informational session with blind and visually impaired individuals who discussed their experience in the workforce and with creating their own businesses hosted by Ace Academy. In the first quarter of PY2021, DSB provided 32 Work-Based Learning Experiences to VR eligible Students with a Disability, and 21 Work-Based Learning Experiences to potentially eligible Students with a Disability.

Strategy: DSB will support training and the exchange of information among state transition partner organizations.

Performance Measure:

- DSB will sponsor or participate in at least one training or event that will bring together transition partners for the purpose of exchanging information that will specifically benefit students who are blind or severely visually impaired.

PY 2020-2021:

- DSB will conduct local transition summits with school districts across the state.
- DSB will participate with trainings of our core partners Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER), Arkansas Career Education (ACE), and Career and Technical Education (CTE).
- DSB will coordinate a training with our Arkansas School for the Blind and Vision Impaired (ASBVI) project.

**Update: PY2022-2023** DSB participated in AER trainings and conferences. Staff also participated in trainings with Helen Keller National Center and Children And Youth with Sensory Impairments (CAYSI).

Strategy: DSB will update the collaborative database of transition students as needed.

Performance Measures:

- Counselors and/or Rehabilitation Assistants will coordinate with Local Education Area (LEA) Supervisors to maintain lists of transition students.
- The Pre-ETS Manager will review the database to insure it is being maintained by Rehabilitation Assistants, who input the local information.

PY 2020-2021:

- Pre-ETS counselors will contact LEA Area Supervisors and have face to face meetings with school staff.
- Referrals identified by LEA's are sent to Pre-ETS counselors and Pre-ETS Manager for review.
- The LEA spreadsheet will be updated monthly.
- Monthly reports of school contacts will be provided to the Pre-ETS Manager.

**Update: PY2022-2023** Pre-ETS counselors have continued to connect with LEA staff and meet face to face when allowed by schools during the pandemic. Pre-ETS staff submit monthly contact reports to their supervisor on all school contacts for that month.

Strategy: Counselors will continue to track transition students on their caseloads to ensure that the IPE is developed or updated before a student graduates from high school.

Performance Measure:

- Area Supervisors will monitor this during case reviews to ensure that no transition student will graduate without a current IPE.

PY 2020-2021:

- Pre-ETS Counselors will develop and update IPE's of transition students before they graduate.
- Pre-ETS Manager will review monitor the cases to ensure the IPE's are completed.
- Pre-ETS Counselors will facilitate a meeting with high school staff and college disability services for those attending college.

**Update PY2022-2023** Pre-ETS counselors maintain updated IPEs for VR eligible students with updates completed at least every 12 months. All potentially eligible students receive information on applying for VR services prior to graduating so that they may make the appropriate decision for their needs.

Strategy: DSB will hold Parent Summits to assist parents and other stakeholders in becoming more knowledgeable and better prepared to advocate for their children at Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings.

Performance Measure:

- Annually, DSB will invite ESVI Regional Certified Vision Consultants and transition parents to a Parent Summit with Counselors to provide information about assistive technology; rights and responsibilities; available resources and services; benefits counseling; and funding for college and career start-up costs.

PY 2020-2021:

- DSB will conduct an annual Back to School Summit in August, 2020.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB conducted a virtual Back to School Summit in August 2020.

Strategy: DSB will continue to provide assessments and services to transition students specifically focused on activities of daily living, including but not limited to, mobility, knowledge of available transportation resources, self advocacy, acquisition of a variety of reading options, awareness of job opportunities, benefits counseling, and rights and responsibilities as an informed participant.

Performance Measures:

- Formal assessments for assistive technology will be performed by Tech Lab staff in accordance with RSA guidelines on Rehabilitation Engineering.
- Counselors will arrange for training for Pre-ETS students and youth to acquire independent living skills and technological skills for them to participate in career exploration services.

PY 2020-2021:

- Pre-ETS counselors arrange trainings in independent living skills and assistive technology for students and youth.
- DSB will consult with additional vendors to provide independent living and technology training.
- Pre-ETS counselors will refer students for appropriate trainings.
- DSB Tech Lab will provide assistive technology trainings.

- DSB's will provide assistive technology through its Assistive Technology Loaner program.

**Update PY2022-2023** The DSB Tech Lab staff averaged 21 visits per month and 60 calls for technology support. Due to Covid 19, the lab was closed for in person visits from March 2020 to May 2021. However, the lab was able to provide remote services and evaluations to consumers. DSB hosted a one week, in person, day Jump Start program that focused on independent living skills and technology for Pre-ETS Students. DSB also hosted a two-week virtual Jump Start through Ace Academy for students. DSB continues to work find new vendors. DSB added Ace Academy, Challenge Solutions, Superior Success, and Helen Keller National Center in the last year.

Strategy: DSB will continue to strengthen relationships with schools, including Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Performance Measures:

- DSB will present at school assemblies, parent teacher organization meetings, and open houses to provide information on Pre-ETS and how to access these services.
- DSB will establish an information clearinghouse and schedule demonstration labs on selected high school campuses to inform parents, students, and education professionals of the needs of students with significant vision problems, and the cost—effective resources available to them.
- DSB will continue its system of mail outs and e-mails to public schools.
- DSB will continue efforts to reach private, home, and accredited virtual schools.

PY 2020-2021:

- Pre-ETS counselors will have face to face meetings with the schools
- Pre-ETS counselors will visit and present information at open houses, parents' night, and staff meetings.
- DSB will annually mail out letters to schools with information about our Pre-ETS program.

**Update PY2022-2023** Pre-ETS counselors have continued to connect with LEA staff and meet face to face when allowed by schools during the pandemic.

Strategy: DSB will continue to strengthen relationships with Educational Services for the Visually Impaired (ESVI).

Performance Measures:

- DSB will continue its system of mail outs and e-mails twice a year to area ESVI representatives.
- In addition to the local networking efforts, the Pre-ETS Manager will dialogue with ESVI at a state level to discover any transition students that need services and should be referred to DSB.
- DSB will refer participants under age 14 to ESVI and will encourage referrals from ages 14 and older from ESVI to DSB.

PY 2020-2021:

- Pre-ETS staff will meet with the ESVI team as a group to strengthen our working relationship.
- Pre-ETS counselors and ESVI consultants will refer students to each other's agency for appropriate services.
- Pre-ETS Manager will provide updated list of students to the counselors.
- Pre-ETS staff will attend the annual AER conference.

**Update PY2022-2023** All Pre-ETS counselors and additional DSB staff attended AER conference. While staff were not able to meet as a group, Pre-ETS counselors maintained contact with their local ESVI consultants, allowing them to continue to receive referrals to the Pre-ETS program.

Goal 3: DSB will expand its outreach efforts to include the general public, as well as the unserved, underserved, minorities, and stakeholders.

Strategy: DSB will expand and improve services to individuals who are blind or severely visually impaired in the underserved Delta area.

Performance Measure:

- DSB will formulate an alliance with non-profit organizations established in the Delta region, to provide information and soft skills trainings to individuals living in poverty in the Delta region of the State of Arkansas.

PY 2020-2021:

- DSB will coordinate meetings with non-profits and agencies that are established in the Delta region, to provide information and trainings to individuals living in the Delta region of the state.

Strategy: DSB will use exhibit booths to educate the public about DSB services and their availability.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB's Outreach Manager participated in the Annual Neighborhoods, USA Conference, the Cross-Disability Summit hosted by Arkansas State Independent Living Council, the Developmental Disabilities Provider Association Annual Spring Conference, the Arkansas State Fair, and the Pulaski County Sheriff's Office Fall Festival.

Performance Measure:

- Each VR Counselor will staff at least one DSB exhibit at a widely attended or significantly relevant event in his/her territory.

PY 2020-2021:

- DSB staff will exhibit and make presentations at career fairs, health fairs, and other events in their area.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB outreach continues to be conducted by VR staff. However, DSB has also hired an Outreach Manager to assist with outreach efforts. VR staff attend job fairs and events in their regions. VR staff have also participated in partner efforts to expand information, such as events on ADA accommodations and transition question and answer sessions. DSB's Outreach Manager has participated in business expos, the City of Little Rock of Housing and Neighborhood Programs and connected with Baptist Health's Community Outreach program.

Strategy: DSB will increase its outreach to minorities and faith-based groups.



Performance Measures:

- Counselors will make at least four outreach efforts to faith-based groups in each of their geographic areas annually.
- Counselors will make at least two outreach efforts to minority groups to include Hispanic, Asian, or other ethnic groups in each of their geographic areas annually.

PY 2020-2021:

- DSB will develop a new program to reach faith-based groups.
- DSB will provide outreach training for their counselors and staff.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB outreach continues to be conducted by VR staff. However, DSB has also hired an Outreach Manager to assist with outreach efforts.

Strategy: Area Supervisors and DSB administrative staff will continue to attend the state conferences of blindness consumer groups, and opportunities will be offered to direct service staff as well.

Performance Measure:

- DSB will send supervisors/administrators to these conferences to interact with participants and make presentations as requested.

PY 2020-2021:

- DSB staff will attend the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) and the American Council for the Blind (ACB) state and national conference.
- DSB will participate with other state conferences of blindness and visual impairment organizations to network on issues faced by other states and gain ideas about how to better serve individuals.

**Update PY2022-2023** Supervisors and administrative staff attended NFB and ACB.

Goal 4: DSB will increase coordination with employers.

Strategy: DSB will ensure that all job ready participants will receive career exploration activities and work experience in their chosen career field on the job site.

Performance Measures:

- DSB will arrange for tours of local businesses for job ready adult participants to explore potential career opportunities.
- DSB will arrange for job shadowing opportunities for job ready adult participants.
- DSB will arrange for informational interviews for job ready adult participants to explore job opportunities.
- DSB will arrange volunteer opportunities for job ready adult participants to explore career fields.
- DSB will accompany job ready adult participants to career seminars and career fairs.

PY 2020-2021:

- DSB counselors and Business Engagement Coordinator will develop more opportunities for participants to tour businesses and explore career opportunities.

- DSB counselors will arrange job shadowing, informational interviews and volunteer opportunities for participants to explore career fields.
- DSB counselors will accompany participants to career seminars and career fairs.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB Staff received training and guidance on required supports and expectations for consumers in Job Ready Status. Staff also received training on how to identify consumers who should be placed in Job Ready Status. This training was at the July 2021 Field Services Meeting.

Strategy: DSB will become Chamber of Commerce members.

Performance Measure:

- VR counselors will make contact with at least two members of their local Chamber of Commerce per month to learn about the trends and needs of those businesses.

PY 2020-2021:

- Each DSB office will join their local Chamber of Commerce.
- DSB will obtain an updated list of chamber business members.
- VR counselors and Business Engagement Coordinator will contact chamber businesses.
- DSB staff will attend Chamber of Commerce events.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB renewed 5 Chamber memberships in PY2020. In PY2021, DSB joined or renewed 17 chamber memberships. DSB is currently a member of 24 local chambers in the state of Arkansas. DSB staff attend as many chamber events as possible. In PY2021, DSB has attended 8 in person chamber events.

Strategy: VR Counselors will conduct public speaking engagements.

Performance Measure:

- Counselors will conduct at least one presentation per year to the local area Lions, Rotary, Civitan, or Kiwanis Club in order to form relationships with local leaders.

PY 2020-2021:

- DSB counselors will conduct local presentations.
- Counselors will conduct COY presentations at local civic community clubs.

**Update PY2022-2023** Due to Covid, PY2020 presentations were not done in group settings. IN PY2021, some staff were able to make group presentations to their COY. However, most still were informal due to Covid restrictions and consumer concerns about Covid.

Strategy: DSB management staff will connect with employers in each economic development district.

Performance Measures:

- DSB staff will establish at least one ongoing internship site per region for DSB participants.
- DSB staff will work in conjunction with the Arkansas Apprenticeship program to locate apprenticeship opportunities for participants.

PY 2020-2021:

- DSB Business Engagement Coordinator will connect with employers in each economic development district.
- DSB Business Engagement Coordinator will develop internships and apprenticeship opportunities for participants.

**Update PY2022-2023** The Business Engagement Coordinator has made contacts in all economic areas of the state through the local chambers of commerce. The local chambers have an array of different businesses to promote and partner with to achieve maximum employment expansion for all DSB clients. This promotes the whole workforce system dynamic for complete community and economic development.

#### SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT GOALS:

Goal 1: DSB will increase the number of Supported Employment providers to better serve DSB participants.

Strategy: DSB will collaborate with organizations such as World Services for the Blind, Job Connections, AEDD Inc., Easter Seals, Building Bridges, and Goodwill to increase SE service availability in unserved or underserved areas of the state due to geographic or other issues.

#### Performance Measure:

- DSB will join our partner ARS to conduct at least one meeting with providers to discuss ways to increase SE services to rural areas.

PY 2020-2021:

- DSB and ARS will conduct a meeting with providers to increase SE services in rural areas.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB is working with the Quality Employment Technical Assistance Center to develop and improve our Supported Employment Program. DSB is also working with the Helen Keller National Center to become an SE vendor.

Goal 2: DSB will increase Supported Employment services to transition students and out of school youth.

Strategy: Counselors will determine whether students or youth are candidates for SE during the employment planning process.

#### Performance Measure:

- DSB will train new staff and provide updates to veteran staff on identifying and providing SE to youth who may be appropriate for supported employment and how to refer them to providers.

PY 2020-2021:

- Staff training on Supported Employment and Customized Employment will be conducted.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB is working with the Quality Employment Technical Assistance Center to develop and improve our Supported Employment Program. DSB is also working with the Helen Keller National Center to become an SE vendor. Six staff completed the Supported Employment Course with Virginia Commonwealth University.

Goal 3: DSB will increase the quality of SE providers for individuals who are blind or severely visually impaired.

Strategy: DSB will determine SE vendor standards targeted to meet the blindness and visual impairment needs of its participants.

Performance Measure:

- At least one presentation or training will be made to educate SE providers about blindness and visual impairments.

PY 2020-2021:

- DSB will provide training for SE providers on blindness and vision impairments.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB is working with the Quality Employment Technical Assistance Center to develop and improve our Supported Employment Program. DSB is also working with the Helen Keller National Center to become an SE vendor.

3. ENSURE THAT THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES ARE BASED ON AN ANALYSIS OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

A. THE MOST RECENT COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT, INCLUDING ANY UPDATES;

DSB conducted a statewide needs assessment to measure the effectiveness in providing services and assess possible needs for the Federal Fiscal Year 2021. The DSB Quality Assurance team used email, and traditional postal mail to send surveys to DSB consumers, DSB staff, DSB partners, and Employers. In the Comprehensive Needs Assessment consumers indicated a desire for job services and extended supports on the job. The goals and priorities that DSB is focused on will support consumers in receiving more effective job services and improve connections with employers to assist consumers in long term job supports.

B. THE STATE'S PERFORMANCE UNDER THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES OF SECTION 116 OF WIOA; AND

DSB has continued to track and maintain an internal analysis of the WIOA performance measures. DSB uses annual reports, monthly reports, and the required federal reports to track and evaluate its performance throughout the program year. Using the ETA 9169 for PY17 and PY18, DSB was able to track the state performance on Measurable Skill Gains and work with ARS to develop a joint expected level for PY20 of 24% and PY21 of 25% for the state. DSB continues to track the employment rates for the program years to determine if they are improving and to measure the effectiveness of DSB's strategies. The data DSB gathers from these reports is used in consultation with its Independent Commission and RSA, to develop a baseline of performance percentages for the agency to move forward in setting applicable performance standards under section 116 of WIOA.

**Update PY2022-2023** For Program Year 2020, the State of Arkansas reported the following rates:

Employment 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter After Exit 60.4%

Employment 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter After Exit 57.2%

Median Earnings 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter After Exit \$5,696.34

Credential Rate 26.2%

Measurable Skill Gains Rate 54.6%

C. OTHER AVAILABLE INFORMATION ON THE OPERATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE VR PROGRAM, INCLUDING ANY REPORTS RECEIVED FROM THE STATE REHABILITATION

COUNCIL AND FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM MONITORING ACTIVITIES  
CONDUCTED UNDER SECTION 107.

DSB has not been monitored since 2011 but is scheduled for a monitoring visit in 2020. DSB has worked with RSA and WINTAC to improve effectiveness in serving participants. Under guidance from RSA and WINTAC, DSB has changed the manner in which it provides Pre-ETS services to both eligible and potentially eligible consumers. DSB has 7 counselors who serve all students with a disability, and youth age 14-16. These 7 counselors are overseen by the new Pre-ETS Manager to ensure that those who are VR eligible receive VR and Pre-ETS services as appropriate while those who are potentially eligible receive all applicable Pre-ETS services. These counselors manage a VR caseload and a separate Potentially Eligible consumer caseload to ensure that these services are received, and funds are expended correctly. As part of DSB's work to better meet RSA guidance our Pre-ETS counselors have been trained on and implemented a time allocation system.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB Field Staff complete monthly time allocation to effectively track the grants they are working under. DSB completed our monitoring visit and are actively working with RSA, the VR Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management, the VR Technical Assistance Center for Quality Employment, and the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: the Collaborative on our corrective action plan.

DSB counselors have received intensive on-site training at selected training centers for the blind and visually impaired. Training is provided on-the-job and monthly meetings are held with the Field Administrator regarding best practices, outreach, and locating work experience locations for the students. Monthly quality assurance reporting forms are turned in regarding each student and the 5 authorized Pre-ETS activities to verify that VR counselors are meeting the goals and objectives set forth in monthly meetings and so that ongoing supports can be arranged as needed.

Additionally, DSB has received intensive feedback on both our VR and Vending Facility Program (VFP) policy from RSA and WINTAC. This feedback has been used to improve and revamp DSB's policy manual with several chapters being prepared to move forward in the promulgation process. DSB continues to draft new policy based on provided feedback and works to ensure that all new policy meets the guidance and recommendations provided by RSA.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB promulgated six chapters of our new policy and continues to work with RSA and the Technical Assistance Centers on additional policy updates.

M. ORDER OF SELECTION

1. WHETHER THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WILL IMPLEMENT AND ORDER OF SELECTION.  
IF SO, DESCRIBE:

A. THE ORDER TO BE FOLLOWED IN SELECTING ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS TO BE PROVIDED VR  
SERVICES

NA

B. THE JUSTIFICATION FOR THE ORDER

NA

C. THE SERVICE AND OUTCOME GOALS

NA

D. TIME WITHIN WHICH THESE GOALS MAY BE ACHIEVED FOR INDIVIDUALS IN EACH  
PRIORITY CATEGORY WITHIN THE ORDER; AND

NA

#### E. HOW INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES ARE SELECTED FOR SERVICES BEFORE ALL OTHER INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

##### Most Significant Disability:

Most significant disability includes individuals eligible for DSB services with the most significant disability whose impairment severely limits four or more functional capacities (such as mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills) in terms of an employment outcome and requires substantial VR services over an extended period of time.

##### More Significant Disability:

More significant disability includes individuals eligible for DSB services with a significant disability whose impairment limits three functional capacities in terms of employment outcome and requires substantial VR services over an extended period of time.

##### Significant Disability:

Significant disability includes individuals eligible for DSB services with a significant disability whose impairment limits one or two functional capacities in terms of an employment outcome and requires substantial VR services over an extended period of time.

#### 2. IF THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT HAS ELECTED TO SERVE ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS, REGARDLESS OF ANY ESTABLISHED ORDER OF SELECTION, WHO REQUIRE SPECIFIC SERVICES OR EQUIPMENT TO MAINTAIN EMPLOYMENT

Should DSB implement an order of selection, it will elect to serve eligible individuals, regardless of any established order of selection, who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment.

#### N. GOALS AND PLANS FOR DISTRIBUTION OF TITLE VI FUNDS

##### 1. SPECIFY THE STATE'S GOALS AND PRIORITIES FOR FUNDS RECEIVED UNDER SECTION 603 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

DSB's activities for supported employment services and programs funded under both Titles I and VI are intended to increase the number of persons receiving supported employment services and to improve employment outcomes for these individuals. The Comprehensive Needs Assessment conducted for Federal Fiscal Year 2021 emphasized the need for participants to have access to job placement, development, and extended job supports such as coaching or on the job training. DSB believes that the most effective and efficient strategy to accomplish this is by expanding and strengthening its collaborative linkages with relevant state agencies and/or private not-for-profit agencies for the provision of supported employment and extended support services. No more than 2.5% of supported employment grant funds will be used for administrative activities, including but not limited to, data collection and analysis, training, and consultation costs. The remainder of grant funds under Title VI, Part B will be used to purchase supported employment services under Individualized Plans for Employment (IPE) for individuals with the most significant disabilities who have been determined eligible for supported employment. DSB will expend 50% or more of these funds on Youth with Disabilities that need supported employment services. The State will provide a match of at least 10 %in non-Federal expenditures for the total amount of expenditures incurred with half of the allotment reserved to provide SE services to youth with the most significant disabilities, our focus being blindness or severe visual impairment. DSB's electronic case management system provides the ability to ensure that Title VI funding is the primary source of payment for supported employment services until that funding is exhausted, at which point funding

continues to be provided through Title I. DSB projects to provide supported employment services to 15 individuals during PY 2020. As explained above, when necessary both Title VI and Title I funds will be used for the provision of services. To successfully meet the supported employment needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities (blind or visually impaired), DSB continues to improve its relationships with the Division of Developmental Disabilities, the Division of Medical Services for the provision of extended services for supported employment clients. DSB counselors and vocational staff from the above agencies work together to identify individuals who would be appropriate referrals to DSB for supported employment services. DSB works with the Department of Education, Special Education to assure that youth with the most significant disabilities are accessing career, transition and employment services including supported employment services. DSB has worked to ensure best practices, so that the needs of youth with the most significant disabilities are met.

DSB counsels those in subminimum wage situations who are blind and visually impaired to provide information and access to vocational rehabilitation to achieve competitive integrated employment in the community. DSB works with the Department of Education, Special Education, along with the Division of Developmental Disabilities and the Division of Medical Services to identify those that are blind and visually impaired age 24 or younger, so that the following occurs prior to the individual seeking work paying subminimum wage (less than Federal minimum wage): 1) During team consultations it is documented and ensured that the individual has received Pre-ETS or transition services under IDEA. 2) The individual was given an opportunity to apply for VR services. Placement in subminimum wage situations are considered only after the individual has been found ineligible for services, or has been determined eligible for VR services but has not been successful and has been provided career counseling, information and referral to other appropriate resources for services designed to assist the individual in attaining competitive integrated employment.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB is working with the VRTAC-QE to improve the Supported Employment program. This collaboration will improve existing policy, develop necessary forms and procedures for staff to ensure better Supported Employment Outcomes for DSB consumers. The Division of Services for the Blind is working with the Technical Assistance Center on Quality Employment to develop guidance and training for all Supported Employment Vendors to ensure they are trained and prepared to provide Supported Employment services to DSB consumer's. These guidelines will include definitions of extended services and the responsibilities of the vendor and DSB. The consumer will transition to extended services prior to case closure and continue with vendor(s) identified in the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). The providers of extended services may include a State agency, a private nonprofit, an employer, or other appropriate resource. DSB funds can be provided for extended services to youth when there is no other source available as long as the youth is under age 25. DSB can not provide more than 4 years of extended services to youth with disabilities. DSB 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.

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 supported employment services 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 supported employment services prior to job placement for any VR participants.

**2. DESCRIBE THE ACTIVITIES TO BE CONDUCTED, WITH FUNDS RESERVED PURSUANT TO SECTION 603(D), FOR YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING:**

**A. THE PROVISION OF EXTENDED SERVICES FOR A PERIOD NOT TO EXCEED 4 YEARS; AND**

DSB uses several vendors to provide comprehensive supported employment services to youth and adults identified as blind or visually impaired.

Half of the funds that DSB receives under the supported employment state grant will be used to support youth with the most significant blindness and low vision needs (up to age 24). Ongoing services are furnished by the VR agency, using funds under the Supported Employment program and/or the VR program, from the time of job placement until the transition to extended services and thereafter by one or more extended services providers. The VR agency may serve as the extended services provider to a youth with a most significant disability until the youth reaches age 25 or receives a maximum of 4 years of extended services, whichever occurs first.

**Update PY2022-2023** A youth with a disability is defined as anyone ages 14-24 who has a disability. 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 disability.

DSB is developing an agreement with CRPs and Medicaid through the Division of Medical Services and with the Division of Development Disabilities to share the cost of extended services in supported employment.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB is working with the VRTAC-QE to improve the Supported Employment program. This collaboration will improve existing policy, develop necessary forms and procedures for staff to ensure better Supported Employment Outcomes for DSB consumers.

#### **B. HOW THE STATE WILL LEVERAGE OTHER PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FUNDS TO INCREASE RESOURCES FOR EXTENDED SERVICES AND EXPANDED SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES.**

DSB is partnering with ARS to develop an agreement with CRPs and Medicaid through the Division of Medical Services and with the Division of Development Disabilities to increase resources for extended services and expand supported employment opportunities for youth with the most significant disabilities.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB has been working closely with the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) and the Children and Youth with Sensory Impairments (CAYSI) to improve services and support available to youth with the most significant disabilities. As part of this work, DSB, ARS, HKNC, and CAYSI have begun a pilot project for Deafblind youth. The dual caseload collaborative process designed by DSB Staff has been taken by CAYSI to use as a model for other states.

#### **O. STATE'S STRATEGIES**

##### **1. THE METHODS TO BE USED TO EXPAND AND IMPROVE SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES**

VR Strategies DSB has developed the following VR strategies to expand and improve services to its consumers for Program Years 2020-2021 and updated for PY2020-2023.

**Goal 1:** DSB will increase the employment opportunities for people who are blind or severely visually impaired.

**Strategy:** VR Counselors will schedule and attend face-to-face job exploration meetings to interview human resource professionals regarding the types of jobs they have, and the skills needed to do those jobs. **Performance Measures:** A minimum of two employer job exploration meetings will be scheduled per month for each client in job-readiness status. DSB will provide additional training on conducting outreach. The DSB Quality Assurance Unit will develop methods to track employer contacts in AWARE and Salesforce.



**Update PY2020-2023** Staff no longer have AWARE employer access and employer contacts are entered by Business Engagement allowing for consistent and accurate tracking. Counselor made 43 employer contacts for Program Year 2020, and 35 employer contacts in the first 2 Quarters of Program Year 2021. While contacts have been made more challenging due to the pandemic, DSB continues to work to increase contacts with employers and to provide staff training and support to improve outreach.

Strategy: VR Counselors will ensure that participants in job ready status are actively seeking employment. Performance Measures: VR Counselors will require three job contacts per week. Assist job-ready participants with registration at Workforce Services. Assist job-ready participants with registering and applying for careers available through the Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP); and assist participants with registering and applying for jobs through employer internet accessible application processes with private, federal, state and non-profit employers. VR counselors will update employer information in the AWARE module and Quality Assurance staff will implement a more effective use of the employer module. DSB will utilize the Salesforce program for tracking employer services.

**Update: PY2022-2023** DSB Staff received training and guidance on required supports and expectations for consumers in Job Ready Status. Staff also received training on how to identify consumers who should be placed in Job Ready Status. This training was at the July 2021 Field Services Meeting.

Strategy: DSB will encourage and support viable self-employment. Performance Measures: Through the DSB Small Business Committee, participants will be provided access to Small Business Association trainings and the Arkansas Secretary of State's trainings on small business enterprises. The counselors will schedule job shadowing experiences with participants who are blind/visually impaired that have maintained successful businesses. Each self-employment proposal submitted by a participant will be reviewed by a team composed of the Field Services Administrator, the Business Engagement Coordinator, and the participant's VR Counselor to ensure that a proposal is realistic and sustainable before it is approved and any funds are provided. DSB will develop an updated brochure to provide interested consumers with information about DSB's small business self-employment program. DSB will revise their policy and procedures for funding small businesses. DSB will coordinate a small business team to review proposals and provide training for VR counselors on completing a small business proposal.

**Update: PY2022-2023** DSB has developed a Small Business Committee and is working to update our policy on Small Business. In addition, DSB is designing a Small Business Brochure to share with consumers.

Strategy: DSB will work in conjunction with provider agencies to provide work appropriate skills and training to blind and low vision participants. Performance Measures: DSB will refer participants to apprenticeship programs across the state. DSB will refer participants to World Services for the Blind, Alpha Pointe, the Louisiana Center for the Blind, Sources, Goodwill, Adult Education, and other providers as necessary for additional skills training, including, but not limited to soft skills and work readiness training to assist participants in improving their probability of securing competitive employment. DSB will work with provider agencies to develop more high demand training for more high demand jobs. DSB will ensure that appropriate guidelines are in place to monitor providers and training. DSB will refer participants to Apprenticeship programs.

**Update: PY2022-2023** DSB continues to work with provider agencies to assist consumers. DSB is working with the Quality Employment Technical Assistance Center to provide training and support to staff on providing apprenticeships to consumers.

Strategy: DSB will provide detailed benefits counseling information to each participant on SSI and SSDI. Performance Measures: DSB will refer 100% of clients, adults, students and youth on SSI and SSDI to benefits counseling for a one-on-one benefits analysis. Area Managers will monitor caseloads to ensure that VR Counselors are referring 100% of SSI and SSDI VR participants to benefits counseling. Counselors will make participants aware of benefits counseling at the time of application, at the time of IPE's, and at the time of closure. New counselors will receive benefits counseling training and current counselors will receive benefits counseling updates.

Strategy: DSB will continue to refer Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) and interested in employment to VR services. Performance Measures: DSB will refer 100% of Older Blind individuals who are interested in employment to VR services. VR counselors will make contact with agencies that serve older individuals such as Green Thumb, and AAA to seek referrals and to educate these agencies about DSB services.

**Update: PY2022-2023** 100% of clients who express interest in work will be referred to VR. DSB will work to develop a tracking mechanism for those clients who start as OIB but decide they wish to work. Clients who express interest in work at the beginning are immediately referred to VR. DSB staff work with local agencies to provide needed services to consumers. DSB also invites agencies to participate in the Older Blind Advisory Committee. Staff have connected with local assisted living centers and town hall meetings to educate communities on our services.

Strategy: DSB will continue to recognize successful participants and their employers. Performance Measures: Each year each counselor will recognize one individual from his/her caseload as an area Consumer of the Year and nominate the individual as a candidate for the overall state Consumer of the Year. DSB will award area Consumers of the Year and their employers with trophies/framed certificates and related publicity.

**Update: PY2022-2023** All Pre-ETS caseloads submitted nominations for Student of the Year, and one overall winner was chosen. DSB had 17 VR caseloads submit a COY nomination, and DSB honored all COYs at the virtual December meeting in PY20 and PY21.

Strategy: DSB will continue to expand its assistive technology services and improve access to these services and equipment. Performance Measures: DSB will provide trainings to employers on the use and function of common assistive technology devices for the blind and visually impaired. DSB's assistive technology staff will develop trainings that can be modified for small and large employers. DSB will provide outreach and training to community organizations on technological advances in low vision and blindness. Provide training to new Workforce Services staff as vacancies occur to increase their knowledge of accessible technology and the needs of participants. DSB staff will continue to meet participants at Workforce Services offices, including DSB sponsored accessible kiosks, to assist participants in their job searches and in becoming more comfortable interacting with the public in an employment setting.

**Update: PY2022-2023** DSB recorded 41 Outreach contacts by counselors during Program Year 2020. DSB staff are now located in Workforce Centers and will work with outreach coordinator to ensure community awareness of programs available.

Strategy: DSB will increase the skills, credentials and professional affiliations of its novice Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors as they move to assume senior counseling responsibilities in connection with DSB overall succession planning. Performance Measures: Novice counselors will attend a specific orientation to VR issues and participate in specialized immersion training during their first six months. Training through the Arkansas Rehabilitation Association, Vision Quest, and other qualified sources. Novice counselors will be exposed to professional organizations each year, as documented in their professional development plans. Novice counselors will attend Immersion training during their first six months. Counselors will attend

specialized training with Louisiana Center for the Blind Mississippi State University and other training opportunities. DSB will utilize the UofA Currents and online training opportunities to provide staff with professional trainings.

**Update: PY2022-2023** Due to Covid 19 and travel restrictions no in person training has taken place. DSB Staff were provided the opportunity to participate in numerous virtual trainings through NRTC, Mississippi State University, University of Arkansas Currents, Helen Keller National Center, CSAVR, NFB, ACB, and the Technical Assistance Centers. DSB had staff participate in AER Pre-ETS trainings, Lead VR, and the Virginia Commonwealth University Supported Employment course.

Strategy: To augment the efforts of DSB staff, DSB will use peer mentoring in transition and job ready exploration to allow experienced participants to provide information, advice, and support to less experienced participants. Performance Measures: Peer mentoring will be used to connect participants interested in self-employment with individuals who have owned small businesses and can offer advice and support. Area Consumers of the Year will be encouraged to provide peer mentoring to other individuals who are blind and severely visually impaired that are trying to manage their rehabilitation plans, gain marketable skills, and secure good jobs. Participants are connected to DSB Vendor Operators. A Peer Mentoring program will be developed for Pre-ETS students. Information will be provided on NFB and ACB organizations and utilize their members as mentors.

**Update: PY2022-2023** Due to Covid 19 and restrictions we have not been able to implement these strategies. All DSB counselors, supervisors, and Field Administrator attended the NFB and ACB conferences.

Strategy: DSB will support training and the exchange of information among the core partners of WIOA. Performance Measures: DSB staff will be active members of the Workforce Investment Boards and WIOA planning committees throughout the State. DSB Executive staff attend monthly WIOA Executive Roundtable meetings with all partners and serve on sub-committees to coordinate services. Staff attend bi-annual partner trainings. DSB executive staff will be active members of the State Workforce Investment Board and its committees.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB staff serve on all WIOA Executive Roundtable Subcommittees. DSB Counselors and Supervisors sit on the WIOA local boards. All DSB counselors, supervisors, and some administrative staff attend the WIOA Partner's meetings each year. Both meetings were virtual in PY2020 and PY2021.

Strategy: DSB will ensure that all job ready participants will receive career exploration activities in their chosen career field at training settings. Performance Measures: DSB will arrange for and accompany job ready adult participants to college, vocational/technical, or university campus visits. DSB will assist participants with reviewing entrance requirements to college, vocational/technical, or universities. Counselors will connect participants to campus tours, assist students with FAFSA and college applications. Counselors will assist students with campus acclimation and introduce them to campus disability services.

**Update: PY2022-2023** DSB staff are available to assist consumers with necessary applications. Counselors arrange for O&M as well as introductions for consumers going to college.

**Goal 2:** Increase Pre-Employment Transition Services to high school students; increase transition services to out-of-school youth.

Strategy: DSB will ensure that all Pre-ETS students and youth receive exposure to work experiences and career exploration activities. Performance Measures: DSB will arrange for tours of local businesses for Pre-ETS students to explore potential career opportunities. DSB will arrange for job shadowing opportunities for Pre-ETS students. DSB will arrange for informational interviews for Pre-ETS students to explore job opportunities. DSB will arrange

volunteer opportunities for Pre-ETS students to explore career fields. DSB will accompany Pre-ETS students to career seminars and career fairs. DSB will arrange for and accompany Pre-ETS students to college, vocational/technical, or university campus visits. DSB will work with more vendors and businesses around the state to develop work experience, job shadowing, informational interviews, and career exploration opportunities. Pre-ETS counselors will explore career options with students and set up work experience and volunteer opportunities for students to gain “real experiences”. DSB will provide a three-week “Jump Start” program in which students will hear from company representatives, explore careers and gain work experience. Pre-ETS students will participate in job shadowing opportunities and informational interviews. DSB will conduct transition fairs and accompany students to other transition/career fairs.

**Update: PY2022-2023** Students were still able to participate in virtual work-based learning experiences. Pre-ETS students were able to attend a virtual informational session with blind and visually impaired individuals who discussed their experience in the workforce and with creating their own businesses hosted by Ace Academy. In the first quarter of PY2021, DSB provided 32 Work-Based Learning Experiences to VR eligible Students with a Disability, and 21 Work-Based Learning Experiences to potentially eligible Students with a Disability.

Strategy: DSB will support training and the exchange of information among state transition partner organizations. Performance Measures: DSB will sponsor or participate in at least one training or event that will bring together transition partners for the purpose of exchanging information that will specifically benefit students who are blind or severely visually impaired. DSB will conduct local transition summits with school districts across the state. DSB will participate in trainings with our core partners, Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER), Arkansas Career Education (ACE) and Career and Technical Education (CTE). DSB will coordinate a training with the Arkansas School for the Blind and Vision Impaired (ASBVI) project.

**Update: PY2022-2023** DSB participated in AER trainings and conferences. Staff also participated in trainings with Helen Keller National Center and Children And Youth with Sensory Impairments (CAYSI).

Strategy: DSB will update the collaborative database of transition students as needed. Performance Measures: Counselors will coordinate with Local Education Area (LEA) Supervisors to maintain lists of transition students. The Pre-ETS Manager will review the database to ensure it is being maintained by Rehabilitation Assistants who input the local information and update the list monthly. Pre-ETS counselors will contact LEA Area Supervisors and have face to face meetings with school staff. Referrals identified by LEAs are sent to Pre-ETS counselors and the Pre-ETS Manager for review. Monthly reports of school contacts will be provided to the Pre-ETS Manager.

**Update: PY2022-2023** Pre-ETS counselors have continued to connect with LEA staff and meet face to face when allowed by schools during the pandemic. Pre-ETS staff submit monthly contact reports to their supervisor on all school contacts for that month.

Strategy: Counselors will continue to track transition students on their caseloads to ensure that the IPE is developed or updated before a student graduates from high school. Performance Measure: Area Supervisors will monitor this during case reviews to ensure that no transition student will graduate without a current IPE. Pre-ETS counselors will develop and update IPEs of transition students before they graduate. Pre-ETS Counselors will facilitate a meeting with high school staff and college disability services for those attending college. The Pre-ETS manager will review and monitor the cases to ensure the IPEs are completed.

**Update PY2022-2023** Pre-ETS counselors maintain updated IPEs for VR eligible students with updates completed at least every 12 months. All potentially eligible students receive

information on applying for VR services prior to graduating so that they may make the appropriate decision for their needs.

Strategy: DSB will hold Parent Summits to assist parents and other stakeholders in becoming more knowledgeable and better prepared to advocate for their children at Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings. Performance Measures: Annually, DSB will invite ESVI Regional Certified Vision Consultants and transition parents to a Parent Summit with VR Counselors to provide information about assistive technology; rights and responsibilities; available resources and services; benefits counseling; and funding for college and career start—up costs. DSB will conduct an annual Back to School Parents Summit and parent summits in local areas.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB did conduct a virtual Back to School Summit in August 2020.

Strategy: DSB will continue to provide assessments and services to transition students specifically focused on activities of daily living, including but not limited to, mobility, knowledge of available transportation resources, self—advocacy, acquisition of a variety of reading options, awareness of job opportunities, benefits counseling, and rights and responsibilities as an informed participant. Performance Measures: Formal evaluations for assistive technology will be performed by Tech Lab staff in accordance with RSA guidelines on Rehabilitation Engineering. Counselors will arrange for training for Pre-ETS students and youth to acquire independent living skills and technological skills in order for them to participate in career exploration services. Pre-ETS counselors arrange trainings in independent living skills and assistive technology for students and youth. DSB will consult with additional vendors to provide independent living and technology training. Pre-ETS counselors will refer students for appropriate trainings. The DSB Tech Lab will provide assistive technology trainings. DSB will provide assistive technology through its Assistive Technology Loaner Program.

**Update PY2022-2023** The DSB Tech Lab staff averaged 21 visits per month and 60 calls for technology support. Due to Covid 19, the lab was closed for in person visits from March 2020 to May 2021. However, the lab was able to provide remote services and evaluations to consumers. DSB hosted a one week, in person, day Jump Start program that focused on independent living skills and technology for Pre-ETS Students. DSB also hosted a two-week virtual Jump Start through Ace Academy for students. DSB continues to work find new vendors. DSB added Ace Academy, Challenge Solutions, Superior Success, and Helen Keller National Center in the last year.

Strategy: DSB will continue to strengthen relationships with schools, including Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Performance Measures: DSB will present at school assemblies, parent—teacher organization meetings, and open houses to provide information on Pre-ETS and how to access these services. DSB will establish an information clearinghouse and schedule demonstration labs on selected high school campuses to inform parents, students, and education professionals of the needs of students with significant vision problems, and the cost-effective resources available to them. DSB will continue its system of mail outs and emails to public schools. DSB will continue efforts to reach private, home, and accredited virtual schools. Pre-ETS counselors will have face to face meetings with the schools.

**Update PY2022-2023** Pre-ETS counselors have continued to connect with LEA staff and meet face to face when allowed by schools during the pandemic.

Strategy: DSB will continue to strengthen relationships with Educational Services for the Visually Impaired (ESVI). Performance Measures: DSB will continue its system of mailouts and emails twice a year to area ESVI representatives. In addition to the local networking efforts, the Pre-ETS Manager will dialogue with ESVI at a state level to discover any transition students that need services and should be referred to DSB. DSB will refer participants under age 14 to ESVI and will encourage referrals from ages 14 and older from ESVI to DSB. Pre-ETS staff will meet with the ESVI team as a group to strengthen our working relationship. Pre-ETS counselors and

ESVI consultants will refer students to each other's agency for appropriate services. Pre-ETS Manager will provide an updated list of students to the counselors. Pre-ETS staff will attend the annual AER conference.

**Update PY2022-2023** All Pre-ETS counselors and additional DSB staff attended AER conference. While staff were not able to meet as a group, Pre-ETS counselors maintained contact with their local ESVI consultants, allowing them to continue to receive referrals to the Pre-ETS program.

**Goal 3:** DSB will expand its outreach efforts to include the general public, as well as the unserved, underserved, minorities, and stakeholders.

Strategy: DSB will expand and improve services to individuals who are blind or severely visually impaired in the underserved Delta area. Performance Measures: DSB will formulate an alliance with non-profit organizations established in the Delta region, to provide economic literacy and soft skills trainings to individuals living in poverty in the Delta region of the State of Arkansas. DSB will coordinate meetings with non-profits and agencies that are established in the Delta region, to provide information and trainings to individuals living in the Delta region of the state.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB outreach continues to be conducted by VR staff. However, DSB has also hired an Outreach Manager to assist with outreach efforts.

Strategy: DSB will use exhibit booths to educate the public about DSB services and their availability. Performance Measures: Each VR Counselor will staff at least one DSB exhibit at a widely attended or significantly relevant event in his/her territory. Staff will increase participation at job fairs and health fairs.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB outreach continues to be conducted by VR staff. However, DSB has also hired an Outreach Manager to assist with outreach efforts. DSB staff attend job fairs and events in their regions. DSB staff have also participated in partner efforts to expand information, such as events on ADA accommodations and transition question and answer sessions.

Strategy: DSB will increase its outreach to minorities and faith—based groups. Performance Measures: DSB will establish a cooperative agreement with the Urban League in Little Rock and Springdale to reach the underserved and unserved populations. VR Counselors will make at least four faith—based outreach efforts in each of their geographic areas annually. VR Counselors will make at least two minority outreach efforts to Hispanic, Asian, or other ethnic groups in each of their geographic areas annually. DSB will develop a new Faith-Based Outreach program. DSB will provide outreach training for their counselors and staff.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB outreach continues to be conducted by VR staff. However, DSB has also hired an Outreach Manager to assist with outreach efforts.

Strategy: Area Supervisors and DSB administrative staff will continue to attend the state conferences of blindness consumer groups, and opportunities will be offered to direct service staff as well. Performance Measures: DSB will continue to send supervisors/administrators to these conferences to interact with participants and they will make presentations as requested. DSB staff will attend the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) and the American Council for the Blind (ACB) state and national conferences. DSB will participate with other state conferences of blindness and visual impairment organizations to network on issues faced by other states and gain ideas about how to better serve individuals.

**Update PY2022-2023** Supervisors and administrative staff attended NFB and ACB.

**Goal 4:** DSB will increase coordination with employers.

Strategy: DSB will ensure that all job ready participants will receive career exploration activities and work experience in their chosen career field at the job site. Performance Measures: DSB will

arrange for tours of local businesses for job ready adult participants to explore potential career opportunities. DSB will arrange for job shadowing opportunities for job ready adult participants. DSB will arrange for informational interviews for job ready adult participants to explore job opportunities. DSB will arrange volunteer opportunities for job ready adult participants to explore career fields. DSB will accompany job ready adult participants to career seminars and career fairs.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB Staff received training and guidance on required supports and expectations for consumers in Job Ready Status. Staff also received training on how to identify consumers who should be placed in Job Ready Status. This training was at the July 2021 Field Services Meeting.

Strategy: DSB will become Chamber of Commerce members. Performance Measures: VR counselors will make contact with at least two Chamber members per month to learn about the trends and needs of those businesses. Each Counselor will obtain an updated Chamber list for their area. Each DSB office will join their local Chamber of Commerce. VR counselors and the Business Engagement Coordinator will contact chamber businesses. DSB staff will attend Chamber of Commerce events.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB renewed 5 Chamber memberships in PY2020. In PY2021, DSB joined or renewed 17 chamber memberships. DSB is currently a member of 24 local chambers in the state of Arkansas. DSB staff attend as many chamber events as possible. In PY2021, DSB has attended 8 in person chamber events.

Strategy: VR Counselors will conduct public speaking engagements. Performance Measure: At least one presentation per year will be given to the local area Lions, Rotary, Civitan, or Kiwanis Club in order to form relationships with local leaders by DSB counselors. Counselors will conduct COY presentations at local civic community clubs.

**Update PY2022-2023** Due to Covid, PY2020 presentations were not done in group settings. In PY2021, some staff were able to make group presentations to their COY. However, most still were informal due to covid restrictions and consumer concerns about Covid.

Strategy: DSB management staff will connect with employers in each economic development district. Performance Measure: DSB management staff will establish at least one ongoing internship site per region for DSB participants. DSB management staff will work in conjunction with the Arkansas Apprenticeship program to locate apprenticeship opportunities for participants. DSB Business Engagement Coordinator will connect with employers in each economic development district and will develop internships and apprenticeship opportunities for participants.

**Update PY2022-2023** The Business Engagement Coordinator has made contacts in all economic areas of the state through the local chambers of commerce. The local chambers have an array of different businesses to promote and partner with to achieve maximum employment expansion for all DSB clients. This promotes the whole workforce system dynamic for complete community and economic development.

Supported Employment Goals and Strategies:

**Goal 1:** DSB will increase the number of Supported Employment (SE) providers to better serve DSB participants.

Strategy: DSB will collaborate with organizations such as World Services for the Blind, Job Connections, AEDD Inc., Easter Seals and Goodwill to increase SE service availability in unserved or underserved areas of the state due to geographic or other issues. DSB will join ARS to conduct at least one meeting with providers to discuss ways to increase SE services to rural areas.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB is working with the Quality Employment Technical Assistance Center to develop and improve our Supported Employment Program. DSB is also working with the Helen Keller National Center to become an SE vendor.

**Goal 2:** DSB will increase Supported Employment services to Pre-ETS students and out-of-school youth.

Strategy: Counselors will determine whether students or youth are candidates for SE services during the employment planning process. Performance Measures: DSB will train new staff and provide updates to veteran staff on identifying and providing SE services to Pre-ETS transition youth. Staff trainings on Supported Employment and Customized Employment will be conducted.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB is working with the Quality Employment Technical Assistance Center to develop and improve our Supported Employment Program. DSB is also working with the Helen Keller National Center to become an SE vendor. Six staff completed the Supported Employment Course with Virginia Commonwealth University.

**Goal 3:** DSB will increase the quality of SE providers for individuals who are blind or severely visually impaired.

Strategy: DSB will determine SE vendor standards targeted to meet the blindness and visual impairment needs of its participants. Performance Measure: At least one presentation or training will be made to educate SE providers about vendor standards. DSB will provide training for SE providers on blindness and vision impairments.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB is working with the Quality Employment Technical Assistance Center to develop and improve our Supported Employment Program. DSB is also working with the Helen Keller National Center to become an SE vendor.

## 2. HOW A BROAD RANGE OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SERVICES AND DEVICES WILL BE PROVIDED TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES AT EACH STAGE OF THE REHABILITATION PROCESS AND ON A STATEWIDE BASIS

A broad range of assistive technology services and devices will be provided to individuals who are blind or severely visually impaired as appropriate at each stage of the rehabilitation process in accordance with the individual's employment goal and IPE. Consumers whose assessments and vocational goal indicate a need for Assistive Technology will receive a technology assessment from the DSB Technology Unit to determine training and technology needs. This recommendation is provided to the counselor, who will then work with the consumer to provide the necessary assistive technology to participate fully in their rehabilitation process. As consumer's progress through the rehabilitation process additional assessments can be conducted to address any additional needs that may arise. At no time will a consumer be denied access to a service or the assistive technology necessary to participate in that service by DSB Staff.

## 3. THE OUTREACH PROCEDURES THAT WILL BE USED TO IDENTIFY AND SERVE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO ARE MINORITIES, INCLUDING THOSE WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, AS WELL AS THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR PROGRAM

The Comprehensive Needs Assessment completed in December 2019 for PY 2020 indicated that those requiring long-term support to maintain employment and those in rural communities were the most underserved populations. Overall job services and transportation were listed as the greatest barriers to employment for the underserved populations. In an effort to reach more communities DSB will continue to use a variety of outreach methods, such as exhibit booths, to educate the public about DSB services and their availability. Additionally, DSB will



increase its outreach to minorities and faith—based groups. DSB will establish an agreement with organizations in the Delta Region to reach the most impoverished citizens of Arkansas. DSB will also enter into an agreement with the Urban League to reach minority populations and those unserved and underserved in the inner city areas of Little Rock and Northwest Arkansas. Area Supervisors and DSB administrative staff will continue to attend the state conferences of blindness consumer groups, and opportunities will be offered to direct service staff as well.

#### 4. THE METHODS TO BE USED TO 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, POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES)

DSB works in conjunction with the Arkansas Education Services for the Visually Impaired (ESVI) and the Department of Education, Special Education Division to identify blind and visually impaired students. Most recently, DSB has expanded its outreach effort to include private schools, alternative schools, and accredited online high school systems. DSB is improving and expanding efforts by offering seminars and in person talks to these educational organizations to inform teachers, parents, and students of the services that are available. DSB offers Parent Summits to provide coordinated efforts to allow students and parents to learn about the options in blindness skills training, education, and employment services. DSB continues to provide a three-week transition learning experience for up to 30 students from across the state, which includes paid work experiences, lessons in self-advocacy, peer mentoring, financial literacy, independent living skills, career counseling, and planning for the future; the students are housed at Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired and go home on weekends. DSB intends to expand this program throughout the State to offer students and youth an opportunity to receive services closer to the communities in which they live.

DSB is also working to offer work experience training, soft skills training, career counseling, and advocacy skills to pre—employment transition students throughout the State. DSB counselors use the Pre-ETS Counselor Guidebook to help prepare students for employment. This guidebook breaks down types of activities and skills related to each of the 5 core services to assist counselors in identifying needs and activities for students. DSB works regularly with Superior Success, and Challenge Solutions to provide trainings and work-based learning opportunities for students. DSB continues to work to identify new vendors to provide additional opportunities for students. DSB is currently working with ASBVI to develop an additional program for students to learn workplace readiness skills during the school year. Working with our Pre-ETS vendors, DSB has been able to offer both in person and distance learning opportunities for students around the state.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB was able to provide a virtual Jump Start program to Students with a Disability in PY2020. In PY2021, DSB offered a virtual and an in person day program for Jump Start to continue to provide Students with a Disability more opportunities. DSB has continued to provide Work-Based Learning Opportunities both virtually and in person to students.

#### 5. IF APPLICABLE, PLANS FOR ESTABLISHING, DEVELOPING, OR IMPROVING COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE

DSB does not have any plans for establishing, developing, or improving community rehabilitation programs within the state.

#### 6. STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF THE STATE WITH RESPECT TO THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA

DSB has continued to track and maintain an internal analysis of the WIOA performance measures. DSB uses annual reports, monthly reports, and the required federal reports to track and evaluate its performance throughout the program year. Using the ETA 9169 for PY17 and

PY18, DSB was able to track the state performance on Measurable Skill Gains and work with ARS to develop a joint expected level for PY20 of 24% and PY21 of 25% for the state. This level came from averaging the state results for PY17 and PY18. DSB continues to track the employment rates for the program years to determine if they are improving and to measure the effectiveness of DSB's strategies.

DSB will use the data gathered from its internal and federal reports to monitor progress towards the PY performance measures. These results will be used to improve the employment outcomes of individuals with blindness and visual impairment in Arkansas. Specifically, DSB will strive to increase the number of individuals who are employed and the wages of those individuals through labor market analysis, targeted counseling on job market areas and the availability of career tracks using Arkansas Labor Market statistics to help individuals make choices that will increase their employability and earning potential. DSB tracks the employment rate for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter After Exit using the data submitted in the RSA 911. This data is also used to track the Retention with the Same Employer measure for DSB. The data for these measures is used to evaluate the effectiveness of DSB's implementation of the WIOA standards each PY and to continue to improve the results for DSB each PY. DSB is committed to monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the six WIOA-required performance measures. DSB will continue to provide training to all DSB staff on the common measures and improve relationships with organizations in the Delta Region to reach the un-served and underserved minority populations in Southeast and South Arkansas. DSB staff will attend Chamber of Commerce events, Lions Club International events, and provide outreach to local area businesses to demonstrate the capabilities and successes of blind and visually impaired Arkansans to enhance relationships and employer willingness to provide on-the-job trainings, apprenticeships, internships, volunteer opportunities, and job shadowing for those we serve. The business and technology section will host "technology talk" seminars and provide demonstrations on college campuses. This activity increases awareness, acceptance, and opens doors for employment opportunities. A Case Review team has been developed to conduct regular independent reviews of case files to offer advice and best practices on service provisions using the new Quality Assurance Tool in the AWARE case management system. At this time DSB has also hired a Quality Assurance auditor to conduct monthly case file audits on all caseloads to improve quality and accuracy in case files. DSB has begun to discuss topics related to vision loss on the radio and on local television news programs. DSB has increased the number of certified rehabilitation counselors in the last year. DSB will continue to seek out certified rehabilitation counselors and provide skills enhancement opportunities to the current staff. DSB is working closely with World Services for the Blind to provide employment training tracks for our clients that result in careers.

**Update: PY2022-2023** For PY2020, the State of Arkansas reported the following on our performance measures:

Employment (Q2) Rate 60.4

Employment (Q4) Rate 57.2

Median Earnings 5696.34

Credential Rate 26.2

Measurable Skills Gains Rate 54.6

## **7. STRATEGIES FOR ASSISTING OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM IN ASSISTING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES**

DSB has cooperative agreements with local Workforce Investment Boards, which are updated as necessary. DSB also has cooperative agreements with the Department of Workforce Services (DWS) and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (a general agreement and a deafblind agreement).

DSB, ARS, the DHS Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS), the DHS Division of Behavioral Health Services (DBHS), and the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE), Special Education Unit (SEU), Transition Unit are partners in a cooperative agreement outlining responsibilities and the provision of services, including supported employment, to transition—aged participants.

The DSB Director serves on the Arkansas Workforce Investment Board, which meets quarterly, and VR Counselors are members of the local Workforce Investment Boards, which meet quarterly across the state.

DSB counselors and support staff are now located in local Workforce Services' offices. Our technology lab staff are also located in the Little Rock Workforce office. Executive and administrative staff have moved to the Department of Commerce building with ARS, and Career Education partners.

DSB continues to support its 17 accessible kiosks for participants at Workforce Center locations. The original 10 kiosks were placed in the same cities where DSB has offices; the second set of seven kiosks were placed in cities with either two—year or four—year Institutions of Higher Education. The kiosks provide participants the same access to the Internet to search for jobs as a sighted person seeking services from Workforce.

#### 8. HOW THE AGENCY'S STRATEGIES WILL BE USED TO:

##### A. ACHIEVE GOALS AND PRIORITIES BY THE STATE, CONSISTENT WITH THE COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT;

DSB and the DSB Board jointly developed the goals, priorities, and strategies based on input provided by the Comprehensive Needs Assessment conducted in December 2019 for PY 2020 and input from key stakeholders. DSB's strategic plan is designed to provide participants with more access to those services the needs assessment identified as essential. Essential services were identified as job development and placement, employment preparation, on the job training, and soft skills development. The strategies are intended to position DSB to successfully meet WIOA performance requirements, to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of services provided to agency clients including those who are unserved or underserved, and to create opportunities to enhance relationships with employers, community organizations, and WIOA partners while addressing the concerns identified during the Comprehensive Needs Assessment conducted in December 2019.

##### B. SUPPORT INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES; AND

DSB uses innovation and expansion funding to support the funding of our Statewide Independent Living Council. DSB has obtained a license for Salesforce to enhance the ability of DSB to coordinate business engagement efforts with partner agencies DSB will continue to provide funding to support technology updates within the NFB Newsline application provided to all Arkansans. Counseling labs that are school based locations have been coordinated with the School for the Blind to provide pre-employment transition core services during the school day to groups of students.

##### C. OVERCOME IDENTIFIED BARRIERS RELATING TO EQUITABLE ACCESS TO AND PARTICIPATION OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE STATE VR SERVICES PROGRAM AND THE STATE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM.

DSB recognizes the importance of providing equitable access and the opportunity to fully participate to individuals with disabilities. Based on the most recent Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, DSB's efforts to reduce the limitations placed on participants in regards to technology and transportation have made an impact in allowing consumers to participate in VR services. The most recent Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment indicated that Job

Services, including Job Placement, were the most significant need of our consumers. DSB will continue to work with providers both in Arkansas and in neighboring states to offer more opportunities for direct job placement. DSB continues to work with partner agencies to locate more opportunities for job placement as well as to expand outreach to employers through our efforts with Business Engagement. Additionally, DSB will work in conjunction with provider agencies to provide work appropriate skills and training to blind and low vision participants. DSB refers participants to World Services for the Blind, Alpha Pointe, Louisiana Center for the Blind, Sources, Goodwill, Adult Education and other providers as necessary for additional skills training, including but not limited to soft skills, and work readiness training to assist participants in improving their probability of securing competitive employment. DSB is continuing to work on strategies to improve those relationships and partnerships to ensure that more participants benefit from the services necessary to meet their need when it comes to employment preparation and soft skills development.

#### **P. EVALUATION AND REPORTS OF PROGRESS: VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT GOALS**

##### **1. AN EVALUATION OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE VR PROGRAM GOALS DESCRIBED IN THE APPROVED VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN FOR THE MOST RECENTLY COMPLETED PROGRAM YEAR WERE ACHIEVED. THE EVALUATION MUST:**

##### **A. IDENTIFY THE STRATEGIES THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS**

**Goal 1:** DSB will increase the employment opportunities for people who are blind or severely visually impaired.

Strategy: VR Counselors scheduled and attended face to face job exploration meetings to interview human resources professionals regarding the types of jobs they have and the skills needed to do these jobs.

Evaluation of Progress PY18-19:

- Each counselor scheduled a minimum of two employer job exploration meetings per month.
- Staff attended Business Expos with Chamber of Commerce and exhibited at other events.
- DSB coordinated and shared information with ARS Business Relations staff

##### **Evaluation of Progress PY20-21:**

Staff no longer have AWARE employer access and employer contacts are entered by Business Engagement allowing for consistent and accurate tracking. Counselors made 43 employer contacts for Program Year 2020, and 35 employer contacts in the first 2 Quarters of Program Year 2021.

Strategy: VR Counselors will ensure that participants in job ready status are actively seeking employment.

Evaluation of Progress PY 18-19:

- Counselors required 3 job contacts per week for each job-ready status participants.
- Counselors are referring clients to Workforce, and the Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP).
- Counselors are assisting participants to register and apply for jobs on employer internet accessible application processes with private, federal, state, and non-profit employers.

##### **Evaluation of Progress PY20-21**

DSB Staff received training and guidance on required supports and expectations for consumers in Job Ready Status. Staff also received training on how to identify consumers who should be placed in Job Ready Status. This training was at the July 2021 Field Services Meeting.

Strategy: DSB will encourage and support viable self-employment.

Evaluation of Progress PY 18-19:

- Counselors provided participants with trainings on small business enterprises.
- Counselors scheduled job shadowing experiences with participants who are blind/visually impaired that have maintained successful businesses.

#### **Evaluation of Progress PY20-21**

DSB has developed a Small Business Committee and is working to update our policy on Small Business. In addition, DSB is designing a Small Business Brochure to share with consumers.

Strategy: DSB will work in conjunction with provider agencies to provide work appropriate skills and training to blind and low vision participants.

Evaluation of Progress PY18-19:

- DSB refers participants to World Services for the Blind, Alpha Pointe, Louisiana Center for the Blind, Sources, Goodwill, Adult Education, and other providers as necessary for additional skills training, including but not limited to soft skills, and work readiness training to assist participants in improving their probability of securing competitive integrated employment.
- DSB refers participants to Apprenticeship programs.

#### **Evaluation of Progress PY20-21**

DSB continues to work with provider agencies to assist consumers. DSB is working with the Quality Employment Technical Assistance Center to provide training and support to staff on providing apprenticeships to consumers.

Strategy: DSB will provide detailed benefits counseling information to each participant on SSI and SSDI.

Evaluation of Progress PY18-19:

- DSB refers 100% of clients, adults, students, and youth on SSI and SSDI to benefits counseling for a one-on-one benefits analysis.
- Counselors provide benefits counseling at the time of application, at the time of IPE's, and at the time of closure.

Strategy: DSB will refer Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) and interested in employment to VR services.

Evaluation of Progress PY 18-19:

- DSB counselors refer OIB participants that are interested in employment to VR services.

#### **Evaluation of Progress PY20-21**

Clients who express interest in work are immediately referred to VR. DSB staff work with local agencies to provide needed services to consumers. DSB also invites agencies to participate in the Older Blind Advisory Committee. Staff have connected with local assisted living centers and town hall meetings to educate communities on our services.

Strategy: DSB will continue to recognize successful participants and their employers.

Evaluation of Progress PY18-19:

- Individuals are recognized as area and state Consumer of the Year along with their employers.

### **Evaluation of Progress PY20-21**

16 VR caseloads submitted a COY for PY2020. All Pre-ETS caseloads submitted nominations for Student of the Year, and one overall winner was chosen. DSB honored all COYs at the virtual December meeting both years.

Strategy: DSB will continue to expand its assistive technology services and improve access to these services and equipment.

Evaluation of Progress PY18-19:

- DSB provides trainings to employers on the use and function of common assistive technology devices for the blind and visually impaired.
- DSB continues to provide training to new Workforce Services staff as vacancies occur in order to increase their knowledge of accessible technology and the needs of participants. DSB's Counselors are now located in 11 Workforce Services offices.
- DSB staff continue to meet participants at Workforce Services offices, including DSB sponsored accessible kiosks, in order to assist participants in their job searches and in becoming more comfortable interacting with the public in an employment setting.
- The Pre-ETS program has set up a Technology Closet so that students can try out technology before purchasing equipment.

### **Evaluation of Progress PY20-21**

DSB staff are now located in Workforce Centers.

Strategy: DSB will increase the skills, credentials and professional affiliations of its novice Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors as they move to assume senior counseling responsibilities in connection with DSB overall succession planning.

Evaluation of Progress PY18-19:

- Novice counselors attended a specific orientation to VR issues and participated in specialized training through the Arkansas Rehabilitation Association or other qualified sources.
- Counselors were exposed to professional organizations each year, as documented in their professional development plans.

### **Evaluations of Progress PY20-21**

DSB Staff were provided the opportunity to participate in numerous virtual trainings through NRTC, Mississippi State University, University of Arkansas Currents, Helen Keller National Center, CSAVR, NFB, ACB, and the Technical Assistance Centers. DSB had staff participate in AER Pre-ETS trainings, Lead VR, and the Virginia Commonwealth University Supported Employment course.

Strategy: To augment the efforts of DSB staff, DSB will use peer mentoring in transition and job ready exploration to allow experienced participants to provide information, advice, and support to less experienced participants.

#### Evaluation and Progress PY18-19:

- Peer mentoring is used to connect participants interested in self-employment with individuals who have owned small businesses and can offer advice and support.
- Area Consumers of the Year provided peer mentoring to other individuals who are blind and severely visually impaired that are trying to manage their rehabilitation plans, gain marketable skills, and secure good jobs.
- Peer mentoring was provided by NFB and ACB members
- Peer mentoring was provided to our Pre-ETS participants during Jump Start and other activities.

Strategy: DSB will support training and the exchange of information among the core partners of WIOA.

#### Evaluation and Progress PY-18-19:

- DSB staff were active participants on the local Workforce Investment Boards throughout the state.
- DSB Executive staff were active members with the State Workforce Investment Board and participated on committees.
- DSB Executive Staff served on WIOA Executive Roundtable and committees.
- DSB staff attend WIOA Partners semi-annual trainings.

#### **Evaluation of Progress PY20-21**

DSB Staff serve on all WIOA Executive Roundtable Subcommittees. DSB Counselors and Supervisors sit on the WIOA local boards. All DSB counselors, supervisors, and some administrative staff attend the partners meetings each year. Both were virtual in PY2020 and PY2021.

Strategy: DSB will ensure that all job ready participants will receive career exploration activities in their chosen career field at training settings.

#### Evaluation and Progress PY 18-19:

- DSB counselors arranged for and accompanied job ready adult participants to college, vocational/technical, or university campus visits.
- Counselors assisted participants with reviewing entrance requirements to college, vocational/technical, or universities.

Goal 2: Increase Pre-ETS to high school students; increase transition services to out-of-school youth.

Strategy: DSB will ensure that all Pre-ETS students and transition youth receive exposure to work experiences and career exploration activities.

#### Evaluation and Progress PY 18-19:

- DSB arranged for tours of local businesses for Pre-ETS students to explore potential career opportunities.
- Counselors arranged job shadowing, volunteer opportunities, and informational interviews for Pre-ETS students to explore job opportunities.

- DSB counselors arranged and accompanied students on college, vocational/technical and university campus visits.
- DSB provided a successful three-weeks Jump Start program in which students heard from business representatives, explored careers and gained work experience.

### **Evaluation of Progress PY20-21**

Students were still able to participate in virtual work-based learning experiences. Pre-ETS students were able to attend a virtual informational session with blind and visually impaired individuals who discussed their experience in the workforce and with creating their own businesses hosted by Ace Academy. In the first quarter of PY2021, DSB provided 32 Work-Based Learning Experiences to VR eligible Students with a Disability, and 21 Work-Based Learning Experiences to potentially eligible Students with a Disability.

Strategy: DSB will support training and the exchange of information among state transition partner organizations.

Evaluation and Progress PY 18-19:

- DSB Pre-ETS staff attended the state AER conferences
- DSB Pre-ETS staff were active participants with the state Transition Summit with representatives of the school districts
- DSB Counselors participated in Deaf-Blind Train the Trainer training with ARS, CAYSI, and Goodwill.
- DSB staff hosted and attended transition fairs statewide.

### **Evaluations of Progress PY20-21**

DSB participated in AER trainings and conferences. Staff also participated in trainings with Helen Keller National Center and Children and Youth with Sensory Impairments (CAYSI).

Strategy: DSB will update the collaborative database of transition students as needed.

Evaluation and Progress PY 18-19:

- Counselors and Rehabilitation Assistants coordinated with Local Education Area (LEA) Supervisors maintained lists of transition students.
- Pre-ETS Manager reviewed the database to ensure it was properly maintained.
- Referrals from the LEA's were reviewed and sent to appropriate Pre-ETS counselor.

### **Evaluation of Progress PY20-21**

Pre-ETS counselors have continued to connect with LEA staff and meet face to face when allowed by schools during the pandemic. Pre-ETS staff submit monthly contact reports to their supervisor on all school contacts for that month.

Strategy: VR Counselors continue to track transition students on their caseloads to ensure that the IPE is developed or updated before a student graduates from high school.

Evaluation and Progress PY 18-19:

- Pre-ETS counselors developed and updated IPE's of transition students before they graduated.



- DSB Managers conducted case reviews to ensure that no transition student graduates without an IPE.

### **Evaluation of Progress PY20-21**

Pre-ETS counselors maintain updated IPEs for VR eligible students with updates completed at least every 12 months. All potentially eligible students receive information on applying for VR services prior to graduating so that they may make the appropriate decision for their needs.

Strategy: DSB will hold Parent Summits to assist parents and other stakeholders in becoming more knowledgeable and better prepared to advocate for their children at Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings.

Evaluation and Progress PY 18-19:

- Annually, DSB invites ESVI Regional Certified Vision Consultants and transition parents to a Parent Summit with VR Counselors to provide information about assistive technology; rights and responsibilities; available resources and services; benefits counseling; and funding for college and career start-up costs.
- DSB counselors conducted Transition Summits in local areas across the state.

Strategy: DSB continue to provide assessments and services to transition students specifically focused on activities of daily living, including but not limited to, mobility, knowledge of available transportation resources, self-advocacy, acquisition of a variety of reading options, awareness of job opportunities, benefits counseling, and rights and responsibilities as an informed participant.

Evaluation and Progress PY18-19:

- DSB Counselors arranged trainings for Pre-ETS students and youth to acquire independent living skills and technological skills for them to participate in career exploration services.
- DSB has established an Assistive Technology Loaner program for Pre-ETS students so that they can try out the equipment before purchasing.

### **Evaluation of Progress PY20-21**

DSB hosted an in person, one week, day Jump Start program that focused on independent living skills and technology for Pre-ETS Students. DSB also hosted a two-week virtual Jump Start through Ace Academy for students. DSB continues to work find new vendors. DSB added Ace Academy, Challenge Solutions, Superior Success, and Helen Keller National Center in the last year.

Strategy: DSB will continue to strengthen relationships with schools, including Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Evaluation and Progress PY18-19:

- DSB staff presented at school assemblies, parent-teacher organization meetings, and open houses to provide information on Pre-ETS and how to access these services.
- DSB conducted face-to-face meetings with the school staff.
- DSB has established an information clearinghouse and scheduled demonstrations on selected high school campuses to inform parents, students, and education professionals of the needs of students with significant vision problems, and the cost-effective resources available to them.

- DSB continued its system of mail-outs and e-mails to public schools.
- DSB continue their outreach to reach private, home, and accredited virtual schools.

Strategy: DSB will continue to strengthen relationships with Educational Services for the Visually Impaired (ESVI).

Evaluation and Progress PY18-19:

- DSB continued its system of mail-outs and e-mails twice a year to area ESVI representatives.
- In addition to the local networking efforts, the Pre-ETS Manager networked with ESVI at a state level to discover any transition students that need services and should be referred to DSB.
- DSB referred participants under age 14 to ESVI and encouraged referrals from ages 14 and older from ESVI to DSB.
- Staff attended the annual AER conference.

Goal 3: DSB will expand its outreach efforts to include the general public, as well as the unserved, underserved, minorities, and stakeholders.

Strategy: DSB continue to expand and improve services to individuals who are blind or severely visually impaired in the underserved Delta area.

Evaluation and Progress PY 18-19:

- DSB conducted outreach with organizations established in the Delta region, to provide economic literacy and soft skills trainings to individuals living in poverty in the Delta region of the State of Arkansas.

Strategy: DSB will use exhibit booths to educate the public about DSB services and their availability.

Evaluation and Progress PY 18-19:

- DSB Counselors and staff exhibited at widely attended or significantly relevant events in his/her territory to include health fairs, conferences, summits, and the Arkansas state fair.

Strategy: DSB will increase its outreach to minorities and faith-based groups.

Evaluation and Progress PY18-19:

- DSB contracted with the state Independent Living Centers to conduct outreach to minorities and faith-based groups.
- These centers conducted at least 3 contacts a month with minorities and faith-based groups.

Strategy: Area Supervisors and DSB administrative staff will continue to attend the state conferences of blindness consumer groups, and opportunities will be offered to direct service staff as well.

Evaluation and Progress PY18-19:

- DSB staff and consumers attended both the NFB and ACB state and national conferences to interact with participants and they will make presentations as requested.

- DSB staff made presentations at the state NFB and ACB conferences.

### **Evaluations of Progress PY20-21**

DSB has hired an Outreach Manager and a Business Engagement Coordinator to assist counselors with conducting outreach across the state. DSB Staff attended both NFB and ACB.

Goal 4: DSB will increase coordination with employers.

Strategy: DSB will ensure that all job ready participants will receive career exploration activities and work experience in their chosen career field at the job site.

Evaluation and Progress PY18-19:

- DSB arranged tours of local businesses for job ready adult participants to explore potential career opportunities.
- DSB arranged job shadowing opportunities and informational interviews for job ready adult participants to explore job opportunities.
- Volunteer opportunities were arranged for job ready adult participants to explore career fields.
- DSB staff accompanied job ready adult participants to career seminars and career fairs.

### **Evaluation of Progress PY20-21**

DSB Staff received training and guidance on required supports and expectations for consumers in Job Ready Status. Staff also received training on how to identify consumers who should be placed in Job Ready Status. This training was at the July 2021 Field Services Meeting.

Strategy: VR Counselors will become Chamber of Commerce members.

Evaluation and Progress PY18-19:

- DSB renewed their membership with local Chamber of Commerce organizations across the state.
- VR counselors contacted business members to explore human resources trends and needs.

### **Evaluation of Progress PY20-21**

DSB renewed 5 Chamber memberships in PY2020. In PY2021, DSB joined or renewed 17 chamber memberships. DSB is currently a member of 24 local chambers in the state of Arkansas. DSB staff attend as many chamber events as possible. In PY2021, DSB has attended 8 in person chamber events.

Strategy: VR Counselors will conduct public speaking engagements.

Evaluation and Progress PY 18-19:

- DSB Counselors conducted at least one presentation per year in their local area Lions, Rotary, Civitan, or Kiwanis Club in order to form relationships with local leaders.

Strategy: DSB management staff connect with employers in each economic development district.

Evaluation and Progress PY18-19:

- DSB staff conducted outreach with employers in each economic development district.

### **Evaluation of Progress PY20-21**

The Business Engagement Coordinator has made contacts in all economic areas of the state through the local chambers of commerce. The local chambers have an array of different businesses to promote and partner with to achieve maximum employment expansion for all DSB clients. This promotes the whole workforce system dynamic for complete community and economic development.

Supported Employment Goals:

Goal 1: DSB will increase the number of Supported Employment (SE) providers to better serve DSB participants.

Strategy: DSB will collaborate with organizations such as World Services for the Blind, Job Connections, AEDD Inc., Easter Seals and Goodwill to increase SE service availability in unserved or underserved areas of the state due to geographic or other issues.

Evaluation and Progress PY18-19:

- DSB collaborated with organizations such as World Services for the Blind, Job Connections, AEDD Inc., Easter Seals, Ed Davis Inc. and Goodwill to increase SE service availability in unserved or underserved areas of the state due to geographic or other issues.
- DSB added new providers TEEM and Building Bridges that serves the southern region of the state to include the rural areas.

### **Evaluation of Progress PY20-21**

DSB is working with the Quality Employment Technical Assistance Center to develop and improve our Supported Employment (SE) Program. DSB is also working with the Helen Keller National Center to become an SE vendor. Six staff completed the Supported Employment Course with Virginia Commonwealth University.

Goal 2: DSB will increase Supported Employment services to transition students and out-of-school youth.

Strategy: Counselors will determine whether students or youth are candidates for SE during the employment planning process.

Evaluation and Progress PY 18-19:

- The Pre-ETS counselors identify youth who might be appropriate for SE and refer them to providers for services.
- DSB trains new staff and provides updates to veteran staff on identifying and providing SE to youth who may be appropriate for supported employment and how to refer them to providers.

### **Evaluation of Progress PY20-21**

DSB is working with the Quality Employment Technical Assistance Center to develop and improve our Supported Employment Program. DSB is also working with the Helen Keller National Center to become an SE vendor. Six staff completed the Supported Employment Course with Virginia Commonwealth University.

Goal 3: DSB will increase the quality of SE providers for individuals who are blind or severely visually impaired.

Strategy: DSB will determine SE vendor standards targeted to meet the blindness and visual impairment needs of its participants.

Evaluation and Progress PY18-19:

- DSB partners with ARS to provide information and training to SE providers.

### **Evaluation of Progress PY20-21**

DSB is working with the Quality Employment Technical Assistance Center to develop and improve our Supported Employment Program. DSB is also working with the Helen Keller National Center to become an SE vendor.

#### **B. DESCRIBE THE FACTORS THAT IMPEDED THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES**

The largest factors that impede the achievement of the VR goals and priorities are staff turnover among DSB's field staff. We have consistently had an average of 8 vacancies among the counselors and support staff during the last year. As a result of an internal audit of our provision of Pre-ETS services, we discovered the need to develop and implement new policies and procedures. We were fortunate to work with WINTAC during this process. As a result, the staff received additional training and a new process was implemented in January 2020.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB struggled to connect with vendors, employers, and consumers during the pandemic due to concerns over health and safety. DSB staff worked to find methods to overcome these barriers, such as zoom and tele-meetings, but they did impact success of strategies. DSB continued to struggle with vacancies in part due to a hiring freeze at the end of Program Year 2020.

#### **2. AN EVALUATION OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM GOALS DESCRIBED IN THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SUPPLEMENT FOR THE MOST RECENT PROGRAM YEAR WERE ACHIEVED. THE EVALUATION MUST:**

##### **A. IDENTIFY THE STRATEGIES THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS**

DSB continued to enlist new SE providers that provide services to the blind and visionally impaired, to include TEEM and Building Bridges that serve the rural and under served population.

DSB's Field Administrator serves on the state APSE Board and works with other APSE members to enhance supported employment opportunities across the state. DSB staff serve on the conference committee, and the next statewide conference will be March, 2020.

DSB has been able to refer youth up to age 24 to supported employment services. Students that enroll in our Jump Start program explore different career options and some of these individuals are referred to community rehabilitation providers for services.

A new vendor application and monitoring forms were developed for the community rehabilitation providers and training was provided.

DSB encouraged participants' family members and other natural support individuals to become SE providers.

DSB works with ARS and providers to provide training for the SE providers.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB continues to work to grow providers. DSB is now working with the VRTAC-QE to improve Supported Employment Outcomes.

#### **B. DESCRIBE THE FACTORS THAT IMPEDED THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES**

The largest factor that impedes the achievement of the supported employment goal is the lack of statewide community rehabilitation programs offering supported employment to the blind and visually impaired. DSB has enlisted some new providers, including TEEM and Building Bridges to serve the Delta (under served) rural area. DSB has a low number of consumers with most significant disabilities that need supported employment services in order to obtain and retain employment.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB continues to work to grow providers. DSB is now working with the VRTAC-QE to improve Supported Employment Outcomes.

### 3. THE VR PROGRAM'S PERFORMANCE ON THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY INDICATORS UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA

DSB continues to work on improving understanding and accuracy of its reporting and measuring of the performance accountability measures for Section 116 of WIOA. Using the data reported on the RSA 911 and ETA 9169, DSB has worked to stay informed about our performance measures to develop guidance on our expected levels of performance. Using the ETA 9169 for PY17 and PY18, DSB met with Arkansas Rehabilitation Services to determine an expected Measurable Skill Gains Rate for the state. In PY17, Arkansas achieved 22.7% Measurable Skill Gains, and in PY18 we achieved 25.2%. Both agencies have been working to improve accuracy in documenting our measurable skill gains and intend to continue to do so moving forward. DSB and ARS averaged the 2 previous year's performance to obtain the rate of 23.9%. Therefore, the agencies mutually agreed that a suggested target of 24% for PY 2020 and 25% for PY 2021 gave us confidence in our ability to achieve the rate and continue to improve accuracy for Program Years 2020 and 2021.

Based on the data reported in the RSA 911, DSB continues to monitor and track performance measures related to WIOA. In Program Year 18, DSB reported 131 participants (33%) to be employed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter After Exit, 65 Participants (18.4%) to be employed in the 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter After Exit, and 46 participants (35%) to have retained employment with the same employer in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter After Exit. DSB continues to track the data for PY 19 as there is a delay in wage quarter reporting. As a state Arkansas reported a median 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter earnings of \$5240.93, while DSB reported \$6,623.43 as an agency. DSB continues to work on improving its measures and working with Arkansas Rehabilitation Services to ensure consistency, accuracy, and growth in our performance measures for Program Years 2020 and 2021.

**Update PY2022-2023** For Program Year 2020, the State of Arkansas reported the following rates:

Employment 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter After Exit 60.4%

Employment 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter After Exit 57.2%

Median Earnings 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter After Exit \$5,696.34

Credential Rate 26.2%

Measurable Skill Gains Rate 54.6%

### 4. HOW THE FUNDS RESERVED FOR INNOVATION AND EXPANSION (I&E) ACTIVITIES WERE UTILIZED

DSB used innovation and expansion funding to support the funding of our Statewide Independent Living Council. DSB has obtained a license for Salesforce to enhance the ability of DSB to coordinate business engagement efforts with partner agencies. DSB will continue to provide funding to support technology updates within the NFB Newline application provided to all Arkansans, including now being able to live stream the service. Counseling labs that are

school based locations have been coordinated with the School for the Blind to provide pre-employment transition core services during the school day to groups of students.

#### Q. QUALITY, SCOPE, AND EXTENT OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

##### 1. 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

DSB remains committed to increasing the quality, scope and extent of Supported Employment Services to eligible consumers. During PY 2018, DSB used vendors to provide comprehensive supported employment services to youth and adults identified as blind or visually impaired.

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, 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 the VR agency, using funds under the Supported Employment program and/or the VR program, from the time of job placement until the transition to extended services and thereafter by one or more extended services providers. The VR agency may serve as the extended services provider to a youth with a most significant disability until the youth reaches age 25 or receives a maximum of 4 years of extended services, whichever occurs first.

During PY2018, DSB increased the number of individuals who received supported employment services by increasing the number of providers. Some of our providers include: Goodwill, World Services for the Blind, Sources, Arkansas Support Network, Building Bridges, Ed Davis Inc. Easter Seals, and S.W. Chance.

DSB participated with trainings in which DOL ODEP Subject Matter Experts provided on supported employment with providers. These trainings also included state leaders in a planning session in which our Director and Field Administrator attended.

DSB continued to utilize a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, Division of Workforce Services, Arkansas Department of Education-Special Education Unit, Division of Developmental Disabilities Services, Division of Adult Services and Behavior Health Services. This MOU defines each agency's roles and responsibilities toward competitive integrated employment for individuals with most significant disabilities. This partnership also supports on-going Employment First activities for the state.

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, provides training Supported Employment providers, along with certification of Job Coaches. DSB supports these trainings rather than duplicating.

DSB are members of Arkansas APSE and the Field Administrator serves on the Board of Directors. We supported the bi-annual statewide APSE conference.

**Update PY2022-2023** DSB is working with the VRTAC-QE to improve the Supported Employment program and enhance the opportunities for individuals with the most significant disabilities. DSB is currently working with HKNC and CAYSI to improve services to youth with the most significant disabilities.

##### 2. THE TIMING OF TRANSITION TO EXTENDED SERVICES

Ongoing services are furnished by the VR agency, using funds under the Supported Employment program and/or the VR program, from the time of job placement until the transition to extended services, and thereafter by one or more extended services providers. The VR agency may serve as the extended services provider to a youth with a most significant disability until the youth reaches age 25 or has received a maximum of 4 years of extended services, whichever occurs first.

In addition, funds allotted under the Supported Employment program or the VR program may be used to provide extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities as authorized under section 604(b)(2) of the Act. However, extended services may not be provided by the VR agency using funds allotted under either the Supported Employment program or the VR program to an individual who is not a youth with a disability. DSB provides extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities for a period of time not to exceed four years, or until a youth reaches the age of 25 and is no longer considered a "youth with a disability," whichever occurs first.

#### 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 WIOA[14], AND ITS SUPPLEMENT UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT[15];

ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPROPRIATE

Division of Services for the Blind

2. AS A CONDITION FOR THE RECEIPT OF FEDERAL FUNDS UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES, THE (ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY)[16] AGREES TO OPERATE AND ADMINISTER THE STATE VR SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN[17], THE REHABILITATION ACT, AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[18], POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED BY THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION. FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER SECTION 111 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

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 AGREES TO OPERATE AND ADMINISTER THE STATE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN[19], THE REHABILITATION ACT, AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[20], 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 AGENCY AND/OR THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT 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;

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

Cassondra Williams-Stokes

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

DSB 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.

#### FOOTNOTES

#### CERTIFICATION SIGNATURE

Signatory information	Division of Services for the Blind
Name of Signatory	Cassondra Williams-Stokes
Title of Signatory	Director
Date Signed	04/13/2022

#### ASSURANCES

The State Plan must include	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	

The State Plan must include	Include
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 plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140.	
3. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to: Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan:	
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. The establishment of either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as applicable (A or B must be selected):	
3.b.(A) "is an independent State commission" (Yes/No)	Yes
3.b.(B) "has established a State Rehabilitation Council" (Yes/No)	No
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. 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. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the local administration of VR funds (Yes/No)	No
3.f. The shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the shared	No

The State Plan must include	Include
funding and administration of joint programs (Yes/No)	
3.g. Statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act. Is the designated State agency requesting or maintaining a waiver of statewideness for one or more services provided under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan? (Yes/No) See Section 2 of this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan	No
3.h. The descriptions 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	
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)(D) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.b. Impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility	

The State Plan must include	Include
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 in accordance with section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act? (Yes/No)	Yes
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 requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) 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 section 101(a)(14) 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.I. Strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and	

The State Plan must include	Include
4.j.i.II. 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) and 101(a)(25))	
5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement:	
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	
5.c. The designated state unit will coordinate activities with any other State agency that is functioning as an employment network under the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency program under Section 1148 of the Social Security Act	
6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program:	
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)(G) and (H) of the Rehabilitation Act	
6.b. The designated State agency assures that it will use funds made available under title VI of the	

The State Plan must include	Include
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:	Yes
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:	
7.b.i. 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	
7.b.ii. 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)(6)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act	

#### VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	58.9	60.5	60.0	61.5
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	47.9	57.3	49.0	57.9
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	5317.7	5697.0	5400.0	5787.0
Credential	21.9	28.9	23.0	30.9

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Attainment Rate				
Measurable Skill Gains	50.0	55.6	51.0	57.6
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>

*"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.*

## VII. PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR COMBINED STATE PLAN PARTNER PROGRAMS

### TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES (TANF)

A. CONDUCT A PROGRAM DESIGNED TO SERVE ALL POLITICAL SUBDIVISIONS IN THE STATE (NOT NECESSARILY IN A UNIFORM MANNER) THAT PROVIDES ASSISTANCE TO NEEDY FAMILIES WITH (OR EXPECTING) CHILDREN AND PROVIDES PARENTS WITH JOB PREPARATION, WORK, AND SUPPORT SERVICES TO ENABLE THEM TO LEAVE THE PROGRAM, SPECIFICALLY CASH ASSISTANCE, AND BECOME SELF-SUFFICIENT (SECTION 402(A)(1)(A)(I) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT)

Arkansas operates a TANF Block Grant assistance program on a statewide basis in accordance with all applicable federal and state laws and policies. This statewide program has been fully articulated in previously-approved TANF State Plans by the Administration for Children and Families.

The Division of Workforce Services and the Department of Human Services - Division of County Operations work collaboratively in making the TANF Program services available in each of Arkansas's seventy-five (75) counties.

### POPULATIONS TO BE SERVED

Transitional Employment Assistance will be available to economically needy families with children under the age of eighteen (18) years who are residing in the State of Arkansas and meet specified eligibility requirements.

Families receiving cash assistance must meet all of the following eligibility criteria.

#### Definition of Needy Family

A needy family is defined as one which includes a child or children under the age of 18 years and the parent(s) or other adult relative caretaker who is living with such child(ren) and whose family income and resources are within specified limits.

#### Definition of Other Adult Relative Caretaker

Other adult relative caretaker is defined as a non-parent relative who is providing care for the child (when there is no natural parent in the home) and is in one of the following degrees of relationship to the child:

- a. A blood or adoptive relative within the fifth degree of kinship (e.g., grandparent, aunt, etc.);
- b. Step-father, step-mother, step-sister, step-brother;

c. A spouse of any of the above.

For purposes of determining family size and family income and resource eligibility, any other adult relative caretaker as defined above, with the exception of a step-parent, may choose to be included as an eligible family member or not.

If such relative chooses not to be included (i.e., is a payee only), then his/her income and resources will not be considered when determining eligibility. In addition, employment services described in the Section (Time Limited Requirement) will not apply.

### **Income Limit**

#### **Cash Assistance**

The family's countable income (as defined in the State's policy and procedures manual) must be equal to or below \$223 per month. The one income limit applies to all family sizes and to initial and on-going eligibility. This amount is 25% of what a full-time (40 hours/week) worker would have earned at the federal minimum wage that was effective September 1, 1997 (\$5.15/hour) in a month.

For the purposes of income eligibility, the following deductions will be made from a family's gross monthly-earned income:

- a. For initial eligibility, a 20% deduction for work related expenses (e.g., taxes).
- b. For on-going eligibility, the 20% work-related deduction followed by a 60% work incentive deduction from the remainder.

### **Resource Limit**

#### **Cash Assistance**

The family's countable resources must be equal to or below \$3,000. The one resource limit applies to all family sizes and to initial and on-going eligibility.

Resources include real and personal property which are currently available or for which the family has the legal ability to make available for current use.

In accordance with Arkansas Act 514 of 2007, the following categories of resources are disregarded:

- (a) The family's homestead;
- (b) One operable motor vehicle;
- (c) Household and personal goods;
- (d) Income-producing property;
- (e) Monies deposited in an approved Individual Development Account (IDA) or approved escrow account for business or career development;
- (f) Any other property specified in the State policy and procedures manual that the agency had determined would be cost-efficient to exclude or which must be excluded due to federal or state statute.

### **Citizenship Requirement**

Recipients must be citizens, qualified aliens who entered the United States before August 22, 1996, qualified aliens who entered the United States on or after August 22, 1996 who are excepted from the five-year bar, or aliens who entered the United States on or after August 22, 1996 and have been in "qualified alien" status for at least five (5) years.



### **Time Limit Requirement**

A needy family who meets all other eligibility requirements will not be eligible to receive TEA assistance if the family includes an adult parent (or other adult relative caretaker who is included as an eligible member) who has received such assistance for twenty-four (24) months unless it is determined that the family meets one of the criteria outlined in the Section (Exemptions/Deferrals). The twenty-four months need not be consecutive months. The twenty-four (24) month count began July 1, 1998.

A needy family that includes an adult parent who meets the criteria outlined in the Section (Exemptions/Deferrals) and is deferred from the twenty-four (24) month time limit will not be eligible to receive TEA assistance beyond the sixty (60) month federal time limit unless it is determined that the family meets one of the criteria outlined in the Section (Hardship Extensions).

### **Personal Responsibility Agreement Requirement**

The Personal Responsibility Agreement (PRA) is an agreement specifying the recipient's responsibilities that are a condition of receiving employment assistance, which may include an employment plan that describes what the recipient and the Division will do to assist the recipient to achieve self-sufficiency through employment.

### **Drug Screening and Drug Testing**

Drug screening of all TEA and Work Pays applicants and current recipients that are otherwise eligible shall be conducted. During their respective eligibility determination or redetermination, the drug screening will be used to determine whether there is reasonable cause to believe the applicant or current recipient engages in the use of drugs. The TEA and Works Pays drug screening and testing program is separate from any employer-required drug screening and/or drug testing. Drug testing information shall be kept confidential.

### **Drug Screening**

Applicants and recipients that are otherwise eligible shall submit a completed drug screening questionnaire as a part of the eligibility determination or redetermination for TEA and Work Pays benefits. Refusal and/or failure, without good cause, to submit a completed drug screening questionnaire shall result in denial of the application or ineligibility of recipient.

If the result of the drug screening indicates a reasonable suspicion to believe that the applicant or recipient has engaged in the use of drugs, then the applicant or recipient shall be required to take a drug test.

### **Exemption from Drug Screening and Testing Requirements**

The following are exempt from the drug screening and testing requirement:

1. A dependent child under eighteen (18) years of age;
2. A non-head of household minor parent who lives with a parent, legal guardian, or other adult caretaker relative.
3. An entity or individual participating in the Career Pathways Program or Community Investment Initiative under the TEA and Work Pays Programs.

### **Drug Testing and Treatment**

If the applicant or recipient that is otherwise eligible tests positive for drugs, the drug testing entity will administer a confirmation test using the same specimen sample from the initial positive test. The results of the confirmation test will determine whether the program refers the applicant or recipient for a substance abuse evaluation and treatment. The applicant or

recipient will be able to present a prescription for any medication or a written certification and a registry identification card issued under Arkansas Constitution, Amendment 98, she/he is taking to the drug testing entity for review in conjunction with any positive test results.

### **Disqualification Related to Drug Testing and Treatment Requirements**

A refusal to take a drug test shall result in the applicant's or recipient's ineligibility for TEA and Work Pays benefits for six (6) months.

If the applicant that is otherwise eligible complies with drug testing and/or treatment requirements, the applicant may be eligible for TEA and Work Pays benefits. The applicant or recipient complying with the substance abuse evaluation and treatment/recovery plan may continue to receive benefits for duration of the program treatment not to exceed six (6) months.

After the six (6) months of treatment or disqualification, the applicant or recipient that is otherwise eligible will be re-tested. If the applicant or recipient tests positive for drugs in a subsequent drug test, validated by a confirmation test, the applicant or recipient that is otherwise eligible shall be ineligible to receive TEA and Work Pays benefits for six (6) months from the date of the positive confirmation test.

### **Designating a Protective Payee**

If an applicant or recipient that is otherwise eligible and is found ineligible to receive TEA and Work Pays benefits as a result of a positive drug test or failure to begin, participate in, and/or complete the drug treatment/recovery support resource program, that applicant or recipient shall not be eligible for benefits and removed from the benefit unit. However, the dependent child's eligibility for TEA and Work Pays benefits shall not be affected.

ADWS or authorized agency shall designate a protective payee, either a caretaker relative or legal guardian of the child, to receive the dependent child's TEA benefits. No person who is the applicant for or recipient that is otherwise eligible for TEA and Work Pays benefits and tests positive for the use of drugs shall serve as a protective payee.

### **Appeal Drug Screening and Drug Testing**

An applicant or recipient that is otherwise eligible may appeal any denial of eligibility for TEA and Work Pays benefits as a result of drug screening or drug testing in accordance with appeal procedures in the TEA Policy manual.

### **Assignment of Child Support**

The adult caretaker must agree to assign child support rights to the State. Such assignment will become effective upon receipt of cash assistance.

### **Drug-Related Convictions**

In accordance with Section 16 of the Arkansas Personal Responsibility and Public Assistance Reform Act, Arkansas opts out of Section 115 of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. Section 115 states that assistance may be denied to anyone who has been convicted of any felony involving a controlled substance including the use or possession of a controlled substance

### **Minor Parent Living Arrangements**

An unmarried parent under the age of 18 must reside in a place of residence maintained by a parent, legal guardian, or other adult relative except in the following situations:

a. It has been determined that the unmarried minor parent's current living arrangement is appropriate. In this situation, the minor parent and child will be required to continue to reside

in such living arrangement as a condition of eligibility unless it is determined that such living arrangement is no longer appropriate due to changed circumstances.

b. The minor parent has no parent, legal guardian, or other adult relative of his or her own who is living or whose whereabouts are known.

c. The minor parent's parent or legal guardian will not allow the minor parent and child to live in his/her home and there is no other adult relative who will allow the minor parent and child to live in their home.

d. The minor parent or child is being or has been subjected to serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, or exploitation in the home of the minor parent's parent or legal guardian.

e. Substantial evidence exists of an act or failure to act that places the minor parent or child at risk of imminent or serious harm in the home of the minor parent's parent or legal guardian.

f. The agency determines that it is in the best interest of the minor parent's child to waive the living arrangement requirement for the minor parent and child.

### **Family Violence Option (FVO)**

Arkansas continues to utilize the Family Violence Option (FVO) for victims of domestic violence. This will allow us to modify program requirements and extend time limits to help victims of domestic violence.

B. REQUIRE A PARENT OR CARETAKER RECEIVING ASSISTANCE TO ENGAGE IN WORK (DEFINED BY THE STATE) ONCE THE STATE DETERMINES THE PARENT OR CARETAKER IS READY TO ENGAGE IN WORK, OR ONCE HE OR SHE HAS RECEIVED 24 MONTHS OF ASSISTANCE, WHICHEVER IS EARLIER, CONSISTENT WITH THE CHILD CARE EXCEPTION AT 407(E)(2) (SECTION 402(A)(1)(A)(II) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT)

In accordance with federal requirements, Arkansas requires parents and caretakers to engage in work as a condition of ongoing eligibility unless they are unable to do so due to one or more of the specific criteria outlined in our Exemptions/Deferrals policy. A non-parent adult caretaker who has chosen not to be included as an eligible member is not required to participate in work activities.

Minor parents are excluded from the employment requirement, however, they must be engaged in appropriate education or training programs.

### **Exemptions/Deferrals**

The following individuals may be exempted or temporarily deferred from any work activity requirement:

- A parent caring for a child:

- a. Under three (3) months of age; or

- b. Between three (3) and twelve (12) months of age if child care for such child is not available.

Note: A parent may be exempted for this reason for a maximum of twelve (12) months in his or her adult lifetime.

- An individual with disabilities (parent or caregiver)

- A woman in the third trimester of pregnancy.

- A parent or caregiver who is caring for individuals with disabilities (child relative or adult relative) living in the home.

- An individual for who support services necessary to engage in a work activity are not available.
- An individual who is unable to participate in work activities due directly to the effects of domestic violence.
- An individual unable to participate in a work activity due to circumstances beyond his or her control.
- A parent or other adult caretaker who is over sixty-(60)-years of age.

The twenty-four (24) month time limit will not apply in any month in which an individual is exempt/deferred for any of the above reasons. In addition, the following individuals may receive an extension of the time limit:

- An individual who cooperated and participated in required activities but was unable to obtain employment because of circumstances beyond his or her control.
  - An individual from whom it has been determined appropriate to extend the time limit, particularly, but not limited to, cases in which it is necessary to protect the child from risk of neglect.
  - Individuals participating in education and training activities who have reached the end of their twenty-four (24) month cumulative limit on financial assistance, have complied with all TEA requirements and are within six (6) months of completing their current education or training program. However, the Local office can make an exception and provide an extension to the six months on a case-by case-basis.

### **Hardship Extensions**

Exemption or deferral from the twenty-four month time limit does not exempt an individual from the federal sixty-(60)-month time limit. Therefore, individuals who have reached the sixty-(60)-month time limit due to exemptions or deferrals from the twenty-four month time limit may receive an extension of the 60-month time limit if the individual meets one of the following hardship extension criteria:

- a. The adult has a physical or mental impairment that is too severe for Rehabilitation services and the individual has been denied SSA/SSI disability through an appeal.
- b. The adult is receiving services through Arkansas Rehabilitation Services in a sheltered workshop and ARS has stated that is the extent of activities the individual can do.
- c. The adult is receiving treatment through the Severe Barriers Project and the Severe Barriers Project team is providing case management services.
- d. The adult has been, and continues to be, unable to participate in work activities due directly to the effects of domestic violence.
- e. The adult was unable to participate in work activities due to circumstances beyond the adult's control.

C. ENSURE THAT PARENTS AND CARETAKERS RECEIVING ASSISTANCE ENGAGE IN WORK IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 407 (SECTION 402(A)(1)(A)(III) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT). CONSISTENT WITH THE REQUIRED STRATEGIC ELEMENTS DISCUSSED IN SECTION II (A)(2) HEREIN, PROVIDE A SPECIFIC ANALYSIS OF HOW THE STATE'S WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES ARE ADDRESSING EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICES FOR PARENTS OR CARETAKERS RECEIVING ASSISTANCE

As articulated in the federally-approved Work Verification Plan, Arkansas determines the appropriate number of hours of work participation for each parent and caretaker based upon the development of the participant's employment plan.

Arkansas has implemented the following minimum number of hours of participation in work activities for Single Parent and Two-Parent Cases:

- Single Parent Cases - A single parent must be engaged in work activities for a minimum of 30 hours per week.
- Two-Parent Cases - Two parent families not receiving federally funded childcare must be engaged in work activities for a minimum of 35 hours per week. Those receiving federally funded childcare must be engaged a minimum of 55 hours per week. If one parent is deferred, the other must be engaged for 35 hours. If one parent is disabled, the other parent must be engaged 30 hours.

Once the employment plan has been developed, the case manager inputs this data into the state's TANF Program IT system that opens the case. Case managers then obtain documentation of actual hours of participation and, upon verification, enter these hours into the system.

The TANF Program IT System tracks the actual hours of participation entered for the required activities. In order to remain eligible to receive financial assistance, a participant must participate in the activities outlined in the employment plan for the required number of hours. The System assists the case manager in recognizing the lack of sufficient hours entered via Exception Reports. These Exception Reports are generated monthly and contain those participants who have not participated in enough hours to comply with the federal requirements.

### **Work and Self-Sufficiency**

As a condition of eligibility, parents, and other adult caretakers who are included as eligible family members, will be required to seek and accept employment unless they are unable to do so due to one or more of the criteria outlined in the Section (Exemptions/Deferrals). Minor parents are excluded from the employment requirement, however must be engaged in educational activities.

### **Applicant Intake**

During the initial interview with the applicant, information will be obtained regarding household and family employment circumstances. This information will be assessed and options or courses of action will be discussed with the applicant. The family may be diverted from assistance at this point through a Diversion Assistance payment.

### **Employability Assessment**

The purpose of the employability assessment will be to determine the applicant's abilities, talents, proficiencies/deficiencies, etc. The assessment is completed to determine the applicant's ability to move into employment and may be done by an agency or organization other than DWS.

During the assessment, the DWS Workforce Specialist will present an orientation/overview of the program, gather pertinent information, and identify barriers that may prevent the applicant from becoming self-sufficient through employment. The DWS Workforce Specialist may also identify the following.

- - Family situation/circumstances

- Employment history/work experience
- Educational attainment/ literacy level/functional educational level
- Skills
- Interests
- Supportive Service needs, if any.

NOTE: Participants who are identified as victims of domestic violence will be referred for appropriate services. Appropriate services may include but are not limited to:

Counseling, housing relocation assistance, referral to mental health, referral to prosecuting attorney and/or law enforcement and the DHS Division of Children and Family Services. The DWS Workforce Specialist will, where appropriate, use all available resources to help the victim of domestic violence receive timely/needed services.

### **Employment Plan**

Information obtained during the assessment will be used to develop the Employment Plan and engage the participant in work or a work-related activity designed to move him/her into full-time employment in the shortest period of time.

The employment plan is a written document that specifies a planned series of actions necessary for the participant to accept full time employment. The plan will identify (1) the participant's employment goals; (2) problems or impediments which may delay or adversely affect employment and what is needed to solve those problems; (3) the particular TEA work activity which is most appropriate for the participant; and (4) specific actions planned with, for, and by the participant in order to attain employment.

During the employment-planning interview, the DWS Workforce Specialist verifies, with the participant, the severity of any problems (i.e., poor/lack of housing, drug abuse, and domestic violence) and identifies actions required to alleviate them. Services will be limited to those necessary for the participant to accept employment.

Upon completion of the assessment process, the DWS Workforce Specialist may engage the participant in one or more of the following work activities: Employment (Unsubsidized or Subsidized); Education Directly Related to Employment; Career and Technical Education; Job Skills Training; Job Search and Job Readiness; On-the-Job Training; Community Service, Work Experience, Attendance as Secondary School; Providing Childcare Services to a Community Service Participant.

### **Work Activities**

Arkansas defines its work activities in accordance with federal guidelines, as submitted in the State's approved Work Verification Plan.

### **Employment**

This activity is for participants who enter employment but are not yet self-sufficient. Employed participants may be involved in additional activities directed at increasing their earning potential. To the extent possible, program services for participants will be arranged so as not to conflict with the participant's employment.

Employment may be either unsubsidized or subsidized.

#### **Unsubsidized Employment**

Unsubsidized employment is supervised full-time or part-time employment in the public or private sector with wages paid by the employer that are not supplemented by TANF or any other public program. The determination of whether or not employment is subsidized depends on whether the employer, rather than the participant, receives a direct subsidy. Self-employment and College Work Study are considered unsubsidized employment in Arkansas.

### Subsidized Employment

Subsidized private sector employment is supervised employment in the private sector for which the employer receives a subsidy from TANF or other public funds to offset some or all of the wages and costs of employing a participant for an established trial period. It is agreed that at the end of the trial period, not to exceed six months, the subsidized employment may be in either the private sector or public sector. Such employment is directly supplemented by federal or state funds.

Subsidized public sector employment is defined as supervised employment in the public sector for which the employer receives a subsidy from TANF or other public funds to offset some or all of the wages and costs of employing a participant for an established trial period. It is agreed that at the end of the trial period, not to exceed six months, the employer is expected to retain the participant as a regular employee without receiving a subsidy.

In subsidized employment, both Private and Public, the participant must receive the same wages, benefits, and working conditions as other employees who are performing comparable work. The employer must meet or exceed Federal Minimum Wage requirements.

### **Education Directly Related to Employment**

This activity is an educational program that is related to a specific occupation, job, or job offer. This includes courses designed to provide the knowledge and skills for specific occupations or work settings and includes English for Speakers of Other Languages and Basic Education. When it is a prerequisite for employment by an employer, this activity may include education leading to a GED or a high school equivalency diploma. Supervised time spent in monitored study sessions is included in the definition.

### **Career and Technical Education**

Career and Technical Education (not to exceed 12 months with respect to any individual) is organized educational programs that are directly related to the preparation of individuals for employment in current or emerging occupations requiring training.

Career and Technical Education must be provided by education or training organizations such as: vocational-technical schools, community colleges, postsecondary institutions, proprietary schools, non-profit organizations, and secondary schools that offer vocational education.

### **Job Skills Training**

Job skills training is training or education for job skills required by an employer to provide an individual with the ability to obtain employment or to advance or adapt to the changing demands of the workplace.

Job skills training includes customized training that meets the needs of a specific employer, general training that prepares an individual for employment, and vocational education training that continues after the twelve-month time limit, if it fits in the definition of this activity.

### **Job Search and Job Readiness**

Job search and job readiness is assistance in seeking or obtaining employment or the preparation for seeking or obtaining employment. Job search activities include making contact with potential employers, applying for vacancies, and interviewing for jobs. Job readiness

activities include classes or workshops where participants can improve their employability skills. Participants learn techniques such as resume writing, workplace etiquette, interviewing, and life skills.

Job readiness activities also include substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment (including mental health treatment needed to address domestic violence), or rehabilitation activities for those who are otherwise employable.

Such treatment or therapy must be determined to be necessary and certified by a qualified medical or mental health professional or treatment provider.

### **On-the-Job Training**

On-the-job training (OJT) is training in the public or private sector that is given to a paid employee while he or she is engaged in productive work and that provides knowledge and skills essential to the full and adequate performance of the job. On-the-job training differs from subsidized employment in that the OJT employer receives a subsidy to help with costs associated with training. "Supported work" for individuals with disabilities is considered OJT if onsite training is included.

### **Community Service**

Community service is a structured program with activities designed to improve the employability of participants not otherwise able to obtain employment, and must be supervised on an ongoing basis no less frequently than daily.

Participation in Community Service enables participants with limited or no experience to learn valuable work habits and socialization skills that employers require of their workers.

Community Service activities are performed with a government entity (city, county or state), or community and charitable organizations.

### **Work Experience**

Work Experience is supervised unpaid work in a public-sector or private-sector setting that allows participants to develop employment/job skills and improve work habits through time-limited unsalaried job training at a clearly defined, well-supervised training site. The Work Experience definition includes unpaid internships. Unpaid internships are short-term and usually part-time worksite learning assignments with a public or private organization that enhances the participant's employability through skill building. The participant does not receive a wage.

### **Attendance at Secondary School**

As a condition of eligibility for TANF cash assistance, a teen parent who does not have a high school diploma or a GED will participate in this activity.

This activity is defined as high school attendance or participation in a GED preparation class.

### **Providing Childcare Services to a Community Service Participant**

This is a defined, structured activity whereby a participant provides unpaid childcare to enable another TANF participant to participate in a community service program. This activity does not include providing childcare to a TANF participant participating in any activity other than community service nor allows one parent in a two-parent family provide childcare for his or her own child while the other parent participates in community service.

D. TAKE SUCH REASONABLE STEPS AS THE STATE DEEMS NECESSARY TO RESTRICT THE USE AND DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION ABOUT INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES RECEIVING



ASSISTANCE UNDER THE PROGRAM ATTRIBUTABLE TO FUNDS PROVIDED BY THE FEDERAL  
GOVERNMENT (SECTION 402(A)(1)(A)(IV) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT)

Arkansas restricts the disclosure of information about individuals and families receiving assistance under the program. It is unlawful, except for purposes directly connected with the administration of the TANF program, for any person or persons to solicit, disclose, receive, make use of, or to authorize, knowingly permit, participate in, or acquiesce in the use of, any list of names, or any information concerning persons applying for or receiving such assistance. This includes information from the records, papers, files or communications of the state or local or county office; or information acquired in the course of the performance of official duties.

Information concerning an applicant, recipient, or other persons known to the Division will not be made available without the written consent of the applicant, recipient, or other persons known to the Division except to authorized employees of the Division of Workforce Services and the Department of Human Services and other state or federally funded agencies for certain purposes directly connected to the implementation of the program or other federally funded programs based on need.

E. ESTABLISH GOALS AND TAKE ACTION TO PREVENT AND REDUCE OUT-OF-WEDLOCK  
PREGNANCIES, WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON TEENAGE PREGNANCIES (SECTION  
402(A)(1)(A)(V) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT)

Arkansas continues to operate programs using state and federal funds to prevent or reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies, including abstinence education.

The Arkansas State Legislature implemented the TANF-funded Community Investment Initiatives which includes a component designed to improve outcomes for youth. These outcomes include reducing risky behaviors such as sexual activities, drug use, and criminal behavior.

### **Plan to Reduce Unwed Births and Teenage Pregnancy**

#### **Introduction**

Unmarried birth prevention should be viewed as a process, not a program, involving multiple strategies and multiple agencies in a sustained effort. The rise in unwed births is an urgent social problem that resists easy solutions. Arkansas' approach is multifaceted with four major components:

- - o Abstinence programs using funding in the welfare reform act
  - o Improved access to family planning services statewide
  - o Community-based efforts in targeted counties
  - o Two state level steering committees to coordinate the efforts

#### **Abstinence Programs**

Arkansas Act 1705 required the establishment of the Community Investment Initiative to provide services to children, adults, families, and parents.

The TANF-funded Community Investment Initiative includes a component designed to improve outcomes for youth. These outcomes include reducing risky behaviors such as sexual activities, drug use, and criminal behavior.

Partnerships are formalized with community and faith-based organizations through the award of TANF-funded contracts on an annual basis.

These community partnerships recognize the reduction of out-of-wedlock births as a priority and have developed programs that include strategies to enhance educational attainment, reduce teenage pregnancies, and reduce the incidence of criminal behaviors by participating youth.

Services offered by providers meet TANF Goal 3, to prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies by providing prevention and intervention programs for students who live in poor communities and/or show evidence of academic underperformance, dropping out, or engaging in negative behaviors that can lead to dependency, out-of-wedlock births, or imprisonment.

### **Improved Access to Family Planning Services**

Arkansas Act 1705 required the establishment of the Community Investment Initiative to provide services to children, adults, families, and parents.

The TANF-funded Community Investment Initiative includes components designed to improve parenting and family functioning through services and support to parents, children, and to families. Additionally, this initiative addresses improving marriage and relationship skills among youth and engaged and married couples.

Partnerships are formalized with community and faith-based organizations through the award of TANF-funded contracts on an annual basis.

Services offered by providers meet TANF Goal 4, to encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

These community partnerships recognize the importance of both family planning as well as enhanced family functioning.

### **Education and Training on Rape Prevention**

The Arkansas Commission on Child Abuse, Rape, and Domestic Violence (ACCARDV) of the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) and the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) are authorized to allocate and administer funds for Sexual Violence Prevention and Education through a cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

These funds strengthen sexual violence prevention and education efforts through the provision of grants to community-based organizations to provide comprehensive sexual violence primary prevention aimed at preventing the initial occurrence of sexual violence.

Programs funded across the State solicit the assistance of community organizations to provide sexual violence prevention and education to youth, at-risk youth, and adults. These programs are designed to change attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that allow sexual violence to occur.

Educational programs are available to specific populations, including males, Hispanics, African Americans, and persons with disabilities.

F. CONDUCT A PROGRAM DESIGNED TO REACH STATE AND LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS, THE EDUCATION SYSTEM, AND RELEVANT COUNSELING SERVICES, THAT PROVIDES EDUCATION AND TRAINING ON THE PROBLEM OF STATUTORY RAPE SO THAT TEENAGE PREGNANCY PREVENTION PROGRAMS MAY BE EXPANDED TO INCLUDE MEN (SECTION 402(A)(1)(A)(VI) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT)

The state uses TANF funds for emergency assistance activities that were previously authorized as of September 30, 1995 under the AFDC Emergency Assistance State Plan.

The Arkansas Department of Human Services, Division of Children and Family Services, in collaboration with the Arkansas State Police, provide services to families to alleviate emergency situations, including allegations of child mistreatment, neglect, and statutory rape.

For families who are experiencing an emergency situation, the Division provides a maltreatment assessment of the family needs.

### **Statutory Rape Prevention and Education**

In Arkansas, a person commits rape if he or she engages in Sexual Intercourse or Deviate Sexual activity with another person:

- By forcible compulsion; or
- Who is incapable of consent because he or she is physically helpless, mentally defective, or mentally incapacitated; or
- Who is less than 14 years of age; or actor is more than 3 years older than victim who is less than 18 years of age, and the actor is the:
  1. Victim's guardian
  2. Uncle, aunt, grandparent, step-grandparent, grandparent by adoption
  3. Brother, sister or the whole or half-blood or by adoption
  4. Nephew, niece or first cousin

The Arkansas Commission on Child Abuse, Rape, and Domestic Violence serves as the lead entity in administering an educational and training effort to increase the awareness of sexual abuse, including statutory rape, provided to state and local law enforcement, educational and related counseling service providers.

In 2007, the Arkansas Sexual Violence Primary Prevention Comprehensive Planning Team was formed by the Arkansas Commission on Child Abuse, Rape and Domestic Violence and the Arkansas Department of Health through the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and Injury Prevention's Rape Prevention and Education (RPE) Cooperative Agreement. The planning team conducted a comprehensive assessment of sexual violence prevention efforts in the state to articulate a vision and broad goals for Rape Prevention in Arkansas.

Additionally, each year the Centers for Disease Control provides funds to the state for Rape Prevention Activities through which the Commission awards contracts to local entities across the state to provide sexual violence, including statutory rape, training.

The Department of Human Services and Arkansas State Police maintain a contractual agreement that jointly maintains the Family Protection Unit, now known as the Crimes Against Children Division (CACD). The CACD is composed of two sections: 1) the Child Abuse Hotline, and 2) specially-trained civilian and law enforcement officials who assess child maltreatment reports. Again, these child maltreatment assessments include sexual abuse (statutory rape) reports. The CADC maintains an around-the-clock statewide intake process (Child Abuse Hotline) for accepting reports of alleged child maltreatment.

Arkansas conducts programs addressing the problem of statutory rape for law enforcement officers, the education system, and relevant counseling organizations through comprehensive prevention strategies using a public health approach. This includes:

- - Delivering school-based primary prevention programs that educate youth on healthy relationships;

- o Training students from middle school to college to intervene when they see someone engaging in unhealthy behaviors;
- o Working with communities to implement social norms approaches to promote safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments;
- o Strengthening the ability of the state and communities to plan, implement, and evaluate sexual violence prevention efforts.

### **State Steering Committees**

Separate Steering Committees are currently in place to provide input and direct the State's Abstinence and Unwed Birth Prevention initiatives.

The Governor's Abstinence Education Steering Committee, composed of ten members appointed by the Governor, was established by Executive Order of the Governor. This committee provides input regarding abstinence education programs on a statewide basis.

The Unwed Birth Prevention Steering Committee is a legislatively appointed committee of twenty members. This committee provides oversight and makes recommendations regarding the Unwed Birth Prevention Program.

G. IMPLEMENT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES AS NECESSARY TO PREVENT ACCESS TO ASSISTANCE PROVIDED UNDER THE STATE PROGRAM FUNDED UNDER THIS PART THROUGH ANY ELECTRONIC FUND TRANSACTION IN AN AUTOMATED TELLER MACHINE OR POINT-OF-SALE DEVICE LOCATED IN A PLACE DESCRIBED IN SECTION 408(A)(12), INCLUDING A PLAN TO ENSURE THAT RECIPIENTS OF THE ASSISTANCE HAVE ADEQUATE ACCESS TO THEIR CASH ASSISTANCE (SECTION 402(A)(1)(A)(VII) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT)

TANF Program participants have access to their monthly cash assistance benefits through electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards. Policies and procedures are in place to ensure that TANF benefits are only used by recipients to purchase goods and services essential or necessary for the welfare of their families.

The state's EBT Restrictions Plan, approved by the Administration for Children and Families, details the specific policies and procedures related to in place to ensure that monthly cash assistance benefits are both accessible and only used for eligible products and services.

### **Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) Transactions**

The Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012 (Pub. L. 112-96) Section 4004 of the Act requires States (but does not require Tribes) to prevent the use of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) assistance in electronic benefit transfer (EBT) transactions at specified locations. In particular, the law requires States receiving TANF grants "to maintain policies and practices as necessary to prevent assistance provided under the State program funded under this part from being used in any electronic benefit transfer transaction in any liquor store; any casino, gambling casino, or gaming establishment; or any retail establishment which provides adult-oriented entertainment in which performers disrobe or perform in an unclothed state for entertainment."

The law defines an electronic benefit transfer transaction as "the use of a credit or debit card service, automated teller machine (ATM), point-of-sale (POS) terminal, or access to an online system for the withdrawal of funds or the processing of a payment for merchandise or a service."

The State Plan also must include an explanation of how the State plans to ensure that (1) recipients of the assistance have adequate access to their cash assistance, and (2) recipients of

assistance have access to using or withdrawing assistance with minimal fees or charges, including an opportunity to access assistance with no fee or charges, and are provided information on applicable fees and surcharges that apply to electronic fund transactions involving the assistance, and that such information is made publicly available.

### **Implementation Steps**

The Division of Workforce Services implemented the following steps to restrict the use of TANF EBT cards at the specified establishments. These steps include:

#### **Step One - Establishment Identification:**

- - Documentation of those establishments identified as “liquor stores” by requesting a list of licensed establishments from the Arkansas Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) Enforcement Division.
  - Documentation of those establishments identified as “gaming establishments” by requesting a list of licensed establishments from the Arkansas Racing Commission.
  - Documentation of those establishments identified as “adult entertainment establishments” by requesting a list of licensed “private clubs with adult entertainment” establishments from the Arkansas Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) Enforcement Division.

It must be noted that “casinos” are legally allowed to operate in the following counties in the State of Arkansas: Crittenden, Garland, Jefferson, and Pope. Two establishments, Southland Greyhound Park and Oaklawn Racing and Gaming, are statutorily allowed to have gaming on their premises.

Additionally, casinos are located in the adjoining states of Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Mississippi. These casinos have been identified and transactions in these establishments will be monitored.

#### **Step Two - Federal Restrictions - Merchant Notification:**

- - Sent a letter to the Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) Enforcement Division soliciting their assistance in informing establishments of the federal restrictions regarding the use of TANF EBT cards in their locations.

#### **Step Three - Federal Restrictions - Participant Notification:**

- - Sent a letter to all current TANF participants advising them of the federal restrictions regarding the use of TANF EBT cards in these locations.
  - Incorporated information regarding the federal restrictions on the use of TANF EBT cards in the initial assessment process for all new TANF participants. Additionally, participants were required to sign an acknowledgement that they were made aware of the EBT restrictions as well as the consequences for utilizing their EBT cards at restricted establishments.

#### **Step Four - Federal Restrictions - Staff Notification:**

-

- Developed and delivered training for DWS TANF staff regarding the Federal Restrictions.

#### Step Five - Development of Program Policies

- Developed TANF Program policies that addressed the following:
- Penalties for clients who uses or accesses TANF cash benefits in an EBT transaction in a prohibited location.
- Penalties for merchants/establishments that allow prohibited EBT transactions.
- Process by which agency staff that becomes aware of prohibited EBT transactions to report such transactions.

#### Step Six - Development of EBT Transactions Monitoring

- - Developed and deployed EBT Transactions monitoring activities will continue within the existing DWS TANF Unit activities.

### **Ensuring Reasonable Access to TANF EBT**

The implications for restricting TANF benefit access at inappropriate locations is a reduction in the number of cash access locations available to EBT cash recipients. This is especially true in rural locations that have very few alternatives for cash access.

While use of or access to TANF benefits in an EBT transaction is limited as described above, the Division is also required by federal law to ensure TANF participants have adequate access to their cash benefits. “Adequate access” to TANF benefits is determined on a case-by-case basis and may vary depending on individual participant strengths and barriers, including access to transportation.

When a TANF client expresses concern with access to their cash benefits or a worker determines a TANF participant does not have adequate access to benefits, the Division will take reasonable steps to ensure adequate access for the participant. Reasonable steps do not include granting EBT withdrawals at one of the prohibited establishments.

### **EBT Card Access Fees and Charges**

Currently, TANF participants may use an ATM two times per month for free. Some ATMs and retailer POS terminals may surcharge their accounts. A surcharge is different from a transaction fee and may or may not be charged by a bank or retailer each time the TANF participant utilizes their card to access their cash benefits. There will be a warning about this fee. TANF participants do not have to pay the fee if they choose not to get their cash at locations where the fee is charged.

Some ATMs and most retailer POS terminals do not surcharge. TANF participants are encouraged to find a location that does not surcharge.

After the second cash withdrawal, TANF participants are charged a transaction fee. If they do not have a sufficient remaining balance in their account to pay this fee, the transaction will be denied.

H. ENSURE THAT RECIPIENTS OF ASSISTANCE PROVIDED UNDER THE STATE PROGRAM FUNDED UNDER THIS PART HAVE THE ABILITY TO USE OR WITHDRAW ASSISTANCE WITH MINIMAL FEES OR CHARGES, INCLUDING AN OPPORTUNITY TO ACCESS ASSISTANCE WITH NO FEE OR CHARGES, AND ARE PROVIDED INFORMATION ON APPLICABLE FEES AND SURCHARGES THAT APPLY TO ELECTRONIC FUND TRANSACTIONS INVOLVING THE

ASSISTANCE, AND THAT SUCH INFORMATION IS MADE PUBLICLY AVAILABLE (SECTION 402(A)(1)(A)(VIII) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT)

When benefits are first issued, Arkansas provides clients information about the fees and surcharges that stores may charge clients when using the EBT card to get cash from their TANF benefit accounts. Clients receive an informational brochure with the initial EBT card disbursement.

The brochure explains that clients receive two free ATM transactions per calendar month. For the third and subsequent TANF cash withdrawal in a calendar month, a retailer has the option to charge recipients a fee of \$0.65 per transaction. Retailers are not permitted to charge a TANF recipient any other fees or surcharges in connection with the client's use of their TANF benefit account.

Additionally, the EBT Customer Service telephone number is provided to clients so they can receive information related to lost or stolen cards, PIN retrieval, or report potential erroneous charges or fees.

I. INDICATE WHETHER IT INTENDS TO TREAT FAMILIES MOVING FROM ANOTHER STATE DIFFERENTLY FROM OTHER FAMILIES UNDER THE PROGRAM, AND IF SO HOW (SECTION 402(A)(1)(B)(I) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT)

Arkansas does not treat families moving into the state differently than other families under the program.

**Treatment of New State Residents**

The same benefits will be available to new residents of Arkansas as are available to all other Arkansas residents.

J. INDICATE WHETHER IT INTENDS TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE TO NON-CITIZENS, AND IF SO INCLUDE AN OVERVIEW OF THE ASSISTANCE (SECTION 402(A)(1)(B)(II) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT)

Arkansas provides assistance under the TANF Program to individuals who are not citizens of the United States in the same manner and based upon the same eligibility criteria as US citizens, if the non-citizen meets the definition of "qualified alien". These qualified aliens are persons who entered the United States before August 22, 1996, qualified aliens who entered the United States on or after August 22, 1996 who are excepted from the five-year bar, or aliens who entered the United States on or after August 22, 1996 and have been in "qualified alien" status for at least five (5) years.

K. SET FORTH OBJECTIVE CRITERIA FOR THE DELIVERY OF BENEFITS AND THE DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY AND FOR FAIR AND EQUITABLE TREATMENT, INCLUDING AN EXPLANATION OF HOW IT WILL PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR RECIPIENTS WHO HAVE BEEN ADVERSELY AFFECTED TO BE HEARD IN A STATE ADMINISTRATIVE OR APPEAL PROCESS (SECTION 402(A)(1)(B)(III) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT)

Arkansas determines eligibility and delivers benefits under the TANF Program in accordance with federal requirements.

A ten-day advance notice of action is sent to recipients prior to the adverse action being taken. The recipient is allowed to appeal the adverse action if he or she responds within the 30 day time period. Continuation of benefits will be granted provided the appeal was received within ten days from the date of the notice.

The Department of Human Services administers and conducts hearings in accordance with the Arkansas Administrative Procedures Act 25-15-201 et seq.

## **BENEFITS**

The TEA program provides various services and assistance to low-income families. TEA benefits may include monthly cash assistance; employment and supportive services for cash assistance recipients and Extended Support Services for certain former cash assistance recipients. In some situations, a family may be determined eligible for a diversion payment instead of regular monthly TEA assistance.

The State also has the flexibility to authorize the use of TANF funds to provide assistance or services to at-risk children or families through programs deemed consistent with the intent of federal and/or state law.

### **Cash Assistance**

#### **Monthly Cash Assistance Payment Amount**

The following amounts by family size are the monthly cash assistance maximums an otherwise eligible TEA family may be paid:

<b>Family Size</b>	<b>Maximum Grant</b>
1	\$81
2	\$162
3	\$204
4	\$247
5	\$286
6	\$331
7	\$373
8	\$415
9 or more	\$457

#### **Cash Assistance Payment Calculation**

The above monthly amounts are not reduced by monthly countable income until a specified income trigger is achieved. When the family's monthly gross earned income plus unearned income equals the monthly equivalent of 20 hours per week of work at the September 1997 minimum wage, then the above maximum payment for the family size is reduced by 50%. Based on the September 1997 minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour, this income trigger is \$446.

### **Family Cap**

The cash assistance amount is not increased due to the addition of a newborn to the family. Newborn is defined as a child born while the mother is receiving TEA benefits, either for other children of her own or as a minor child herself, or who is born within nine months of the month such assistance was terminated to the mother unless the mother's case has been closed continuously for at least six (6) months.

### **Penalties for Program Non-Compliance**

A family's cash assistance will be reduced when the adult caretaker or a minor parent is found to be in non-compliance with the child support cooperation requirement, the work activity requirements, and/or other requirements of the Personal Responsibility Agreement.



### **Non-Cooperation with the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE)**

When the OCSE determines that an adult caretaker or a minor parent whose cooperation is required in order to establish paternity or to obtain child support payments has failed to cooperate in those activities and so notifies the DHS county office, the non-compliance penalty will be imposed,

The non-compliance penalty is a 25% reduction of the full cash assistance payment.

The penalty may be lifted at any time upon compliance with child support enforcement requirements.

### **Non-Compliance with the Work Activity Requirements**

When it is determined that a person who is required to participate in work activities has failed to do so without good cause, a sanction will be imposed.

### **Non-Compliance with Other Requirements of the PRA**

When it is determined that a person who has signed a Personal Responsibility Agreement has failed to comply with any other activity required by the PRA (such as ensuring the children receive immunizations), the appropriate non-compliance penalty will be imposed. The penalty may be lifted at any time upon the receipt of proof that the particular requirement has been met

### **Supportive Services**

Appropriate supportive services will be available to TEA family members. Such services include, but are not limited to, case management services, child care assistance, medical coverage for all Medicaid eligible family members, transportation or reimbursement for transportation costs, purchases (or reimbursements) for work related expenses, relocation assistance on a limited basis, referrals to appropriate agencies or organizations for counseling, treatment, etc., and other services deemed necessary by the DWS Workforce Specialist for successful participation by the participant.

Supportive services will be available to TEA applicants whose TEA cash assistance case previously closed due to non-compliance with a work activity requirement. Such services include, but are not limited to child care and transportation and other services as deemed necessary by the DWS Workforce Specialist for successful compliance prior to approval of the TEA application.

The Transitional Employment Assistance Program allows for funding for the Arkansas Better Chance for School Success Program to be utilized in Arkansas' TANF program. The expenditures are utilized in accordance with the regulations provided for under the Arkansas Better Chance program.

### **Individual Development Accounts (IDA)**

TEA recipients may establish Individual Development Accounts (IDA) for the purpose of accumulating savings, up to certain maximums specified in the State policy and procedures manual, for education for themselves or their children, small business development, home ownership, or transportation needs. Such funds will not be considered an available asset in determining the family's TEA eligibility for as long as the family receives TEA.

TEA recipients who secure employment while participating in this project will receive matching fund donations to their IDAs. Recipients who are not employed will not receive matching funds.

### **Extended Support Service**

For those families who become ineligible for continued TEA benefits due to employment, or who choose to no longer receive cash assistance due to employment, or who reach a state or

federal time limit and the adult is employed, extended support services will be available as provided for by federal and state law.

Such families are deemed financially eligible for Extended Support services if they were eligible for TANF cash assistance in the month prior to case closure due to employment. Such services will include one year of extended Medicaid coverage for those who meet the eligibility criteria under federal law for such coverage and one year of extended child care assistance at no cost with an additional year of child care assistance based on the current Division of Child Care fee scale.

### **Extended Support Services — Employment Bonus**

For those families who become ineligible for continued TEA cash assistance benefits due to employment, or who choose to no longer receive cash assistance due to employment, or who reach the state or federal time limit and the adult is employed, an Employment Bonus cash payment will be made to such family provided a bonus payment has not already been made to the family in the preceding twelve (12) months. The purpose of such payment is to help the employed adult meet employment related expenses, until he or she has received a full month's earnings. It is expected that this one-time bonus payment will help enable the adult to maintain his or her employment.

The Employment Bonus will not count toward the adult's maximum twenty-four month limit.

### **Extended Support Services - Transportation Bonus**

For those families who become ineligible for continued TEA cash assistance benefits due to employment, or who choose to no longer receive cash assistance due to employment, or who reach the state or federal time limit and the adult is employed, one month of Extended Support Transportation assistance will be made to the family. The payment will assist the family in meeting transportation costs in the first month following termination of TEA cash assistance.

The Extended Support Transportation payment will not count toward the adult's maximum twenty-four month limit.

### **Extended Support Services - Job Retention**

For those families who become ineligible for continued TEA cash assistance benefits due to employment, cash payments for the purpose of enabling the adult to retain his or her job may be made during the twelve-month period following the closure due to employment.

The Extended Support Job Retention payments will not count toward the adult's maximum twenty-four month limit.

### **Extended Case Management Services**

Extended Case Management Services are provided to an individual whose case closes due to employment for up to twelve months following case closure. Periodic contacts are made with the employed person to ensure that necessary support services are being received and to make appropriate referrals if necessary.

### **Diversion Payment**

A diversion payment may be provided to an otherwise eligible TEA family in certain specified circumstances so that the family does not come on to regular TEA cash assistance. To qualify for diversion, the adult caretaker must meet the following conditions:

1. Have a minor child living in the home;
2. Be currently employed but having a problem that jeopardizes the employment; or

3. Be promised a job but needs help in order to accept the job (e.g., needs car repairs, uniforms, etc.)
4. Has never received a diversion payment;
5. Agree to forego any TEA benefits for a period of 100 days.

The diversion payment will be the actual cost of what it would take to resolve the problem up to a maximum equal to three (3) months of what the monthly TEA cash assistance would have been for the family size. Under Arkansas State Law, a diversion payment is considered a loan. If not repaid, it will count toward the adult's maximum time limit of twenty-four (24) months.

L. INDICATE WHETHER THE STATE INTENDS TO ASSIST INDIVIDUALS TO TRAIN FOR, SEEK, AND MAINTAIN EMPLOYMENT (SECTION 402(A)(1)(B)(V) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT)—

1. PROVIDING DIRECT CARE IN A LONG-TERM CARE FACILITY (AS SUCH TERMS ARE DEFINED UNDER SECTION 1397J OF THIS TITLE); OR
2. IN OTHER OCCUPATIONS RELATED TO ELDER CARE, HIGH-DEMAND OCCUPATIONS, OR OCCUPATIONS EXPECTED TO EXPERIENCE LABOR SHORTAGES AS, DETERMINED APPROPRIATE BY THE STATE FOR WHICH THE STATE IDENTIFIES AN UNMET NEED FOR SERVICE PERSONNEL, AND, IF SO, SHALL INCLUDE AN OVERVIEW OF SUCH ASSISTANCE.

The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services works collaboratively with the State's twenty-five (25) two-year colleges and technical institutions to provide training to low-income recipients in medical occupations to address the low workforce demand.

Prior to the provision of this training, a determination is made regarding whether or not these occupations are determined as "high-demand" in the geographical area by the Division's Labor Market Information Unit. Attracting and training individuals in elder care will ensure a pool of employees with the skill set necessary to provide quality care.

M. PROVIDE FOR ALL MOE-FUNDED SERVICES THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION: THE NAME OF THE PROGRAM BENEFIT OR SERVICE, AND THE FINANCIAL ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA THAT FAMILIES MUST MEET IN ORDER TO RECEIVE THAT BENEFIT OR SERVICE. IN ADDITION, FOR TANF MOE-FUNDED SERVICES (CO-MINGLED OR SEGREGATED MOE) DESCRIBE THE PROGRAM BENEFIT PROVIDED TO ELIGIBLE FAMILIES (SSP SERVICES DO NOT HAVE TO INCLUDE A DESCRIPTION BUT THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES ENCOURAGES IT) (§263.2(B)(3) & §263.2(C) PREAMBLE PAGES 17826-7)

Arkansas provides funding for the Arkansas Better Chance for School Success Program that is utilized in Arkansas's TANF program for MOE purposes. The expenditures are utilized in accordance with the regulations provided for under the Arkansas Better Chance program.

The Arkansas Better Chance Program is a school readiness program for children ages 3-5 at state licensed child care centers and at schools governed by local health and safety laws for families with gross income not exceeding 200% of the FPL.

TANF MOE funds are not used to fund any other services.

#### TANF CERTIFICATIONS

The State Plan must include	Include
1. Operate a child support enforcement program under the State Plan approved under part D. (section 402(a)(2) of the Social Security Act);	Yes
2. Operate a foster care and adoption assistance	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
program under the State Plan approved under part E, and that the State will take such actions as are necessary to ensure that children receiving assistance under such part are eligible for medical assistance under the State Plan under title XIX. (section 402(a)(3) of the Social Security Act);	
3. Specify which State agency or agencies will administer and supervise the program referred to in paragraph (1) for the fiscal year, which shall include assurances that local governments and private sector organizations (section 402(a)(4) of the Social Security Act)—	
3. (A) have been consulted regarding the plan and design of welfare services in the State so that services are provided in a manner appropriate to local populations; and	Yes
3. (B) have had at least 45 days to submit comments on the plan and the design of such services;	Yes
4. Provide each member of an Indian tribe, who is domiciled in the State and is not eligible for assistance under a tribal family assistance plan approved under section 412, with equitable access to assistance under the State program funded under this part attributable to funds provided by the Federal Government. (section 402(a)(5) of the Social Security Act);	Yes
5. Establish and enforce standards and procedures to ensure against program fraud and abuse, including standards and procedures concerning nepotism, conflicts of interest among individuals responsible for the administration and supervision of the State program, kickbacks, and the use of political patronage. (section 402(a)(6) of the Social Security Act);	Yes
6. (optional) Establish and Enforcing standards and procedures to (section 402(a)(7) of the Social Security Act).—	
6.i. screen and identify individuals receiving assistance under this part with a history of domestic violence while maintaining the confidentiality of such individuals;	Yes
6.ii. refer such individuals to counseling and supportive services; and	Yes
6.iii. waive, pursuant to a determination of good cause, other program requirements such as time	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
limits (for so long as necessary) for individuals receiving assistance, residency requirements, child support cooperation requirements, and family cap provisions, in cases where compliance with such requirements would make it more difficult for individuals receiving assistance under this part to escape domestic violence or unfairly penalize such individuals who are or have been victimized by such violence, or individuals who are at risk of further domestic violence.	

**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;

The SNAP Act of 1977, as mandated by the Food and Security Act of 1985, the Hunger Act of 1988, the Mickey Leland Domestic Hunger Relief Act of 1990, The Personal Responsibility and Reconciliation Act of 1996, The Balanced Budget Act of 1997, the Farm and Rural Investment Act of 2002 and the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR 7.273) requires states to operate a SNAP Employment and Training Program. The Arkansas Department of Human Services is the agency responsible for the administration of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Arkansas' E&T Program will serve all 75 counties, and 100% of the State's work registrants including ABAWDs. The SNAP E&T Program is designed to assist at-risk, childless, able-bodied adults ages 18 through 49 and eligible volunteers to achieve sustainable wages. SNAP recipients who volunteer must not be TEA recipients or receiving unemployment benefits. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, providers will still offer in-person training that is consistent with social distancing guidelines, however, virtual options are available.

Arkansas' SNAP Employment and Training program is administered at the state level and is comprised of the following positions:

- SNAP Administrator – oversees the overall functions and development of the program, ensures that the SA complies with all federal regulations and state policies.

- E&T Program Manager – responsible for the daily functions of the unit.
- Program Analyst – Develops training for SNAP E&T providers, provides technical assistance to field staff and providers
- E&T Policy and Development Coordinator – responsible for auditing and processing monthly invoices for the E&T program
- Administrative Assistant – Clerical duties as assigned and maintaining reimbursement database.

Arkansas' E&T program offers several components such as but not limited to Supervised Job Search, Work Experience, Occupational Training as well as comprehensive training with providers that encourages, advises, and instructs what is needed to maintain a compliant employment and training program.

The SA has seven E&T providers that help to provide coverage to the entire state. FY22 E&T providers are:

- Adult Education
- Canopy
- Arkansas Employment Career Center (AECC)
- Workforce Development
- Shorter College
- Our House
- Arkansas Northeastern College

All E&T providers administer the program by completing assessments, appropriate component selections and overall case management. The State Agency has developed policy that describes the employment and training process including the referral process, reimbursements, and eligibility worker responsibilities. <https://humanservices.arkansas.gov/wp-content/uploads/Supplemental-Nutrition-Assistance-Program-Policy-Manual.pdf> SNAP Section 3600

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;

During the applicant interview, the Eligibility Worker will explore the participant's circumstances to identify whether the individual is appropriate for the Employment & Training (E&T) Program. A checklist will be used to ensure that the individual will be screened for possible exemptions prior to being referred to the Employment and Training (E&T) program. Based on the presented barriers and desires of the client, the EW will match the participant with an applicable E&T Provider based on location, services needed, and services provided, etc. The individuals are given the contact information for the applicable E&T provider. In the event the provider encounters an individual that is a potential E&T candidate, the E&T provider will use the States' MIS system; SNAP Works, to determine if they are an active SNAP recipient.

If the potential candidate is a SNAP recipient, they are eligible to participate in the program and the provider can make an immediate referral electronically through SNAP Works. The provider must have the individual's social security number to verify their SNAP participation status. Because the SNAP participant has expressed an interest with a particular provider, The State Agency will review the client to ensure they are not on TEA or receiving unemployment. The SA will also review the eligibility system to review work registration status and previous case notes and make necessary updates if applicable. The eligibility worker will update the case notes in the eligibility system and complete the task in SNAP Works. Once the State Agency has determined that the individual is eligible and appropriate for the program, the provider will complete the online assessment to determine strength and skills. This assessment will determine which components are necessary and appropriate for the individual. If the individual is not a SNAP participant, they may complete an online application by logging into <https://access.arkansas.gov>. Once the individual determined eligible for SNAP, they can be referred through SNAP Works by the eligibility worker.

All E&T providers will provide substantial case management services by completing an assessment that includes identifying participation barriers, barrier reduction assistance, identifying the participant's education level, work history review, completing a career assessment, establishing individualized employment plans, assigning components, determining long and short-term goals, progress monitoring, guidance, and success coaching.

All provider/client interactions are documented via the states' MIS. If a participant expresses needs outside of the providers scope of work, that participant will be referred to an appropriate community resource. This referral to an outside resource is also communicated to the State Agency via the MIS. The State Agency will determine if the client's E&T participation should be reassessed based on the services needed or rendered by the outside source (substance abuse treatment, battered women' shelter, food pantry, etc.). The provider will be expected, at minimum, to follow-up with the client on a monthly basis and address any changes or progress related to those outside referrals.

As the providers complete their assessments with the participants, it is encouraged to address the client's needs and not just barriers to the E&T program. The State Agency provides a resource guide to E&T providers that will assist them in finding resources available in their area and provides annual trainings that will include best practices, new regulations, and case management guidance in providing a holistic approach to case management.

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;

#### OPERATING BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2022

Name of Partner/Contract	Total Contract Amount/Admin	Total Participant Reimbursements	Total Cost	% of Budget
Arkansas Adult Education Section of Arkansas Division of Workforce Services 50/50 Provider	2,379,198	0	2,379,198	45%
Maximus Human Services	2,814,669	0	2,814,669	55%
Total	5,193,867	0		100%
	<b>AMOUNT</b>			
<b>DIRECT COSTS:</b>				
a) Salary/Wages	\$46,000			
1. E&T Program Manager - \$15,333.33				
2. Program Eligibility Analyst - \$15,333.33				
3. Program Coordinator - \$15,333.34				
b) Fringe Benefits	\$14,000			
c) Contractual Costs	There are 7 E & T providers. Each provider will service only E&T SNAP participants and provide direct E & T services.			
d) Non-Capital Equipment and Supplies	Short-Term Certificates - The cost of reimbursements for these types of			



Name of Partner/Contract	Total Contract Amount/Admin	Total Participant Reimbursements	Total Cost	% of Budget
	classes			
e) Materials	Marketing materials encourage enrollments into E&T for SNAP participants around the State.			
f) Travel	Planned staff trainings for State Agency E&T Staff. Included is paid virtual trainings, registration costs, travel expenses, etc.			
g) Building/Space	\$35,781			
h) Equipment & Other Capital Expenditures	Cost of equipment for county offices to service E&T participants around the state.			
<b>INDIRECT COSTS:</b>	0			
<b>Participant Reimbursement</b>	\$1,313,150.00			

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;

A checklist is used by the EW to ensure that the individual will be screened for possible exemptions prior to being referred to the Employment and Training Program. The EW will explain to the individual that they are to notify their local county office for further assistance if their circumstances change after being referred to the program. Upon approval or recertification for SNAP, the EW will orally and briefly explain the individuals work requirements (SNAP and ABAWD) and the E&T program.

A consolidated notice will be generated upon approval or recertification of SNAP that will detail the following:

- Applicable work requirements for each adult household member subject to the work requirements.
- SNAP Employment and Training program and the benefits of participating
- The reimbursement process (including the exemption process)

- Good Cause process
- Disqualification process for failing to abide by the work requirements

The State's E&T providers use the States' MIS system, SNAP Works, to determine if a SNAP participant is eligible for E&T. If an individual is a SNAP recipient, the provider can make an immediate referral electronically through SNAP Works. The provider must have the individual's social security number to verify their SNAP participation status. Once the State Agency has determined that the individual is a SNAP participant, SNAP Works will send a task to the EW to screen the participant for E&T. Once this has been determined, the provider will be alerted through SNAP Works and the client is scheduled for their assessment. The provider will complete the online assessment to determine strength and skills. This assessment will determine which components are appropriate for the individual.

#### 5. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POPULATION THE STATE AGENCY INTENDS TO PLACE IN E&T;

##### Estimated Participant Levels

Figure	Description	Total Estimated
A.	Anticipated number of work registrants in the State during the Federal FY (unduplicated count)	125,423
B.	Estimated number of Work Registrants Exempt from E & T	125,423
C.	Work Registrants Exempt from E&T(federally mandated)	125,423
D.	Percent of all work registrants exempt from E&T	100%
E.	Anticipated number of ABAWDs in the State during the FY.	12,317
F.	Anticipated number of ABAWDs in waived areas of the State.	0
G.	Anticipated number of Able Bodied Adults to be exempted under the State's ABAWDs discretionary exemption allowance	1,777
H.	Number of potential at-risk Able Bodied Adults expected in the State during the Federal FY.	10,540

#### 6. THE ESTIMATED NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS THE STATE AGENCY EXPECTS TO PLACE IN E&T;

##### Mandatory, Voluntary, and ABAWD Projected Participation

	0
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	0
B) How many total voluntary participants do you expect to serve in E&T during the FY?	782
C) How many ABAWDs do you expect to serve in E&T during the FY?	1,342

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;

The SA has seven E&T providers that help to provide coverage to the entire state.

FY22 E&T providers are:

- Adult Education
- Canopy
- Arkansas Employment Career Center (AECC)
- Workforce Development
- Shorter College
- Our House
- Arkansas Northeastern College

All E&T providers administer the program by completing assessments, appropriate component selections and overall case management. The State Agency has developed policy that describes the employment and training process including the referral process, reimbursements, and eligibility worker responsibilities. <https://humanservices.arkansas.gov/wp-content/uploads/Supplemental-Nutrition-Assistance-Program-Policy-Manual.pdf> SNAP Section 3600

8. THE METHOD THE STATE AGENCY USES TO COUNT ALL WORK REGISTRANTS AS OF THE FIRST DAY OF THE NEW FISCAL YEAR;

The EW determines the work registration code in the eligibility determination process, the code is keyed into the State Agency's eligibility system . On the second day of the fiscal year and each

month thereafter, work registrants will be captured using the social security number on file and will be matched with the social security numbers obtained on October 1. If a match is not found, the social security number is added to the file of unduplicated work registrant social security numbers and the count increased by one. Reports are generated monthly.

**9. THE METHOD THE STATE AGENCY USES TO REPORT WORK REGISTRANT INFORMATION ON THE QUARTERLY FORM FNS-583;**

Reports generated from the agency's automated SNAP records will provide information regarding persons registered for work, total number exempted and new work registrants for the month. This information will be used to obtain the initial count of work registrants and the number of Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents to be served in the E&T Program. This information is the basis for the data reported on line 3a of form FNS-583.

**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);**

Arkansas' method of identifying unduplicated work registrants from being erroneously counted within a Federal Fiscal Year is an automated data processing system that establishes files of unduplicated work registrants using the social security numbers or unique system assigned case numbers in the system call budget unit ID's as the source for identifying duplications. The system will report the number of unduplicated work registrants on October 1. And each month thereafter, new work registrants will be captured and provided through regular monthly reports from DCO System Reporting. Each of these totals are retained and added to the FNS 583 when the FNS 583 is submitted.

**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;**

Currently, county office workers are responsible for the following duties: intake, application processing, recertification, work registration, and referring non-ABAWD work registrants to the E&T Program if these individuals are interested in participating in the program. Each household member subject to the work registration requirements will be notified by the DHS worker that he or she has been work registered via the DCO-260. In E&T counties, the work registration notice advises each household member classified as an ABAWD that he or she will be referred to the E&T Program. The notice also advises other work registrants that they may volunteer to participate in the E&T Program in E&T counties. The E&T Provider will be able to use our online benefit check to determine if a SNAP client is eligible for E&T. If a client is receiving benefits it will show through benefit check. If the client comes back as a match in the universe of E&T participants then they can participate in the program and the provider can make an immediate referral electronically through the E&T MIS. The Provider must have the individual's social security number to verify their benefits through benefit check. If the individual is not a SNAP participant may also complete an online application by logging into <https://access.arkansas.gov/Voter.aspx>. Once the client is determined eligible for SNAP then

they can be referred through the E&T MIS by the County Office. Arkansas has chosen the option to reinstate the eligibility of ABAWDs who have used their 3 months but who can verify that they will meet the ABAWD work requirement within 30 days from the date of application. If a client applies for SNAP and states that they want to participate in E&T then the application will be approved and an immediate referral will be made through the E&T MIS. The provider will receive the referral the next day and contact the client to schedule an appointment. If the client does not comply with the appointment and assessment process within 30 days then the provider notifies the county office through the E&T MIS and also sends a message through the E&T MIS messenger system notifying them of the non-compliance. The county office will then close the SNAP case and process an overpayment. Able Bodied Adults may be exempt from work requirements if certain conditions are met and a determination is made by the eligibility worker. If the exemption is granted, the eligibility worker must change the Able Bodied Adult's program status in the ANSWER eligibility system. Upon receipt of the referral the provider initiates a contact within 5 days with the individual to schedule an assessment, and logs in the contact to the Referral Log. If the participant misses the first appointment, a second appointment can be scheduled within 10 days. The second appointment will be put in the mail no later than the next business day following the missed appointment, and all missed appointments are entered into the case file and the reason if one is provided. If the participant misses both appointments that were issued during the referral month, enter on the State report entitled "Monthly Report" that the person was a "no show". **Inter-Agency Coordination**

The Department of Human Services is the single agency responsible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in Arkansas. Community based partners, local adult education centers, vocational schools, and community colleges will implement all E&T services in the E&T counties through a contractual relationship with DHS.

### Methods of Coordination

Newly work-registered household members classified as ABAWDs will be automatically referred to the E&T Program. The *E&T Program referral* (DCO-205) will be used to refer work-registered volunteers to the E&T Program as requested, or due to a case action in participating E&T counties.

### Coordination Time Frames

Activity	Agency	Timeframe
Referral of newly registered ABAWDs	DHS - Automated report	Weekly or Bi-weekly
Referral of Volunteer Work Registrants	DHS - County Office Worker (DCO-260)	Within 5 days of date application approved
E&T Assessment and Component Assignment	Contractor - E&T Coordinator	Within 30 days of receipt of referral
Reimbursements for E&T Participants	DHS - Finance Office	Once policy is implemented, within 10 days

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;

Arkansas E&T has an agreement with the Department of Workforce Services (DWS) due to a relationship that has been built with Arkansas Career Education. Arkansas Career Education (ACE) is the only statewide E&T contractor. DWS provided the SA with information about employment trends by region. Because Arkansas is a very rural state, employment in certain occupations and areas are limited. The 65+ age group has experienced an increase which also increases the need for healthcare workers. Based on this growing trend, as well as the changes being experienced by the nation, the SA will continue to build its program by seeking providers that educate and prepare SNAP participants in healthcare and social assistance, manufacturing, and food services.

Through DWS, Arkansas can connect with services through the Workforce Investment Board (WIB) as well as the services offered under the Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA) to help those at-risk able-bodied adults maintain SNAP eligibility while gaining skills necessary for success. The State Agency has a region-by-region agreement with DWS to allow SNAP recipients to use WIOA as a qualifying activity. DWS notifies local county offices if a SNAP participant is engaged in WIOA-based job search. The state agency continues to coordinate with workforce to develop ways of connecting participants with jobs that are in high demand and develop or seek out providers that provide trainings and certifications for these demands in the workforce.

In 2019, Arkansas Legislature passed a law that will require SNAP participants between 50-59 to engage in a work activity to remain eligible for SNAP. WIOA Title 1 programs can assist this group with supervised job search activities as well as new job search trends and activities. This law is not expected to go live until SFY 2024.

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;

Not applicable to Arkansas.

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

A conciliation process is not planned as the program is voluntary at this time.

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.

The State will not provide reimbursement for dependent care costs.

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.

### Participant Reimbursement Details

Complete the table below with information on each participant reimbursement offered by the State agency. A description of each category is included below.

- Allowable Participant Reimbursements. Every State agency must include childcare and transportation in this table, as well as other major categories of reimbursements (examples of categories include, but are not limited to: tools, test fees, books, uniforms, license fees, electronic devices, etc.). Mandatory States must meet all costs associated with participating in an E&T program, or else they must exempt individuals from E&T.
- Participant Reimbursement Caps (optional). Indicate any caps on the amount the State agency will provide for the participant reimbursement.
- Who provides the participant reimbursements? Indicate if the participant reimbursement is provided by the State agency, a provider, an intermediary, or some other entity. The State agency remains ultimately responsible for ensuring individuals receive participant reimbursements, even if it has contracted with another entity to provide them.
- Method of disbursement. Indicate if the participant receives the participant reimbursement in advance or as a reimbursement. Also indicate if the amount of the participant reimbursement is an estimated amount or the actual amount.

Transportation (and other allowable transportation costs).  
\$50 per month

Allowable educational expenses (testing costs, books, licensing, etc).  
\$50 per month

Allowable employment costs (background checks, licensing, uniforms, personal safety items, etc.)  
\$50 per month

Dependent Care \$50 per month

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.

See response to number 15.

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;

NA

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;

NA

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;

NA

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

NA

E. OTHER INDICATORS APPROVED BY FNS IN THE E&T STATE PLAN.

NA

B. ABLE-BODIED ADULTS WITHOUT DEPENDENTS (ABAWD) [28]

1. ITS PLEDGE TO OFFER A QUALIFYING ACTIVITY TO ALL AT-RISK ABAWD APPLICANTS AND RECIPIENTS;

Not applicable

2. ESTIMATED COSTS OF FULFILLING ITS PLEDGE;

Not applicable

3. A DESCRIPTION OF MANAGEMENT CONTROLS IN PLACE TO MEET PLEDGE REQUIREMENTS;

Not applicable

4. A DISCUSSION OF ITS CAPACITY AND ABILITY TO SERVE AT-RISK ABAWDs;

Not applicable

5. INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIZE AND SPECIAL NEEDS OF ITS ABAWD POPULATION; AND

Not applicable

6. INFORMATION ABOUT THE EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND WORKFARE COMPONENTS IT WILL OFFER TO MEET THE ABAWD WORK REQUIREMENT

Not applicable

#### TRADE ADJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE (TAA)

Has the state incorporated TAA into the sections indicated above?

Yes

#### JOBS FOR VETERANS' STATE GRANTS

A. HOW THE STATE INTENDS TO PROVIDE EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING AND JOB PLACEMENT SERVICES TO VETERANS AND ELIGIBLE PERSONS UNDER THE JVSG;

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 veterans and other eligible persons. The JVSG-funded DVOPs, LVERs, and Consolidated Position (CP) staff who serves in a dual role as a



DVOP specialist and LVER, fill a role in the overall program of services to veterans and other eligible persons. The DVOPs, LVERs, and CP are dedicated to their primary statutory responsibilities as defined by Veterans' Program Letters (VPL). The DVOPs focus on providing Basic and Individualized Career Services through case management to veterans with significant barriers to employment (SBE) and other eligible persons. The LVERs coordinate with local business service teams and members of the community to advocate to employers on behalf of 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 of service requirements. In addition, JVSG 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 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 DVOP specialist or CP 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.

**B. THE DUTIES ASSIGNED TO DVOP SPECIALISTS AND LVER STAFF BY THE STATE;  
SPECIFICALLY IMPLEMENTING DVOP AND LVER DUTIES OR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES  
AS OUTLINED IN 38 U.S.C. § 4103A AND 4104. THESE DUTIES MUST BE CONSISTENT WITH  
CURRENT GUIDANCE;**

In accordance with Title 38 U.S.C. Section 4103(a), DVOPs provide Individual Career Services to eligible veterans and eligible persons to meet their employment needs, prioritizing services to disabled and special disabled veterans, as defined by Title 38 U.S.C. Section 4211, and to other eligible veterans in accordance with priorities determined by the Secretary. The statute also requires that DVOPs place maximum emphasis on assisting veterans who are economically or educationally disadvantaged. This aligns with the U.S. Department of Labor's Veterans Employment and Training Service (DOL VETS) to provide meaningful services that promote successful careers for eligible veterans and eligible persons. DVOPs provide employment assistance through Basic and Individualized Career Services in a case management service delivery strategy including, at minimum, an objective assessment to veterans identified with an SBE, including disabled and special disabled veterans.

The Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist works directly with veterans and eligible persons who have significant barriers to employment, as identified in 38 U.S.C. 4103A(a)(1). The services provided by a DVOP specialist are referred to as individualized career services but were once called intensive services. These services include, but are not limited to:

- Comprehensive assessment interviews
- Career guidance services
- Individual Employment Plans (IEPs)
- Staff-assisted job search activities

- Labor Market Information (LMI)
- Basic staff-assisted career services

Some other responsibilities that DVOP specialists have are case management, outreach services to veterans, and group job counseling, which differs from licensed counseling.

It is important that a DVOP establish a strong rapport and relationship with the veterans they serve, to provide them the best services possible to help them reach their employment goals.

A special disabled or disabled veteran, as those terms are defined in 38 U.S.C § 4211(1) and (3); special disabled and disabled veterans are those: Those who are 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, who were discharged or released from active duty because of a service-connected disability;

- A homeless person, as defined in Sections 103(a) and (b) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. I 1302(a) and (b)), as amended;
- A recently-separated service member, as defined in 38 U.S.C § 4211(6), who has been unemployed for 27 or more weeks;
- An offender, as defined by WIOA Section 3 (38), who is currently incarcerated or who has been released from incarceration;
- A veteran lacking a high school diploma or equivalent certificate; or
- A low-income individual (as defined by WIOA Section 3 (36).
- Veterans Aged 18 to 24
- Vietnam-era Veterans
- Eligible Transitioning Service Members in need of individual career services, Spouses and Caregivers

## **DVOP**

All duties assigned to DVOPs are performed in accordance with those prescribed by Title 38, Chapters 41 and 42. DVOPs assist disabled veterans as a priority group in addition to veterans and other eligible persons with SBEs who require individualized career services as outlined in the current VPL. The DVOPs assigned to the VR&E program work closely with U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) staff to provide career guidance and pre-rehab plan assessment information. This collaboration is in accordance with the processes outlined in the most recent VPL -National Implementation of the Department of Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment and Veterans' Employment and Training Service Partnership Project. The population served by DVOPs includes any veteran ages 18 -24 or any other population specified by the Assistant Secretary.

The Secretary of Labor has identified veterans, ages 18-24, as eligible for DVOP services because of this population's high rate of unemployment. DVOPs will initiate and foster ongoing and active lines of communication with local organizations that provide services to targeted veterans groups or others with significant barriers to employment. They will be expected to actively maintain contact with County Veteran Service Officers and detention facilities within their area. Arkansas plans to increase outreach activities to Veterans Centers, Community Based Outreach Clinics, and other similar organizations and agencies that serve veterans in the identified target groups.

Arkansas continues to out-station a DVOP at the Fort Roots, VA Medical Hospital, in response to the high number of SBE Veterans discharged through the VR&E program. All duties assigned to

DVOP are performed in accordance with those prescribed by Title 38, Chapters 41 and 42. The DVOP assist disabled veterans as a priority group in addition to veterans and other eligible persons with SBEs who require individualized career services as outlined in the current VPL. The DVOP assigned to the VR&E program work closely with U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) staff to provide career guidance assessment information. This collaboration is in accordance with the processes outlined in the most recent VPL and Department of Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment and Veterans' Employment and Training Service Guide (TAG).

DVOPs will be required to work with veterans to provide assessments, develop individual employment plans, and manage referrals to services to address identified barriers to employment. DVOP specialists will be expected to provide a full range of services to veterans and other eligible persons including but not limited to:

- Comprehensive 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 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.

Once significant barriers to employment are identified by Wagner-Peyser staff, veterans will be directed to the nearest DVOP for a comprehensive assessment and the development of an Individual Employment Plan (IEP), if necessary. DVOP staff providing individual career services will be required to use Arkansas JobLink (AJL) to record services, case notes, referrals, and follow-up services.

## **LVER**

Arkansas LVER staff will advocate, on behalf of veterans, with businesses and industries. LVERs will perform the full range of employer outreach activities, which are offered through the workforce system. Staff will report 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.

LVERs will also have an active partnership with community-based organizations that provide or coordinate an array of services to veterans.

LVERs are fully integrated into Business Service Team and promote Arkansas veterans to local employers by highlighting the advantages of hiring veterans and create job development contacts. The services of LVERs and Business Service Teams are delivered through Job Fairs, Veterans Events, and the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserves (ESGR). This collaboration serves to attract veterans and employers in need of services by either the LVER or DVOP. In addition, LVERs work with all workforce staff and partners to identify and build capacity to increase resources for all veterans. LVERs also market the Hire Veterans Medallion Program available to employers hiring veteran.

### **Consolidated DVOP specialist and LVER position**

In accordance with VPL 01-20, the Consolidated Staff position 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 veterans and employers consistent with the requirements of 38 U.S.C. Section 4103A and 4104.

#### **C. THE MANNER IN WHICH DVOP SPECIALISTS AND LVER STAFF ARE INTEGRATED INTO THE STATE'S EMPLOYMENT SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEM OR AMERICAN JOB CENTER;**

DVOP, LVER and Consolidated DVOP/LVER position integration goes beyond co-location, and function as seamlessly as possible within the assigned AWC or other outreach location where services can be leveraged to better facilitate the placement of SBE veterans. 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 DVOP & CP 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 intensive 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 Wagner-Peyser program, the Trade Adjustment Assistance program and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act program. All staff has access to and can view all services provided to the veteran regardless of funding stream. By partnering with other state agencies, ADWS 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 the assistance of 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 of these groups.

#### **D. THE INCENTIVE AWARD PROGRAM IMPLEMENTED USING THE 1% GRANT ALLOCATION SET ASIDE FOR THIS PURPOSE, AS APPLICABLE;**

## **Arkansas Division of Workforce Services**

### **Jobs for Veterans State Grant**

#### **Incentive Award Plan**

In accordance with 38 U.S.C. 4112 and VPL 01-22, 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 30<sup>th</sup> of each year and expended by December 31<sup>st</sup> of each year and will be awarded as Monetary Awards to 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 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter of each year. Any part of the 1% of these funds that is not obligated by the 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter will remain unobligated at the grant closeout.

#### **Overview**

The overall goal in utilizing the Incentive Awards is to motivate JVSG and Non-JVSG staff 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 advocating for veterans and other eligible persons, 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 persons. (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 persons 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).

#### **Disbursement of Monetary Award Amounts**

The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services will award Monetary Award Amounts (5 for each category) for a 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 (DVOP, DV/LV-CP, LVER, Job Service, WIOA) are:

**First Place:** \$1,256.00

**Second Place:** \$969.00

**Third Place:** \$791.00

#### **Award Planning Disbursement Processing**

1. The SVC will submit annual incentive award reports detailing all individual award recipients by close of business June 30, of each calendar year to Senior Management, Budget Office, and Payroll to include:
  - All individual recipients by name, by office, location, type of office (e.g., Comprehensive or Satellite).
  - The cash amount of each award that funded by the incentive award allocation, and a description and value of each non-financial award that is funded by the base allocation, if applicable.
2. Next, the recommendation letter signed by Agency Director will be submitted to ADWS Human Resources for submission to the Department of Commerce for submission to Department of Finance & Administration (DF&A) for employment verification.

***Note: Monitor this process with HR to ensure Awards are being processed for payment in the JVSG 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter.***

3. Once awards are verified by the Department of Finance & Administration (DF&A) - ADWS will be notified with an official Letter of Award and Payroll will notify the SVC & Budget of the official payment date.

E. THE POPULATIONS OF ELIGIBLE VETERANS TO BE SERVED, INCLUDING ANY ADDITIONAL POPULATIONS DESIGNATED BY THE SECRETARY AS ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES, AND ANY ADDITIONAL POPULATIONS SPECIFICALLY TARGETED BY THE STATE WORKFORCE AGENCY FOR SERVICES FROM ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM PARTNERS (E.G., NATIVE AMERICAN VETERANS; VETERANS IN REMOTE RURAL COUNTIES OR PARISHES);

Veterans and eligible persons with significant barriers to employment (SBE), economically or educationally disadvantaged, recently separated, homeless, including domestic violence and other dangerous or life threatening conditions, offenders and veterans between the ages 18-24, Vietnam-era veterans, and eligible transitioning service members, identified in VPL 03-19 as the target groups for services by Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists and Consolidated Disabled Veteran Outreach Program Specialist (CP) . The state will focus efforts to increase services and outreach to the target populations as identified in guidance.

The State will take steps to ensure that veterans with significant barriers receive individual career services by DVOP and CP specialists. During the initial assessment, if a veteran self-attest to meeting one or more of the SBE criteria, Arkansas Workforce Center (AWC) staff will refer the individual to a DVOP and CP specialist for intensive case management services.

To promote the hiring and retention of veterans, we are actively reaching out to both two and four-year institutions of higher education to provide direct assistance in placing veterans that obtain credentials and to increase awareness of the range of services available through the AWCs. This strategy, combined with the Career Readiness Certificate program, is designed to provide veterans intensive services and occupational and computer skills training to help veterans be more competitive and appealing to potential employers. These tools will also provide veterans with an advantage when pursuing educational and training credentials.

The Arkansas JobLink System (AJL,) the state management information system, provides detailed performance reports. This database is used to monitor and track the number of Veterans and types of services provided virtually and/or through staff assisted services. Based on the data provided by AJL we are able to measure at both the local and state level the effectiveness of our outreach to the targeted veteran population. The information is also used to calculate the incentive awards for DVOPs, LVERs, and AWC staff that provide exceptional service and meet performance measures.

Targeted veterans are identified as the following:

- Special disabled or disabled veteran, as those terms are defined in 38 U.S.C. §4211(1) and (3); Special disabled and disabled veterans are those who are 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 were discharged or released from active duty because of a service connected disability.
- Homeless, as defined in Section 103(a)and (b) of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11302(a) and (b), as amended;
- A recently separated service member, as defined in 38 U.S.C. § 4211(6) who has been unemployed for 27 or more weeks;
- An offender, as defined by WIOA Section 101(27), who is has been released from incarceration
- Lacking a high school diploma or equivalent certificate; or

- Low-income (as defined by WIOA at Sec. 101(25)(B))
- Veterans Aged 18 to 24
- Vietnam-era Veterans
- Eligible Transitioning Service Members, Spouses and Caregivers

Arkansas continues to out-station a DVOP at the Fort Roots, VA Medical Hospital, in response to the high number of SBE Veterans discharged through the VR&E program. All duties assigned to DVOP are performed in accordance with those prescribed by Title 38, Chapters 41 and 42. The DVOP assist disabled veterans as a priority group in addition to veterans and other eligible persons with SBEs who require individualized career services as outlined in the current VPL. The DVOP assigned to the VR&E program work closely with U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) staff to provide career guidance assessment information. This collaboration is in accordance with the processes outlined in the most recent VPL and Department of Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment and Veterans' Employment and Training Service Guide (TAG).

Arkansas does not have designated tribal lands and does not have a specific strategy for outreach to Native American veterans.

#### F. HOW THE STATE IMPLEMENTS AND MONITORS THE ADMINISTRATION OF PRIORITY OF SERVICE TO COVERED PERSONS;

"The description of how the state implements and monitors priority of service to covered persons is included in the Common Elements of the WIOA State Plan."

#### G. HOW THE STATE PROVIDES OR INTENDS TO PROVIDE AND MEASURE, THROUGH BOTH THE DVOP AND AMERICAN JOB CENTER STAFF:

##### 1. JOB AND JOB TRAINING INDIVIDUALIZED CAREER SERVICES,

"Per VPL 01-22, a response to this section is not required."

##### 2. EMPLOYMENT PLACEMENT SERVICES, AND

"Per VPL 01-22, a response to this section is not required."

##### 3. JOB-DRIVEN TRAINING AND SUBSEQUENT PLACEMENT SERVICE PROGRAM FOR ELIGIBLE VETERANS AND ELIGIBLE PERSONS;

"Per VPL 01-22, a response to this section is not required."

#### H. THE HIRE DATE ALONG WITH MANDATORY TRAINING COMPLETION DATES FOR ALL DVOP SPECIALISTS AND LVER STAFF; AND

"Per VPL 01-22, a response to this section is not required."

#### I. SUCH ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AS THE SECRETARY MAY REQUIRE.

As outlined in Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 10-16, Change 1, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) establishes six primary indicators of performance. JVSg conforms to the three employment-related primary indicators of performance on a biennial basis for the Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSg) program. The established JVSg targets will cover veterans served by JVSg staff only.



The following are established for PY 2022 and PY 2023.

Performance Indicators	PY 2022- 2023 Performance Targets
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	55.3%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	56.5%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$6,205

## UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (UI)

### A. CONTENTS OF A COMPLETE UI SQSP PACKAGE

#### 1. TRANSMITTAL LETTER

October 15, 2021

Mr. Nicholas E. Lalpui

Regional Administrator

US Department of Labor

525 South Griffin Street, Room 315

Dallas, TX 75202

Submitted on behalf of the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services,

Dear Mr. Lalpui:

Enclosed are the original copies of the State Quality Service Plan (SQSP) for the Alternate Year and UI Integrity Action Plan for Fiscal Year 2022. The SQSP identifies ADWS' performance during the most recently completed Secretary's Year. Our biennial SQSP reflects ADWS' performance during the most recently completed Secretary's Year and outlines our strategies for the upcoming Fiscal Year continued commitment to performance excellence and client-centered services. ADWS' Integrity Action Plan outlines the activities ADWS will undertake during Fiscal Year 2022 to improve the Improper Payment Rate. The SQSP and UI Integrity Action Plan will be submitted in accordance with Unemployment Insurance Program Letter (UIPL) No. 25-21.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact Kristen Rhodes-Berry at 501-683-5366.

Sincerely,

Charisse Childers, Ph.D.

Director

CC/krb

Enclosures

THE SIGNED COPY OF THE TRANSMITTAL LETTER IS MAINTAINED WITH THE AGENCY AND THE REGIONAL OFFICE

## 2. BUDGET WORKSHEETS/FORMS

THE SIGNED COPY OF THE BUDGET-RELATED WORKSHEETS/FORMS ARE MAINTAINED WITH THE AGENCY AND THE REGIONAL OFFICE

## 3. THE STATE PLAN NARRATIVE

### STATE PLAN ALTERNATE YEAR NARRATIVE ARKANSAS — FY 2022

During FY 2022, the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (ADWS) will continue to pursue a strategic direction designed to take ADWS from a mainframe legacy environment to a new web-based environment using server technology and focusing on customer self-service. The intent of this new environment is to better leverage staff resources due to continued declines in federal program and administrative funding. ADWS is also planning on changing from a local office driven model of meeting the claimants needs to a service center approach. This will remove barriers to claimants by removing the necessity of having to travel to local offices in person, which in rural areas of the state can be a challenge.

ADWS launched its Automated Adjudication System (AAS) in July 2005. Like the UI State Information Data Exchange System (SIDES), ADWS' AAS system is a web-based system 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. In March 2012, ADWS deployed its electronic response system for employers to the World Wide Web. 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 server technology and 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 which is in the RFP process currently searching for an appropriate product to house the benefits, tax and appeals systems.

To compliment ADWS' electronic response system, during the second quarter of 2014, ADWS deployed the first phase of its fax manager system. This system enables bar coded documents and any related attachments returned to the agency via fax to transfer seamlessly to the appropriate claim. A subsequent analysis of field and central office operations revealed that one of the biggest areas of opportunity with regard to increasing staff efficiency related to the number of staff hours needed to prepare and process documents to the imaging repository throughout the unemployment insurance program. During the fourth quarter of 2015, ADWS began utilizing the fax manager system as a gateway to electronically transfer appeal related documents to associated unemployment insurance claim files. The electronic transfer of appeal related documents resulted in a measureable decrease in the number of staff hours devoted to processing appeal related document imaging repository. In August 2017, ADWS implemented the new imaging process throughout the unemployment insurance program. The implementation of the new imaging process has enabled ADWS to streamline some functions and improve overall efficiency of available staff resources.

In March 2015, ADWS deployed its "Claims Processing Hotline" to selected Workforce Centers as a method of leveraging staff resources by shifting one local office's claimstaking workload to another local office experiencing a lower claimstaking volume. The deployment of the Claims Processing Hotline did not alter existing claimstaking procedures, the only difference being that a claimant may be served at a local office via telephone rather than in-person. Due to the success

of the Claims Processing Hotline pilot, during FY 2016 ADWS deployed the Claims Processing Hotline to all remaining Workforce Centers.

In June 2017, ADWS deployed a pilot project to selected local offices to evaluate the impact of transferring claimstaking and claims maintenance as well as the diversion of Workforce Center incoming telephone calls to a full hotline environment. During the expanded pilot project, ADWS obtained sufficient data to meaningfully evaluate the impact of a full hotline environment on local office operations, internal and external customer satisfaction as well as UI timeliness and quality standards. The expanded pilot project revealed increased efficiency of available staff resources with minimal adverse impact on claimstaking and claims maintenance functions. By April 30, 2018, all local offices were integrated into the expanded Claims Processing Hotline environment.

In February 2022, ADWS migrated the "Claims Processing Hotline" into the UI Service Center, incorporating all Workforce Centers as a method of leveraging staff resources by distributing claimstaking workload evenly throughout the state. This model follows the original "Claims Processing Hotline" in process however, the change in staff line of supervision from local Workforce Center management to UI Administration has allowed for UI staff to be 100% focused on hotline claimstaking activities. Although still in its infancy, the UI Service Center has already proved to be an extremely efficient tool in providing UI services to claimants throughout the state.

#### Current Financial Considerations Impacting Performance

Staffing, funding limitations and requirements to operate and maintain current systems continue to impact the ADWS' ability to implement the move from a legacy mainframe environment to an Internet and server based environment. To assist with funding of a new comprehensive system, the Arkansas Legislature opened a funding source that will be available for collection of up to thirty-five million over three years. ADWS is in the process of selecting a vendor and working through the needed IT budget to be successful in implementing a massive change to our existing work processes.

ADWS continues to examine ways to efficiently and cost effectively automate and reduce staff. The completion of the UI Benefits Operations Self-Assessment Tool and collaboration with NASWA's UI Integrity Center Review Team will further ADWS' goal of effectively automating systems while maximizing available resources. While ADWS performs well above the median in most performance measures, there are areas of opportunity for ADWS to further improve its performance ratings, particularly with regard to the Improper Payment Rate. As highlighted by ADWS' UI Benefit Operations Self-Assessment, the legacy mainframe environment is an impediment to fully maximizing available fiscal resources and staffing. Due to continued delay in the development and implementation of movement towards a new web-based environment, ADWS will begin examining consortium and third party products in order to expedite the deployment of a modernized benefits system. A concerted effort to move from a legacy mainframe environment to an Internet and server based environment will enable ADWS to reduce or eliminate barriers impacting the efficiency and accuracy of the UI program.

Training and retention continues to be major points of emphasis for ADWS in order to cultivate and maintain a well-trained and experienced staff. ADWS continues in its mission of cultivating staff with a focus on succession planning. During the summer of 2018, ADWS began utilizing the National Integrity Academy as a tool for staff development and improvement for UI Administration management staff. In 2019, the National Integrity Academy was made available to Field Operations staff to further promote staff development and claim integrity. ADWS remains committed to providing quality service along with a commitment to reduce and eliminate improper payments; training emphasis will continue to focus on promoting a thorough understanding and working knowledge of the unemployment insurance program.

This commitment to staff development will be instrumental in ensuring continued improved program performance with regard to Core Measures and Integrity efforts.

As ADWS staff is transitioning to all UI staff reporting to UI Admin staff as opposed to the local office managers, a newly invigorated training system is being developed to ensure a constant voice of the UI program and relating program goals and expectations to staff.

### **Integrity Related Law Changes**

ADWS continues in its effort to improve the prevention, detection, and recovery of improper unemployment insurance benefits. During the 2019 Arkansas legislative session, ADWS pursued legislation designed to address issues impacting its Improper Payment Rate. Act 453's most significant provisions increases the disqualification period for committing unemployment insurance fraud, increases the length of enforcement of the disqualification, and increases the penalty assessed to fraud overpayments from 15% to 50%. Act 453 also prohibits claimants who have fraud overpayments issued from receiving future unemployment insurance benefits until such time as their fraud overpayment is repaid in full, including penalty and interest. The provisions of Act 453 will be assessed to nonmonetary determinations and overpayment determinations issued on and after October 1, 2019. Finally, Act 375 creates the "UI Integrity Fund" which will consist of the proceeds of penalty in excess of the federal minimum of 15% assessed on fraud overpayments. Act 375 limits the use of the 35% excess penalty to activities related to the prevention, detection and recovery of improper unemployment insurance benefits. This revenue stream will enable ADWS to implement new programs designed to reduce our primary cause of improper payments, Benefit Year Earnings issues; education of employers and claimants regarding their roles in preventing and reducing improper payments; and to ensure claimants are engaged in meaningful and appropriate work search activities.

### **GPRA Goals and Targets**

First Payments – Intrastate: The goal for FY 2020 is that at least 87% of intrastate first payments for full weeks of unemployment be made within 14/21 days from the week ending date of the first compensable week. Actual performance for ADWS for the SY 2019 was recorded at 93.18% and ADWS recognizes that this is a critical area and will continue to monitor first payments in an effort to ensure that we maximize performance results and continue to exceed the measure during FY 2022. The interstate unit as all UI groups is still recovering from the Pandemic volume which reduced the ability to communicate with other states with Interstate specific issues as the other state were also overrun with claims. We are working towards improving the timeliness of first payments though staff training and a higher level of oversight to decrease the amount of time between when an issue is identified, and processes are updated to handle the issues.

New Status Determinations: The GPRA goal for FY 2019 was that 89% of status determinations for new employers be made within 90 days of the end of the first quarter in which liability occurred. ADWS' performance for SY 2019 was at 90.90%. The GPRA goal for FY 2020 is that 89.0% of status determinations for new employers be made timely. While performance improved slightly from SY 2018 to SY 2019, ADWS recognizes the importance of making new status determinations timely and will continue to train staff and monitor performance of its system and processes to insure ADWS continues to exceed the measure. The implementation of a new front-loaded system to assist to better track staff progress in processing and will reduce the number of paper forms to process and identifying opportunities for improvement.

Detect Benefit Overpayments: The GPRA goal for FY 2020 is at least 54.5% of the estimated detectable, recoverable overpayments will be established. The overpayment detection rate for Arkansas was 50.43% for SY 2019. ADWS will continue with its efforts to improve preventing, detecting and recovering improper unemployment insurance overpayments.

Most of Arkansas' overpayments are the result of Benefit Year Earnings issues. ADWS continues in its efforts to educate claimants on the importance of reporting earnings and reporting the earnings correctly. Wage investigations are initiated on 100% of the cases involving employees reported through the National New Hire Directory and State New Hire Directory. Each week, all hits involving active claims are distributed to local office staff in order to contact claimants and employers to ensure the timely and accurate reporting of earnings during the continued claim process. ADWS' IVR Cross Match System installs control dates on claims whenever there are matches made between claimants and the State New Hire Directory.

Local offices then contact claimants and employers if a week is claimed and there is a match with the State New Hire Directory. This process enables the local office staff another opportunity to address potential earnings fraud and to detect potential separation issues.

In October 2017, ADWS began electronically distributing its "Fraud: It's A Crime!" newsletter to claimants who filed a new or additional claim. In June 2018, ADWS deployed its "Stopped Earnings Report" to the local offices. The report is designed to identify claimants who reported earnings for two consecutive weeks and then abruptly stop. The "Stopped Earnings Report" enables local office staff to rapidly identify potential earnings fraud and other nonmonetary issues during a claim series. On August 1, 2019, ADWS began electronically distributing a second fraud alert newsletter, "Fraud Alert—Unemployment Law Changes for 2019," which highlights the increased penalties for committing unemployment insurance fraud beginning October 1, 2019. In 2020 additional fraud related penalty information was added to the ARKnet continued claim system and claimants must read the information and select that they agree before being able to move forward to the claim filing process.

### **Assessment of Program Performance in Prior Years**

In program year 2020, for the first time, ADWS' performance did not fall below minimum performance standards for any of the established Core Measures. Accordingly, there are no Corrective Action Plans required in accordance with the Additional Planning Guidance for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Unemployment Insurance (UI) State Quality Service Plan (SQSP) as per UIPL 15-19 dated June 28, 2019. Our goal is to return to this high level of performance in the coming years, after repair from the pandemic related high volume of claims in 2020 and 2021.

### **Core Measures**

#### Detection of Overpayment Measure

ALP = the percentage of detectable/recoverable overpayments established for recovery must meet or exceed 50%. Regarding the Core Measure, ADWS will continue to strive to meet or exceed the Core Measure of 50% to 95% for the Detection of Overpayments. ADWS' performance for SY 2021 was 44.03% but the requirement was waived by DOL. SY2019 was 56.36% an increase from 48.35% for SY 2018 and from 47.94% for SY 2017.

#### Effective Audit Measures

ALP = total score of 7 or more and passing scores in all four factors. Passing scores in the four factors follow: Factor 1, Employers Audited = 1.0%, Factor 2, Change in Total Wages from Audits = 2.0%, Factor 3, Total Wages Audited = 1.0% and Factor 4, Average Number of Misclassified Employees Detected per Audit = 1.0%.

Performance for CY 2018: ADWS had the following factor scores: Factor 1 = 1.2%, Factor 2 = 3.3%, Factor 3 = 1.5% and Factor 4 = 2.3%. ADWS anticipates again meeting the Core Measure for Effective Audit Measures for CY 2022.

#### Data Validation – Tax

ALP = all tax populations submitted and passing.

### Improper Payment Measure – Integrity Action Plan Included.

ALP = maintain an Improper Payment Rate of less than 10% for covered programs.

Performance for IPERA Year 2018: The Improper Payment Measure is defined as all UI benefits overpaid and underpaid as estimated from the BAM survey of paid UI claims for the IPERA year which begins on July 1 and ends on June 30 of the following calendar year. For IPERA year 2018 ending on June 30, 2018, ADWS met the ALP by recording an Improper Payment Rate of 9.864%. While ADWS met the Improper Payment Measure, strategies will continue to be developed and implemented to continue to improve program performance in this critical area.

### UI Overpayment Recovery Measure

ALP = The recovery rate is calculated by dividing the amount of improper overpayments recovered by the amount of improper overpayments identified. The ALP for the recovery rate measure is 68% for the 2018 IPIA period.

Performance for IPIA Year 2020: ADWS exceeded the ALP by recording an overpayment recovery rate of 148.74%.

### **Secretary Standards in Regulation**

Data for the most recent Secretary's Year showed acceptable levels of performance by ADWS in all categories. No narratives required.

### **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, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, Chapter VI, UIPL 03-07, and UIPL No., Change 1.

#### Benefit Accuracy Measurement (BAM)

The Benefit Accuracy Measurement (BAM) Annual Determination Letter for CY 2018 reflects that ADWS' BAM Unit is compliant with investigative as well as all method and procedure requirements set forth in ET Handbook No. 395, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, and through findings established through ET Handbook No. 396, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition.

#### Tax Performance System (TPS)

ADWS' UI Tax Operations are in compliance with Federal reporting and oversight requirements. For CY 2018, all TPS sample reviews were passing.

#### Data Validation (DV)

ADW submitted all DV items for validation and certification by June 10, 2020. All DV items passed for Validation Year 2020.

#### UI Program Integrity

During SY 2021, ADWS maintained an Improper Payment Rate of less than 10%. While ADWS has maintained an Improper Payment Rate of less than 10% for the past few years, ADWS continues to experience fluctuations of the Improper Payment Rate of lowering to below 10% and rising to greater than 10%. ADWS' primary root cause of Improper Payments continues to be Benefit Year Earnings issues. During the 2019 legislative session, ADWS pursued legislation that will increase the penalties for individuals who commit unemployment insurance fraud and provide a revenue stream for activities designed to prevent, detect and reduce the Improper Payment Rate.

## Issue Detection Date and Determination Date

### **UI Reporting Requirements**

The spreadsheet provided for creating the SQSP included a listing of missing and untimely submitted reports for the reporting period.

- ETA204: The report was submitted and is viewable in the state menu currently. We will work to locate the transmission sheet to give the date of submission, this was a state menu issue.
- ETA8401 for 04/01/2021 was submitted on 10/14/2021, and the 03/31/2021 submission is being prepared currently and will be submitted as soon as possible.
- The ETA9057 report requirement was waived previously.
- The ETA9129 reports included have not yet reached their due dates.

There were also several reports that were submitted untimely due to high staff turnover and the increased volume of claims with the pandemic. We are working to put failsafe measures in place to prevent this from occurring in the future.

### **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. During SY 2018, ADWS continued its efforts in fully implementing the WIOA program, in collaboration with the program's core and non-core 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 in an effort 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.

ADWS has long benefited from the integration of its workforce partner programs, including UI, within its local offices. The longstanding practice of having the UI program integrated into local offices throughout the state has enabled the UI program to ensure that income support is available to eligible individuals who are simultaneously utilizing the onsite services provided by partner programs. To ensure that claimants are aware of the array of services provided through the workforce center, claimants are required to obtain ES staff assisted 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. Beginning in July 2016, ADWS began notifying

claimants at the time of filing UI claims they must upload a resume to their individual AJL account. Resumes uploaded to an individual AJL account are then searchable by employers. An up-to-date AJL account ensures that claimants have maintained their work registrations and are able to access services offered through the Arkansas Workforce Centers. The referral for services to all partner organizations will continue as UI moves to the service center method for delivering services.

### **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 unemployment insurance data for SY 2021. 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 in order to pay UI Benefits. ADWS projects a trust fund balance of \$855,000,000 at the end of CY 2022.

During the 2019 Arkansas legislative session, ADWS sought to ease the tax burden on employers by pursuing legislation to create a flexible taxable wage base. SB 298, now Act 512 of 2019, is designed to slow the growth of the UI Trust fund while easing the tax burden on Arkansas' employers by providing for the automatic adjustment of the taxable wage base based on economic factors directly affecting the UI Trust Fund. Beginning January 1, 2020 the taxable wage base has the potential to increase or decrease between \$7,000 and \$10,000 every calendar year based on the average insured unemployment rate for the most recently completed state fiscal year. Act 512 of 2019 also contains special triggers that could result in the taxable wage base being set at \$11,000 or \$12,000 depending on expenditures from the UI Trust Fund and the UI Trust Fund balance as of June 30, 2019. These special triggers will supersede the regular factors used to determine the taxable wage base for the following calendar year. During the Pandemic the Arkansas Legislature passed a temporary freeze on the taxable wage base and stabilization calculations for rate year 2022 to remain at the 2021 rate year levels.

ADWS implemented the Treasury Offset Program concerning delinquent employers in October 2015. For the period of January 1, 2019 through July 31, 2019, ADWS received \$25,979.81 through offsets of delinquent employers' tax returns. An additional \$104,955.09 was received in response to the tax intercept notices sent to employer. Since the implementation of the Treasury Offset Program, ADWS received \$214,126.73 through offsets of delinquent employers' tax returns and \$560,948.39 in response to notices sent to delinquent employers who received notices that their debts were submitted for collection through the Internal Revenue Service.

In addition to the current legislatively authorized activity, ADWS previously implemented some varied strategies to protect or replenish the trust fund. ADWS began participating in the Treasury Offset Program in SY 2013 to recover benefit overpayments.

In March 2012, ADWS began matching claims with the state payroll system, AASIS, in order to detect improper payments to state employees as quickly as possible. The cross-match returns weekly earnings for the match weeks, eliminating the need to send wage audit requests to individual agencies. In 2014, ADWS deployed its front-end identity verification to reduce the risk of fraudulent unemployment insurance claims. ADWS enhanced its front-end identity verification practices in 2016.

In order to make initial claim eligibility determinations faster and more accurate, ADWS will continue to seek to increase employer utilization of the online response systems available to employers to respond to notices to last employer, notices to base period employers, the adjudication questionnaires, and wage audit notice requests. ADWS continues to experience positive results with the online, general fraud reporting system available to the general public on the ADWS home page.



#### 4. CORRECTIVE ACTION PLANS (CAPS)

For the first time, ADWS' performance did not fall below minimum performance standards for any of the established Core Measures. Accordingly, there are no Corrective Action Plans required in accordance with the Additional Planning Guidance for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Unemployment Insurance (UI) State Quality Service Plan (SQSP) as per UIPL 15-19 dated June 28, 2019.

#### 5. UI PROGRAM INTEGRITY ACTION PLAN (UI IAP)

	Federal Fiscal Year	Accountable Agency Officials	
State			
ARKANSAS	2021		
	Top Three Root Causes (Calendar Year 2019)	Calendar Year 2018 (% of \$ Overpaid)	Calendar Year 2019 (% of \$ Overpaid)
Root Cause #1	Benefit Year Earnings	60.808%	59.929%
Root Cause #2	Separation Issues	17.078%	13.904%
Root Cause #3	All Other Causes	8.640%	12.086%

#### NATIONAL PRIORITY STRATEGIES

**(Note: If these areas are addressed in the top three root causes, there is no need for duplication)**

##### **WORK SEARCH**

ADWS will prevent, detect and reduce potential work search issues by conducting random audits of claims. Develop a random work search audit process to require selected claimants to report to their assigned local office during the third and eight week in the claim series

##### **SIDES**

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 server technology and 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.

##### **INTEGRITY DATA HUB**

ADWS will stay connected with the Integrity Center's fraud alert system, learning about new and emerging ways claimants commit fraud.

#### **ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES (PY2020)**

##### **CARES ACT STRATEGIES**

Hire and Train Staff

## **HIGH \$ OP STRATEGIES**

Use resources such as NASWA and the Integrity Center Data Hub to stay current on the subject of fraud.

**Summary: (Provide a summary of the plan that the state has designed. The summary should include outreach efforts planned by the agency to inform all UI and workforce staff, and employers of the strategic plan to ensure everyone understands the importance of maintaining program integrity.)**

ADWS' UI IPIA Integrity Rate for the period of July 1, 2018 through June 30, 2019 was 9.71%. The UI IPIA Integrity Rate for the period of July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018 was 9.86%. The IPIA Integrity Rate for the period ending June 30, 2019 represents a decrease of .15% from the previous IPERA year. ADWS continues to strive to reduce its UI IPIA Integrity Rate.

The following causes have been identified by ADWS' Benefit Accuracy Measurement (BAM) Unit as the top three root causes of overpayments: (1) Benefit Year Earnings: At 5.90%, Benefit Year Earnings issues continue to be the leading cause of overpayments. Benefit Year Earnings issues continue to occur as a direct result of claimants failing to report their earnings, either in whole or in part, during the continued claim process. The percentage of Benefit Year Earnings issues compared to dollars paid during IPIA year 2019 represents a 6.93% increase from IPIA Year 2018. BAM data for the period ending June 30, 2019 indicate that 62.42% of dollars overpaid is the direct result of claimant error in failing to report earnings or due to claimants incorrectly reporting earnings. The percentage of dollars overpaid for IPIA Year 2019 is an increase from 60.38% the previous IPIA year. (2) Separation Issues: At 1.25%, the second leading cause of overpayments is attributed to claimant error, employer error or a combination of the two regarding separation issues. The percentage Separation Issues compared to dollars paid during IPIA Year 2019 represents a decrease of .85% in separation issues resulting in overpayments. BAM data indicate that 13.188% of dollars overpaid during the period ending June 30, 2019 is the result of incorrect or inadequate separation information provided by one or both of the parties. The percentage of dollars overpaid for IPIA Year 2019 represents a 9.317% decrease from the preceding IPIA Year. (3) Other Issues. At 0.579%, is a leading cause of overpayments during IPIA Year 2019 is attributed to "Other Issues." These types of issues are generally due to claim maintenance errors, appeal reversals, and fraud outside the key week. BAM data for IPIA Year 2019 reflects that 6.11% of dollars overpaid is the result of "Other Issues." The percentage of dollars overpaid because of "Other Issues" during IPIA Year 2019 reflects a 1.88% decrease in overpayments due to "Other Issues" when compared to IPIA Year 2018.

ADWS continues to work to improve preventing, detecting and recovering improper unemployment insurance overpayments. The GPRA goal for FY 2021 is that at least 57.5% of the estimated detectable recoverable overpayments will be established. ADWS' GPRA performance for SY 2020 was 49.11%. ADWS will work to meet goal expectations. With regard to the Core Measure, ADWS met the Core Measure of 50% to 95% for the Detection of Overpayments with 54.45% of the detectable/recoverable overpayments established for recovery. ADWS will continue in its efforts to ensure its UI staff and workforce partners are well trained in identifying and addressing issues impacting a UI claim during its life cycle. A well-trained workforce and knowledgeable partners are a critical component in reducing the improper payment rate. Maintaining adequate staffing levels in the FIRE Unit and BPC will ensure the continued timely issuance of determinations and the establishment of overpayments.

In order to continue to improve the overpayment detection rate and reduce the operational overpayment rate further, ADWS will continue to pursue the following major strategies: 1. Prevent, detect and reduce future overpayments by continuing with efforts to increase the

number of employers who respond to ADWS requests for information through our electronic systems; 2. Prevent and reduce future overpayments through claimant messaging; 3. Prevent, detect, reduce and recover overpayments by interlinking more of the investigative and administrative systems; 4. Prevent, reduce and recover overpayments by continuing ADWS efforts to follow-up with employers who have not returned wage audit notices.

With regard to Benefit Year Earnings issues, ADWS continues to educate claimants on the importance of reporting earnings timely and accurately. ADWS' IVR Crossmatch System installs control dates on claims whenever matches are made between claimants and the State New Hire Directory. Local offices then review those claims and, if appropriate, contact claimants regarding reporting earnings. All claims that have a "hit" on the State New Hire Directory and/or National New Hire Registry result in the issuance of a wage audit notice to the employer. In 2016, ADWS central office staff began emailing the IVR Crossmatch hits to the local offices to be more proactive in contacting claimants who have been matched with the State New Hire Directory. This provides ADWS with an early opportunity to verify that claimants are properly reporting work and earnings as well as provide an opportunity for early intervention. ADWS continues to mail letters to claimants who claim the week in which a match was made from the State New Hire Directory. These letters congratulate claimants for obtaining new employment and serve as another opportunity to issue instructions regarding reporting earnings. In November 2017, ADWS began distributing its "Fraud: It's A Crime!" newsletter to every claimant who files an initial, additional or reopened claim. This newsletter is also delivered electronically to all claimants who provided an email address during the claims filing process. In August 2019, ADWS began distributing a second claimant newsletter focusing on the pending enhanced penalties for committing unemployment insurance fraud.

To further combat Benefit Year Earnings issues, ADWS implemented a process during the second quarter of 2018 which requires claimants who reported earnings for two consecutive weeks and then stopped reporting earnings during their continue claim series to report to their local office for a claim review. During the second quarter of 2020, ADWS projects anticipated the implementation of process to conduct random audits of active partial claims in an effort to ensure that work and earnings issues are prevented or detected in its earliest states. However, COVID-19, push this project back. Once implemented a random sample of claimants receiving partial benefits will be required to submit to a random earnings audit during the third and seventh week of the claim series. This will provide ADWS with yet another opportunity to ensure that claimants understand their rights and responsibilities with regard to reporting earnings from work or self-employment. ADWS will also have the opportunity to stress the importance of timely reporting any other potential eligibility issues that may arise during the claim series. The process will be evaluated to determine whether the random audit process should specifically target continued claimants reporting less than 40% of their weekly benefit amounts.

In the third quarter of 2018, ADWS implemented updates to the online wage audit notice response system (IRME), which added a comment section at the bottom of the online wage audit notice form to allow employers to provide additional information. The modification to the online wage audit notice form has been beneficial in detecting new nonmonetary issues outside of work and earnings. All responses are reviewed by a fraud investigator and then forwarded to the adjudication unit for adjudication.

In addition to the enhancements made to ADWS' IVR Crossmatch System, ADWS deployed an employer reporting tool to securely report instances of claimant activity that impact eligibility and an online reporting system for citizens to report suspected claimant and employer unemployment insurance fraud, job refusals and failure to report for job interviews. Referrals made by citizens are simultaneously forwarded to UI Administration and UI Technical and are

typically assigned for investigation within 24 hours of receipt. The quick notification to ADWS of these events, when substantiated, will continue to reduce improper payments.

To emphasize the importance that the highest levels of Arkansas government have placed on preventing inaccurate wage reporting by claimants, beginning in March 2012, ADWS developed and deployed a wage crossmatch that runs biweekly with state employee payroll. This report contains the weekly pay of any state employee who also claimed benefits within the applicable two-week period. ADWS utilizes this tool to identify claimants with earnings issues and immediately initiates a priority investigation.

ADWS will continue efforts to message and to educate employers and claimants on the importance of timely and correctly reporting earnings as well. In the follow-up projects on non-returned 901As from the new hire crossmatches and the quarterly wage crossmatches, FIRE Unit personnel explain the processes available to employers for completing the requests. Additionally, these same personnel are available to provide on-site or on-line training for employers upon request.

In January 2016 ADWS FIRE Unit initiated the Quarterly Crossmatch Review Project. This is an in-house project initiated to maximize detection of overpayments and minimize the number of improperly paid weeks. This follow-up project is modeled after the New Hire Follow-up Project that ADWS has operated for approximately eight years.

In the first year after its inception, Quarterly Crossmatch Project raised the pre-follow-up return rate average of 59.59% to an approximate average of 71.52% post-follow-up, which is the equivalent of 10,791 additionally returned notices from employers. The pre-follow-up Quarter Crossmatch return rate was an approximate average of 71.90% for the period of 2017-3 through 2018-2 quarterly wage crossmatches. The approximate average return rate after the follow-ups for this same period was 82.87%, or a total of 8,421 returned audit notices. The average return rate represents an average increase of 2,105 audit notices each quarter during that period. The Quarterly Crossmatch Review Project performs follow-ups on employers for the previous audit quarter. The follow-ups are performed six weeks prior to a new crossmatch begin date and completed within a five-week period. The project began with employers with 30 or more outstanding wage audit notices who did not return their initial wage audit notice requests. The employers are contacted again either by telephone or email. ADWS is utilizing all available resources to increase overall performance and efficiency in the area of detection of benefits overpayments and investigations. ADWS depends on the involvement and contributions of key experienced employees for the future success of this project. ADWS expanded the project in January 2017 to follow-up with employers with 20 or more non-returned 901As. When the unit is fully staffed, ADWS will expand the project yet again by establishing a lower threshold for non-returned 901As. By the end of October, ADWS expanded the follow-ups to include employers with ten or more non-returns. ADWS later expanded the threshold to include employers with five or more audit notices that were not returned. Given the success to date of the project, ADWS eventually will expand this project to review all employers with non-returned notices; however, the lack of available experienced staff to perform follow-ups is a factor that adversely affects these efforts.

The second leading cause of overpayments in Arkansas is separation issues due to inadequate or untimely separation information being provided by the employer. In March 2012, ADWS deployed its electronic response system for employers to the World Wide Web. Through the electronic response system, employers may receive and respond to Notice to Last Employers, Notice to Base Period Employers, and adjudication questionnaires via the Internet. This system enhances ADWS' adjudication system by enabling it to have the same functionality as SIDES at a lower cost. The implementation of this method of response has improved the quality of

nonmonetary determinations and reduced the number of improper payments due to the untimely employer responses to adjudication questionnaires or appeals. Marketing to employers continues to be essential to the effectiveness of this system. In combination with ADWS' efforts to better educate our employers on the importance of accurately and timely responding to requests from ADWS for separation information, ADWS expects a continued reduction in errors that arise during the adjudication process.

To address nonmonetary adjudication quality, ADWS designated an AAS Training Officer whose primary responsibility is to evaluate and improve the existing procedures for our adjudication staff. AAS supervisory staff are required to review a sampling of all adjudicators' determinations in order to ensure consistent and accurate interpretation of Arkansas' unemployment insurance laws. During FY 2019, the AAS Program Operations Manager and AAS Supervisors participated in BTQ training which served as a refresher course on the essential elements of timely and quality nonmonetary adjudications. AAS staff are required to submit to mandatory 100% case review whenever an improper finding is detected as a result of supervisory case review and/or a BAM investigation in order to ensure the proper and consistent application of law and policy. Adjudication staff continue with its effort to improve the quality of the adjudication process by exceeding the minimum number of reasonable attempts that must be made to obtain information from an interested party. The improvement in the quality of nonmonetary determinations should help reduce the total amount of improper payments to claimants who are later determined to be ineligible for UI benefits as a result of the appeal process.

The third leading cause of overpayments in Arkansas is the result of "Other Issues." These types of issues are generally due to claim maintenance errors, appeal reversals, and fraud outside the key week. ADWS continues to educate staff regarding law and policy to reduce and prevent claim maintenance errors, misinformation provided to claimants and employers, and appeal reversals arising from insufficient information. Continued education of claimants and employers will also be a significant point of emphasis in order to prevent and detect potential issues during the life cycle of the claim. While Arkansas' improper payment rate is not impacted by work search issues due to the ability to issue a waiver, returning claimants to work as expeditiously as possible continues to the primary objective of ADWS. To that end, the implementation of a random work search audit process for claimants will further ADWS' primary objectives and serve to ensure that claimants are complying with UI eligibility requirements. The random audit process will also provide an opportunity for UI staff to ensure that claimants understand their rights and responsibilities with regard to their UI claim.

ADWS continues to work to improve preventing, detecting and recovering improper unemployment insurance overpayments. The GPRA goal for FY 2020 is that at least 54.5% of the estimated detectable recoverable overpayments will be established. ADWS' GPRA performance for SY 2019 was 50.43%. ADWS is currently at 56.75% for the period ending June 30, 2019. With regard to the Core Measure, ADWS met the Core Measure of 50% to 95% for the Detection of Overpayments with 56.36% of the detectable/recoverable overpayments established for recovery. ADWS will continue in its efforts to ensure its UI staff and workforce partners are well trained in identifying and addressing issues impacting a UI claim during its life cycle. A well-trained workforce and knowledgeable partners is a critical component in reducing the improper payment rate. Maintaining adequate staffing levels in the FIRE Unit and BPC will ensure the continued timely issuance of determinations and the establishment of overpayments.

In order to continue to improve the overpayment detection rate and reduce the operational

overpayment rate further, ADWS will continue to pursue the following major strategies: 1. Prevent, detect and reduce future overpayments by continuing with efforts to increase the number of employers who respond to ADWS requests for information through our electronic systems; 2. Prevent and reduce future overpayments through claimant messaging; 3. Prevent, detect, reduce and recover overpayments by interlinking more of the investigative and administrative systems; 4. Prevent, reduce and recover overpayments by continuing ADWS efforts to follow-up with employers who have not returned wage audit notices.

With regard to Benefit Year Earnings issues, ADWS continues to educate claimants on the importance of reporting earnings timely and accurately. ADWS' IVR Crossmatch System installs control dates on claims whenever matches are made between claimants and the State New Hire Directory. Local offices then review those claims and, if appropriate, contact claimants regarding reporting earnings. All claims that have a "hit" on the State New Hire Directory and/or National New Hire Registry result in the issuance of a wage audit notice to the employer. In 2016, ADWS central office staff began emailing the IVR Crossmatch hits to the local offices to be more proactive in contacting claimants who have been matched with the State New Hire Directory. This provides ADWS with an early opportunity to verify that claimants are properly reporting work and earnings as well as provide an opportunity for early intervention. ADWS continues to mail letters to claimants who claim the week in which a match was made from the State New Hire Directory. These letters congratulate claimants for obtaining new employment and serve as another opportunity to issue instructions regarding reporting earnings. In November 2017, ADWS began distributing its "Fraud: It's A Crime!" newsletter to every claimant who files an initial, additional or reopened claim. This newsletter is also delivered electronically to all claimants who provided an email address during the claims filing process. In August 2019, ADWS began distributing a second claimant newsletter focusing on the pending enhanced penalties for committing unemployment insurance fraud.

To further combat Benefit Year Earnings issues, ADWS implemented a process during the second quarter of 2018 which requires claimants who reported earnings for two consecutive weeks and then stopped reporting earnings during their continue claim series to report to their local office for a claim review. During the second quarter of 2020, ADWS projects anticipates the implementation of process to conduct random audits of active partial claims in an effort to ensure that work and earnings issues are prevented or detected in its earliest states. A random sample of claimants receiving partial benefits will be required to submit to a random earnings audit during the third and seventh week of the claim series. This will provide ADWS with yet another opportunity to ensure that claimants understand their rights and responsibilities with regard to reporting earnings from work or self-employment. ADWS will also have the opportunity to stress the importance of timely reporting any other potential eligibility issues that may arise during the claim series. The process will be evaluated to determine whether the random audit process should specifically target continued claimants reporting less than 40% of their weekly benefit amounts.

In the third quarter of 2018, ADWS implemented updates to the online wage audit notice response system (IRME), which added a comment section at the bottom of the online wage audit notice form to allow employers to provide additional information. The modification to the online wage audit notice form has been beneficial in detecting new nonmonetary issues outside of work and earnings. All responses are reviewed by a fraud investigator and then forwarded to the adjudication unit for adjudication.

In addition to the enhancements made to ADWS' IVR Crossmatch System, ADWS deployed an employer reporting tool to securely report instances of claimant activity that impact eligibility and an online reporting system for citizens to report suspected claimant and employer unemployment insurance fraud, job refusals and failure to report for job interviews. Referrals made by citizens are simultaneously forwarded to UI Administration and UI Technical and are

typically assigned for investigation within 24 hours of receipt. The quick notification to ADWS of these events, when substantiated, will continue to reduce improper payments.

To emphasize the importance that the highest levels of Arkansas government have placed on preventing inaccurate wage reporting by claimants, beginning in March 2012, ADWS developed and deployed a wage crossmatch that runs biweekly with state employee payroll. This report contains the weekly pay of any state employee who also claimed benefits within the applicable two-week period. ADWS utilizes this tool to identify claimants with earnings issues and immediately initiates a priority investigation.

#### Root Cause #1: Benefit Year Earnings

Strategies	Actions		Resources
1. Prevent UI Overpayments by continuing to educate claimants regarding timely and accurately reporting earnings and potential cl1. Prevent im issues when filing continued claims.	Continued dissemination of "Your Unemployment Insurance Information Handbook" through direct and electronic contact.	Ongoing	UI Administration, Legal, Field Operations, FIRE Unit, and UI Technical
	Continued distribution of the "Fraud: It's A Crime" newsletter to claimants emphasizing how to properly report earnings and other potential issues during a claim series	Ongoing	UI Administration, Legal, Field Operations, FIRE Unit, and UI Technical
	Require claimants who are in continued claim status and reported earnings for two consecutive weeks and stop reporting earnings to report to the local office for review of potential separation and/or other issues.	Ongoing	UI Administration, Legal, Field Operations, FIRE Unit, and UI Technical
2. Prevent, detect, and reduce UI overpayments by educating employers of the importance of providing timely and accurate wage information to ADWS.	Continued outreach to educate employers regarding state and federal unemployment laws through employer trade groups and periodic employer updates.	Ongoing	UI Administration, Legal, Field Operations, FIRE Unit, and UI Technical
	Continued distribution of employer newsletter	Ongoing	UI Administration, Legal, Field Operations, FIRE

Strategies	Actions		Resources
	regarding the unemployment insurance program		Unit, and UI Technical
	Distribute 901A response instructions with the ADWS Online Employer Services portal.	Ongoing	UI Administration, Legal, Field Operations, FIRE Unit, and UI Technical
	Follow up with noncompliant new hire employers.	Ongoing	UI Administration, Legal, Field Operations, FIRE Unit, and UI Technical

Root Cause #2: Separation Issues

1. Reduction in the number of improper nonmonetary determinations by increasing the number of reasonable attempts to contact employers for information.	Exceed the minimum number of attempts (2) to contact an employer for separation information in cases that will likely result in a finding of eligibility.	Ongoing	UI Administration, AAS Program Manager, and AAS Satellite Office Supervisors.
2. Reduction in the number of improper nonmonetary determinations through continued adjudicator training.	Continued education and monitoring of AAS staff to ensure consistent and accurate interpretation of Arkansas' unemployment laws.	Ongoing	UI Administration, AAS Program Manager, and AAS Satellite Office Supervisors.
	Reduction of the number of wrong last work issues by confirming last employer when more than three weeks have passed between the separation date and the IC date.	Ongoing	UI Administration, AAS Program Manager, and AAS Satellite Office Supervisors.
	Mandatory 100% case review for any adjudicator who receives a BAM finding for an improper separation nonmonetary determination.	Ongoing	UI Administration, AAS Program Manager, and AAS Satellite Office Supervisors.
	Continued case review for adjudicators by AAS Satellite Office Supervisors.	Ongoing	UI Administration, AAS Program Manager, and AAS Satellite Office Supervisors.



1. Reduction in the number of improper nonmonetary determinations by increasing the number of reasonable attempts to contact employers for information.	Exceed the minimum number of attempts (2) to contact an employer for separation information in cases that will likely result in a finding of eligibility.	Ongoing	UI Administration, AAS Program Manager, and AAS Satellite Office Supervisors.
3. Reduction of improper payments through monitoring of appeal decisions.	Continued monitoring of appeal decisions to rapidly install stop payments in appeals filed by employers that result in a reversal of benefits.	Ongoing	UI Administration, AAS Program Manager, and AAS Satellite Office Supervisors.
	Continue to provide list of appeal reversals to Local Office Managers and Area Operations Chiefs to ensure local offices are properly installing stop payments and forwarding to BOP to establish overpayments	Ongoing	UI Administration, AAS Program Manager, and AAS Satellite Office Supervisors.
4. Prevent UI overpayments by continuing to educate employers of the importance of providing timely and sufficient information regarding separation issues.	Continued dissemination of "Unemployment Insurance Handbook for Arkansas Employers" through direct and electronic contact.	Ongoing	UI Administration, Contributions, UI Technical, and ADWS Website
	Continued distribution of employer newsletter regarding the unemployment insurance program.	Ongoing	UI Administration, Legal, FIRE Unit, and UI Technical
5. Detect concealed separation issues through continued utilization of the "Stopped Earnings" report.	Continued utilization of the "Stopped Earnings" report to detect potential unreported separation and other nonmonetary issues.	Ongoing	UI Administration, UI Technical, and Field Operations

Root Cause #3: All Other Causes

Strategies	Actions		Resources
1. Prevent, detect and reduce UI overpayments resulting	Continued review of Appeal Tribunal cases to identify employer appeal reversals to ensure	Ongoing	UI Administration, Board of Review, Appeal Tribunal, UI Technical,

Strategies	Actions		Resources
from appeal reversals.	prompt implementation of appeal decision to reduce amount of overpayments.		and Field Operations
2. Prevent, detect and reduce UI overpayments resulting from unreported nonmonetary issues.	Continued monitoring review of field operations daily reports to ensure proper application of law, policy and procedure.	Ongoing	UI Administration, UI Technical, and Field Operations
	Continued dissemination of claimant and employer newsletters covering potential nonmonetary issues that may arise in a claim series.	Ongoing	UI Administration, UI Technical, and Field Operations
3. Prevent, detect and reduce UI overpayments resulting from claim maintenance errors.	Continued review of randomly case files for each staff member to identify quality control and training issues.	Ongoing	UI Administration, UI Technical, and Field Operations
	Mandatory retraining and claim review for staff members who fail two or more quality reviews in a six month period.	Ongoing	UI Administration, UI Technical, and Field Operations
Additional:			

#### *CARES ACT STRATEGIES*

Strategies	Actions		Resources
1. Detect and reduce UI overpayments resulting from unreported earnings.	Mandatory 100% audit of claims(901A) to identify and investigate fraud, making sure the response option is available via ADWS Online Employer Services Portal	10/30/2020	UI Administration, UI Technical, Fire Unit
2. Detect and reduce UI Fraud	Hire and train staff to investigate fraud	Ongoing	UI Administration, Fire Unit, Fraud Unit
Additional:			

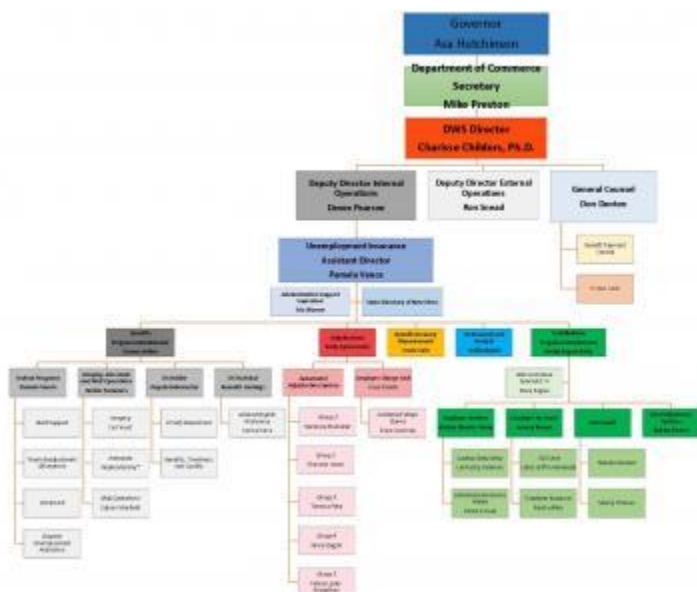
#### *High \$ OP Strategies*

Strategies	Actions		Resources
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Strategies	Actions		Resources
1. Prevent, detect and reduce UI overpayments by working NASWA's Integrity Center to identify areas of opportunity for claimant messaging.	Continue to explore opportunities in the claims filing and continued claims processes to incorporate claimant messaging.	Ongoing	UI Administration, Legal, Fire Unit, BPC
	Continued distribution of the "Fraud: It's A Crime" newsletter to claimants emphasizing how to properly report earnings and other potential issues during a claim series.	Ongoing	UI Administration, Legal, Field Operations, FIRE Unit, and UI Technical
	Continue to partner with NASWA and the Integrity Data Hub to identify fraud nationwide	Ongoing	UI Administration, Legal, Fire Unit, BPC and Fraud Unit
Additional:			

## 6. ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

The Unemployment Insurance Program Organization Chart can be found at:



## 7. SQSP SIGNATURE PAGE

U.S. Department of Labor SQSP SIGNATURE PAGE

OMB Approval No. 1205-0132 Expires 2/28/2021

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR Employment and Training Administration FEDERAL FISCAL  
YEAR 2019 STATE ARKANSAS

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE STATE QUALITY SERVICE PLAN SIGNATURE PAGE

This Unemployment Insurance State Quality Service Plan (SQSP) is entered into between the  
Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, and  
Arkansas Division of Workforce Services

The Unemployment Insurance SQSP is part of the State's overall operating plan and, during  
this Federal fiscal year, the State agency will adhere to and carry out the standards set forth in  
Federal UI Law as interpreted by the DOL, and adhere to the Federal requirements related to  
the use of granted funds.

All work performed under this agreement will be in accordance with the assurances and  
descriptions of activities as identified in the SQSP Handbook and will be subject to its terms.

TYPED NAME AND TITLE SIGNATURE DATE

STATE ADMINISTRATOR

Charisse Childers, Ph.D., Director

DOL APPROVING OFFICIAL

DOL APPROVING OFFICIAL

THE SIGNED COPY OF THE SQSP SIGNATURE PAGE IS MAINTAINED WITH THE AGENCY AND  
THE REGIONAL OFFICE

### 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:

#### PERFORMANCE INDICATOR APPENDIX

##### ALL WIOA CORE PROGRAMS

##### ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES - ADULT PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	83.0	83.0	83.0	83.0
Employment (Fourth Quarter	82.0	82.0	82.0	82.0

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
After Exit)				
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	6,389	6,649.00	6,389	6,649.00
Credential Attainment Rate	81.0	81.0	81.0	81.0
Measurable Skill Gains	71.0	71.0	71.0	71.0
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>

*“Effectiveness in Serving Employers” is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.*

#### ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES - DISLOCATED PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	89.0	83.0	89.0	83.0
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	87.0	85.0	87.0	85.0
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	6,900	7,227.00	6,900	7,227.00
Credential Attainment Rate	79.0	79.0	79.0	79.0
Measurable Skill Gains	70.2	68.5	70.2	68.5
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>

*“Effectiveness in Serving Employers” is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.*

#### ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES - YOUTH PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	77.0	73.0	77.0	73.0
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	77.0	76.0	77.0	76.0
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	3,200	3,700	3,200	3,700
Credential Attainment Rate	68.0	62.0	68.0	62.0
Measurable Skill Gains	57.0	59.0	57.0	59.0
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>

*“Effectiveness in Serving Employers” is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.*

#### WAGNER-PEYSER ACT - WAGNER PEYSER PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	72.0	69.5	72.0	69.5
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	73.0	69.5	73.0	69.5
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	5,400	5,477	5,400	5,477
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 <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>

*“Effectiveness in Serving Employers” is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.*

**ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAM - ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	42.0%	42.0%	43.0%	43.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	22.0%	27.8%	23.0%	30.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$4,500	\$4,500	\$4,600	\$4,600
Credential Attainment Rate	46.0%	46.0%	47.0%	47.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	50.0%	52.0%	51.0%	53.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>

*“Effectiveness in Serving Employers” is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.*

**VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM (COMBINED OR GENERAL) - VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	58.9	60.5	60.0	61.5
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	47.9	57.3	49.0	57.9
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	5,317.7	5697.0	5,400.0	5787.0
Credential Attainment Rate	21.9	28.9	23.0	30.9
Measurable Skill Gains	50.0	55.6	51.0	57.6
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>

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*"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.*

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM (BLIND) - VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION  
PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	58.9	60.5	60.0	61.5
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	47.9	57.3	49.0	57.9
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	5317.7	5697.0	5400.0	5787.0
Credential Attainment Rate	21.9	28.9	23.0	30.9
Measurable Skill Gains	50.0	55.6	51.0	57.6
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>

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*"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.*

ADDITIONAL INDICATORS OF PERFORMANCE

Additional Indicators of Performance
Arkansas has not established any additional indicators of performance.