

ARKANSAS



WIOA

WORKFORCE INNOVATION & OPPORTUNITY ACT

**COMBINED
STATE PLAN**

PROGRAM YEARS

2024-2027



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Note: Requirements for Combined State Plan partner programs are available in a separate supplemental document.

I. WIOA STATE PLAN TYPE and EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

(a) Unified or Combined State Plan.

Combined State Plan. This plan includes the Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, Wagner-Peyser Act, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, and Vocational Rehabilitation programs, as well as the optional Combined State Plan partner programs identified below.

- **Employment and Training programs under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program** (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** (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** (authorized under 38, U.S.C. 4100 et. seq.)
- **Unemployment Insurance programs** (authorized under state unemployment compensation laws in accordance with applicable federal law)

(b) Plan Introduction or Executive Summary.

DRAFT



*Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders
State of Arkansas*

Executive Summary

On Tuesday, November 8, 2022, Sarah Huckabee Sanders was elected governor by the people of Arkansas. She became the 47th governor and the first woman elected to lead the state of Arkansas. Standing firm on her commitment to strengthening Arkansas' economy and workforce, within her first 40 days in office, she signed an executive order to create the Governor's Workforce Cabinet and the state's Chief Workforce Officer.

The [executive order: EO-23-16](#) highlighted the following disparities and goals for the state of Arkansas.

WHEREAS: Arkansans must have the skills to compete for employment in the current job market;

WHEREAS: In Arkansas, approximately six out of ten jobs require credentials beyond a high school diploma, however, less than half of the workforce in Arkansas is credentialed beyond a high school diploma;

WHEREAS: In Arkansas, fewer than fifty percent (50%) of high school graduates attend college or postsecondary training;

WHEREAS: Currently, there are six state agencies in Arkansas state government that provide or coordinate career and technical education and workforce development;

WHEREAS: It is the policy of this Administration to create a single entity to coordinate and to assist in career and technical education, which in turn, will ensure that young adults who are entering the workforce are prepared for high-wage, high-growth careers; and

WHEREAS: The Governor seeks to establish the Governor's Workforce Cabinet and the Chief Workforce Officer.

The Arkansas Department of Commerce has established high-level aspirations that are aligned with the Governor's vision. Division-specific key performance indicators will help Commerce reach those goals. Three key performance indicators include:

	Current	2028 Goal
Labor Force Participation Rate	57.7%	59.4%
Per Capita Income	\$52,600	\$66,500
Real GDP per Capita	\$45,00	\$51,000

Below is a summary of changes that are being implemented by Commerce in coming years.

- The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (ADWS) will be reorganized into three new divisions: Re-employment, Arkansas Workforce Connection, and Workforce Policy & Innovation in an employer-centric workforce development model.
- Unemployment Insurance will now be called Re-employment and report directly to the Secretary. This is a high profile and incredibly important function that has been undergoing significant and complex system, process and technical change with the UI Modernization project.
- Arkansas Workforce Connection will have the sole focus of executing the various state and federal workforce development programs that are currently in multiple locations across Commerce and coordinating with local workforce development boards. This employer-centric division will also have a significant focus on ensuring we meet our customers' needs with a comprehensive and consistent effort of customer/business outreach. This division will include (1) the Office of Skills Development; (2) Employer Workforce Programming that supports new and expanding businesses to meet their workforce needs; (3) Adult Education (Title II); (4) Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (Title IV); (5) Services for the Blind (Title IV); and (6) Employment Services (Titles I and III). The leader has not been named for this division.
- Workforce Policy & Innovation will be a new group that will be the glue between policy, program and outcome that integrates best practices, measures outcomes, and collaborates with stakeholders to support on-the-ground solutions that operationalize and improve the state's workforce development strategy. This group will not only be the thinkers and dreamers on how to drive up Arkansas' labor force participation rate, they will also be responsible for the State Workforce Development Board and ensure federal and state compliance. They will also work with and receive input from – Arkansas Workforce Connection, Re-employment, Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC), external workforce development organizations and employers.

Conclusion

Arkansas employers are facing significant challenges in attracting talent with the skills needed to run and grow their businesses. This is largely due to low labor force participation and educational attainment coupled with an increasingly dynamic labor market with evolving skill requirements. Many Arkansans are underemployed or detached from the labor force, and facing challenges with poverty, food insecurity, housing, health, and criminal justice system involvement.

Solving these challenges can lead to improved employer productivity and growth; attraction of new business and industry; improved educational, credential, and skill attainment; improved population health and economic security; reduced recidivism; and increased efficiency and effectiveness at all levels. With limited funding (see next page), meeting these goals will require increased efforts to leverage resources, foster strategic partnerships, and implement innovative solutions.

Arkansas' Program Year (PY) 2024-2027 WIOA Combined State Plan seeks to outline the vision and strategies to address the aforementioned challenges and achieve the governor's workforce development goals.

FUNDED APPROPRIATION

GRANTS SFY 2021-2022

LEGACY 810	
ADWS Training Trust Fund	\$3,256,577
Disaster Relief	\$24,000,000
Individual Development Account Program	\$141,738
Loans to Local Workforce Development Boards	\$1,500,000
New Hire Registry	\$200,141
Operations	\$79,947,386
Rainy Day	\$1,050,687
Reed Act Funds	\$3,100,000
Special Funds	\$10,026,000
Training Allowances & Payments	\$12,050,000
Transitional Employment Program-TANF	\$29,939,578
UI Trust Fund Interest/Unemployment	\$3,000,001
Unemployment Insurance Administration Fund	\$6,000,000
Unemployment Insurance Benefits	\$5,001,000,000
Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Payments	\$20,325,709
Legacy Total	\$5,195,537,817
ADULT EDUCATION 810	
Adult Basic Education	\$21,507,041
Adult Education Administration	\$1,751,429
AmeriCorps	\$66,148
Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund II	\$823,200
Federal Adult Basic Education	\$5,906,027
GED Testing	\$350,000
Governor's Commission on Adult Literacy	\$768,567
SNAP E&T	\$741,490
TANF	\$2,235,906
Adult Ed Total	\$34,149,808
REHABILITATION SERVICES 520	
Operations	\$33,907,082
Vocational Rehabilitation/Supported Employment/Independent Living	\$25,455,385
Increasing Capabilities Access Network	\$888,402
Statewide Disability Telecommunications Equipment Program People with	\$571,703
Disabilities Program	\$30,000
Technology Equipment Revolving Loan Program	\$532,085
Cash Operations	\$362,042
Rehabilitation Services Total	\$61,746,699
SERVICES FOR THE BLIND 520	
Operations	\$6,459,293
Vocational Rehabilitation/Supported Employment/Older	\$5,633,585
Individuals Who are Blind	
Services for the Blind Total	\$12,092,878
GRAND TOTAL	\$5,303,527,202

*Funded appropriation amounts will be updated prior to final submission of the PY 2024-2027 WIOA State Combined Plan

II. STRATEGIC ELEMENTS

(a) Economic, Workforce, and Workforce Development Activities Analysis.

(1) Economic and Workforce Analysis

(A) Economic Analysis

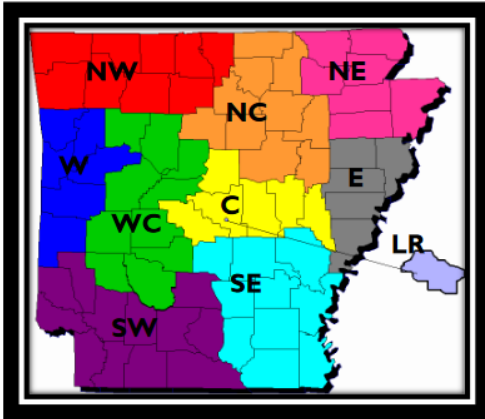
Arkansas' economic analysis provides a robust foundation for understanding the existing demand in industry sectors and occupations, offering insights into the anticipated trends and dynamics of the labor market and the changing needs of the employers. The reliance on authoritative data sources and advanced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

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

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

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

Local Workforce Development Areas



Central Arkansas Workforce Development Area

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

City of Little Rock Workforce Development Area

Inside the city limits of Little Rock

Eastern Arkansas Workforce Development Area

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

Northwest Arkansas Workforce Development Area

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

North Central Arkansas Workforce Development Area

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

Northeast Arkansas Workforce Development Area

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

Western Arkansas Workforce Development Area

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

West Central Arkansas Workforce Development Area

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

Southwest Arkansas Workforce Development Area

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

Southeast Arkansas Workforce Development Area

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

Arkansas is rich in natural resources. There are many historical landmarks, including over 2,600 listings on the National Registry of Historical Places and 53 state parks scattered throughout the state. This is one of the reasons Arkansas is called the Natural State.

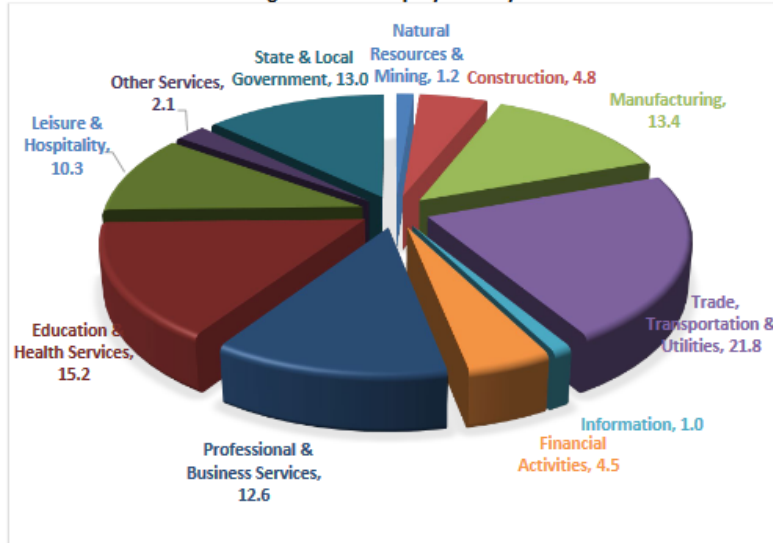
Educational opportunities in the state of Arkansas are numerous. Prospective students have a wide range of institutions to choose from, ranging from two-year community and technical colleges to four-year universities. Students can also choose between public/state institutions and private or religious-based institutions. These schools offer a variety of programs, ranging from technical certificates and associate degrees to graduate degrees. Arkansas also has several small institutions that focus on specific types of careers. With all these educational opportunities, an array of occupational careers is waiting for students. Arkansas' population, based on State Census Data Center estimates, was 3,045,637 as of July 1, 2022, an increase of 17,515 residents from the July 1, 2021, estimate of 3,028,122. The not-seasonally adjusted average unemployment rate for first quarter 2022 was 3.6 percent, while the seasonally adjusted number was 3.2 percent.

SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS DURING THIRD QUARTER 2022

AVERAGE EMPLOYMENT CHANGES

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

Average Covered Employment by NAICS



EMPLOYMENT CHANGES FROM SECOND QUARTER 2022

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

Source:

<https://www.discover.arkansas.gov/docs/Publications/QCEW/Current/CEE.pdf>



Arkansas

In-Demand Occupations



High Skill			Moderate Skill		
SOC Title	Total Annual Openings	May 2022 Mean Wage	SOC Title	Total Annual Openings	May 2022 Mean Wage
General and Operations Managers	3,281	\$84,460	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	4,917	\$47,090
Registered Nurses	1,717	\$66,530	Nursing Assistants	2,531	\$29,970
Clergy	1,435	\$46,910	Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks	1,687	\$41,160
Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	1,066	\$50,610	Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary	1,398	\$28,840
Accountants and Auditors	1,048	\$70,660	Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	863	\$45,990
Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	957	\$53,080	Medical Assistants	684	\$33,940
Management Analysts	836	\$78,380	Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education	650	\$31,680
Financial Managers	762	\$115,200	Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics	544	\$43,280
Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	690	\$75,990	Heating, Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration Mechanics and Installers	544	\$45,560
Medical and Health Services Managers	657	\$94,840	Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Workers, All Other	498	\$36,570
Project Management Specialists	541	\$82,180	Dental Assistants	478	\$28,510
Human Resources Specialists	519	\$58,750	Hairdressers, Hairstylists, and Cosmetologists	414	N/A
Fundraisers	506	\$56,510	Paralegals and Legal Assistants	399	\$50,080
Middle School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	483	\$52,890	Computer User Support Specialists	318	\$64,210
Buyers and Purchasing Agents	465	\$83,870	Physical Therapist Assistants	283	\$51,470

Basic Skill		
SOC Title	Total Annual Openings	May 2022 Mean Wage
Fast Food and Counter Workers	8,649	\$25,580
Cashiers	6,063	\$25,760
Retail Salespersons	5,610	\$31,130
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	4,655	\$32,880
Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers	4,638	\$53,020
Stockers and Order Fillers	4,202	\$32,090
Waiters and Waitresses	3,751	\$28,270
Office Clerks, General	3,632	\$36,190
Customer Service Representatives	3,012	\$37,110
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	2,953	\$26,680
Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	2,566	\$28,130
Cooks, Restaurant	2,256	\$28,530
First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	2,150	\$42,820
Receptionists and Information Clerks	2,034	\$30,610
First-Line Supervisors of Food Preparation and Serving Workers	1,939	\$32,350

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

Source: <https://www.discover.arkansas.gov/docs/Publications/Economic-Report-OCI/Economic-Report.pdf>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Top 10 Fastest Growth

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

Top 10 Decline

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

Top 10 Fastest Decline

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

Source: Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, Projections Suite Software

Source: <https://www.discover.arkansas.gov/docs/Publications/Economic-Report-OCI/Economic-Report.pdf>

Emerging Demand Industry Sectors and Occupations.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Source: <https://www.discover.arkansas.gov/docs/Publications/Economic-Report-OCI/Economic-Report.pdf>

Top 5 Industry Supersectors

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

Top Industries - Top 10 Growth

NAICS Code	NAICS Title	2022 Estimated Employment	2024 Projected Employment	Numeric Change	Percent Change
722500	Restaurants and Other Eating Places	89,758	93,472	3,714	4.14%
524100	Insurance Carriers	23,041	26,509	3,468	15.05%
813200	Grantmaking and Giving Services	7,444	9,602	2,458	34.41%
551000	Management of Companies and Enterprises	35,456	37,684	2,228	6.28%
424000	Merchant Wholesalers, Nondurable Goods	19,333	21,006	1,673	8.65%
238200	Building Equipment Contractors	20,175	21,741	1,566	7.76%
611100	Elementary and Secondary Schools	77,255	78,651	1,396	1.81%
452000	General Merchandise Stores	39,209	40,229	1,020	2.60%
621100	Offices of Physicians	27,151	27,963	812	2.99%
622100	General Medical and Surgical Hospitals	51,855	52,636	781	1.51%

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Top 5 Major Occupational Groups

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

Top Occupations - Top 10 Growth

SOC Code	SOC Title	Employment		Change		Annual Openings			
		2022 Est.	2024 Proj.	Numeric	Percent	Exits	Transfers	Change	Total
35-3023	Fast Food and Counter Workers	36,015	37,436	1,421	3.95%	3,982	3,957	710	8,649
11-1021	General and Operations Managers	29,660	30,969	1,309	4.41%	696	1,931	654	3,281
41-2031	Retail Salespersons	34,308	35,401	1,093	3.19%	2,240	2,824	546	5,610
41-3021	Insurance Sales Agents	9,272	10,343	1,071	11.55%	390	508	536	1,434
53-7062	Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	29,103	30,114	1,011	3.47%	1,435	2,714	506	4,655
35-2014	Cooks, Restaurant	11,013	11,994	981	8.91%	794	972	490	2,256
53-3032	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	37,527	38,453	926	2.47%	1,766	2,688	463	4,917
43-9041	Insurance Claims and Policy Processing Clerks	7,655	8,552	897	11.72%	333	501	448	1,282
13-1031	Claims Adjusters, Examiners, and Investigators	7,744	8,622	878	11.34%	224	424	439	1,087
53-7065	Stockers and Order Fillers	21,735	22,589	854	3.93%	1,420	2,355	427	4,202

DRAFT

Top 10 Fastest Growth

SOC Code	SOC Title	Employment		Change		Annual Openings			
		2022 Est.	2024 Proj.	Numeric	Percent	Exits	Transfers	Change	Total
13-1131	Fundraisers	1,929	2,534	605	31.36%	80	124	302	506
11-2033	Fundraising Managers	129	166	37	28.68%	4	8	18	30
13-2053	Insurance Underwriters	1,534	1,737	203	13.23%	44	78	102	224
51-9194	Etchers and Engravers	70	79	9	12.86%	4	4	4	12
43-9041	Insurance Claims & Policy Processing Clerks	7,655	8,552	897	11.72%	333	501	448	1,282
41-3021	Insurance Sales Agents	9,272	10,343	1,071	11.55%	390	508	536	1,434
13-1031	Claims Adjusters, Examiners, & Investigators	7,744	8,622	878	11.34%	224	424	439	1,087
29-1171	Nurse Practitioners	2,649	2,926	277	10.46%	64	80	138	282
15-2051	Data Scientists	275	303	28	10.18%	7	14	14	35
13-1081	Logisticians	1,375	1,514	139	10.11%	39	87	70	196

Top 10 Decline

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

Top 10 Fastest Decline

53-5011	Sailors and Marine Oilers	38	32	-6	-15.79%	1	3	-3	1
51-9031	Cutters and Trimmers, Hand	81	73	-8	-9.88%	4	6	-4	6
27-3023	News Analysts, Reporters, & Journalists	213	195	-18	-8.45%	8	16	-9	15
43-9022	Word Processors and Typists	60	55	-5	-8.33%	4	3	-2	5
51-6062	Textile Cutting Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders	100	93	-7	-7.00%	6	7	-4	9
47-4061	Rail-Track Laying and Maintenance Equipment Operators	316	296	-20	-6.33%	6	16	-10	12
51-6021	Pressers, Textile, Garment, and Related Materials	193	181	-12	-6.22%	12	10	-6	16
27-3041	Editors	493	464	-29	-5.88%	20	28	-14	34
51-8092	Gas Plant Operators	157	148	-9	-5.73%	4	12	-4	12
41-9041	Telemarketers	736	698	-38	-5.16%	38	68	-19	87

Source: Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, Projections Suite Software

Source: <https://www.discover.arkansas.gov/docs/Publications/Economic-Report-OCI/Economic-Report.pdf>

Employers' Employment Needs.

Arkansas, mirroring the national economic landscape, stands at the forefront of evolution, embodying diverse industries and hosting prominent Fortune 500 companies. The state's business environment extends beyond its borders, featuring major operations of renowned companies headquartered elsewhere. Arkansas continues to thrive in energy extraction, minerals, timber production and agriculture,

creating a substantial number of jobs and contributing to the production of value-added products.

Despite much of Arkansas being predominantly rural, the state is home to numerous contract manufacturers and producers of unique goods, presenting both challenges and opportunities for economic development. Notably, the Arkansas Workforce Development System recognizes the dynamic employment needs of the state and has strategically identified 15 target industries. These industries, ranging from Advanced Food Manufacturing to Smart Grid Technologies, showcase the state's commitment to fostering diverse enterprises.

Arkansas' focus on advanced food manufacturing, aerospace/aviation, biosciences, data centers, distribution and logistics services, firearms and ammunition, paper and timber products, regional headquarters, smart grid technologies, software development and data management services, steel production, sustainable building products and fixtures, technical support services, transportation equipment manufacturing, and Walmart suppliers illustrates the richness of Arkansas' economic landscape. Aligning with the national trend, service industries are expected to be primary revenue generators, particularly in metropolitan areas. This strategic focus underscores the state's dedication to meeting the employer employment needs for skilled workers across a broad spectrum of industries, contributing to sustained economic growth and development.

To equip workforce boards for development planning, this report leverages data from the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services Labor Market Information (LMI) website. The information has been transformed into interactive visualizations, accessible for download in image or PDF format. These tools aim to empower stakeholders at both state and local levels, facilitating a nuanced understanding of future industry and occupational needs.

Arkansas' economic outlook, while sharing similarities with the nation, reveals distinctive facets that underscore its unique position in the evolving economic landscape. WIOA serves as a comprehensive framework in the United States for addressing employer employment needs through the public workforce system. WIOA emphasizes the development of a skilled and adaptable workforce to meet the dynamic demands of the labor market. Employers can engage with the public workforce system to fulfill their workforce requirements in several ways. WIOA is designed to enhance the competitiveness of the nation's workforce by aligning education and training programs with the current and future needs of employers. Through the public workforce system, WIOA aims to meet the following employer employment needs:

- **Skilled Workforce Development:** WIOA supports the development of a highly skilled and adaptable workforce by facilitating training and education programs that align with the specific skills demanded by employers in various industries. This includes both technical skills and essential soft skills necessary for success in the modern workplace.
- **Talent Recruitment and Placement:** The public workforce system, under WIOA, assists employers in identifying and recruiting qualified candidates for job openings.

This involves the creation of a talent pool that matches the skills and qualifications sought by employers, streamlining the hiring process and reducing recruitment challenges.

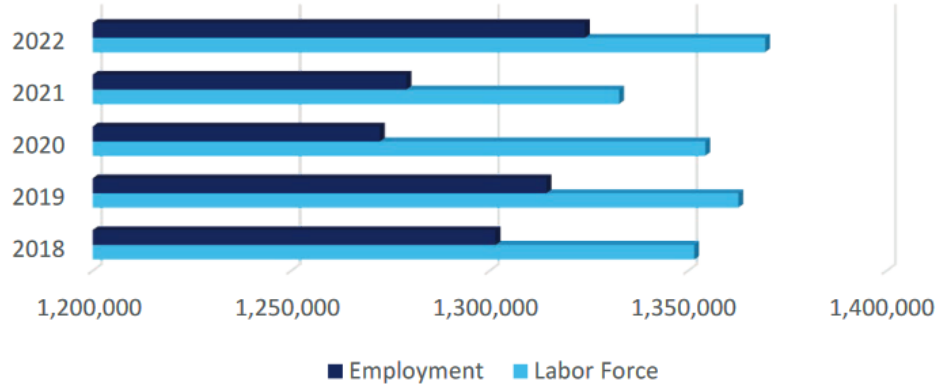
- **Customized Training Programs:** WIOA encourages the customization of training programs to meet the unique needs of employers. This can involve collaborations between training providers, educational institutions and employers to design curricula that directly address the specific skill gaps within particular industries or companies.
- **Apprenticeship Opportunities:** WIOA promotes apprenticeship programs as a valuable pathway for individuals to acquire industry-specific skills while meeting the workforce needs of employers. These programs facilitate a hands-on learning experience, ensuring that workers are well-prepared for the demands of their chosen professions.
- **Workforce Diversity and Inclusion:** The public workforce system, under WIOA, emphasizes the importance of fostering diversity and inclusion in the workplace. By supporting initiatives that promote equal opportunities and inclusivity, WIOA contributes to creating a workforce that reflects the diverse talents and perspectives of the broader community.
- **Labor Market Information:** WIOA facilitates the provision of up-to-date labor market information to employers. This includes data on current and projected skill demands, industry trends and emerging occupations, enabling employers to make informed decisions about their workforce needs and strategies. By addressing these key aspects, WIOA and the public workforce system play a pivotal role in connecting job seekers with employment opportunities.

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

Arkansas 2018-2022 Labor Force/Employment

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Labor Force	1,351,496	1,362,642	1,354,296	1,332,620	1,369,367
Employment	1,301,459	1,314,290	1,272,344	1,278,984	1,323,949
Unemployment	50,037	48,352	81,952	53,636	45,418
Unemployment Rate	3.7%	3.5%	6.1%	4.0%	3.3%

Source: Arkansas Division of Workforce Services Local Area Unemployment Statistics



Source: <https://www.discover.arkansas.gov/docs/Publications/Economic-Report-OCI/Economic-Report.pdf>

B. Workforce Analysis

Labor Force and Unemployment Rate

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

Arkansas Employment Status 2022 Table S2301

Arkansas Employment Status, 2022				
	Total	Labor Force Participation Rate	Employment/Population Ratio	Unemployment Rate
Populations 16 years and over	2,402,462	58.20%	54.9%	5.1%
AGE				
16 to 19	165,397	35.2%	29.3%	16.5%
20 to 24	205,218	72.4%	65.0%	9.4%
25 to 29	195,578	80.3%	74.9%	6.0%
30 to 34	194,001	79.4%	74.9%	5.1%
35 to 44	378,345	79.2%	75.2%	4.5%
45 to 54	360,316	75.7%	73.2%	3.2%
55 to 59	193,645	66.2%	64.0%	3.1%
60 to 64	190,528	50.1%	48.8%	2.7%

65 to 74	304,000	22.7%	22.0%	2.8%
75 years and older	215,434	6.7%	6.5%	2.6%
Race and Hispanic or Latino Origin				
White alone	1,793,739	57.2%	54.2%	4.3%
Black or African American alone	349,801	57.7%	52.1%	9.4%
American Indian or Alaska Native alone	13,335	58.6%	55.4%	4.7%
Asian alone	38,130	69.4%	67.2%	2.9%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	7,443	63.0%	58.0%	7.8%
Some other race alone	63,335	70.7%	66.8%	0.1%
Two or more races	136,679	62.6%	58.7%	5.8%
Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race)	163,574	70.8%	67.4%	4.5%
White alone, nor Hispanic or Latino	1,735,795	56.8%	54.1%	4.4%
Population 20 to 64 years	1,717,631	73.1%	0.693	4.8%
SEX				
Male	858,902	77.0%	72.7%	4.9%
Female	858,729	69.2%	65.9%	4.7%
With own children under 18 years	315,450	74.0%	70.5%	4.5%
With own children under 6 years only	69,080	72.0%	68.2%	5.1%
With own children under 6 years and 6 to 17 years	68,858	67.3%	63.4%	5.7%
With own children under 6+ to 17 years only	177,512	77.3%	74.2%	3.9%
Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months				
Below Poverty Level	254,974	42.2%	33.8%	19.7%
At or above the poverty level	142,205	80.5%	77.4%	3.4%
Disability Status				
With any disability	267,316	37.0%	33.2%	10.2%
Educational Attainment				
Population 25 to 64 years	1,512,413	73.20%	69.90%	4.20%
Less than high school graduate	162,017	54.40%	50.10%	8.00%

High school graduate (includes equivalency)	501,966	67.00%	63.40%	5.20%
Some college or associates degree	46,129	76.10%	72.40%	4.20%
Bachelor's degree of higher	387,131	85.70%	83.50%	2.00%
Source U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year Estimate				
Employment and unemployment estimates may vary from the official labor force data released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics because of differences in survey design and data collection. For guidance on differences in employment and unemployment estimates from different sources go to Labor Force Guidance.				

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

A review was conducted of Arkansas' historical data (January 2008 – September 2019) for the state labor force and the number of employed. Due to the Great Recession of 2008, both the labor force and the number of unemployed decreased from 2008–2010. The number made a modest recovery from 2010–2012 and then sharply declined again until 2014. From that point onward the labor force and number of unemployed have experienced a steady increase. However, since 2014, the number of employed has increased at a faster rate than the labor force. In fact, the number of employed in September 2019 has surpassed the pre-recession level, while the labor force is just approaching its pre-recession level. As a result, the unemployment rate has been steadily decreasing from its highest in May 2011 (8.5%) to its lowest at 3.4% in August 2019.

Arkansas' historical data for 2015–2019 was reviewed for table S2301 Employment Status. While the unemployment rate for the entire population remained stagnant at 5.1% when comparing 2019 to 2022 although there were dramatic changes within the individual populations. The unemployment rate from 2019 to 2022 estimates for the 16-19 years of age population reduced drastically from 19.3% to 16.5%, while the estimated population increased from 160,796 to 165,397 representing a 2.7% increase. This has been attributed to the increase of service sector positions, and replacing the aging population dealing directly with the public that likely chose retirement if it was available during the Pandemic period for safety.

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

Labor Market Trends

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

Population:

Arkansas grew in population in 2022 by 19,746 from 2021 and added a total of 31,812 new residents from 2018 to 2022. Of Arkansas's 10 Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDAs), Northwest Arkansas saw the largest increase in population, adding 16,934 in 2022. The Eastern, Northeast, Southeast, and Southwest Arkansas LWDAs saw decreasing populations in 2022.

Age Distribution:

An analysis of Arkansas' population distribution by gender and age group for 2010 and 2022 revealed that between 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 17.8% in 2022, a growth of about 120,000 people. During the same period, the under 20 age group went down from 27.2% to 25.5%, a net decrease of about 20,000. Based on the population projections, by 2030, 20.5% of the state population will be age 65 or older resulting in the older population continuing to increase its share of the total population.

Racial and Ethnic Composition:

This subsection describes the projected racial and ethnic composition of the state population from 2013-2030. 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 24) are examined.

Whites constitute the current and projected predominant population group in Arkansas. The under 24 age group is more diverse than the total population with whites constituting 63.8% of the under 24 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 24 population, with the share of the white group decreasing from 63.8% in 2018 to a projected 59.3% in 2030, a decrease of 4.5 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 7.8% in 2018 to 10.1% in 2030. This is also true for the under age 24 population with the Hispanic group growing from 11.6% in 2018 to 14.6% in 2030.

Employment status by race data for 2022 show that whites made up 75.3% of the labor force while the total of all minority groups made up 24.7%. The unemployment rate for all races, including Hispanics, was 3.3%. The unemployment rate for all minority groups combined was 4.9%. Hispanics of all races made up 8.1% of the labor force, with an unemployment rate of 2.9%.

Industry:

This section describes projected labor demand trends by industry sector for the state of Arkansas for the decade of 2020-30. The analysis is based on the long-term (2020-30) State and 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 124,387 jobs between 2020-30, a 9.05% increase. Goods-Producing industries are expected to add 14,340 new jobs, while the Services-Providing industries should see most of the growth, with 114,345 new jobs being added.

The **Natural Resources and Mining** super-sector is slated to add 5,565 jobs between 2020 and 2030. Driving the growth is the Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting sector, which could see a gain of 5,531 jobs. Animal Production is forecast to be among the ten highest growing occupations, rising by 2,929 jobs during the projection period. However, Logging could see a loss of 183 jobs. The Mining sector is slated to experience a net gain of 34 jobs. While Mining (except Oil and Gas) could see a gain of 42 jobs, Oil and Gas Extraction is predicted to lose 38.

Construction is estimated to grow by 2,563 jobs. More than two-thirds of the growth could come in the Specialty Trade Contractors subsector, with a growth of 1,713 new jobs over the 10-year period. Driving this growth is Building Equipment Contractors, which is forecast to add 945 new jobs. On the negative side of the economy, Land Subdivision could see a loss of 12.75%, making the Top 20 Fastest Declining Occupations list.

The **Manufacturing** super-sector is expected to increase by 6,212 jobs but is not predicted to be at pre-pandemic levels. However, the Non-Durable Goods Manufacturing industry group is estimated to increase employment by 2,363 jobs exceeding pre-pandemic levels. The Food Manufacturing subsector is the driving force behind the growth, with a projected gain of 2,417. Animal Slaughtering and Processing is the top growing industry in Manufacturing with a growth of 1,296 jobs. Animal Food

Manufacturing is slated to be the fastest growing industry among Non-Durable Goods Manufacturing, increasing its workforce by 20.58%. 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 group is Converted Paper Product Manufacturing, with a loss of 459, placing third in the state in numeric decline. Apparel Knitting Mills is slated to be the fastest declining industry in the state with a potential loss of 44.57% of its workforce. In all, five Non-Durable Goods Manufacturing industries made the Top 20 Fastest Declining Industries list.

The **Durable Goods Manufacturing** industry group is forecast to increase employment by 3,849 jobs, but only to 98.28% of pre-pandemic level. The largest increase in jobs should be seen in the Transportation Equipment Manufacturing subsector, with 1,710 jobs anticipated overall. Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing is slated to be the top growing industry in this group, with an increase of 1,270 jobs. Iron and Steel Mills and Ferroalloy Manufacturing could see a 28.26% rise in jobs, becoming the fastest growing industry in Manufacturing. However, not all Durable Goods Manufacturing industries are slated to see so bright a future. Electrical Equipment Manufacturing is predicted to decrease by 338 jobs, placing among the ten highest declining industries in the state. Its 13.03% decline places the industry in the Top 20 Fastest Declining Industries list and the fastest among Durable Goods industries.

The **Trade, Transportation, and Utilities** super-sector is slated to add 14,394 jobs during the 10-year projection period. The Wholesale Trade sector is expected to grow by 1,711 new jobs. Merchant Wholesalers, Durable Goods is anticipated to add 1,266 jobs, while Merchant Wholesalers, Nondurable Goods is predicted to raise staffing by 538 jobs. On the other side, Wholesale Electronic Markets and Agents and Brokers could lose 93 jobs between 2020 and 2030. The Retail Trade sector is estimated to grow by 5,592 jobs by 2030. Electronic Shopping and Mail Order Houses is forecast to be among the ten fastest growing industries in the state, increasing its workforce by 45.62%. General Merchandise Stores is predicted to grow by 1,374 jobs. On the negative side of the economy, Electronics and Appliance Stores is slated to lose 398 jobs, or 13.03% of its workforce, becoming the fourth highest declining industry in the state and on the Top 20 Fastest Declining Industries list. In all, five Retail Trade industries made the Top 20 Fastest Declining Industries list, with Book, Periodical, and Music Stores projected to lose more than a third of its workforce, second fastest in the state.

The **Transportation and Warehousing** sector is forecast to add 6,802 jobs between 2020 and 2030. Truck Transportation is the biggest driver of this growth, adding 2,321 new jobs, making the Top 20 Growing Industries list. Warehousing and Storage is slated to increase by an additional 1,905 jobs. Other Transit and Ground Passenger Transportation is estimated to be the second fastest growing industry in the state, increasing by 70% between 2020 and 2030, while Support Activities for Road Transportation could see a 30.17% rise in jobs. On the negative side of the labor

market, the Pipeline Transportation subsector is expected to cut 52 jobs from its workforce, while Scenic and Sightseeing Transportation is projected to lose a third of its workforce. The Utilities industry sector is projected to add 289 jobs during the 2020-2030 projection period. Electric Power Generation, Transmission and Distribution is slated to add 302 jobs, while Water, Sewage and Other Systems is estimated to gain 87 jobs. However, Natural Gas Distribution, could cut 100 jobs from its workforce.

The **Information** super-sector could continue to struggle through 2030, losing an additional 166 jobs. The Telecommunications subsector could see a significant net loss of 464 jobs over the projection period, making the Top 20 Fastest Declining Industries list and the second highest declining. Newspaper, Periodical, Book, and Directory Publishers is expected to be among the ten fastest declining industries, losing an estimated 15.22%. However, there are a few positives in the Information super-sector. Motion Picture and Video Industries is slated to add 48.73% to its workforce, sixth fastest in the state after losing more than 48% of its workforce during the pandemic. Data Processing, Hosting and Related Services is also anticipated to see considerable growth, adding an additional 296 jobs to its own workforce.

The **Financial Activities** super-sector is estimated to gain 7,201 jobs from 2020 to 2030. The Finance and Insurance sector is expected to gain 6,296, more than 87% of the total growth in Financial Activities. The Insurance Carriers and Related Activities subsector is estimated to add 5,158 jobs to its workforce. Driving this growth is Insurance Carriers, with a growth of 4,554, placing the industry as the fourth highest growing industry in the state. The Credit Intermediation and Related Activities subsector is estimated to add 932 new jobs to its own workforce. The Real Estate and Rental and Leasing sector is expected to add 905 jobs between 2020 and 2030. Most of the gain is likely to occur in the Real Estate subsector, adding 733 jobs to its workforce. The Rental and Leasing Services subsector could increase by an additional 175 jobs.

The **Professional and Business Services** super-sector is expected to increase employment by 14,722 jobs between 2020 and 2030. The Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services sector is slated to raise staffing by 6,549. Driving job growth is Computer Systems Design and Related Services, which is estimated to gain 2,705 of those jobs, a 30.62% increase, placing in the Top 20 Growing Industries list as well as the Top 20 Fastest Growing Industries list. Management, Scientific, and Technical Consulting Services is forecast to increase by an additional 1,744 jobs. The Management of Companies and Enterprises sector could gain 947 jobs by the end of 2030. The Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services is estimated to increase by 7,226 jobs. The Administrative and Support Services subsector drives this growth with a gain of 6,562 jobs. Employment Services leads the sector in growth, adding an estimated 3,539 jobs, and becoming one of the ten highest growing industries in the state. One downside is Facilities Support Services, slated to lose 113 jobs from its workforce and placing it among the Top 20

Declining Industries.

Education and Health Services is estimated to be the top growing super-sector for 2020 to 2030, gaining 39,762 jobs. Educational Services industry sector is estimated to gain 7,779 jobs during the projection period. Elementary and Secondary Schools should see most of this growth with 5,305 new jobs anticipated to be added, third highest growing industry statewide. Health Care and Social Assistance is forecast to grow by 31,983 jobs. Of those jobs, 13,315 could be found in the Social Assistance subsector. Driving this growth, Individual and Family Services is projected to be second in the state in numeric growth, adding 7,771 jobs. In all, seven industries in the Healthcare and Social Assistance sector made the Top 20 Growing Industries list. Child Day Care Services is expected to be one of the ten fastest growing industries, gaining 38.23% during the 2020-2030 projection period. Specialty (except Psychiatric and Substance Abuse) Hospitals is estimated to be the ninth fastest growing industry, raising employment by 41.87%.

Leisure and Hospitality super-sector is projected to grow at 24.22%, and would be the fastest growing in the state, increasing its overall workforce by 25,780. Most of the growth is likely to come in the Accommodation and Food Services sector, which is projected to add 22,011 new jobs. Driving the recovery in Leisure and Hospitality is Restaurants and Other Eating Places, projected to increase employment by 19,074 jobs, to become the top growing industry in the state. The Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation sector is estimated to add 3,769 jobs. Museums, Historical Sites, and Similar Institutions is slated to be the fastest growing industry, raising employment by 75.47%. In all, five Leisure and Hospitality industries are on the Top 20 Fastest Growing Industries list.

The Other Services (Except Government) is predicted to add 8,732 jobs between 2020 and 2030. Religious, Grantmaking, Civic, Professional, and Similar Organizations could lead the super-sector with 8,467 jobs. Grantmaking and Giving Services could increase employment by 55.55%, fifth fastest in the state, while Religious Organizations is anticipated to add 2,566 new jobs between 2020 and 2030, making the Top 20 Growing Industries list. On the negative side of the labor market, Private Households is forecast to be the top declining industry with a decline of 923 jobs, also making the Top 20 Fastest Declining Industries list.

Occupation:

This section describes projected labor demand trends by occupation group for the state of Arkansas for the decade of 2020-30. The analysis is based on the long-term (2020-30) State occupational projections published by the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services and the national long-term occupational projections published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The occupations analyzed include the major occupation groups within the Standard Occupational Classifications (SOC) structure.

A total of 169,601 total annual openings are expected each year of the projection

period. Of these, 62,624 or 37% would be due to employees leaving the workforce, while 94,538 or 56% would be due to those changing jobs. Growth and expansion accounts for 12,439 or 7% of the annual job openings. All major groups should see positive net growth over the 10-year projection period.

The **Management Occupations** major group is expected to gain 7,834 jobs during the projection period, with 11,371 total annual job openings. Of these, 4,630 are expected to come from employees leaving the workforce, 5,958 from those changing jobs, and 783 from growth and expansion. The Top Executives occupational family is expected to lead the major group in growth, adding 2,864 jobs. General and Operations Managers is forecast to be the top growing occupation in the major group and seventh statewide, adding 2,699 new jobs. The Other Management Occupations occupational family is estimated to account for 2,324 new jobs but face a mixed outlook. Medical and Health Services Managers is slated to increase employment by 32.17%, or 1,866 new jobs, making both the Top 20 Growing Occupations list as well as the Top 20 Fastest Growing Occupations list. Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers is expected to lose 1,914 jobs during the projection period, becoming the top declining occupation in the state.

The **Business and Financial Operations Occupations** major group is projected to gain 7,801 jobs by 2030. The group should see 6,521 annual job openings with 1,810 due to those exiting the workforce, 3,931 from those changing jobs, and 780 due to growth and expansion. The Business Operations Specialists occupational family is slated to add 5,765 jobs to its workforce. Management Analysts leads all occupations in the major group with 1,168 new jobs. Fundraisers is slated to raise employment by 47.60%, becoming the third fastest growing occupation in the state. Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists is expected add 1,059 additional jobs. On the negative side of the labor market, Buyers and Purchasing Agents is forecast to lose 223 jobs, or 5.70% of its workforce.

The **Computer and Mathematical Occupations** major group is expected to add 3,759 jobs during the projection period. Total Annual Openings could amount to 2,326 jobs with 572 annual openings due to exiting the workforce and 1,378 due to changing jobs. Another 376 openings are estimated for growth and expansion. The Computer Occupations minor group should see most of this growth with 3,335 jobs expected over the 10-year period. Software Developers, Applications is anticipating the highest gain with 1,882 new jobs on the horizon, making the Top 20 Growing Occupations list, while Information Security Analysts is anticipating a growth of 33.65%, placing in the Top 20 Fastest Growing Occupations list. Mathematical Science Occupations is slated to experience a net gain of 424 jobs with Operations Research Analysts placing among the ten fastest growing occupations at 38.74% gain. Statisticians also made the Top 20 Fastest Growing Occupations list with a growth of 31.36%. On the negative side, Computer Programmers could see a decline of 87 jobs from its workforce.

The **Architecture and Engineering Occupations** major group could add 996 jobs by

2030. The group is expected to have 1,007 total annual openings with 301 annual openings due to employees leaving the workforce, 606 from employees changing jobs, and 100 from growth and expansion. The Engineers minor group leads the group in numeric change, expecting to add 750 jobs during the projection period. In this minor group, Industrial Engineers could add 235 jobs, becoming the top growing occupation in the major group. Materials Engineers is slated to raise employment by 35.85%, placing in the Top 20 Fastest Growing occupations list.

The **Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations** major group is predicted to gain 588 new jobs through the 2020-2030 projection period. Annual openings due to those leaving the workforce would amount to 187, while those changing jobs are estimated to account for 624 openings. Growth and expansion could account for an additional 59 openings bringing total annual openings to 870. The Life, Physical, and Social Science Technicians minor group is expected to gain 209 jobs. Clinical, Counseling, and School Psychologists is expected to lead the major group in numeric change, adding 95 new jobs to its workforce, while Epidemiologists could be the fastest growing occupation in the major group, raising employment by 40%.

The **Community and Social Services Occupations** major group is estimated to gain 4,088 new jobs during the projection period. The group could see 3,699 total annual openings with 1,222 due to exiting of the workforce and 2,068 due to employees changing jobs. Another 409 annual openings would be due to growth and expansion. Clergy is slated to add 1,133 jobs to its workforce. It is also estimated that the occupation could experience 1,223 annual job openings. Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Mental Health Counselors is slated to increase its workforce by 26.85%. In all, ten occupations are forecast to add more than 100 new jobs between 2020 and 2030.

The **Legal Occupations** major group is projected to add 649 jobs by 2030. Of the 596 annual openings, 216 should be due to employees exiting the workforce, while 315 would be for employees changing jobs. Growth and expansion could lead to 65 annual job openings. The Lawyers, Judges, and Related Workers minor group leads the group with 355 new jobs anticipated, with Lawyers accounting for 336 of those new jobs. The Legal Support Workers minor group also expects robust growth with 294 jobs projected to be added. Paralegals and Legal Assistants leads this minor group with 268 jobs expected.

The **Education, Training, and Library Occupations** major group is expected to gain 8,742 jobs during the projection period. The group could see 7,816 total annual openings with annual openings due to occupational exits and occupational transfers accounting for 3,251 and 3,691 jobs, respectively. Growth and expansion are expected to account for 874 annual job openings. Postsecondary Teachers is expected to add 1,135 jobs, while the Preschool, Primary, Secondary, and Special Education School Teachers minor group is predicted to increase by 4,485 jobs. Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education is projected to add 1,391 new jobs, a 36.44% increase,

placing among the ten fastest growing occupations in the state. Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary, of the Other Education, Training, and Library Occupations occupational family, is also anticipated to add 1,391 jobs during the 2020-2030 projection period.

The **Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations** major group is projected to add 1,520 jobs by 2030. Of the 1,749 total annual openings, 612 of them could come from employees leaving the workforce, 985 from those changing jobs, and 152 from growth and expansion. The Entertainers and Performers, Sports and Related Workers minor group leads the group with 630 new jobs anticipated. Public Relations Specialists is predicted to be the top growing occupation in the major group, adding 630 new jobs, while Interpreters and Translators could be the fastest growing occupation, raising employment by 26.55%. In all, five occupations are estimated to increase by more than 100 new jobs. On the downside of the economy, Floral Designers is slated to lose 34 jobs between 2020 and 2030, or 11.53% of its workforce, becoming the top and fastest declining occupation in the major group.

The **Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations** major group is estimated to add 10,934 jobs by the end of the projection period. This group could see 6,326 annual job openings with 2,375 due to employees leaving the workforce, 2,858 due to employees changing jobs, and 1,093 due to growth and expansion. The Health Diagnosing and Treating Practitioners occupational family anticipates adding 6,939 jobs. Driving growth is Registered Nurses, which is predicted to see continued growth with 2,344 jobs and among the ten highest growing. Nurse Practitioners is slated to be the fastest growing occupation statewide, increasing by 54.04% and placing third on the Top 20 Growing Industries list. Speech-Language Pathologists, also in the same occupational family, is among the ten fastest projected growing occupations, at a rate of 38.69%. The Health Technologists and Technicians family is predicted to experience a growth of 2,884.

Healthcare Support Occupations is projected to add 11,271 jobs by 2030 and be the second fastest growing major group, increasing the workforce by 20.13%. The group could see 8,571 total annual openings with 3,672 of the jobs due to employees leaving the workforce, 3,772 from employees changing jobs, and 1,127 from growth and expansion. The Home Health and Personal Care Aides; and Nursing Assistants, Orderlies, and Psychiatric Aides is the biggest driver of growth, predicted to add 8,196 jobs. Home Health and Personal Care Aides leads the major group in numeric change and second highest statewide, with 6,445 new jobs anticipated. Nursing Assistants is also projected to see steady growth, making the Top 20 Growing Occupations list with a gain of 1,623. One downside in the Healthcare Support Occupations major group is Medical Transcriptionists, which is slated to lose 68 jobs, or 12.85% of its workforce. Pharmacy Aides is projected to cut 11.38% of its own workforce, or 14 jobs.

The **Protective Service Occupations** major group is expected to add 2,321 jobs over the projection period with 3,153 total annual openings. Of these, 1,193 would be from

employees leaving the workforce, and 1,728 coming from those changing jobs. Another 232 are estimated to be from growth and expansion. The Other Protective Service Workers minor group leads the major group with 1,071 new jobs anticipated. Within this group, Security Guards is estimated to be the top growing occupation, adding 736 new jobs. Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers, of the Law Enforcement Workers occupational family, is slated to add 698 new jobs. However, Correctional Officers and Jailers could see a reduction of 227 jobs, or 3.82% of its workforce, becoming one of the ten fastest growing statewide.

Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations is estimated to add 21,219 jobs during the projection period, a 21.11% increase, making the major group the top and fastest growing in the state. Of the 21,899 annual job openings, 8,482 should be due to employees leaving the workforce, while 11,295 could come from employees changing jobs. Another 2,122 are related to growth and expansion. The Food and Beverage Serving Workers minor group leads the group with 10,906 jobs expected, with Fast Food and Counter Workers adding 6,590 to become the top growing occupation in the state. In all, four occupations make the Top 20 Growing Occupations list, all among the top ten. Fast Food and Counter Workers also leads the state in the number of job separations with the most annual exits and the most job transfers as well as the most annual job openings. Cooks, Restaurant is slated to be the second fastest growing occupation in the major group, increasing employment by 51.77%. On the negative side, Cooks, Private Household is slated to cut 7.18% of its workforce.

The **Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations** major group is projected to add 2,997 jobs by 2030. The group should have 6,169 total annual openings with 2,586 jobs due to employees exiting the workforce, 3,283 due to employees changing jobs, and 300 due to growth and expansion. The Building Cleaning and Pest Control Workers minor group is expected to add 2,068 jobs with Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners estimated to add 1,647 of those jobs, placing it on the Top 20 Growing Occupations list. Pesticide Handlers, Sprayers, and Applicators, Vegetation is slated to raise employment levels by 13.94%, becoming the fastest growing occupation in the major group.

The **Personal Care and Service Occupations** major group is expected to gain 4,305 jobs over the projection period. Of the 4,511 total annual openings, 1,833 should be due to employees leaving the workforce, while 2,248 would be due to those changing jobs. Another 430 jobs could come from growth and expansion. The Other Personal Care and Service Workers minor group leads the major group with 2,009 new jobs expected. Childcare Workers is anticipated to add 1,080 new jobs. Tour and Travel Guides is predicted to be among the ten fastest growing occupations, raising employment by 36.76%. Ushers, Lobby Attendants, and Ticket Takers could fare even better, increasing by 43.31%, fifth fastest in the state.

The Sales and Related Occupations major group is projected to gain 5,028 jobs by the end of 2030. The group is estimated to make available 17,816 jobs annually with 6,887

from employees leaving the workforce, 10,426 related to job change, and 503 due to growth and expansion. The Sales Representatives, Services is slated to grow by 2,610 jobs. Driving this growth is Insurance Sales Agents, with an anticipated increase of 2,002 jobs, among the top ten of the Top 20 Growing Occupations list. Retail Salespersons could also experience good growth with 1,917 new jobs between 2020 and 2030. A few downsides in the Sales and Related Occupations major group are Cashiers, slated to lose 506 jobs during the projection period, becoming the third highest declining occupations in the state. Telemarketers is predicted to be among the ten fastest declining occupations in the state, losing an estimated 19.60% of its workforce.

The **Office and Administrative Support Occupations** major group is expected to gain 1,513 jobs over the projection period, but heavily mixed with some occupational families experiencing gains, while others are expecting job losses. Its 0.95% growth is the slowest in the state. Annual openings for this group are estimated to be 17,551. Of these, 7,533 are estimated to come from occupational exits, while 9,867 could come from occupational transfers. Another 151 are forecast to come from growth and expansion. The Information and Record Clerks minor group should see the most growth with 1,825 jobs added, while Other Office and Administrative Support Workers is estimated to gain 1,045 jobs. Insurance Claims and Policy Processing Clerks leads all occupations in the major group with a gain of 1,002 new jobs. Customer Service Representatives is expected to increase by an additional 928 jobs. On the negative side of the local job market, the Secretaries and Administrative Assistants occupational family is forecast to lose 1,026 jobs, or 5.31% of its workforce. Leading the decline is Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive, which could lose 762 jobs, second highest statewide. Seven occupations within this major group are included on the Top 20 Fastest Declining Occupations list with Word Processors and Typists leading the state as the fastest declining occupation, cutting 32.16% of its workforce between 2020 and 2030.

The **Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations** major group is estimated to add 3,411 jobs between 2020 and 2030. The major group is predicting 3,648 total annual openings with 884 due to employees leaving the workforce and 2,423 due to employees changing jobs. Growth and expansion are estimated to account for an additional 341 annual openings. The Agricultural Workers minor group drives growth in the major group gaining 3,324 jobs, more than 97% of the major group's growth. Farmworkers, Farm, Ranch, and Aquacultural Animals is predicted to add 1,602 jobs and be the fastest growing occupation in the major group, increasing its workforce by 27.98%. Farmworkers and Laborers, Crop, Nursery, and Greenhouse is predicted to increase employment by 1,371. On the reverse side of the labor market, Graders and Sorters, Agricultural Products is forecast to lose 62 jobs.

The **Construction and Extraction Occupations** major group is projected to gain 2,759 jobs over the projection period, with 5,409 total annual openings expected. The group is expected to have 1,554 annual openings due to employees leaving the

workforce, 3,579 due to employees changing jobs, and 276 due to growth and expansion. The Construction Trades Workers minor group is expected to see a large gain with 2,030 jobs expected equivalent to 73.58% of the major group's overall growth. Electricians are slated to gain 575 new jobs, while Construction Laborers could add 571 to its workforce. On the negative side of the labor market, Construction and Building Inspectors is estimated to lose 47 jobs, or 4.77% of its workforce.

The **Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations** major group is expected to gain 5,402 jobs by 2030. The major group is estimated to have 6,439 total annual openings with 1,938 due to employees leaving the workforce, 3,961 due to employees changing jobs, and 540 due to growth and expansion. The Other Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations minor group could lead the group with 3,891 jobs projected, with Industrial Machinery Mechanics leading the major group with 1,825 new jobs anticipated, placing in the Top 20 Growing Occupations list and the fastest growing occupation at a rate of 25.82%. Maintenance and Repair Workers, General also could experience rapid growth, increasing its workforce by 1,086. On the negative side of the economy, Telecommunications Equipment Installers and Repairers, Except Line Installers could become the top declining occupation in the major group with a loss of 66 jobs. Home Appliance Repairers is slated to be the fastest declining occupation, cutting 13.38% of its workforce by 2030, placing on the Top 20 Fastest Declining Occupations list.

The **Production Occupations** major group is projected to add 3,197 jobs between 2020 and 2030. The group is expected to experience 13,111 total annual openings with 4,326 due to occupational exits and 8,465 due to occupational transfers. Another 320 could come from growth and expansion. The Food Processing Workers minor group leads the major group with 1,335 new jobs expected. Driving this growth is Meat, Poultry, and Fish Cutters and Trimmers, which is estimated to add 611 jobs. Leading the major group in numeric growth is First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers, anticipated to gain 681 jobs. Computer Numerically Controlled Tool Programmers is slated to be the fastest growing occupation in Production Occupations, increasing its workforce by 26.92%. On the reverse side of the labor market, Assemblers and Fabricators is predicted to lose 621 jobs. Inspectors, Testers, Sorters, Samplers, and Weighers is estimated to be the top declining occupation in the major group, losing 479 jobs, or 7.82% of its workforce. Cutters and Trimmers, Hand is forecast to reduce its already small workforce by 25.93%, becoming the fastest declining occupation in Production Occupations and second fastest statewide.

The **Transportation and Material Moving Occupations** major group is estimated to gain 14,053 jobs during the projection period, the second highest in the state. With 19,037 total annual openings expected, 6,555 could come from employees leaving the workforce, while 11,077 would come from those changing jobs. Growth and expansion are estimated to account for 1,405 annual job openings. The Material Moving Workers occupational family is estimated to grow by 6,962 jobs, while the Motor Vehicle

Operators family is estimated to add 6,523 jobs. Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers leads the group with 3,056 new jobs, while Stockers and Order Fillers is estimated to add an additional 2,699, placing fifth and sixth on the Top 20 Growing Occupations list, respectively. Passenger Vehicle Drivers, Except Bus Drivers, Transit and Intercity is slated to increase its workforce by 22.52% to become the fastest growing occupation in the major group.

Labor Force and Unemployment Rate:

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

The State's monthly unemployment rate remained the same or lower than the U.S. unemployment rate during the first six months of calendar 2023. In January 2023, the Arkansas and U.S. unemployment rates were 3.4%. By July 2023 the Arkansas rate was 2.6% compared to the national rate of 3.5%.

Median Household/Per Capita Personal Income:

Arkansas' median household income was \$52,528 in 2022 which increased by \$405 from 2021 to 2022 but is below the national median household income of \$69,717 for 2022. Arkansas' per capita personal income in 2022 was \$51,787 an increase of \$639 from 2021. Over the 2018-2022 period, the per capita personal income increased by \$9,221. The state's per capita personal income is below the United States per capita personal income of \$65,423.

Wages:

Fast Food and Counter Workers was estimated to have the most employees across the state with 36,520 employed in 2022 with an average wage of \$25,579. Cashiers was the second largest occupation with 32,840 employed, earning an average wage of \$25,766. General and Operations Managers had the highest average wage of the 10 largest occupations, averaging \$84,457 annually.

Orthopedic Surgeons, Except Pediatric topped the Occupations Paying the Most list with an annual salary of \$365,576. Physicians, Pathologists, with an average annual salary of \$322,848, ranked second on the Occupations Paying the Most list.

The entry wage estimate for employers of all sizes was \$26,393 for 2022. The median wage estimate for employers with 250-499 employees was \$38,566, while wages for experienced workers averaged \$59,676 for employers in all size categories.

Of the 1,230,850 estimated employees with hourly wage data, 141,122 or 11% made less than \$12 an hour while 300,624 or 24.4% made more than \$27 an hour.

Employees making between \$17 and \$21.99 totaled 238,737 or 19.4%.

LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AREAS

Arkansas is divided into ten local Workforce Development Areas (WDA). These ten areas were analyzed along with their projected percent and numeric change in total employment for all sectors between 2020-2030. The Northwest WDA is expected to grow at the fastest rate (11.8%) and add the greatest number of jobs (37,898). The City of Little Rock WDA is next with a growth rate of 10.9% (adding 21,352 jobs) closely followed by the Central WDA with 10.8% expected growth (19,271 jobs). The West Central WDA (8.8%), Northeast WDA (8.4%), Western WDA (8.0%) and North Central WDA (6.7%) are all expected to grow at greater than 5%, while the Southwest WDA (4.5%) and Eastern WDA (2.8%) will grow slower than 5%. Only Southeast WDA (1.9%) is expected to grow slower than 2%, which is an economic standard for strong growth.

Most of the jobs across all industry sectors are in three Local Workforce Development Areas – Northwest, Little Rock and Central. The three areas together account for about 65.6% of all projected job growth with the Northwest WDA taking the largest share.

1. Central Arkansas WDA:

The Central Arkansas WDA is expected to add 19,271 new jobs between 2020 and 2030. The region's 10.78% growth is faster than the state's growth rate. Goods-Producing industries are projected to gain 906 new jobs, while the Services-Providing industries are predicted to add 18,669 jobs. Self Employed Workers, All Jobs could see a reduction of 304 jobs between 2020 and 2030. The population for the area grew 7.27% from 2010 to 2020 to 532,991 total residents.

Education and Health Services is estimated to be the top growing super-sector in Central Arkansas, with a growth of 5,940, an increase of 16.61%. Leisure and Hospitality is slated to be the fastest growing super-sector, increasing its workforce by 22.84%. Food Services and Drinking Places is projected to be the top growing industry, gaining 3,358 new jobs during the projection period. Warehousing and Storage could see significant growth in the area, driving up the industry's workforce by 46.67%. On the negative side of the local labor market, Manufacturing could experience a net loss of 150 jobs. Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing is estimated to lose 154 jobs, becoming the top declining industry, while Textile Product Mills could lose a third of its small area workforce, becoming the fastest declining industry.

Central Arkansas is expected to have 23,007 annual job openings during the projection period, with 8,492 created from employees leaving the workforce, 12,588 from changing jobs, and 1,927 from growth and expansion. The Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations major group is projected to add the most jobs, with 3,600 new jobs anticipated. Driving this growth is Fast Food and Counter Workers, which is predicted to add 1,687 new jobs to the labor market. The Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations major group is estimated to be the fastest growing major group,

with an increase of 21.94%. Nurse Practitioners is forecast to increase its workforce by 58.38%, becoming the fastest growing occupation in the area. For declining occupations, Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers is predicted to lose 122 jobs, becoming the top declining occupation. Switchboard Operators, Including Answering Service is anticipated to cut 26.32% of its workforce.

The LWDA saw an increase in the labor force of 7,881 to 255,674 from 2021 to 2022, and the labor force increased by 4,541 over the 2018 to 2022 period. Employment increased by 9,495 between 2021 and 2022 and increased by 5,007 over the five-year period. The LWDA has seen a fluctuation in unemployment over the same time periods. From 2021 to 2022, unemployment decreased by 1,614, and from 2018 to 2022, unemployment decreased by 466. The LWDA's unemployment rate dropped by 0.2% over the five-year period. In 2023, the unemployment rate dropped by half a percent from January to 2.8% in July 2023.

2. City of Little Rock WDA:

The City of Little Rock WDA is expected to grow by 21,532 jobs during the 2020-2030 projections period, or an increase of 10.86%; greater than the state growth rate. Goods-Producing industries are projected to experience a net growth of 1,059 jobs, while Services-Providing industries are predicted to add 21,229. A loss of 756 self-employed workers is expected. Population in the area has grown 4.39% from 2010 to 2020 bringing the area to 202,484 residents.

Education and Health Services is estimated to be the top growing super-sector in the City of Little Rock WDA, adding an anticipated 7,590 new jobs, an increase of 14.71%. Leisure and Hospitality is slated to be the fastest growing super-sector with a change of 34%. Food Services and Drinking Places is projected to lead the area in numeric growth, adding an estimated 3,669 new jobs to its workforce. Wood Product Manufacturing is projected to experience a boom in its workforce, increasing 10-fold due to influx of new business, becoming the fastest growing in the City of Little Rock WDA. Warehousing and Storage is also forecasted to experience high growth with a boom in new warehousing facilities. The Information super-sector is expected to lose 11.04% of its workforce, or 271 jobs between 2020 and 2030. Private Households is predicted to be the top declining industry, cutting 519 jobs, while Machinery Manufacturing could cut 40.87% from its own workforce.

City of Little Rock WDA employers are expected to have 23,534 annual openings during the projection period. Of these, 8,425 could come from employees leaving the workforce, while 12,956 would be from employees changing jobs. Growth and expansion would account for an additional 2,153 jobs. Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations is predicted to be the top and fastest growing major group with 3,676 new jobs, a 32.03% increase. Home Health and Personal Care Aides is slated to be the top growing occupation, adding 1,105 new jobs to its workforce. Industrial Truck and Tractor Operators is slated to raise employment levels by 82.45% between 2020 and 2030, becoming the fastest growing occupation. On the downside of the

economy, Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners is predicted to be the top declining occupation, losing 138 jobs during the projection period. Switchboard Operators, Including Answering Service could become the fastest declining occupation, losing an anticipated 24.10% of its workforce.

The labor force increased in the LWDA by 2,235 from 2021 to 2022 and saw an increase of 126 between 2018 and 2022. Employment increased by 3,725 from 2021 to 2022 and increased by 108 from 2018 to 2022. Unemployment and the unemployment rate decreased between 2021 to 2022, with unemployment decreasing by 1,490 and the unemployment rate decreasing by 1.6% to 3.5% in 2022. The unemployment rate fluctuated from 2018 to 2022, but ultimately settled at 3.5% in 2022, the same rate as 2018. The area unemployment rate fluctuated from January 2023 through July 2023, settling to 3.1% in July 2023.

3. Eastern Arkansas WDA:

The Eastern Arkansas WDA is expected to gain 1,067 new jobs during the 2020-2030 projection period, a 2.75% increase in employment and slower than the state's 9.05% growth. Goods-Producing industries are projected to experience a small net gain of 60 jobs, while the Services-Providing industries are predicted to gain 1,251. Self-employed workers could lose 244 from its ranks. Population declined 12.58% from 2010 to 2020, a loss 16,239 residents from Eastern Arkansas counties, bringing the total population to 112,849.

Leisure and Hospitality is expected to be the top and fastest growing super-sector, with a gain of 875 jobs, an increase of 23.78%. Driving this growth is Food Services and Drinking Places, which is slated to add 460 new jobs to its workforce. Amusement, Gambling, and Recreation Industries is expected to triple in size over the next ten years with most of it likely to occur within the first half of that due to recovery from the pandemic. On the negative side of the labor market, Educational Services could struggle, losing 261 jobs between 2020 and 2030, placing it as the top declining industry. Broadcasting (except Internet) is predicted to be the fastest declining industry, cutting 27.27% of its already small workforce. In all, five major groups are forecast to experience job loss with Manufacturing cutting 33 jobs and Information cutting 11.94% of its workforce.

The area is expected to have 4,586 annual openings during the projection period, with 1,821 being from employees leaving the workforce, 2,658 from employees changing jobs, and 107 from growth and expansion. Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations is predicted to be the top growing major group, adding 503 jobs to its workforce. Healthcare Support Occupations is projected to be the fastest growing major group, with an anticipated gain of 16.78%. Home Health and Personal Care Aides is anticipated to be the top growing occupation between 2020 and 2030, increasing its ranks by 230 jobs. First-Line Supervisors of Personal Service & Entertainment and Recreation Workers, Excluding Gambling Services is slated to be the fastest growing occupation, increasing its workforce by 73.33%. On the negative

side of the labor market, Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers is forecast to be the top declining occupation, with a loss of 122 jobs, while Executive Secretaries and Executive Administrative Assistants could see a 23.53% reduction in employment, becoming the fastest declining occupation. In all, five major groups are estimated to see job loss, with Office and Administrative Support Occupations leading with 209 jobs.

The labor force in the Eastern Arkansas WDA decreased by 209 to 43,374 in 2022 from 2021 and has decreased by 3,380 from 2018 to 2022. Employment increased from 2021 to 2022, gaining 342 workers to 41,441. Unemployment saw a decrease from 2021 to 2022, having 551 fewer unemployed, enough to change the unemployment rate from 5.7% to 4.5%. Since the beginning of 2023, the unemployment rate fluctuated from 5.2% in January, ending July 2023 at 4.6%.

4. North Central Arkansas WDA:

The North Central Arkansas WDA is projected to add 5,514 new jobs during the 2020-2030 projection period, or increase employment by 6.67%, slower than the state's 9.05% change. Goods-Producing industries are expected to add 1,342 new jobs, while the Services-Providing industries could add 4,217. The area is also expected to lose 45 Self-Employed and Unpaid Family Workers. Between 2010 and 2020, there was a 2.10% decline in population, bringing its total down to 233,324 residents.

Education and Health Services is projected to be the top growing super-sector in North Central Arkansas, with a growth of 1,912 jobs. Natural Resources and Mining is forecast to be the fastest growing super-sector, with a growth of 30%. Food Services and Drinking Places is projected to be the top growing industry, adding 914 new jobs to its workforce. Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing is predicted to increase employment by 49.83%, becoming the fastest growing industry. The Information super-sector is anticipated to be the only downside in North Central Arkansas during the 10-year projection period, losing 47 jobs, or 12.74% of its workforce. In terms of industry sectors, Electrical Equipment, Appliance, and Component Manufacturing is slated to be the top and fastest declining industry, losing an estimated 80 jobs, or 46.24% of its workforce, between 2020 and 2030.

North Central Arkansas is expected to have 9,972 total job openings annually between 2020 and 2030. Of these, 3,894 would be for employees leaving the workforce, while 5,527 would be for those changing jobs. Growth and expansion would account for an additional 551 jobs. The Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations major group is predicted to have the highest numeric change, with 915 new jobs. Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations is forecast to be the fastest growing major group, increasing by 32.63%. Leading this area in numeric growth is Home Health and Personal Care Aides, with a gain of 358 jobs. Nurse Practitioners is expected to increase employment by 58.57%, becoming the fastest growing occupation. On the flip side of the economy, Office and Administrative Support Occupations is estimated to lose 43 jobs between 2020 and 2030. Cashiers is anticipated to lose 104 jobs,

becoming the top declining occupation. Medical Transcriptionists is slated to be the fastest declining occupation, cutting 27.59% of its workforce.

The North Central Arkansas WDA labor force increased by 1,380 from 2021 to 2022 and increased by 101 between 2018 and 2022. Employment rose by 1,809 while unemployment decreased by 429 from 2021 to 2022. The unemployment rate decreased to 3.8%, or 0.5% from 2021 to 2022. The unemployment rate fluctuated in 2023 but ended at 3.8% in July.

5. Northeast Arkansas WDA:

The Northeast Arkansas WDA is expected to add 9,610 jobs during the projection period. At 8.44%, the area is anticipated to grow slightly slower than the state growth rate during the 2020 to 2030 projection period. Goods-Producing industries are predicted to have a gain of 2,848 jobs, while Services-Providing industries could add 7,123. Self Employed Workers, All Jobs is anticipating a net loss of 361 jobs, 4.37% of its workforce. The population has increased 3.32% from 2010 to 2020, bringing the total population to 270,075.

Education and Health Services is expected to be the top growing super sector, with 3,480 new jobs to be added during the projection period. Leisure and Hospitality is forecast to be the fastest growing super sector, increasing its payroll by 20.45%. Food Services and Drinking Places is projected to lead the Northeast Arkansas WDA in numeric growth, increasing its workforce by 1,654 jobs. Animal Production is anticipated to be the fastest growing industry with a 43.49% increase. On the negative side of the labor market, the Information super sector is slated to lose 104 jobs, or 16.48% of its workforce between 2020 and 2030. Driving this decline is Telecommunications, which is forecast to experience a 26.34% reduction in jobs.

The Northeast Arkansas WDA is expected to have 14,085 annual job openings during the projection period. Of these, 5,252 would be from employees leaving the workforce, while 7,872 would be from employees changing jobs. Another 961 would be from growth and expansion. Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations is estimated to be the top growing major group, adding 1,624 new jobs. Healthcare Support Occupations is predicted to be the fastest growing major group, increasing its workforce by 21.66%. Driving this growth is Home Health and Personal Care Aides, which is slated to add 640 new jobs between 2020 and 2030, a 31.13% increase. Nurse Practitioners, of the Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations major group, is forecast to raise employment levels 55.53% over the next ten years. On the negative side of the economy, Office and Administrative Support Occupations is predicted to lose 150 jobs, or 1.23% of its workforce. Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers is expected to be the top declining occupation, cutting 158 jobs, while Switchboard Operators, Including Answering Service could be the fastest declining occupation, losing 24.14% of its own workforce. Data Entry Keyers could also see losses, becoming the second fastest declining occupation at a rate of 19.44%.

The Northeast Arkansas WDA labor force increased to 123,323 in 2022, or by 2,933 since 2021, and increased over the 2018-2022 period by 1,801. Employment increased by 3,612 while unemployment decreased by 679 from 2021 to 2022. The unemployment rate dropped to 3.4%, a decrease of 0.6% from 2021 to 2022. The area's unemployment rate ended at 3.4% by July 2023.

6. Northwest Arkansas WDA:

Among the 10 Local Workforce Development Areas, Northwest Arkansas has the largest employment base in the state. This region is projected to gain 37,898 jobs, an increase of 11.75%, from 2020 to 2030. The area is growing faster than the state's 9.05% growth. Goods-Producing industries are projected to gain 4,248 new jobs, while Services-Providing industries are predicted to add 34,712 jobs over the 2020-2030 projection period. The area is estimated to lose 1,062 Self-Employed jobs. The population grew 18.45% from 2010 to 2020 bringing the total population to 688,662.

Education and Health Services is expected to be the top growing super-sector with 12,077 jobs anticipated to be added. Natural Resources and Mining could be the fastest growing among the super-sectors, raising employment levels by 36.06%. Food Services and Drinking Places is estimated to lead the Northwest Arkansas WDA as the top growing industry, adding 4,320. Museums, Historical Sites, and Similar Institution is predicted to be the fastest growing industry, increasing its workforce by 67.07%. On the negative side of the labor market, Machinery Manufacturing is predicted to lose 99 jobs, or 7.05% of its workforce, while Furniture and Related Product Manufacturing is anticipated to be the fastest declining industry, cutting 11.68% of its workforce. All super-sectors in the Northwest Arkansas WDA are forecast to experience growth.

Northwest Arkansas is projected to have 40,977 annual job openings over the 2020-2030 projection period. Of these, 14,702 would be due to employees leaving the workforce, 22,485 for those changing jobs, and 3,790 for growth and expansion. The Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations major group is predicted to add the most jobs, with a net gain of 4,813, while Healthcare Support Occupations is estimated to be the fastest growing major group with a 31.18% growth. Home Health and Personal Care Aides could see significant growth in the region with a projected increase of 1,934, a 55.01% rise in jobs. Nurse Practitioners could see an increase of 60.69%, becoming the fastest growing occupation in the Northwest Arkansas WDA. On the negative side, Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers could lose 370 jobs during the projection period, while Pressers, Textile, Garment, and Related Materials is slated to be the fastest declining occupation, losing an estimated 18.18% of its local workforce.

The Northwest Arkansas WDA labor force and employment increased from 2021 to 2022, with the labor force gaining 18,938 to 350,997 and employment increasing by 20,020 to 342,190. Unemployment decreased by 1,082 to 9,807 in 2022 and has seen a decrease of 623 since 2018. The unemployment rate dropped from 2021 to 2022 by 0.5% to 2.5%. The area's unemployment rate fluctuated from 2018, but ultimately

settled at 2.5 in 2022. The unemployment rate ended July 2023 at 2.5%.

7. Southeast Arkansas WDA:

The Southeast Arkansas WDA is expected to increase employment by 1,504 between 2020 and 2030. Goods-Producing industries are projected to experience a net loss of 233 jobs, while the Services-Providing industries are predicted to gain 2,165 jobs. The area is estimated to lose 428 Self-Employed Workers. Population in the area declined 10.84% from 2010 to 2020, with a loss of 23,166 residents, bringing its residency to 190,554.

Leisure and Hospitality is slated to be the top and fastest growing super sector, gaining 1,439 new jobs, an increase of 30.41%. Driving this growth is Food Services and Drinking Places, with a gain of 1,063 jobs. Religious, Grantmaking, Civic, Professional, and Similar Organizations is predicted to increase its labor force by 52.46% between 2020 and 2030 to become the fastest growing industry in the Southeast Arkansas WDA. On the negative side of the labor market, five super sectors are estimated to see net losses, with the Manufacturing super sector forecast to cut 377 jobs, while the Information super sector could see a 21.63% reduction in its own workforce. Paper Manufacturing is predicted to be the top declining industry, losing 356 jobs, 13.36% of its workforce. Broadcasting (except Internet) is estimated to be the fastest declining industry, cutting its small area workforce by 36.36%.

Southeast Arkansas WDA employment is expected to increase by 1.93% between 2020 and 2030, the slowest WDA in the state. Of the 8,785 job openings projected to be available annually, 3,451 would be from employees leaving the workforce, 5,184 from employees changing jobs, and 150 from growth and expansion. Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations is predicted to be the top and fastest growing major group, with a gain of 1,112 new jobs, a 24.15% increase. Fast Food and Counter Workers is driving this growth, adding 542 jobs to its workforce. Directors, Religious Activities and Education is slated to increase staffing by 69.23%, becoming the fastest growing occupation in the area. On the negative side of the economy, Office and Administrative Support Occupations is expected to be the top declining major group, losing an estimated 467 jobs, 5.92% of its workforce. The Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations major group could decline slightly faster at a rate of 5.99%. Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers is predicted to be the top declining occupation, with a loss of 243, while Switchboard Operators, Including Answering Service is estimated to lose a third of its workforce to become the fastest declining occupation.

Southeast Arkansas saw a decrease in the labor force of 418 to 76,542 from 2021 to 2022, but employment increased by 249 to 72,999 for the same period. Both the labor force and employment have decreased since 2018 by 4,843 and 4,551 respectively. Unemployment decreased by 667 to 3,543 from 2021 to 2022 and the unemployment rate decreased to 4.6% in 2022. After starting at 4.9% in January 2023, the unemployment rate fluctuated, ultimately settling to 4.2% in July 2023.

8. Southwest Arkansas WDA:

Employment in the Southwest Arkansas WDA is forecast to increase by 3,843, for a 4.48% growth, during the 2020-2030 projection period, which is slower than the state's growth rate. Goods-Producing industries are projected to gain 1,124 jobs, while the Services-Providing industries are predicted to increase by 3,073 jobs. The area is expected to experience a net loss of 354 Self-Employed Workers. Population decreased 8.42% from 2010 and 2020, bringing its total down to 213,073 residents.

Leisure and Hospitality is estimated to be the top and fastest growing super-sector, with a gain of 1,151 jobs, a growth of 21.20%. Food Services and Drinking Places is predicted to add 888 new jobs, becoming the top growing industry, while Religious, Grantmaking, Civic, Professional, and Similar Organizations is slated to increase its workforce by 38.76%, becoming the fastest growing industry. On the negative side of the economy, the Information super-sector could see its workforce drop by 15.22%, or 51 jobs. Paper Manufacturing is forecast to be the top declining industry, losing 108 jobs, while Oil and Gas Extraction is slated to be the fastest declining industry, cutting its workforce by 27.86%.

Between 2020 and 2030, Southwest Arkansas employers are estimated to have 10,095 job openings annually. The area is forecasted to have 3,841 annual openings due to employees leaving the workforce, while 5,870 are due to employees changing jobs. Growth and expansion could account for 384 annual job openings. Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations is estimated to be the top growing major group, increasing employment by an anticipated 892 jobs. Community and Social Service Occupations is predicted to be the fastest growing major group, raising employment levels by 24.33%. Home Health and Personal Care Aides leads the region in numeric change, adding an estimated 334 jobs, or nearly 26% to the workforce between 2020 and 2030. Musicians and Singers is slated to be the fastest growing occupation, increasing its ranks by 59.42%. Office and Administrative Support Occupations is projected to be the top and fastest declining major group, losing 276 jobs, 3.40% of its labor force. Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers is predicted to be the top declining occupation in the area, losing 249 jobs, while Medical Transcriptionists could lose 31.58% of its already small workforce in the Southwest Arkansas WDA.

The Southwest Arkansas WDA labor force decreased from 2021 to 2022 by 295 to 88,656, while employment increased by 271 to 84,828. Over the five-year period from 2018 to 2022, the area has seen a decrease of 4,254 in the labor force and decrease of 3,486 in employment. Unemployment decreased by 566 from 2021 to 2022 and decreased by 768 over the five-year period. The unemployment rate dropped by 0.6% from 2021 to 2022 to 4.0%. After various fluctuations in the unemployment rate during 2023, the rate settled at 4.0% in July 2023.

9. West Central WDA:

West Central Arkansas is expected to see an employment increase of 10,633 during the

2020-2030 projection period. Goods-Producing industries are projected to gain 1,411 new jobs, while the Services-Providing industries are predicted to gain 9,365. Self Employed Workers, All Jobs is estimated to lose 143 jobs by 2030. The population declined 0.42% from 2010 and 2020, bringing the area's total population down to 313,162 residents.

Leisure and Hospitality is estimated to be the top and fastest growing super-sector, adding 3,054 jobs, an increase of 25.01%. Driving this growth is Food Services and Drinking Places, which is slated to grow by 2,169 jobs. Transit and Ground Passenger Transportation could see significant gains during the projection period, increasing by 93.70%. On the negative side, Federal Government, Excluding Post Office is predicted to cut staffing by 124 jobs, 14.81% of its local workforce. Telecommunications is projected to decline by 26.09%, becoming the fastest declining industry. The Information super-sector is estimated to lose 56 jobs, equivalent to 8.18% of its workforce.

West Central Arkansas' occupational employment is expected to increase 8.77% during the projection period, which is slightly lower than the state growth rate. About 15,503 annual job openings are anticipated in the area. Of these, 5,863 are estimated to come from employees leaving the workforce, while 8,577 from employees changing jobs. Growth and expansion are estimated to account for 1,063 of those jobs. The Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations major group is projected to be the top and fastest growing major group with 2,298 new jobs, a 21.89% increase. Home Health and Personal Care Aides leads the West Central Arkansas WDA in numeric growth, adding 772 jobs, a 30.07% uptick. Nurse Practitioners is slated to be the fastest growing occupation, increasing its workforce by 60.96%. On the negative side of the labor market, Cashiers is projected to be the top declining occupation, losing an estimated 106 jobs, while Sewing Machine Operators could cut 37.04% of its workforce, becoming the fastest declining occupation.

In 2022, the labor force and employment increased in the West Central Arkansas WDA. The labor force increased by 2,521 to a total of 129,963, while employment increased 3,153 to a total of 124,933. The labor force decreased by 2,092 from 2018 to 2022 and employment decreased by 1,594. Unemployment decreased from 2021 to 2022 by 632 to 5,030. This caused the unemployment rate to drop from 4.4% to 3.9%. The unemployment rate fluctuated through 2023 but ended at 4.0% in July.

10. Western Arkansas WDA:

The Western Arkansas WDA is expected to experience a net growth of employment with 9,078 jobs forecast to be added during the projection period. Goods-Producing industries are projected to have a net gain of 1,382 jobs, while the Services-Providing industries are estimated to add 8,178. The area is predicted to lose 482 self-employed workers. The population declined 1.93% from 2010 to 2020 for a total population of 255,058.

The Education and Health Services super sector is expected to be the top growing super sector, with a gain of 3,940 jobs. Leisure and Hospitality is predicted to be the fastest growing super sector, adding 22.62% to its workforce. Driving this growth is Food Services and Drinking Places with an increase of 1,651 new jobs. Motion Picture and Sound Recording Industries could experience significant growth between 2020 and 2030 due to new business ventures and recovery from historical losses. On the negative side of the labor market, Electrical Equipment, Appliance, and Component Manufacturing is anticipated to be the top declining occupation, cutting 118 jobs from its workforce, while Telecommunications could see a 27.36% reduction in employment, becoming the fastest declining occupation.

The Western Arkansas WDA is projected to see a 7.96% growth of its workforce between 2020 and 2030, which is slower than the state growth rate. Around 14,063 annual job openings are expected to be available during the projection period, with 5,308 created from employees leaving the workforce, 7,847 from those changing jobs, and 908 from growth and expansion. Food Preparation and Food Serving Related Occupations is projected to be the top growing major group, with a gain of 1,689 jobs. Healthcare Support Occupations is projected to be the fastest growing major group, increasing its workforce by 29.25%. Home Health and Personal Care Aides is expected to be the top growing occupation in the area, gaining 890 new jobs, while Nurse Practitioners could see a 60% increase, becoming the fastest growing occupation. On the negative side of the job market, Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers is slated to lose 241 jobs between 2020 and 2030, while Word Processors and Typists is predicted to be the fastest declining occupation, cutting 34.62% of its already small employment.

The Western Arkansas WDA labor force increased 1,781 to 109,484 and employment increased by 2,289 to 105,951 from 2021 to 2022. Over the 2018-2022 period, the labor force decreased by 2,990 while employment decreased by 2,405. Unemployment and the unemployment rate both fluctuated from 2018 to 2022. Unemployment ultimately decreased by 585 to 3,533 unemployed, while the unemployment rate dropped by 0.5% to 3.2%. The area's unemployment rate fluctuated through 2023, ending at 3.6% in July.

Education and Skill Levels of the Workforce.

Education

Occupations requiring no formal educational credential are likely to add 35,524 jobs between 2020 and 2030. Occupations requiring a high school diploma or equivalent could add 35,255 jobs, but also have 68,204 annual job openings when job exits and transfers are examined. Job seekers with at least an associate degree could see 42,092 new jobs and 32,447 annual job openings when they are ready to enter the workforce. Jobs requiring a master's degree could see the largest percent change, with a 20.57% gain in employment over the 10-year period. Every educational category is forecasted to see net gains in jobs.

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

Top Occupations Requiring High School Diploma or Less:	
Fast Food and Counter Workers	8,699
Retail Salespersons	5,504
Cashiers	4,878
Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers	4,186
Waiters and Waitresses	3,993
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	3,674
Stockers and Order Fillers	3,600
Office Clerks, General	3,125
Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	3,082
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	2,979

Top Occupations Requiring Associate Degree/Postsecondary Training:	
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	4,690
Nursing Assistants	2,483
Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks	1,342
Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary	1,116
Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	1,028
Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education	587
Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics	537
Medical Assistants	519
Health Information Technologists, Medical Registrars, Surgical Assistants, & Healthcare Practitioners, AO	369
Hairdressers, Hairstylists, and Cosmetologists	369

Top Occupations Requiring Bachelor Degree or Higher:	
General and Operations Managers	2,212
Registered Nurses	1,637
Clergy	1,223
Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	984
Project Management Specialists and Business Operations Specialists, AO	963
Software Developers and Software Quality Assurance Analysts and Testers	885
Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	881
Accountants and Auditors	851
Management Analysts	780
Medical and Health Services Managers	697

Skills

Employment projections for 2020-2030 were combined with skills data from the Occupational Information Network (O*NET) to estimate worker skills that are more in-demand. The content skills listed are developed capacities that facilitate learning or more rapid acquisition of knowledge. The skills of critical thinking, active listening, speaking, monitoring, and reading comprehension will show the most growth over the 2020-2030 projection period.

Content Skills:	
Active Learning	32,082
Active Listening	80,743
Complex Problem Solving	13,645
Coordination	57,455
Critical Thinking	83,505
Equipment Maintenance	6,682
Equipment Selection	10
Installation	938
Instructing	8,174
Judgment and Decision Making	32,072
Learning Strategies	11,663
Management of Financial Resources	1,252
Management of Personnel Resources	6,976
Mathematics	2,812
Monitoring	64,470
Negotiation	7,234
Operation and Control	18,088
Operation Monitoring	18,417
Operations Analysis	1,672
Persuasion	16,808
Quality Control Analysis	11,275
Reading Comprehension	62,211
Repairing	6,066
Science	2,314
Service Orientation	39,028
Social Perceptiveness	52,313
Speaking	76,875
Systems Analysis	3,269
Systems Evaluation	2,200
Time Management	34,201
Troubleshooting	7,744
Writing	34,629

A knowledge represents the acquisition of facts and principles about a domain of information. The knowledge domains of English language, customer and personal service, education and training, mathematics, and administration and management show the strongest growth from 2020 to 2030.

Knowledge Domains:	
English Language	84,732
Customer and Personal Service	83,884
Education and Training	63,489
Mathematics	50,586
Administration and Management	50,432
Public Safety and Security	36,680
Computers and Electronics	35,563
Administrative	33,165
Psychology	29,999
Production and Processing	24,358
Mechanical	23,153
Sales and Marketing	18,989
Food Production	18,467
Personnel and Human Resources	17,705
Sociology and Anthropology	13,509
Therapy and Counseling	13,010
Engineering and Technology	11,017
Transportation	10,725
Medicine and Dentistry	10,532
Law and Government	9,853
Chemistry	9,687
Biology	9,598
Building and Construction	8,111
Economics and Accounting	7,662
Design	6,367
Philosophy and Theology	6,118
Geography	5,024
Physics	4,909
Communications and Media	3,342
History and Archeology	2,383
Fine Arts	362
Foreign Language	69
Telecommunications	-333

According to the US Census, Arkansas has a population of 3,045,637 individuals. The highest level of education among people aged 25 years and older includes: no high

school diploma 10%, high school diploma 34.7%, Associate's 6.4%, Bachelor's 13.9%, Master's or higher including a professional degree is 7.6%. The Title II Adult Education program served 16,730 individuals in the 2022-2023 fiscal year, which is an increase of 15% over the previous fiscal year. Adult learners enroll in adult education to attain their Arkansas High School Diploma, participate in English learning activities, workforce preparation activities, and job training programs. Arkansas Adult Education enrollment in the 2022-2023 program year was 9,690 individuals. Of those 9,690 individuals enrolled as participants, only 339 entered at the 9th-grade level or higher, while 6,792 entered below the 9th-grade level. 2,559 of the total enrolled entered as English as a second language learner, with Hispanic/Latinos seeing an increase in enrollment of 29% from the 2021-2022 program year. Arkansas also saw an increase in the Latino population in the most recent census. This is consistent with the increase in enrollment of English Language Learners for adult education.

The 25-44 year-old age group saw the highest increase in enrollment as a total, and also as a percentage of the overall enrollment with 2,849 in that age group comprising 29% of the total enrollment. For the 2022-2023 program year, 4,163 Educational Functioning Level Gains were made, which was 61.6% of the total enrollment of those making an Educational Functioning Level gain (EFL). Of the other measurable skill gain indicators that were identified, 1,877 secondary credentials were met at 27.8% of the total enrollment; 82 transcripts were identified in postsecondary education; 72 milestones were met for on-the-job or apprentice training; and 562 occupational skills exams were passed that were required for benchmarks to be met and skill gains be recorded.

<https://statisticalatlas.com/state/Arkansas/Educational-Attainment>

<https://nrs.ed.gov/rt/reports/longitudinal> - Arkansas "Measurable Skill Gains Table".

(2) Workforce Development, Education and Training Activities Analysis.

(A) The State's Workforce Development Activities.

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), 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.

The Adult Education Section supports adult basic and literacy education programs for adults who lack basic skills, a high school diploma, or proficiency in English. Adult

education and literacy activities include English language acquisition activities, workforce preparation activities, and integrated education and training (IET) that provides adult education and literacy activities, concurrently and contextually with both workforce preparation activities, and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster and is for the purpose of educational and career advancement. Adult education and literacy activities may also include workplace adult education and literacy activities, family literacy activities, integrated English literacy and civics education.

All adult education providers are required to integrate the Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy (WAGE™), a job readiness program for unemployed and underemployed adults within the Division of Workforce Services, Adult Education Section, into the curriculum. WAGE™ is unique from other career readiness programs in that it focuses on improving the basic academic skills of participants while providing workforce preparation and workforce training activities. With the needs of business and industry at its core, WAGE™ addresses the requirement for a competent workforce among entry level jobs in environments ranging from manufacturing to health care to hospitality and tourism. Participants can earn a Level I and Level II WAGE™ Certificate by completing the requirements of each module. In addition, through the IET program, participants earn job-industry recognized certifications and credentials. Participants have earned credentials in CDL, welding, Phlebotomy, Certified Nursing Assistant, NCCER, Pharmacy Tech, National Career Readiness Certificate, and much more.

In addition, the Adult Education Section operates the Temporary Assistant for Needy Families (TANF) and the SNAP Employment & Training (E&T) program through adult education centers across the state. The TANF program operates in 65% (24 of the 37 programs) of Arkansas Adult Education programs and covers 68% (51 of the 75 counties) of Arkansas counties. Each year of the TANF program has seen an increase in the number of programs participating, counties covered by the program, and student enrollment in the program. The Adult Education Section is the largest provider of SNAP E&T services, serving 74 of the 75 counties and having had over 5,700 participants dually participate in SNAP E&T and adult education. The Adult Education Section also works closely with Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Program, along with local workforce development boards. In addition, adult education is collocated in most of the comprehensive workforce centers and utilizes the mobile one-stop services for job fairs, job training events, and Open House activities throughout the year.

The Arkansas Workforce Centers are at the forefront of the workforce activities and represent Arkansas's version of the American Jobs Center. There are 23 workforce centers spread across the state providing access to many Arkansans. In addition to these locations, Arkansas has nine 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 ADWS and are managed locally by a partnership between ADWS, ARS, and 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.

Arkansas Workforce Centers - Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) has nine field offices co-located at Arkansas Workforce Centers in Harrison, Fayetteville, Jonesboro, Searcy, West Memphis, Helena, Russellville, Hot Springs, and El Dorado. ARS maintains counselor itinerary points at all other Workforce Centers. Services to Disabled Persons - Arkansas Rehabilitation Services is the general vocational rehabilitation agency in Arkansas. ARS provides targeted services to eligible Arkansans with disabilities to help clients obtain or maintain competitive integrated employment. Significant barriers remain for working age Arkansans with disabilities to participate in the state's workforce. The Annual Disability Statistics Compendium: 2023, indicates only 35.3% of individuals aged 18 to 64 with disabilities are employed. [1] Reference: Annual Disability Statistics Compendium: <https://disabilitycompendium.org/> Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Demographics and Statistics (StatsRRTC), (2008); Report on Disability Demographics for Arkansas; Retrieved 06/12/2023

The Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) has 14 Field Office locations co-located within Arkansas Workforce Centers and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) offices (Fayetteville, Fort Smith, Harrison, Russellville, West Memphis, Jonesboro, Pine Bluff, Hot Springs, Benton, Little Rock, Monticello, El Dorado, Texarkana, and Magnolia). DSB is the vocational rehabilitation agency for Blind and Visually Impaired individuals in Arkansas. Significant barriers to employment exist for individuals who are blind and visually impaired. DSB works with participants to obtain, retain, maintain, or advance in competitive integrated employment. According to the Annual Disability Statistics Compendium: 2023, approximately 3.6% of Arkansans report having a visual disability. [1] Reference: Annual Disability Statistics Compendium: <https://disabilitycompendium.org/> Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Demographics and Statistics (StatsRRTC), (2008); Report on Disability Demographics for Arkansas; Retrieved 12/29/2023.

(B) The Strengths and Weaknesses of 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 and low labor force participation rate.
- 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.

The strength of the Adult Education Section's workforce development activities focuses on improving an individual's academic and workplace skills holistically. The workforce development component within adult education considers an individual's knowledge, skills, and abilities when developing the individual academic and career pathway. Collaboratively, the WAGE™ job readiness program, Career Coach, and local Adult Education staff first evaluates an individual's talent and abilities by learning more about their natural abilities through an interest inventory leading to career pathways. The WAGE™ program provides for the development of individual learning plans that provide instructions to increase the knowledge, skills, and abilities to prepare for careers that best fit their interests. The Adult Education Section's holistic approach focuses on addressing any barriers to learning, including assisting with identifying disabilities and any needed social services. These comprehensive services are coordinated more effectively and efficiently because all the core partner programs are located under the Arkansas Department of Commerce. The weakness of the workforce development activities is that of the advances in technology that require a

more rapid response. There is a need to quickly respond to workforce needs, and with so many different titles and services that overlap, too many options may stagger rapid responses and overwhelm the average Arkansan. In addition, many participants in adult education face barriers of transportation and childcare. Although adult education centers are set up to offer instruction at a distance, internet service is spotty and some do not have the technology to participate in online learning and lack digital literacy skills.

ARS views itself as the expert with working with individuals with disabilities who are seeking and maintaining employment. ARS also has expertise in assisting employers in maintaining employees who experience illness and injury that results in disability. ARS utilizes co-location opportunities for increased effectiveness and efficiency in serving consumers. ARS has co-located offices with DWS in multiple locations. Transportation and access to technology has been and remains a challenge for ARS clients.

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

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

(C) **State Workforce Development Capacity.**

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 Sarah Sanders and the Arkansas Workforce Development Board, the functional design of the Arkansas workforce system starts with coordination at the highest level through the Governor's Workforce Cabinet, which provides a common direction at the state agency level for

driving workforce development. This partnership at the highest level will increase capacity and extend the alignment of the system to a broader and more diverse population of jobseekers across the state.

The agencies represented in this plan, 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 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.

The Adult Education Section provides workforce development activities in all 75 counties within the state through an extensive provider system. Adult education has 37 providers that can respond to the demands within their local communities to service all eligible adult learners and special populations. The local providers can hire additional teachers, paraprofessionals, and trainers as needed. Furthermore, providers are connected to 25 community colleges and colleges, seven school districts, and two literacy councils, with a host of satellite facilities. Every adult education program must offer Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy (WAGE™), a job readiness program for unemployed and underemployed adults, trademarked by the Adult Education Section.

The WAGE™ program is administered at adult education centers across the state. WAGE™ is unique from other career readiness programs in that it focuses on improving the academic basic skills of participants while providing workforce preparation and workforce training activities. With the needs of business and industry at its core, WAGE™ addresses the requirement for a competent workforce among entry level jobs in environments ranging from manufacturing to health care to hospitality and tourism. Participants can earn a Level I and Level II WAGE™ Certificate by completing the requirements of each module.

The Level I WAGE™ Certificate is designed to prepare adult learners with the essential soft skills needed in today's workforce. A Career Coach works with participants to explore interests through a career assessment, apply employability skills that address competencies in the areas of applied knowledge, effective relationships, and workplace skills, and help with the transition into post-secondary education or training programs or the workforce. Adult Education teachers provide academic instruction as well as integrate financial literacy and digital literacy into the classroom. Completing the WAGE™ Level I Certificate gives participants the skills needed to attain and retain employment.

The Level II WAGE™ Certificate is designed to support adult learners in choosing a career path within the 16 career clusters. The Adult Education Section's first phase of career clusters, which are based on high demand industries in Arkansas, include Business Management and Administration, Education and Training, Health Science, Hospitality and Tourism, Information Technology, and Manufacturing. Adult Education teachers provide contextualized learning that enables participants to improve academic skills while learning about a specific career path related to their interest. Learners have an opportunity to earn job industry certifications in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and First Aid, Guest Service Gold®, IC3 Digital Literacy Certification, Forklift, National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC), OSHA-10, and ServSafe related to a specific career cluster. Career Coaches assist participants in finding employment and/or enrolling in postsecondary education or training programs.

The WAGE™ program is a focal point of developing Integrated Educational and Training activities developed cooperatively with local business and industry, and adult education goals. Together, local programs and employers identify workforce needs and establish curriculum, certificates, and credentials needed to meet those needs. Each local program establishes their plan to implement and execute successful IET programs with the Adult Education Section. The Adult Education Section reviews and consults local program of IET requirements, industry needs, and funding opportunities available to meet the plans of the IET's purpose. The WAGE™ program is not only used as a foundational component of workforce preparation needs, but also as a catalyst to propel participants into successful career pathways.

ARS serves individuals statewide through 19 local offices and the Arkansas Career Development Center. ARS counselors work with a variety of vendors and providers to provide services to consumers.

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

(b) State Strategic Vision and Goals.

(1) 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. certificate or degree; obtain guidance on how to make career choices; or are businesses and employers seeking skilled workers.

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

Under WIOA, partner programs and entities that are jointly responsible for workforce and economic development, educational, and other human resource programs collaborate to create a seamless customer-focused workforce delivery system that integrates service delivery across all programs and enhances access to the programs' services. The workforce delivery system includes six core programs (Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs; Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy

Act; Title III Wagner-Peyser program; and Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation program), as well as other required and optional partners identified in WIOA. In Arkansas, these programs are administered by the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (Titles I, III), Adult Education (Title II), and the Rehabilitation Services portion of Title IV. The Division of Services for the Blind administers the remaining portion of Title IV. Through the Arkansas Workforce Center network, these partner programs and their service providers ensure that businesses and job seekers—a shared client base across the multiple programs identified above— have access to information and services that lead to positive employment outcomes. Under WIOA, workforce centers and their partners:

- Provide job seekers with the skills and credentials necessary to secure and advance in employment with family-sustaining wages.
- Provide access and opportunities to all job seekers, including individuals with barriers to employment, such as individuals with disabilities, to prepare for, obtain, retain, and advance in high-quality jobs and high-demand careers.
- Enable businesses and employers to easily identify and hire skilled workers and access other supports, including education and training for their current workforce.
- Participate in rigorous evaluations that support continuous improvement of workforce centers by identifying which strategies work better for different populations.
- Ensure that high-quality integrated data inform decisions made by policy makers, employers, and job seekers.

The management of the Arkansas workforce delivery system is the shared responsibility of 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:

- **Deliver Quality Employer Services:** Develop, offer, and deliver quality business services that assist specific businesses and industry sectors in overcoming the challenges of recruiting, retaining, and developing talent for the regional economy. To support area employers and industry sectors most effectively, workforce center staff identifies and has a clear understanding of industry skill needs, identify appropriate strategies for assisting employers, and coordinate business services activities across workforce center partner programs, as appropriate. This includes the incorporation of an integrated and aligned business services strategy among workforce center partners to present a unified voice for the workforce center in its communications with employers. Additionally, workforce centers use the forthcoming performance measure(s) on effectiveness in serving employers to support continuous improvement of these services.
- **Reflect a Welcoming Environment:** Reflect a welcoming environment to all customer groups who are served by the workforce centers. All workforce center staff are courteous, polite, responsive, and helpful to job seekers, businesses, and others who visit the workforce centers, either in person or by telephone or e-mail. Moreover, workforce center staff are sensitive to the unique needs of individuals with disabilities and are prepared to provide necessary accommodations.
- **Provide Career Services that Empower:** Provide career services that motivate, support and empower customers, including individuals with disabilities, to make informed decisions based on local and regional economic demand and effectively attain their personal employment and education goals.
- **Value Skill Development:** Value skill development by assessing and improving each individual's basic, occupational, and employability skills. **Create Opportunities:** Create opportunities for individuals at all skill levels and levels of experience by providing customers, including those with disabilities, as much timely, labor market, job-driven information and choice as possible related to education and training, careers, and service delivery options, while offering customers the opportunity to receive both skill-development and job placement services.
- **Improve Job Seeker Skills:** Improve the skills of job seeker and worker customers. Workforce centers offer access to education and training leading to industry-recognized credentials through the use of career pathways, apprenticeships, and other strategies that enable customers, including those with disabilities, to compete successfully in today's global economy. They provide businesses with access to the quantity and quality of talent they need and support upskill/backfill strategies that expand job opportunities in the community.

Innovation and Service Design

Arkansas Workforce Centers reflect innovative and effective service design.

- **Integrate Intake Process:** Use an integrated and expert intake process for all customers entering the workforce centers. Frontline staff is highly familiar with

the functions and basic eligibility requirements of each program and can appropriately assist customers and make knowledgeable referrals to partner programs, as needed and as appropriate given the authorized scope of the program.

- **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.

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

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

- Veterans and eligible spouses
- Individuals with disabilities, both youth and adults
- English language learners (Limited English Proficiency)
- Migrant and seasonal farmworkers
- Out-of-school youth
- Adult and youth ex-offenders (justice-involved)
- Public assistance recipients (TANF, SNAP, SSI, Medicaid, etc.)
- Youth in, or previously in, foster care
- Homeless individuals, both youth and adults
- Runaway youth
- Pregnant and parenting youth
- The long-term unemployed
- Low-income workers earning wages below self-sufficiency
- Basic skills deficient individuals
- The over 55 age group

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.

(2) **Goals.**

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

special populations, jobseekers, workers and businesses alike.

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

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

Goal 1 Objectives:

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

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

Goal 2 Objectives:

- 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:

- a. Increase access to the workforce development system through a no wrong door approach to services.
- b. Develop an image-building outreach campaign that educates Arkansans about the services and the career development opportunities available in the State.
- c. Utilize technology, including social media and search engine optimization, to better connect jobseekers and employers with the talent development system in Arkansas.
- d. 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:

- a. Conduct a statewide skills and asset analysis to determine the skills gaps 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. Develop and maintain a system for the continuous assessment and alignment of programs with current and future skills demand.

(3) Performance Goals.

WIOA ensures that federal investments in employment and training programs are accountable to jobseekers, employers, customers, and taxpayers. WIOA establishes common performance measures across the four core programs and also requires other programs authorized by the Act to report on the same indicators. In addition, WIOA

requires the establishment of primary indicators on credential attainment and skills gain and on the effectiveness of services to employers. The tables with the performance goals in Title I, II, III and IV are included within the Core Program Section in the Performance Indicators Appendix.

(4) **Assessment.**

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

A formula workforce system evaluation is underway, and the results will be used to plan strategies for the following year.

Areas of opportunity in regard to assessment include evaluating the effectiveness of alignment of core programs into Arkansas Workforce Development. Additional emphasis will be placed on improvement of co-enrollment and increased data collection in this area.

(c) State Strategy.

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

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;
- 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; and
 - 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 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;
- Increased attainment of college-level certificates and associate degrees; and
- Increased enrollment in college-level certificate and associate degree programs.

The Adult Education Section oversees the delivery of a wide range of workforce education and training programs and related services across the state through 37 adult education providers and education programs that support career preparation and advancement. Through required participation with the Arkansas Workforce Development Board and regional Advisory Boards, partnerships of industry-specific occupations, industry sector partnerships, partnerships with employers, registered apprenticeships, and other workforce development partners, adult education providers work to identify opportunities to train and educate adults for the needs and demands in

the program-specific areas as well as general specified credential and employment opportunities.

The Adult Education Section addresses the region-specific needs and goals through their local workforce development board (LWDB) and individual advisory committee. The analysis of the LWDB and individual site-specific advisory committees drive the programs and direction each adult education program pursues to meet those needs and achieve those goals. The programs utilize input from labor market information and local and regional stakeholders to align services through the WAGE™ program and existing Integrated Education and Training (IET) opportunities that yield industry-recognized credentials, which in turn, meets the upcoming demands of the region and local workforce needs.

Adult education programs utilize the career pathway and apprenticeship models to address basic skills and deficient aspects of adult learners, which help achieve attainable steps to progress and success. In this process, the career pathway and apprenticeship models are constructed to help learners earn credentials along the path to earning incremental and stackable credentials. As the Adult Education Section analyzes local and sector employment conditions, partners in Adult Education have in place a process to identify and align industry credentials and certificates for those skills and competencies needed in that area. The Adult Education Section assists adults and businesses through contextualized learning, IETs, and WAGE™ curriculum to meet the industry's in-demand occupations and workforce needs.

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

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

(2) **Strategies to Align Programs.**

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

The Adult Education Section works with other programs outside of the core partners such as the Department of Human Services SNAP E&T and TANF programs. The Adult Education Section utilizes aspects of the student intake process and specifically asks if potential students participate in other WIOA core programs upfront. This assists Adult Education staff in connecting with other partners' services to assist in student success with other WIOA core partners. Adult education is also collocated in most of the comprehensive workforce centers and works with core partners firsthand in connecting wrap-around services. Once participants begin services with Adult Education providers, the student completes a Student Learning Plan and identifies goals and an action plan. Upon meeting measurable skill gains and targeted goals, learning plans are reassessed to connect to available resources and optimize customer service best practices to improve student success.

One of the ways adult education addresses the weakness of Customer Service is through training. Adult education staff participate in annual required customer service training either virtually or in-person. In addition, specific training such as Bridges Out of Poverty and Generational Differences are also included to help practitioners relate and understand the population they are serving. As a result, the retention rate of adult education learners has increased over 5% in the last two years.

ARS regional managers are members of the local workforce development boards sharing information regarding the provision of services to individuals with disabilities looking for or maintaining employment. Staff receive ongoing training to improve service provision to consumers and employers.

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

III. OPERATIONAL PLANNING ELEMENTS

(a) State Strategy Implementation.

(1) State Board Functions.

Arkansas is fortunate to have multiple layers of governance and strategy as it relates to carrying out functions of the state workforce development board. In addition to the Arkansas Workforce Development Board, Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders issued Executive Order (EO) 23-16, which created the Governor's Workforce Cabinet and the position of the Chief Workforce Officer (CWO) to advise the Governor on issues

regarding workforce development and career education in Arkansas and to undertake the following duties:

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

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

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

The roles and responsibilities of the Arkansas Workforce Development Board (AWDB) were established under Arkansas Act 907 of 2015 and WIOA Section 101(d). The AWDB has policymaking and oversight responsibilities for the Arkansas Workforce Development system. Additionally, Arkansas Act 907 of 2015 gives the AWDB responsibility for oversight of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

The AWDB operates under a committee structure of 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;
 - 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 Partners Roundtable

The WIOA Partners 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 Partners Roundtable operates as a de facto "committee" of the Arkansas Workforce Development Board due to the common members on each body.

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

- Arkansas Workforce Development Board Staff Director
- Arkansas Division of Workforce Services Agency and Deputy 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)
- Arkansas Office of Skills Development Director
- Arkansas Division of Information Systems Chief Data Officer
- Program Directors representing Unemployment Insurance, TAA, RESEA, LMI, Rapid Response

(2) Implementation of State Strategy.

(A) Core Program Activities to Implement the State's Strategy.

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

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

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

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

career coach that comes a few days a week to assist individuals with career services activities. The Title I Adult Program has referred individuals whose native language isn't English to adult education for services. In contrast, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services has been very instrumental in providing disability screening to adult learners who are interested in working. Arkansans that are co-enrolled typically have higher outcomes than those just enrolled in one program. The wraparound services and support have been key to their success.

The local workforce development boards are utilized in the Adult Education's request for proposal (RFP) process. Local workforce development boards are allowed to review and comment on the RFP application of each eligible adult education applicant. One of the considerations is how the eligible provider demonstrates alignment between proposed activities and services to the one-stop partners. This includes how the applicant plans to align with the LWDB regarding employment, training, education, and supportive services that adult education learners need. In addition, the eligible adult education application must include the applicant's proposed activities, services, and the regional needs identified in the LWDB proposed local plan, including concurrent enrollment.

Adult education providers must offer students integrated education and training (IET) programs. IET is a service approach that provides adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement. An IET program must include three components: adult education and literacy activities, workforce preparation activities, and workforce training. In addition, as part of a career pathway, the design of an IET program should support the local and state workforce development board plans as required under WIOA. Adult education providers rely heavily on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) and other educational entities for the training component. In addition, adult learners are connected to programs such as TANF, WIOA, and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services to help pay tuition costs, as Title II funds cannot pay tuition on learners' behalf. This braided funding approach allows programs to maximize the services and allows adults to be co-enrolled in multiple programs.

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

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

- Job vacancies in labor market areas

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

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

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

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

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

counselor to ensure the employment goal considers the participant's strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, and interests. DSB staff are aware of the services and opportunities provided by other core programs and refer participants to additional resources and services when possible.

(B) Alignment with Activities outside the Plan.

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

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

One of the areas Adult Education plans to strengthen is to offer more pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships opportunities to learners. State staff has met with the Office of Skills Development, a division of the Department of Commerce, to discuss ways to expand apprenticeships to adult learners. Although a few providers currently work with apprenticeship providers in the state such as the National Apprenticeship Training Foundation, Arkansas Construction Education Foundation, and Little Rock Electrical JATC, there is a need for more partnerships in other sectors and across the state. Apprenticeship programs can help satisfy the integrated education and training (IET) requirement of all adult education providers. IETs enable individuals to secure industry-relevant certifications or credentials, obtain employment within an occupational area, or advance to higher levels of future education and employment. IETs are selected based on the Local Workforce Development Plan, which outlines the sectors that are high-demand and lead to high-wages.

Working with WIOA One-Stop Partners helps create a framework for existing education and workforce services to move from disconnection to integration into one system. This process of working with WIOA partners in conjunction with local workforce development boards and local advisory boards offers a more efficient and customer-centered approach to workforce development. Adult Education's best

practices are shared with One-Stop Partners to collaborate monthly with WIOA partners through referrals and co-enrollment to minimize the duplication of services. The attention, timing, and education or training involved benefit from having core partners working together to bring shared services to align with the skill needs of industries and prepare individuals to be successful for future employment or postsecondary education opportunities, including apprenticeships.

Another partnership that the state office has formed is working with Arkansas Virtual Academy (AVA) through iCEV, an online Career Technical Education (CTE) training program. Adult learners will have access to training modules that lead to job-industry recognized certifications and AVA's career technical education instructors. Adult learners will be able to access workforce training opportunities no matter where they are in the state. Working with other organizations allows the state to expand opportunities for Arkansans as well as reduce duplication of services.

The public library is another partnership that local adult education providers are building. The Fayetteville Public Library and the Fayetteville School District Adult Education program have formed a partnership in which the adult education program is offering basic skills instruction, English Language Acquisition and integrating workforce preparation training and digital literacy into the course. In addition, the library provides workforce training programs in the Skilled Trades, Information Technology, Heavy Equipment Operation, and Culinary Arts that lead to a certification. The library is an excellent partner for the workforce training component of adult education's integrated education and training program.

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

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

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

identify co-enrolled participants to avoid duplication of services and more effective services for those participants.

C. Coordination, Alignment and Provision of Services to Individuals.

The Trade Adjustment Act (TAA) Program. The Arkansas TAA Program consists of 4 positions and delivers Program and Fiscal Services to clients virtually from the Central Office with Reporting responsibilities out-stationed. TAA works closely with the Local Offices, WIOA and other One Stop partners to provide reemployment/job search assistance, labor market information, relocation assistance and training services. All TAA clients are referred to area WIOA staff for assessment, allowing for co-enrollment with supportive services and coordination with OJT and RA training services. One-on-one assessments are provided to assist clients with review of employment opportunities. Quarterly meetings are held with WIOA Boards and staff to discuss and remove any barriers to co-enrollment and seek opportunities to encourage participation in the programs available to them. During this period of waiting for Program reauthorization, Trade staff conducts outreach to Trade eligible clients to remind and offer the life-time training eligibility.

Adult Education is the Department of Human Services (DHS) largest provider of the SNAP E&T program and has been providing employment and training services since 2017 and TANF services since 2020. Adult education providers work closely with the local Division of County Operations offices and One Stops to ensure that activities are coordinated to meet the needs of the clients. DHS funds two state Adult Education positions, a TANF and SNAP E&T Program Advisor, whose role is to oversee the TANF and SNAP E&T program across the state at local adult education programs. The Program Advisors train TANF and SNAP E&T Coordinators on policies, case management, and customer service.

Local adult education TANF and SNAP E&T Coordinators are required to earn a Career Service Provider (CSP) certificate within one year of hire. The CSP Course includes competencies in areas such as helping skills, labor market information, career assessment, employability skills, and program management to name a few. On the local level, the coordinators have been very instrumental in helping individuals with job search skills, resumes, mock interviews, identifying a career pathway, and enrolling in postsecondary education and training programs. In addition, coordinators help eligible individuals reduce barriers by providing supportive services such as childcare, assistance with transportation, and tuition and supplies. The adult education providers can provide individuals participating in adult education or work activities with gas cards and reimbursements with a receipt. The TANF funds have made significant impact in the lives of participants because barriers such as transportation and childcare, which often impede progress and success, can be reduced or eliminated. Participants who are co-enrolled in the TANF program and adult education often show improved outcomes such as higher employment, increased median earnings, and higher wages compared to those adult learners not participating in TANF.

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

As an education entity, professional development is vital to the infrastructure of adult education. Since those with barriers to employment tend to be the most marginalized, it's important to have an understanding about the population and provide excellent customer service to them. Adult education providers are required to participate in customer service training either virtually or in person annually. In addition, Bridges Out of Poverty and Generational Differences is provided to ensure that Career Service Providers, teachers, and other staff can appropriately interact with individuals from all walks of life and can handle various situations or conflicts if they arise.

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

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

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

The Division of Services for the Blind works with participants to provide services in the manner that best benefits their success. Some participants receive services remotely or in their home, while others may attend overnight training or day training to accomplish their needs. DSB assists consumers with obtaining transportation to these services as necessary and works with vendors to ensure services are accessible

across the state. DSB maintains a resource list of referral sources around the state to assist with removing barriers for individuals. DSB's rate setting process takes into consideration the rural nature of the state and how that may be a barrier to service providers when defining rates for services to expand access to services to all 75 counties.

D. Coordination, Alignment and Provision of Services to Employers.

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

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

Role in the Arkansas Workforce State Plan:

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

In Arkansas, TPM is integrated into the workforce plan as a key tool for engaging employers and ensuring that workforce development efforts are closely aligned with the needs of the state's economy. By adopting TPM, Arkansas is taking a proactive,

employer-centric approach to workforce development, setting the stage for a more responsive and effective workforce ecosystem.

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

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

- A team leader to coordinate the activities of the team.
- A coordinated “script” to market the system to employers.
- Use of the Arkansas Workforce Center name as the primary marketing approach, with agency specialty areas (i.e., Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, Services for the Blind, DVOP/LVER Veterans Services) presented as a part of the overall system as needed.
- An information sharing strategy that makes contact results available to all team members.
- A clear menu of services across all partners.
- A division of duties with employer sector specializations as deemed appropriate for quality customer service.
- Multiple agency participation with clear cost and information sharing commitments.
- At a minimum, job search, employer contacts, job orders, or job development leads performed by any center staff as a result of outreach will be entered into the Wagner-Peyser database (Arkansas Job Link).

Arkansas has received several discretionary grants from the U.S. Department of Labor to address workforce development and training needs of Arkansas employers and jobseekers. Specifically, through the Arkansas Apprenticeship Pathway Initiative, Arkansas Sector Partnership, and the Arkansas Job Driven National Emergency Grant, the State has been able to connect with numerous employers throughout the state to identify existing and emerging occupations and training needs. These grants have enabled the state to be very flexible and immediately responsive to the training needs identified by employers. Through the use of project management teams comprised of core, mandatory, and optional partners in addition to Registered

Apprenticeship, two- and four-year educational institutions, local workforce development boards, and non-profit organizations, the State is able to most effectively deliver services through these grants and maximize on subject matter expertise from all involved.

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

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

One of the services Adult Education provides to employers is workplace classes. Workplace classes include instruction at a workplace, or an off-site location designed to improve the workforce's productivity for a company. Instruction includes contextualized literacy, writing, math, English language acquisition, and workforce preparation at Educational Functioning Levels appropriate to learners. Adult education providers have also provided computer skill-building for use on the job, specialized vocabulary relevant to the employer or industry, and basic on-the-job conduct such as being on time, attendance, and relations with peers and supervisors. The employer is a vital partner who helps guide and design the curriculum to meet the organization's needs.

Another service that Adult Education provides to employers is conducting a literacy task analysis (LTA). A literacy task analysis is a method of obtaining detailed information about the specific components of a job that require literacy skills such as reading, writing, computation, communication, creative thinking, problem-solving, personal management, and teamwork skills. A trained WAGE™ Coordinator consults with a manager and works with a group of employees to complete the LTA and gain an understanding of the abilities, skills, and knowledge of a specific job. The experienced employees serve as the subject matter experts who define the tasks and skills needed to perform a job successfully.

The purpose of conducting an LTA on behalf of an organization is to help employees learn new tasks, transfer to another job, or be promoted. As technology evolves rapidly, employees must learn new tasks, such as operating highly technical equipment or mastering complex quality control procedures. By conducting a literacy task analysis, trainers can develop materials that integrate the basic skills with new job tasks. This will enable employees to respond to change more effectively. Literacy task analysis can help employers retain talent by identifying the literacy requirements of different types of jobs. Workers will better understand the added skills needed to move from one position to another in the company. A literacy task analysis can clearly

point out the different types of basic skills and training required to improve an employee's ability to deliver quality service in lateral transfers within an organization. Lastly, a literacy task analysis can help identify the skills gap of a reliable employee who exhibits desirable employability traits but may lack the skills needed for a higher position. Conducting a literacy task analysis on higher-level jobs will enable trainers to develop materials that will better prepare these employees for promotion and increased responsibility.

Regarding coordinating services with other core programs, the Business Engagement Committee, a subcommittee of the state's WIOA Executive Committee, is represented by state staff of the core programs whose primary focus is to meet the needs of businesses, coordinate services, and reduce duplication. Core partners engage with employers to identify challenges and how the state can assist. The Business Services Team, which has a working knowledge of each core program, helps to connect the employer with the appropriate program. The employer may be working with multiple programs at the same time. For example, in a layoff, a Rapid Response Task Force member may respond to employers and future displaced workers by providing an overview of services available to help employees transition quickly back into the workplace. After assessing skills, individuals without a high school diploma may be referred to adult education for retooling and upskilling. An employee with a disability may be referred to Arkansas Rehabilitation Services to help with training and other needs. The state team works in tandem to meet the needs of business and industry. Because the core programs are under the Division of Workforce Services and most of the programs are collocated, collaboration and communication among the partners happens almost daily.

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

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

Partnerships include chamber of commerce organizations, employers, and educational institutions. The Chamber of Commerce provides additional visibility to the efforts and

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

E. Partner Engagement with Educational Institutions and Other Education and Training Providers

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

Core and non-core programs have strong partnerships with the State's two- and four-year institutions of higher education, especially at the community college level. Several Arkansas Workforce Centers are located on community college campuses, which enable a 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.

Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative provides funding to the State's community colleges to provide post-secondary training to low-income custodial parents that are TANF eligible. This program provides supports to eligible parents to begin training in a career pathway that will enable them to move up the ladder of success in their chosen field.

Adult Education has a strong partnership with educational institutions. Community colleges comprise 25 or 66% of local education agencies, whereas school districts comprise 7 or 19% of adult education providers in the state. Most adult education providers are located directly on community college campuses and, therefore, are often feeders to the community college regarding student enrollment. Adult education providers work closely with the college to provide adult learners with workforce

training opportunities through the integrated education and training program. At the Northwest Technical Institute, North Arkansas College, and Eastern Arkansas Community Colleges Adult Education programs, learners are dually enrolled in the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program. SAU-Tech allows the ASU-Tech Adult Education program to use its classroom space and equipment for a CNA program. The adult education program hires technical and ABE instructors. Grant funds from TANF are used to pay for the TB test, supplies, and certification exam of eligible TANF participants.

The Adult Education state staff also works with the Arkansas Department of Education, Career Technical Education (CTE) Division to identify workforce training programs that adults can access after-hours. At the PEAK Innovation Center, a technical and career training center for high school students in Ft. Smith, Arkansas, the Ft. Smith Adult Education program plans to offer workforce training opportunities to adults in Advanced Manufacturing, Construction Technology, and Adult Apprenticeships after hours and possibly weekends. As mentioned, the state office and providers also work with Arkansas Virtual Academy (AVA), the state's virtual high school, to offer online career technical education courses to adult learners. Since adult education providers are required to have an integrated education and training (IET) program, the partnership helps recruit qualified CTE instructors to teach the contextualized portion of a training program while an ABE instructor does the basic skills portion. The IET model quickly teaches students literacy, work, and college-readiness skills so they can move through school and into living wage jobs faster.

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

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 Partners Roundtable

continue and transition from an implementation body to a coordination and continuous improvement body. By doing so, we set ourselves up to more efficiently bring in other federal, state, and private or non-profit resources to the benefit of our citizens. By utilizing this design, the WIOA Partners Roundtable can approach additional partner programs with a united front.

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

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

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

F. Improving Access to Postsecondary Credentials

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

Role in the Arkansas Workforce State Plan:

- **Establish Credential Registry:** Implements a comprehensive, state-wide registry that lists all available credentials, including degrees, certificates, licenses, badges, and apprenticeships, along with their associated skills and competencies.
- **Facilitate Skills-Based Practices:** Offers human and machine-readable data that demonstrates the relationship between skills, credentials, and learning opportunities, thereby aligning educational and occupational pathways with current market demands.
- **Increase Accessibility and Usability:** Ensures that information about credentials and programs is easily accessible and usable by all stakeholders, including job

- seekers, employers, and education providers.
- **Empower Job Seekers:** Individuals can better understand and communicate their qualifications, making informed decisions about their career paths and educational opportunities.
 - **Aid Employers in Talent Acquisition:** Employers gain a clearer understanding of potential employees' skills and competencies, leading to more effective hiring and workforce development strategies.
 - **Support Data-Driven Decision Making:** The credential registry provides valuable data that can inform policy decisions, educational program development, and workforce planning.

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

All core benchmark indicators in adult education are tied to improving adult participants' employment and education outcomes. Adult Education focuses on improving the opportunities tied to these benchmarks, which include attaining a credential, earning a high school equivalency diploma, and entering the workforce. Adult education providers have collectively focused on industry-recognized postsecondary credentials applicable to market research, collaboration with local industry, and planning with local workforce development boards (LWDBs) and individual advisory boards to produce coursework and partnerships in programs associated with workplace and workforce components. These begin with the most basic certificates and credentials, and through the career pathways model and related career clusters, adult education offers Integrated Education and Training (IET) to adults.

Adult education centers model the practice of using contextualized material related to a career field or sector to assist adults in becoming academically proficient and knowledgeable about the job duties and responsibilities of a particular career. Courses are packaged together with business and industry to achieve a certificate or credential upon completion. Completing courses in the IET model leads to career pathways in associated fields and postsecondary education. One of the key components of adult education is working to create and improve IET opportunities that will enable individuals to secure industry-relevant certifications or credentials, obtain employment within an occupational area, or advance to higher levels of future education and employment.

Working with WIOA One-Stop Partners helps create a framework for existing education and workforce services to move from disconnection to integration into one system. Ideas, curricula, and best practices are shared through regional and local training and conferences. The curriculum is concurrently and contextually taught to

learners for both general and specific career and postsecondary advancement opportunities.

This process of working with WIOA partners in conjunction with local workforce development boards and local advisory boards offers a more efficient and customer-centered approach to workforce development. Adult Education's best practices are shared with One-Stop Partners for information and collaboration purposes. This allows opportunities for co-enrollment of participants across programs and a reduction in the duplication of services. The attention, timing, and education or training involved benefit from having core partners working together to bring shared services to align with the skill needs of industries and prepare individuals to be successful for future employment or postsecondary education opportunities, including apprenticeships. Examples of the improved activities leading adults to certifications in beginning health science coursework start with CPR and First Aid and lead to options for Phlebotomy, Sterile Technician, Pharmacy Technician, CNA, LPN, and so forth. Another example in the transportation field begins with certifications in OSHA and or as a forklift operator, which can lead to the pursuit of a commercial driver's license (CDL), crane operator, heavy equipment operator, additional CDL endorsements, or other postsecondary opportunities in transportation and logistics. One more example is in the Broadband field, where participants can begin with OSHA and CPR/First Aid and bundle packaged coursework to attain certificates as a cellphone tower technician, underground directional driller certificate, and wireless and fiberoptic technician, which can lead to additional stackable credentials in the telecommunication field. Associated with the scope of developing IET courses encompasses many different prepackaged credential applications found in the Office of Skills Development, Career Technical Education, Arkansas Community Colleges, Vocational Rehabilitation, and other key WIOA partners. Utilizing the resources and efforts of all partners is a key component in meeting the adult learner's demands and minimizing duplication of resources. In adult education's data management system, Literacy, Adult and Community Education System (LACES), the participation in 2022-2023 in postsecondary education credentials had 1027 participants either enrolled in or earned a certificate/credential/diploma. Popular industry-recognized credentials included Certified Nurse Assistant, Pharmacy Technician, Certified Medical Technician, Phlebotomy, Dental Assistant, Commercial Driver's License, Heavy Equipment Operation and Safety, Welding, Education Paraprofessional, Praxis Exams in Education, Plumbing, Trac-Pipe, Condense Water Heater NPE, and others. Through continued educational practices and collaboration with key partners, programs have demonstrated the ability to deliver access to industry-specific credentials for their participants. Adult education focuses its technical assistance on honing best practices across the state as credentials and gains are linked to key educational benchmarks.

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

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

G. Coordinating with Economic Development Strategies.

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

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

Adult education utilizes the Department of Workforce Services Labor Market Information to identify labor and occupational trends in the state. In addition, Adult Education staff participates in the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC) meetings and training to stay abreast of the companies that are either coming to Arkansas or expanding. This allows for further collaboration, especially for the opportunity of student referrals. With the recent federal legislation of the CHIPS and Science Act, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and the Inflation Reduction Act, the state now has an opportunity to help Arkansans access new, high-quality jobs. The legislation will help WIOA core programs leverage business outreach efforts to identify those employers who will be pursuing these incentives to help them increase access to training and employment opportunities for those with barriers to employment.

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

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

(b) State Operating Systems and Policies.

(1) State operating systems that support coordinated implementation of State strategies.

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

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

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

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

Each quarter, quarterly wage record information is loaded into AJL to measure the progress on State and local common performance measures. The quarterly wage information includes wages paid to an individual, the social security account number, the name of the individual, and the Federal employer identification number of the employer paying the wages to the individual. State wage records are available to other member

states through the Wage Record Interchange System (WRIS) on a quarterly basis. Likewise, Arkansas is able to track participants that work or move outside of Arkansas for performance measurement purposes through WRIS wage records from member states.

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

Literacy, Adult and Community Education System (LACES), designed by Literacy Pro, is Adult Education's data management system. Arkansas Adult Education has used the data management system in Arkansas since the 2017-2018 program year. The policies and use of LACES are written into the Adult Education's Assessment Policy and Distance Learning Guidelines and Adult Education Program Policies. LACES is a key component of strategy-making, funding, and reporting. The system is built with many key automatic reports informative for student and program progress and can report attendance and performance for all national reporting tables. Adult Education state staff has provided ongoing technical assistance to field users and aligned the policies to regulate the practice of reporting in a timely and accurate manner. With timely and accurate reporting, training can be focused on addressing possible errors or changes in policy, procedure, or practice. Through LACES, monitoring is done on a site level as well as a state level. Consistent and accurate reporting allows the state to monitor progress and trends over time. Consistency in reporting practice allows Adult Education in Arkansas to analyze accurate data, make key decisions, or give immediate assistance. Functions in LACES allow Adult Education to provide files to the Arkansas Division of Higher Education (ADHE) and the Division of Workforce Services (DWS) for data matching purposes, which can then be uploaded into LACES for reporting.

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services currently has a contract with Libera to provide a cloud-based case management system. ARS is in the process of implementing a new case management system with a scheduled go-live date for mid-2024.

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

(2) State policies that will support the implementation of the State's strategies.

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

One strategic activity to support integrated service delivery is the implementation of CiviForm, an innovative digital tool designed to streamline the application process for

government and community services. Developed with support from Google.org, it simplifies the experience of finding and applying for various services, making them more accessible and efficient for residents.

Role in the Arkansas Workforce State Plan:

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

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

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

Role in the Arkansas Workforce State Plan:

- **Skills-Based Matching:** Utilizing advanced matching algorithms, the portal will connect job seekers with employers based on skill compatibility, moving beyond traditional credential-based hiring.
- **Leverage Learning and Employment Records (LERs):** Incorporating LERs, the portal will enable individuals to maintain a comprehensive and verified record of their skills and work history.
- **Connect Learning to Employment:** The platform will provide access to a range of learning and training opportunities, allowing individuals to acquire or upgrade skills in alignment with market demands.
- **Empower Individuals:** The platform will empower job seekers and workers by providing them with tools and information to navigate their career paths effectively.
- **Enhance Employer Engagement:** The portal will enable employers to identify and connect with candidates more efficiently, based on skill needs.
- **Facilitate Continuous Learning and Advancement:** The platform will promote a culture of continuous learning and skill development, crucial for career advancement and workforce adaptability.

- **Streamline Work Search Activities:** The portal will feature an intuitive dashboard for Unemployment Insurance claimants to track their required weekly work search activities to maintain benefit compliance while simultaneously connecting with jobs that match their skills and experience.

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

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

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

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

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

Infrastructure costs and other partnering agreements are developed between sub-grant recipients and local workforce development boards. Infrastructure costs are paid using federal funds and state funds, if needed, to supplement the costs. Adult Education requires its local providers to negotiate and sign a Memorandum of Understanding

(MOU) that addresses the service delivery elements required by WIOA with the workforce board of their respective regions. Two or more local areas in a region may develop a single joint MOU if they are in a region that has submitted a regional plan. The MOU includes a description of services to be provided through the One-Stop delivery system, an agreement on funding the costs of the services and the operating costs of the system (including funding of the shared services and operating costs of the One-Stop), methods for referring individuals between the One-Stop operators and partners for appropriate services and activities, methods to ensure the needs of workers, youth and individuals with barriers to employment. The duration, procedures for amending, and assurances of the MOU are reviewed to ensure substantial changes have not occurred, renewal, not less than once every 3-year period to ensure appropriate funding and delivery of services are included. The MOU may contain other provisions, including in-kind partner contributions and alternative funding, agreed to by the parties consistent with WIOA Title I, the authorizing statutes and regulations of one-stop partner programs, and the WIOA regulations. The Title II Adult Education Director reviews and signs off on all adult education providers' MOUs and Infrastructure Funding Agreements (IFAs).

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

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

(3) State Program and State Board Overview.

(A) State Agency Organization.

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

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 Secretary of the Arkansas Department of Commerce.

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

The Adult Education Section has 37 providers that serve all 75 counties in Arkansas. The state office has seven middle managers or Program Advisors who provide

technical assistance to adult education programs and literacy councils by interpreting federal and state regulations and providing support and guidance to the field. Program Advisors also evaluate program effectiveness through annual on-site visits, program reviews, and desk audits to ensure program compliance and monitor and approve federal and state grant budgets, amendments, expenditure reports, and adult education and literacy council program project applications.

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

Adult Education also has a Finance Section comprising a Division Manager, Fiscal Support Specialists, an Auditor, and administrative personnel. The Finance Office ensures compliance with federal and state regulations, reviews and processes payments to the field, and conducts financial audits. An Executive Assistant to the Director and two Administrative Specialists support the field program and staff in various vital administrative tasks.

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) to receive federal vocational rehabilitation funds. In Arkansas, the ARS Commissioner is the state director of the vocational rehabilitation program. SRC members are Governor appointed. The Commissioner and senior management provide leadership to the agency's major components including, Field Services, the Arkansas Career Development Center, Access and Accommodations, and Business Engagement. Field Services provides services in three primary categories: pre-employment transition, transition, and general vocational rehabilitation. VR counselors determine client eligibility, develop the individualized plan for employment with the client, oversee case management, provide vocational rehabilitation counseling and related job readiness services to assist clients in obtaining or maintaining competitive integrated employment. ACDC, ARS' internal training unit, provides programs where clients receive industry recognized credentials as well as an array of supportive services. Access and Accommodations addresses a client's assistive technology needs at school and at work. The Business Engagement unit is ARS' primary link to employers and provides information about services and supports available to businesses

The Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) is the Vocational Rehabilitation Agency for individuals who are Blind and Visually Impaired in Arkansas. DSB is an independent commission and therefore has a governing board who appoints the director of the agency. Board members are appointed by the Governor. The Director and leadership team provide guidance and support to all units of the agency including, Field Services,

Business and Technology, Fiscal, Business Engagement, Outreach, and Quality Assurance. Field Services staff include counselors for Vocational Rehabilitation, Pre-Employment Transition Services, and Older Individuals who are Blind. The Business and Technology unit oversee the DSB Technology Lab to assess and train consumers on technology, Braille Services, and the Randolph-Sheppard Program.

(B) State Board.

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

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

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

Membership Roster

Government/Lead State Program Directors

1. Governor Sarah Sanders- Governor
2. Dr. Charisse Childers- ADWS/State Workforce Agency (WIOA Title I-IV)
3. Commissioner Joseph Baxter- Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (VR- WIOA Title IV)
4. Dr. Trenia Miles- Arkansas Adult Education- (WIOA Title II)
5. Dr. Cassondra Williams- Arkansas Division of Services for the Blind (WIOA Title IV)
6. Clint O'Neal- Arkansas Economic Development Commission
7. Dr. Ken Warden- Arkansas Department of Higher Education- replacing Dr. Maria Markham

Workforce 20% (8 Members)

8. William French- Labor Organization
9. Vacant- Labor Organization
10. Karen Breashears- Labor or Apprenticeship
11. Kelly Sharp- Community Based Organization
12. Brian Marsh-Community Based Organization
13. Vacant- Youth Rep- replacing Shana Chaplain
14. Vacant- Veterans Rep
15. Vacant- Organization Serving Individuals with Barriers to Employment Rep (Justice

Involved, Immigrants etc.)

Elected Officials (2 Members)

16. Judge Brandon Ellison

17. Vacant- Mayor- replacing Mayor James Sanders

Business Representatives

18. Thomas Anderson- T.A. Holdings LLC

19. Len Blaylock- Aerojet Rocketdyne

20. Miles Crawford- Boss LLC

21. Rebecca Ives- Lockheed Martin Corporation

22. Candice Lawrence- Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce

23. Randy Henderson- Nucor Steele

24. Vacant- replacing Rachel Mize

25. George Nunally- George Nunally Chevrolet

26. Latanyua Robinson- Latrobe Inc

27. Vacant- replacing Randy Finegan

28. Vacant- replacing Abby Houseworth

29. Vacant- replacing Julie Roberson

30. Vacant- replacing Charles Johnson

31. Vacant- replacing Holley Little

32. Vacant- replacing Robert Thorne

(4) Assessment and Evaluation of Programs and One-Stop Program Partners.

(A) Assessment of Core and One-Stop Program Partner 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.

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 is currently underway.

Adult Education monitors local programs through quarterly reports, annual technical site visits, and intensive three-day program reviews performed on each program every four years. A program's review may be scheduled in fewer than four years if the program exhibits substantially increased risk and has excessive findings. The adult education providers are evaluated and monitored on the following in Program Reviews: Program Management and Operations, Instruction, Workforce Preparation and Training, Career Coach, Technology, Enrollment/Recruitment/Retention, Data Analysis, Advisory Committee, WIOA Partnerships and Collaboration, Financials, Facilities, Data Entry Staff Interview, Instructor Staff Interview, and ADA Coordinator Interview/Observation.

The site visit form is based on the top frequent findings of the Program Review and, therefore, may be modified annually. During site visits, Program Advisors review and check student folders to ensure that items such as a Student Learning Plan, Public School Waiver/Home School Letter/Court Order Letter, and Student Test documentation match the data management system. Program Advisors also check if student attendance matches what is entered into the data management system.

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

Adult Education also evaluates each program annually through an E&E (Effective and Efficient) calculation, currently based upon the programs' progress on the federally negotiated benchmarks in NRS Tables 4 and 5. Once a program year has ended, the Adult Education Section generates an Effective & Efficient (E&E) report based on each local provider's benchmarks of core performance indicators. For the 2022-23 fiscal E&E report, local providers must meet the state's MSG benchmark of 50%. Monthly Director's Reports, bi-weekly staff meeting data read-outs, quarterly reports, and desk audits are data analytical mechanisms used to evaluate and assess performance. These

reports are used with prior reports to help identify trends and rates of performance for a myriad of performing cohorts. Along with these reports, aspects of demographic information are shared for local programs to analyze state data versus local program data.

Programs that do not meet the E&E benchmarks are provided additional technical assistance to prepare a performance improvement plan. The performance improvement plan implementation is monitored throughout the year to assist programs in progressing toward efficient and successful performance. For programs that have not met benchmarks for two consecutive years, meetings occur bi-weekly with technical assistance from a team of program advisors, where goal-setting and crucial data analysis elements are identified and planned. Program advisors and program directors set small, achievable goals for impacting performance bi-weekly. Technical assistance is provided to all programs, including those that meet or exceed the performance benchmarks, to address deficiencies in any specific EFL and to set and reach goals for performance improvement. Through E&E team assistance and targeted training, 34 of the 37 programs met or exceeded the MSG goal of 50% at an overall state average of 60% MSG attainment. This matched the previous year's performance and the number of programs that succeeded in meeting the negotiated benchmarks.

State and national performance data and negotiated targets were shared with local providers at the Fall Administrators' meeting, through advisory committee meetings, specialized training, and the Adult Education committees that identified the professional development needs and requests to promote continued improvement in program performance. In the analysis of performance data, the Administrators' Meetings also highlighted training pieces that addressed recruitment and retention strategies, distance education software usage guidance and strategies, addressing ESL needs, and incorporating IET programs into the services offered by each program to increase the credential attainment rate and help participants prepare for the workforce.

Data was analyzed and shared after the performance data was entered into the National Reporting System. Notes were made on distance learning performance rates for ABE, ESL, and Distance Learning participation groups. Also noted was the trending difference in female to male participation and a trending Distance Learning performance rate change in ESL participants that showed lower functioning ESL participants outperforming the ESL Levels 3 and 4. As other Performance and enrollment data was analyzed, results were shared throughout the year at training, conferences, and Administrators' Meetings. Additionally, monthly program performance data on a state level was shared with local programs to monitor rates and trends at their centers compared to state numbers.

In analyzing the data, statewide training needs were addressed. Targeted training was held multiple times throughout the year to address enrollment and recruitment, targeted instruction and classroom management, retention strategies, curriculum development in addressing a wide range of contextualized and multi-level focuses, and

test anxiety as needed. The importance of clean data was addressed by analyzing the data, focusing on professional development for the importance of the follow-up process, and entering accurate data correctly.

Data analysis guided the state's year-long process of collecting, entering, and improving the data in the state's data management system. This propelled the initiative for discovery and sharing of best practices for developing data entry processes and procedures, monitoring data at the program and class levels, understanding federal tables, utilizing state reports, detailing participant progress by assessment and subject area, developing IETs, quarterly reporting and analysis, and training for diversity and test anxiety. Each of these processes and procedures saw accuracy and efficient progress in reporting. Professional development training will continue to be developed as Adult Education moves to improve and meet targets for performance in measurable skill gains and follow-up measures.

Identified performance measures are assessed and reported quarterly. ARS and the SRC conducts consumer satisfaction surveys. ARS has developed and is piloting a consumer satisfaction evaluation system that occurs at four pre-determined points. Results are reported in the SRC annual report. Staff are evaluated yearly on position specific metrics and performance improvement plans are developed if necessary.

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

(B) Previous Assessment Results.

WIOA core programs are mandated to submit an annual report to federal agencies by October 1. These results are used to determine the overall effectiveness of each program. The results also assist in planning for the subsequent program years.

As mentioned previously, Adult Education evaluates each program annually through an E&E (Effective and Efficient) calculation, currently based upon the programs' progress on the federally negotiated benchmarks in NRS Tables 4 and 5. Programs not meeting E&E are provided intense technical assistance to develop and implement a program improvement plan, with follow-up throughout the remainder of the program year. In the program year 2021-22, 33 of the 37 local programs (89%) met the E&E requirement. This was a 5% increase over the previous year. In 2022-23, 34 of the 37 programs (92%) met the requirement, which was an improvement of 3% over the previous year. Only one program did not meet the requirement for the past two years but was held harmless due to COVID-19.

Adult Education provides intense technical assistance for programs falling short of the required benchmarks. In the first year of not meeting the requirement, the program's regional Program Advisor meets with the program to identify deficiencies and assist

with developing a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) implemented by the program and monitored by the regional Program Advisor in the following year. If a program does not meet the E&E requirement for a second consecutive year, an Adult Education team meets with the program to identify deficiencies and assist in developing a PIP. Team members are chosen based on the needs of the program. This targeted technical assistance effectively assists local programs in making necessary changes for future success.

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

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services Assessments: In PY20, 8,214 participants were served and 2,377 exited successfully employed. The employment rate second quarter after exit was 55.4% and the fourth quarter rate after exit was 50.5%. The credential rate was 19.2% and the measurable skills gains rate was 60.9%. During PY22 8,340 participants were served and 1,200 exited successfully employed. The employment rate for second quarter after exit was 65.2% and the fourth quarter rate after exit was 64.6%. The credential rate was 35.5% and the measurable skills gain rate was at 59.4%.

Increase the availability of Supported Employment (SE) services to youth and adults with significant disabilities: ARS places a high priority on Supported Employment (SE) Services to youth and adults with the most significant disabilities. As a result of the 2021 RSA monitoring, ARS made changes to its SE services model. ARS continues to research other VR agencies to determine SE best practices. During PY2022, 381 individuals had an SE employment plan.

Improve public relations, marketing, information, outreach, and referrals: ARS promotes the services of the agency and its programs through a variety of mediums, including digital platforms, video clips, written publications, graphic flyers, and our website. ARS has contracted with communications providers to offer materials in alternative languages and in alternative formats. ARS also hosts outreach events for special populations, like the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community, to meet their unique needs. An online electronic referral form was developed that can be sent via a hyperlink that takes less than 30 seconds to complete to begin the referral process. QR codes are now present on all materials to make it much easier for potential clients to find our website and specific pages by using their phones to scan the codes. ARS used data gathered through the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment to set goals and priorities to improve services, marketing, and outreach for PY2024-2027.

Increase collaboration with business that leads to increased employment outcomes: ARS is increasing partnerships with businesses to promote On-the-Job Training and Apprenticeships. The programs support paid work experiences for clients that can

result in employment offers upon successful completion of the training. ARS partners 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 gainfully employed in the medical field and in transportation/logistics upon completion of the programs.

Expand and improve transition services program: The transition services programs expanded to include work-based learning programs to school districts across the State where students are engaged in small-business efforts on campus or in work opportunities both on and off campus. The transition services program includes the Youth Leadership Program, summer Film Camp for careers in the film industry, College Bound Arkansas, the Transition Employment Program.

Develop and improve Community Rehabilitation Programs: ARS has an open application process for entities wishing to become a Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) vendor for external employment services. ARS provides training to CRPs throughout the year. ARS' state-owned CRP Arkansas Career Development Center (ACDC) offers a limited number of programs via brick and mortar. In partnership with Educational Co-ops ACDC has expanded online/hybrid programming. ACDC offers Career Technical Education courses to high school students to gain industry recognized credentials, along with workforce experience. ACDC also offers several support services such as assistance with financial aid applications, interview skills, and job searching through the Student Assistance & Support Services (SASS) program. ACDC provides Career Counseling to 14Cs statewide. Recipients of ACDC services include pre-employment transition students, high school students, vocational clients, veterans, and juveniles.

Improve training, resources, and continuing education: ARS partners with the Rehabilitation Services Administration, the Council for State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Technical Assistance Center on Quality Employment, and San Diego State University to offer direct training on vocational rehabilitation service provisions and management of the vocational rehabilitation program. ARS 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: A major factor in employers retaining employees with disabilities in the workplace is accessing and implementing appropriate accommodations. ARS, through Access and Accommodations and the Business Engagement Unit acts as a resource to other State agencies and private businesses to provide information and assistance on ADA accommodations, technical assistance on ergonomics, technological advances, and how ARS can aid in meeting accommodation needs for existing employees through assessment and training

services. ARS' Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work program assists employers in participating in the interactive process with employees with disabilities to access and implement workplace modifications and accommodations to get employees with disabilities back to employment as quickly and safely as possible or to retain employees with disabilities as productive/valuable members of the workplace.

Increase the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery for agency clients: ARS is implementing a new case management system with enhanced features to create efficiency with data entry and a goal to improve timely services. ARS is focusing on rapid engagement process to include a short referral or QR code to start the referral/application process. The agency field program is receiving technical assistance from VRTAC-QM, to help provide statewide training on fiscal basics and vocational spending. ARS is revising rates of payment for all services, to increase effectiveness to clients and establish consistency.

In PY 2021, DSB served 932 participants with 145 rehabilitated closures. In PY 2022, DSB served 1021 participants with 148 rehabilitated closures. In PY 2022, the employment rate second quarter after exit was 44.8% and the fourth quarter rate after exit was 35.1%. The credential rate was 40.0% and the measurable skills gains rate was 19.0%. The median earnings second quarter after exit for PY 2022 was \$7,949.00. DSB has worked with the Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Employment (VRTAC-QE) to increase staff capacity and understanding of the Supported Employment (SE) program. This will increase identification of participants, including youth, who can benefit from SE services. DSB has revised Supported Employment Policy and procedures, including rates and payment structure in response to the monitoring and feedback from RSA and the technical assistance centers. DSB is working to expand Pre-ETS service provision across the state. DSB added the College Experience Camp for VR eligible Students with a Disability in July 2023 and looks forward to growing that program to meet the needs of participants. DSB staff have participated in the National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute, Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation, National Council of State Agencies for the Blind, Association of People Supporting Employment First, Association of Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired, National Rehabilitation Counseling Association, Lead VR, National Training Center for Transformational Rehabilitation Leadership, and Randolph-Sheppard trainings to enhance knowledge of VR and participant success. These conferences and trainings also provide insight and bring innovation to the agency. In addition, DSB has worked with and brought in trainers from all technical assistance centers to develop policy, procedures, and provide training. DSB has worked with the Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management (VRTAC-QM) to develop a new rate setting guide and standards. DSB has worked with VRTAC-QM to update and improve the case and contract review process to allow evaluation of service provision.

(C) 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.

The entire evaluation report can be found at:

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

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

Evaluation & Research Projects

A new evaluation is underway.

Governor's Workforce Cabinet

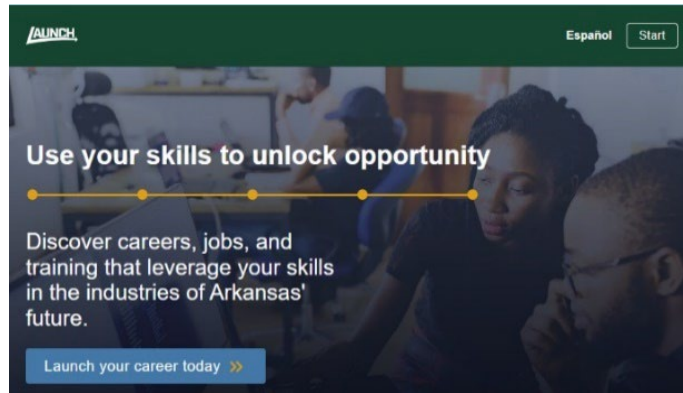
In response to the evolving workforce challenges, Executive Order 23-16 was issued in early 2023 to establish the Governor's Workforce Cabinet. The cabinet is composed of key state department leaders, including the Secretaries of Commerce, Education, Corrections, Human Services, Labor and Licensing, Transformation and Shared Services, and Veterans Affairs. The group is chaired by the Governor's Chief Workforce Officer, who oversees the coordination and execution of state workforce development policies and career education strategies for the State of Arkansas.

Data-Driven Workforce Strategy

The Executive Order requires the Governor's Workforce Cabinet to prepare and implement a data-driven strategic plan for workforce development in Arkansas. The development of the workforce strategy involved a collaborative, user-centered design process, engaging a wide array of stakeholders. This included state, regional, and national partners, ensuring that the strategy benefits from a diverse range of insights and best practices. Input was also solicited from local businesses, non-profits, educational institutions, and community groups, ensuring that the strategy is grounded in the real-world needs of Arkansas's workforce and employers.

LAUNCH Skills-Based Workforce Platform

A key outcome of this collaborative process is the design of LAUNCH, a user-centered platform tailored to Arkansas's specific workforce needs. LAUNCH is envisioned as a comprehensive tool that will facilitate easier access to employment and educational resources for residents and provide a streamlined talent acquisition and management system for employers. The platform, being collaboratively developed with [Research Improving People's Lives](#) (RIPL), is designed to integrate data-driven insights, leveraging the state's robust data-sharing infrastructure and advanced technologies like AI, to offer personalized and intuitive support for learning and employment.



LINKED OPEN DATA ON CREDENTIALS

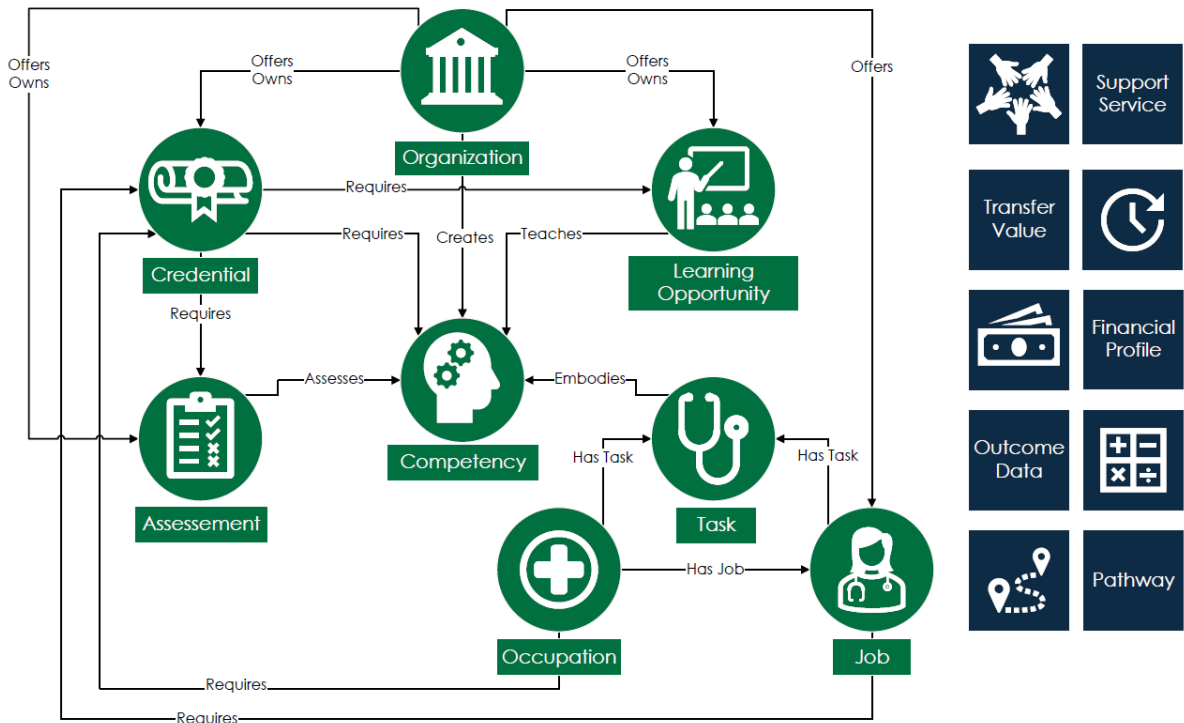
Credential Registry

Arkansas has made significant progress towards compliance with DOL requirements and best practices for ensuring that individuals, employers, educators, and training providers have access to the most complete, current and beneficial information about providers, programs credentials, and competencies supported with these public, federal funds. In support of this goal, we have established a statewide credential registry that is publicly accessible and supports full transparency and interoperability using [Credential Transparency Description Language](#) (CTDL) specifications. Arkansas is making rapid progress, as featured in a [recent report from the American Enterprise Institute](#) (AEI), on publication of all ETPL, higher education, adult education, career and technical education, and registered apprenticeship programs and credentials, which will establish the interoperable foundation for many other state efforts, such as interoperable Learning and Employment Records (LERs).

Skills Data Coordinator

In order to support [credential transparency](#), Learning and Employment Records, skills-based hiring, and data-driven alignment of workforce and education pipelines with evolving employer demand, Arkansas has established the position of Skills Data Coordinator. This role, established out of Arkansas's participation in the [NGA Skills-Driven State Community of Practice](#), works to raise awareness of skills-based practices, cultivate communities of practice, provide educational resources, and establish statewide shared service data infrastructure to support the interoperability and use of data related to skills and credentials.

Arkansas Credential Registry Relationship Map



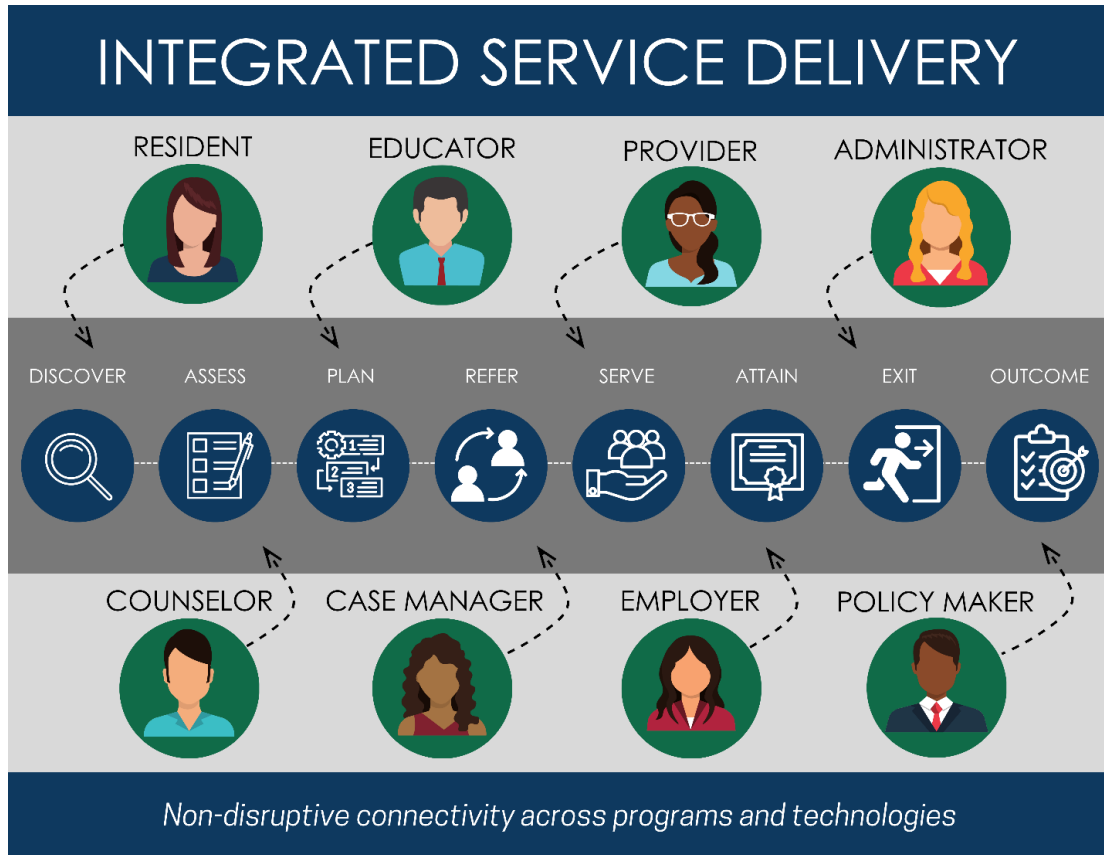
INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY

In alignment with the [WIOA Integrated Service Delivery Vision](#), Strategic Goal 2 of the Arkansas WIOA State Plan seeks to enhance service delivery to employers and jobseekers through:

- Development of 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 address.
- Development of an integrated data system that will enable the sharing of information between partner agencies to more efficiently serve both employers and jobseekers.
- Exploration of 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).

Significant progress was made towards this goal in program year 2022 with the modification of the open source [CiviForm](#) service discovery and eligibility screening platform to meet WIOA common intake needs with the support of [Google.Org](#) fellows. An integrated data system was also developed for facilitating electronic referrals between case management systems. Data sharing opportunities were explored and

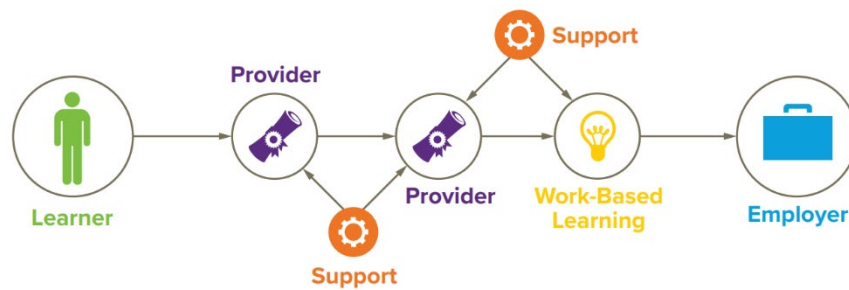
are progression with governmental programs, community-based organizations, and healthcare systems to support a “No Wrong Door” service delivery strategy.



TALENT PIPELINE MANAGEMENT

Arkansas workforce staff participated in the Multistate Career Readiness cohort of the [Talent Pipeline Management \(TPM\) Academy](#) hosted by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation alongside Arkansas eligible training providers. Talent Pipeline Management (TPM) is a cutting-edge, data-driven approach to meeting talent demand that enables employers to play an active role in creating and managing their talent supply chains.

Throughout the six-month program, teams from Arkansas, Florida, and Tennessee learned and applied proven strategies to create career pathways for students and workers with talent pipelines aligned to dynamic business needs. Data on demand, supply, skills, competencies, and credentials plays a critical role in TPM, and the longitudinal data system developed under WDQI was a key support, that will be incredibly valuable during implementation of these strategies in PY 2023 and beyond in coordination with Next-Gen Sector Partnerships.



JOBS AND EMPLOYMENT DATA EXCHANGE (JEDX)

Arkansas was one of seven states that actively contributed to working groups, standards, and protocols for the [Jobs and Employment Data Exchange \(JEDx\)](#), an initiative of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation and the [T3 Innovation Network](#) to develop a public-private approach for collecting and using standards-based jobs and employment data.

Working groups, surveys, and [employer engagement](#) during program year 2022 identified multiple value propositions for JEDx to improve not only the timeliness, granularity, breadth, and utility of labor market information (LMI), but also to reduce employer reporting burden, support interoperable Learning and Employment Records, support integrated service delivery, and provide valuable talent analytics to employers, providers, researchers, and government.

Arkansas participated in “bridge phase” planning in PY 2022 and submitted a letter of intent for participation in the pilot phase of the JEDx partnership in PY 2023.

ELIGIBLE TRAINING PROVIDER REPORTING

Heading into our second year of “all participants” eligible training provider reporting (ETA 9171), we have started to simplify the process for providers by starting earlier in the process and aligning data collected in WIOA case management system (AJL) with the administrative data that is contained in the Arkansas Higher Education Information System (AHEIS). By ensuring that CIP Codes entered in AJL match those in AHEIS and capturing the unique degree codes of the programs, we were able to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the data match for the for-credit programs on the ETPL.

For non-credit programs and providers, we have provided a roster to fill out for each of their programs with in-depth instructions, illustrations, and recorded presentations on how to provide the needed data for all participants in a secure manner. We are making use of an easy-to-use encrypted transfer system that does not require the providers to have any specialized knowledge or skills related to secure file transfer because that can be a limiting factor in getting them to engage in the data collection.

Over the past year we have worked with providers to improve the quality and utility of ETPL data such as reporting on each individual credential as opposed to one program that can result in multiple credentials. For example, providers have previously reported a single welding program that can result in three different for-credit credentials that ranged from a one semester certificate of proficiency to a two-year associate degree. By increasing the grain and interoperability of ETPL reporting, we

are able to more clearly differentiate participation, completion, and outcomes at the credential level.

This is beginning to help improve consumer use of the ETPL by providing more transparent information about program costs, length of time needed to complete a program, and expected employment and earnings outcomes for different credential levels.

Chief Research Officer, Dr. Jake Walker, presented more information on this topic in a [WDQI Web Convening presentation](#) on "A World Without Waivers: Arkansas' Journey Reporting ETPL All Participant Measures."

EVALUATION AND RESEARCH – ENROLLMENT TO EMPLOYMENT

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

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

ADULT EDUCATION JOINT PIRL DEVELOPMENT

To support an interoperable data foundation based on standard file layouts for the Evaluating Enrollment to Employment Pathways training, Arkansas worked with the case management software provider for Title II Adult Education programs to generate a WIOA Joint Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) file for Title II. Representing Title II Adult Education programs in the same format as WIOA Titles I & III allows for integration and analysis across WIOA Titles I & III, Title II, and Title IV (via RSA-911 crosswalk) to better understand patterns of referral, co-enrollment, common exit, and outcomes of joint service delivery episodes.

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA RECORD LINKAGE ROADMAP

During PY 2022, Arkansas conducted [research](#) under the America's DataHub Consortium to assess record linkage approaches for the foreign-born population and to recommend a roadmap for improving the fidelity of administrative data linkage on the foreign-born science and engineering workforce.

[America's Data Hub](#) facilitates coordinated research to drive both infrastructure recommendations and response to relevant evaluation and research needs for current

policy priorities through a series of research efforts for the development of a national secure data service. The Foreign-Born Scientists and Engineers and the U.S. Workforce (FBSE) project is focused on improving the evidence base for measuring the economic impact of foreign-born scientists and engineers, which can be particularly affected by record linkage approached based upon Social Security Number (SSN), introducing coverage gaps and biases into data, evidence, and performance reporting.

Arkansas contributed to this work by researching record linkage approaches, assessing the quality of administrative data and the impact on record linkage performance for the foreign-born population, assessing and comparing the performance of a wide variety of record linkage approaches, and identifying methodologies for assessing, mitigating, and communicating record linkage bias.

Based on findings and consultation with a panel of experts, the Arkansas research team developed a roadmap of actionable recommendations for improving record linkage fidelity for the foreign-born population by:

- Raising awareness of record linkage bias
- Improving mitigation and communication of record linkage bias through education
- Increasing transparency of record linkage approaches, performance, and data quality
- Enhancing the collection and sharing of individual identifiers to improve record linkage performance

This research has broader implications for improving record linkage at the state and federal levels and will continue into PY 2023 with implementation or recommendations.

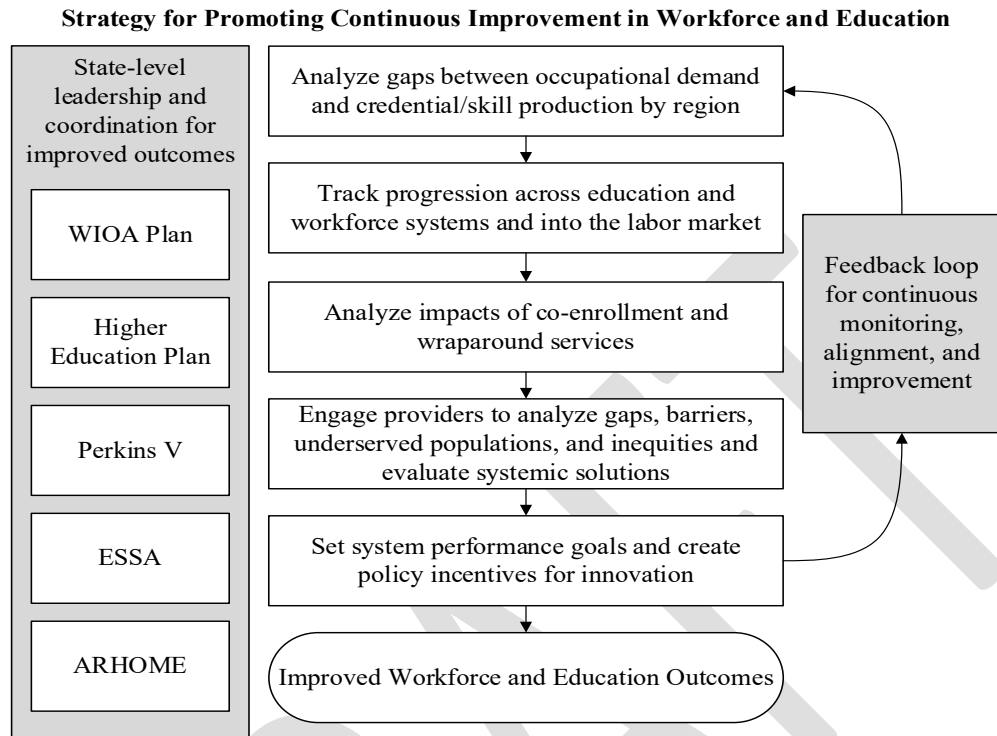
Some recommendations have already been implemented through changes in Applied Data Analytics training program curriculum. Some recommendations have relevance to discussions by the [Workforce Information Advisory Council](#) on enhanced collection and sharing of wage data. Record linkage improvement will also be assessed during Jobs and Employment Data Exchange (JEDx) pilots.

WORKFORCE DATA QUALITY INITIATIVE

On June 23, 2021, the U.S. Department of Labor awarded Arkansas a [Workforce Data Quality Initiative](#) (WDQI) round 8 grant in the amount of \$2,510,575. This grant is designed to improve the delivery of training and employment services and to measure their effectiveness by supporting the development and expansion of workforce longitudinal databases and enhance their ability to share performance data with stakeholders.

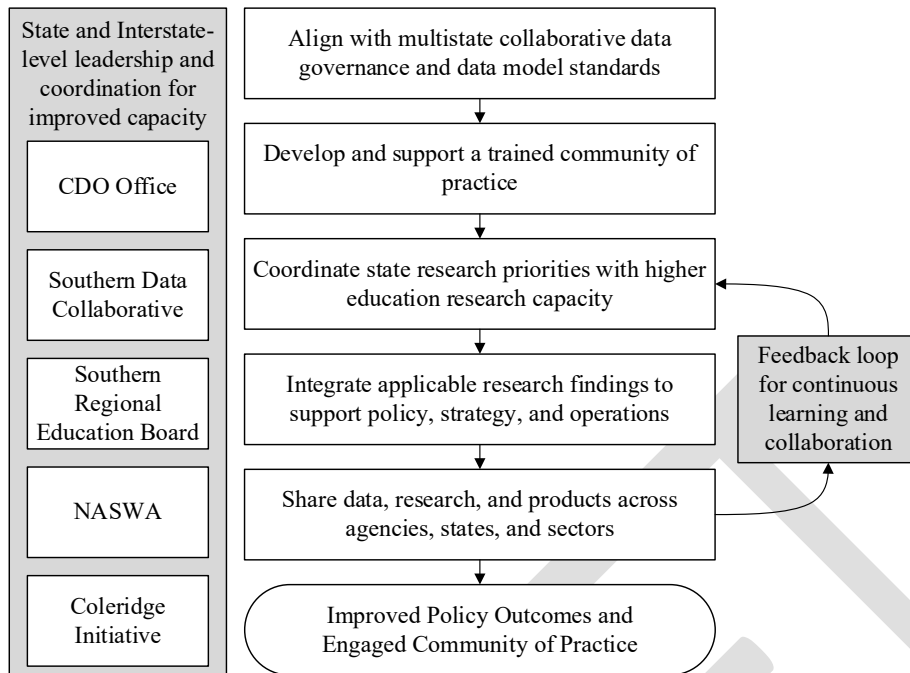
Arkansas' objective is to expand and enhance the longitudinal data systems around the needs of two complementary strategies for promoting continuous learning and improvement in workforce and education. The first strategy is to help state leaders and service providers continuously improve programs and 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 interagency, interstate, and cross-sector collaboration to support improved policy outcomes and an engaged community of practice.

Strategy for Promoting Continuous Learning in Workforce and Education



WDQI efforts in PY 2021 were largely focused on employment, unemployment, postsecondary program participation and completion, and work-based learning. This included development and delivery of an Applied Data Analytics training program on work-based learning to a multistate group of participants. The final report for that training program is available [here](#).

WDQI activities in PY 2022 were largely focused on inclusion of WIOA Titles I-IV, SNAP, and TANF in the longitudinal data system and development of the aforementioned “Evaluating Enrollment to Employment Pathways” training program.

TANF data was included using the [Chapin Hall TANF data model](#) from the [TANF Data Collaborative](#). SNAP data was incorporated using a model based on the [USDA Gold Standard](#) record layout used in the SNAP Longitudinal Data Project. This use of standard record layouts contributes to multistate analyses and the ability to share and codevelop research and data products.

PY 2023 activities will largely focus on a number of identified evaluation and research projects and products and enhanced data sharing for federal and military employees.

STATEWIDE LONGITUDINAL DATA SYSTEMS GRANT PROGRAM

Arkansas applied for and was awarded a grant under the [IES Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems Grant Program](#) to modernize and expand the statewide longitudinal data system for early childhood through postsecondary education with modern data hub capabilities similar to those being implemented under WDQI.

Key work products under this grant include:

- Development of a centralized, standardized, and interoperable non-traditional student management and information system to collect non-traditional provider, program, student, and outcomes data. This system will be accessible to all non-traditional education and training providers public and private and will be used to facilitate state and federal reporting related to these programs, inform state leaders and policy makers concerning program funding and need, administer/manage non-traditional sources of student financial aid.
- Modernization of early childhood to postsecondary longitudinal data to use [Common Education Data Standards](#) (CEDS) for multistate interoperability and collaborative development and sharing of research, data, and products.
- Incorporation of data on foster care and juvenile justice participants.
- Incorporation of more robust early childhood education data.
- Development and delivery of Applied Data Analytics training programs addressing Arkansas education and workforce priorities.
- Development and delivery of tiered-access tools and data products to facilitate access, analysis, and use of linked administrative education data by school and government staff, researchers, and the public.

This project will leverage, complement, and expand upon longitudinal data developed under the Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI), Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI), Democratizing Our Data Challenge (DDC), and Arkansas Health and Opportunity for Me (Medicaid expansion) programs to support state needs with a comprehensive integrated data system.

Future longitudinal data system work across all of these efforts is planned to include robust integration with the credential registry, Learning and Employment Records (LERs), and enhanced labor market information such as that envisioned under the Jobs and Employment Data Exchange (JEDx). Implementation of Talent Pipeline Management (TPM) is also expected to provide timely, actionable data on evolving employer demand which can be used in conjunction with state administrative data to support informed alignment of workforce and education talent pipelines and provide timely measures of credential quality and demand. Consumer information products and user-centered platforms like LAUNCH can leverage this complete, timely, interoperable data foundation to provide highly actionable and personalized supports to residents for career awareness, exploration, pathway planning and navigation, employment, and connection with supportive services.

Arkansas SLDS Infrastructure and Interoperability Modernization Project Scope

Data Collection and Management	Data Sharing, Integration, and Quality Management	Longitudinal Data Analysis	Research, Analytics Capacity Building, and Multistate Sharing	Access, Dissemination, and Use
Early Childhood Education	Modernization and expansion of the Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) with Data Hub and CEDS Integrated Data Store (IDS) capabilities (#2)		Administrative Data Research Facility Expansion and Applied Data Analytics Training Programs (#3)	Tools and Open Data Products (#4)
Elementary and Secondary				
Career and Technical				
Higher Education				
Nontraditional Student Management and Information System (#1)				
Foster Care				
Juvenile Justice				
Adult Education	Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI)			
Workforce Development	Democratizing our Data Challenge (DDC)			
Human Services (SNAP, TANF)				
Vocational Rehabilitation				
Registered Apprenticeship				
Employment	Democratizing our Data Challenge (DDC)			
Unemployment				
Corrections	Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI)			
Medicaid	Arkansas Health and Opportunity for Me (ARHOME)			
Legend	In Place / In Progress (Leveraged Resource)	IES SLDS Project Scope (Addition / Enhancement)		

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(5) Distribution of Funds for Core Programs.

(A) Title I Program Policies that Establish the State's Methods and Factors Used to Distribute Funds to Local Areas

Youth Activities

Youth Activities in accordance with WIOA section 128(b)(2) or (b)(3). The AWDB coordinates and establishes policy for conducting all employment and training activities within the workforce investment system created by the federal Workforce

Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 and Arkansas Code §15-4-3707 through 15-4-3713, including all activities conducted in and through Arkansas's one-stop centers. The criteria for funding the programs included in this plan will be consistent with the federal and state laws governing those programs and are described in detail in the funding sections below.

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 required in WIOA Section 128(b)(2)(A)(i), as follows:

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

- 33 1/3 percent of the funds will be based on the relative number of disadvantaged youth in each workforce development area compared to the total number of disadvantaged youth in the state.

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

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 each Local Area's weighted average of "eligible youth" and, if the average exceeds the overall state average, additional funding will be awarded.

Adult and Training Activities.

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 required in WIOA Section 132(b)(1)(B)(ii):

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

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

areas.

Dislocated Worker Employment and Training Activities

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

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

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

Not more than twenty-five percent of the total state allotment will be reserved for Rapid Response activities. Rapid Response activities in Arkansas are administered by the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services as the lead agency of the Governor's Dislocated Worker Task Force.

(B) For Title II:

Methods and Factors the Eligible Agency Will Use to Distribute Title II Funds.

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

The Adult Education Section distributes Section 231 or State Basic Grant federal funding through a needs and performance-based formula. The funding formula was developed by a task force composed of Adult Education Section staff and adult

education directors of local programs from various types of local education agencies and regions of the state. The funding formula went through a legislative process and review in 2017.

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

For programs that will submit a Request for Proposal (RFP) application for Section 225 Correctional/Institutional funds, funding will be distributed based on enrollment of participants in institutional settings. Adult Education Section will set aside 8.25% of the State Basic Grant for Correctional Education. Likewise, adult education providers who applied for Section 243 Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education funding will be based on English Language Learners enrollment and the ability to provide Integrated Education and Training to English Language Learners. The total number of participants will be divided by the total grant award amount allocated for IELCE in Arkansas.

Direct and Equitable Access to Eligible Providers

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 the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services as the lead agency of the Governor's Dislocated Worker Task Force.

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. Before the announcement of an RFP, the Adult Education Section 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. 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 applicants have direct and equitable access to the questions.

All applicants who have shown and met the demonstrated effectiveness requirement will also be evaluated using the 13 Statutory Considerations found in the law at 231 (e) (1-13). 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 consider the literacy rate and the core performance indicators as outlined in Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) law. The state will identify, assess, and award grants using the RFP process of providers who have demonstrated effectiveness in providing adult education activities to eligible individuals. An eligible individual is an individual who has attained 16 years of age; who is not enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under State law; and who is basic skills deficient; does not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent and has not achieved an equivalent level of education; or is an English language learner.

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

Currently, the adult education providers in the state are divided into five regions: Northeast, Southeast, Southwest, Northwest, and Central Regions. Although multiple providers may exist within an area, the state has reconfigured all 75 counties to better align with the 10 local workforce development boards (LWDBs). 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 school districts, community colleges, institutions of higher education, and literacy organizations. Other eligible providers have been and will continue to be considered using a direct and equitable process. Funding is awarded to local adult education/literacy providers through a competitive grant process based on literacy

rate and the core performance indicators outlined in Title II of the WIOA law. Applications are competitive, open, and available to all eligible applicants. Grants/contracts are awarded for one year, with two one-year renewals based on performance and available funding.

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

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 designated 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 and Visually Impaired.

(C) Vocational Rehabilitation Program

Funds are distributed between the two Vocational Rehabilitation designated state agencies (DSAs), Arkansas Rehabilitation Services and the Division of Services for the Blind, under written agreement of the heads of the two DSAs in consideration of the incidence and severity of disability and the historical cost of rehabilitation for the two populations. The agreement distributes 88% of the VR grant to Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) and 12% to Division of Services for the Blind (DSB)

(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 Partners Roundtable (consisting of each WIOA core partner) had been evaluating workforce system solutions in other states to better unite the case management and job search functions of our programs. We are increasing these efforts now that each of Arkansas' WIOA core partners under the Department of Commerce umbrella. Our intentions are to identify ways to either integrate or replace these legacy systems. These Department of Commerce believes that our efforts will eventually lead to the implementation of a data warehouse and analytics platform that will support oversight, consumer education, and decision-making at all levels of the workforce system. The integrated warehouse may also be a means to deliver some of the benefits that an integrated case management system is envisioned as providing. This model will allow Commerce to work to develop

advanced statistical models that can help identify not only who most needs services but to also help prescribe the types of services that may be most effective for a given customer based on what we learn from having served similarly situated customers in the past.

Common Intake Efforts that will Support Assessment and Evaluation-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Adult Education Section's data management system (LACES) has aligned key intake data fields to match the Combined State Agency's plans to create a common intake process. The LACES data fields also match the federal reporting tables and the key reporting federal benchmarks we share in Measurable Skill Gains, 2nd Quarter Employment after Exit, 4th Quarter After Exit, Median Earnings 2nd Quarter After Exit, and Credential Attainment.

Key indicators of participant data from LACES will be able to transfer and match indicators to the common intake for integrating partner information systems into one common intake. This participant portfolio of information is kept from intake through exit with links to postsecondary enrollment information and post-exit employment follow-up information to keep participant information accurate and accessible for reporting and cross-agency sharing purposes.

Throughout the year, as students' progress, performance and attendance are collected.

Similarly, follow-up information is also updated in students' records as they exit. At the end of the Program Year, a file is prepared for the Department of Higher Education and the Department of Labor to data match participant information to supplement ongoing manual outcomes local providers complete throughout the year. Attached to the student file in LACES, which generates co-enrollment and participation in multiple programs, is information taken from the intake form that asks for initial enrollment or co-enrollment in other core WIOA programs. This information is also updated and kept for other WIOA partners to use as adult education participants are referred to those core WIOA partners.

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

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

Integration of Data Systems to Facilitate Streamlined Intake and Service Delivery

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

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

Role in the Arkansas Workforce State Plan:

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

improving overall satisfaction and engagement.

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

is working with other core partners to implement a common intake and referral system.

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

State Board Assistance to the Governor in Aligning Technology and Data Systems Across Required One-Stop Partner Programs.

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

AWDB members are actively involved in the development of two new ground-breaking platforms that will improve the one-stop delivery system and strategies for technological improvements to improve the services and activities of the one-stop delivery system.

Google.Org CiviForm (WIOA Common Intake)

Google.Org is a philanthropic organization through which Google employees can serve on six-month, pro-bono fellowships in the public sector and develop open-source products for public benefit. Google fellows have been working with Arkansas for 18 months to modify CiviForm for statewide use.

Arkansas will be the first to leverage CiviForm statewide, with 9 other states showing

interest in adoption. All civic entities benefit from continuous, collective innovation to the platform, which is owned and led by a public sector governance board.

RIPL DOORS (LAUNCH) (Career, Program & Job Recommendations)

Research Improving People's Lives (RIPL) is a tech-for-social-impact nonprofit that works with governments to help them use data, science, and technology to improve policy and lives.

Arkansas has received philanthropic funding through Walmart.Org to implement the DOORS platform for data-driven career, training, and job recommendations (Netflix for your Career).

Arkansas is soft launching the same platform used by Hawaii, Colorado, New Jersey, Washington, Virginia, and Rhode Island. A first-in-the-nation enhanced version (DOORS+) will go live for public access in January as "LAUNCH" as branded by Governor Sanders.

Data Systems and Procedures to Produce the Reports Required under Section 116.

Arkansas is using its Workforce Data Quality Initiative - WDQI Round 8 grant to develop and produce information and reports required under section 116.

Although the minimum requirements for WIOA reporting are currently met, some systems lack the level of data and programming to produce enhanced products beyond the minimum that is required. Arkansas has established a longitudinal administrative database (LP2), the state must expand its current capacity to further the vision of WIOA and to more effectively analyze the impact of certifications, work experience, education, training programs, and federal workforce programs.

Arkansas objectives for expanding and enhancing the longitudinal data system are centered around the needs of two complementary strategies for promoting continuous learning and improvement in workforce and education. The first strategy is to help the state leaders and service providers continuously improve programs and services and align resources to the evolving needs of citizens to deliver better workforce and education outcomes.

The second strategy is to facilitate continuous learning and collaboration through shared standards and governance, analytic capacity building, coordinated research and data products, and inter-agency, interstate, and cross-sector collaboration to support improved policy outcomes and an engaged community of practice.

Both strategies are heavily reliant upon the availability of:

- A comprehensive database of high-quality, timely, linked administrative longitudinal data

- Training for analyzing data and applying insights for improved performance and policy
- Mechanisms for providing secure, governed, tiered data access and data products to a wide range of state workforce, research, and public users.

Arkansas objectives for the major activities supported by this funding opportunity include:

- Expanding the workforce longitudinal database – The state seeks to expand the scope of the SLDS to support application of the above strategies to WIOA Title I, II, III, and IV programs, Registered Apprenticeship Programs, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).
- Improving the quality of workforce data – The state seeks to improve the quality of workforce data by maturing from a legacy repository data warehouse approach to a modern data hub approach that extends SLDS analytical capabilities with best practice data governance and data quality management capabilities including metadata management (data dictionaries), data quality management, and master data management.
- Expanding capacity to match workforce and education data – The state seeks to expand its capacity for administrative data linkage by leveraging advanced probabilistic identity resolution across a broader population and adding support for household linkage.
- Using data for analysis of workforce and education programs – The state seeks to develop a statewide skills gap analysis to support program improvement and alignment as well as products to support analysis of co-enrollment, equity, program cost effectiveness, credential attainment, skills gains, career pathways, work history, and apprenticeships.
- Producing and disseminating workforce training provider performance information and outcomes – The state seeks to disseminate workforce training provider performance information and outcomes via provider performance dashboards.
- Creating user-friendly portals to inform consumer choice – The state seeks to support user-friendly options for informing consumer choice by adding products to the state open data portal and the learning management system informed by user-centered design.

Outcomes

The measurable outcomes expected to result from the project include:

- Increase the employment outcome reporting frequency from annual to quarterly (300%)
- Increase the annual completers covered by the skills gap analysis by 250%
- Increase Arkansas labor force coverage in the SLDS
- Increase coverage of credential attainment in the SLDS
- Provide applied data analytics training on integrated workforce data to 60 participants.

- Increase the number of consumer-facing workforce outcome products from 1 to 6 (500%)

LACES is Adult Education's online student data management software. It is designed for Adult Basic Education (ABE) and correctional education programs. LACES allows users to easily set baselines and parameters to track program progress and student goals, deliver high-quality results, and streamline data reporting to state and federal agencies. The prepackaged table applications prepared by LACES match the National Reporting System (NRS) federal reporting tables and benchmark standards with similar table formats. As each local provider enters data, data is collected and managed into the appropriate tables for accurate reporting. Local providers enter data throughout the fiscal year. By managing the report parameters, Adult Education can export files and data match with the Department of Higher Education and The Department of Labor for accurate postsecondary participation and employment verification. At the end of the program year, a "freeze" term is used to describe the time when no more data can be entered until after the freeze, which indicates the time for the state to assess the data, make sure it is correct, and begin the end of year summaries. This data freeze is when the files are merged through the LACES system, deduplicated, and updated for reporting.

ARS utilizes its case management system to collect and report all data on the general VR program. ARS works with RSA's data unit to provide the most accurate and timely performance results.

DSB utilizes the AWARE case management system to collect and report all data on the VR program. The system allows DSB to require and set parameters to enhance accuracy of data entry and collection of all required data elements. DSB has worked closely with RSA's data unit and Alliance to improve the adaptations in AWARE to provide the most accurate and timely performance results for the program.

(B) Assessment of Participants' Post-Program Success.

Lead agencies are invested in and committed to the Governor's vision for workforce development in Arkansas. The Departments of Labor & Workforce Development, Education, Economic & Community Development, Human Services, Adult Education, and Rehabilitation are poised to offer educational and employment transitional services. Much of the progress of participants will be tracked and our system will incorporate workforce data to help to identify, assess, and certify skills for successful careers, and help to promote economic development by connecting workforce development with job creation and growth. The core workforce partners will utilize the WIOA Performance Measures for the Core Programs to monitor and improve all WIOA core programs. These performance measures include the following: Second Quarter and Fourth Quarter after Exit, Median Earnings, Credential Attainment Rate, Measurable Skill Gains, and Effectiveness in Serving Employers. Performance for each of these measures will be segmented by Adults, Dislocated Workers, Youth, Adult Education, Wagner-Peyser, and Vocational Rehabilitation. State and local workforce boards will utilize these performance measures in measuring the progress of the core

partners in their area. These measures will assist Arkansas in determining the effectiveness of its workforce development system and allow the state to continuously improve this system.

The state will use the Eligible Training Provider (ETP) system to monitor the completion and employment rate of all participants receiving training services through the workforce system. The ability to review educational programs to ensure that participants are becoming employed in the occupations in which they are trained will assist both the educational system and the workforce system in determining the effectiveness of the training programs being developed and offered in our state. Programs eligible to receive workforce funding for the training of participants will be reviewed on an annual basis and the programs not meeting performance levels set by the state will be removed. Arkansas' response to the Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI), will connect a diverse range of tools for common presentation to customers and integrative use of common data. Arkansas will be linked to the State Department of Education's Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS), and together they will conduct analysis, implement continuous process improvement in the delivery of workforce and education services, enhance return on investment, and drive strategic policy making.

Employment rate of all participants receiving training services through the workforce system. The ability to review educational programs to ensure that participants are becoming employed in the occupations in which they are trained will assist both the educational system and the workforce system in determining the effectiveness of the training programs being developed and offered in our state. Programs eligible to receive workforce funding for the training of participants will be reviewed on an annual basis and the programs not meeting performance levels set by the state will be removed. Arkansas' response to the Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI), will connect a diverse range of tools for common presentation to customers and integrative use of common data. Arkansas will be linked to the State Department of Education's Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS), and together they will conduct analysis, implement continuous process improvement in the delivery of workforce and education services, enhance return on investment, and drive strategic policy making.

The Adult Education Agency provides services to adults, specifically in the workforce development section, in preparing them for the workplace, targeting literacy and educational deficiencies, and reaching postsecondary and employment goals through strategic planning and systematic programs with educational providers.

As participants enter adult education provider services throughout the state of Arkansas, the WAGE™ program is designed as a foundational tool to bring all participants into a workforce engagement aspect. As they map out their educational goals with intake staff and Career Coaches, the WAGE™ curriculum is meant to establish a foundation for moving forward and moving ahead in the workplace. As participants attain their WAGE™ *Workforce Preparation Certificate*, they plan with Career Coaches and education staff stackable goals that include attaining their GED®,

industry certificates, and credentials that are associated with, or in conjunction with Integrated Education and Training (IET) and postsecondary options for the best route to better employment or sustainable employment circumstances.

After participants have completed and exited, adult education providers practice follow-up procedures and a manual outcome process to ensure participants have moved on to postsecondary opportunities or have attained and maintained employment. As adult education providers complete the follow-up procedures mandated and monitored by the Adult Education Section, the development of the workforce and workplace opportunities of those participants exiting adult education is assessed. The performance indicators from the data collected are measured and compared to national standards and negotiated benchmarks. Data is also reviewed and analyzed in many strategic ways to identify differences between those attaining MSG versus those who did not attain an MSG and how it affected earnings; those who earned lower-level certificates and credentials (including WAGE™ I certificates) versus those who did not, and how it affected wages; and those who attained industry-recognized credentials versus those who did not, and how it affected wages. Longitudinal data collected in this respect was reviewed and analyzed over time to show differences in those making gains and those who did not. Data is shared with core partners at various monthly and quarterly meetings, and goals are set to address improvement in performance.

Those performance measures are reassessed at the state level, with core partners, and with local providers. They continue to be addressed with all providers to persist in improving best practices raising the outcomes and circumstances of adult education participants.

Additional section goals are also established to make ongoing benchmark improvements in areas of performance, literacy activities and workforce preparation. Adult Education Section goals are established in-house and monitored through the Senior Management Team and Division director. Similarly, the WIOA Executive Committee also sets and tracks performance goals across WIOA partners. These goals are created and set through WIOA Executive subcommittee groups to establish better practices of shared reporting and cross-agency functions to improve co-enrollment wrap-around services and participant performance.

ARS is implementing a new client satisfaction survey that assesses satisfaction at four stages of the rehabilitation process – eligibility, plan development, services provision, and closure. ARS conducts a triennial needs assessment of clients, employers, and other partners. This assessment is used to develop goals, priorities, and strategies to better meet customer needs. ARS meets with WIOA core partners on a scheduled basis to review performance data to identify successes, challenges, and how to better service our customers.

Division of Services for the Blind meets with WIOA core programs and core partner agencies monthly to review and analyze the WIOA implementation in Arkansas. Discussions focus on progress of partnership at the state and local levels, integration

of services, co-location and outcomes for job seekers who receive services. DSB also works with partners to track consumers across core programs to ensure data collection is accurate for federal reporting. The data captured provides insight into the number of individuals and type of services received through WIOA partnerships. The information also provides an opportunity to identify how services are delivered statewide and highlight efforts made by each region. Using employment data, the core programs and partner agencies can pinpoint success and/or gaps that require additional resources and attention. Consumer and business satisfaction surveys are collected annually to determine progress and to gather recommendations for continuous improvement.

(C) Use of Unemployment Insurance (UI) Wage Record Data.

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.

ARS uses UI Wage Record Data to report on the 2nd and 4th Quarter After Exit employment of participants. This data also provides the data for the 2nd Quarter After Exit Median Earnings for ARS participants. This data is gathered by ARS staff with approved access to the UI Wage records and placed in the case management system. To ensure confidentiality, only authorized staff have access to this data in both the UI system and the case management system.

DSB uses UI Wage Record Data to report on the 2nd and 4th Quarter After Exit employment of participants. This data also provides the data for the 2nd Quarter After Exit Median Earnings for DSB participants. This data is gathered by DSB staff with approved access to the UI Wage records and placed in AWARE. To ensure confidentiality only a few staff have access to this data in the UI system and AWARE.

(D) Privacy Safeguards.

The State is aware that a key element of success to utilizing data across agencies for either improved customer service or improved measurement and tracking of outcomes is ensuring the integrity of all data and ensuring confidential data is treated as such. The data retention policies are required by the State to identify and adopt a

records retention schedule for the retention of documents and data following state and federal mandates.

This is accomplished with various technical safeguards and ensuring personnel handling this data are properly trained in all relevant regulations and the fundamentals of handling personal and confidential data. Technical safeguards may include:

- Approved processes that limit access to the data to only those personnel who require access to carry out their daily job functions;
- Network security, monitoring, firewalls, etc. to prevent unauthorized access to data from entities outside of State government;
- Encryption technology; and
- Secure data transport mechanisms.

Data Sharing Agreements are used when confidential information is shared with another entity. All partners that will provide and share data in collaboration efforts will enter into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) and/or a data sharing agreement to ensure security of sensitive information.

The privacy requirements for Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) outlined in section 444 of the General Education Provisions Act (20 U.S.C. 1232g) are enforced through role-based user operations that ensure separation of duties and data disclosure. The state mandates the local system staff must be compliant and must sign state confidentiality agreements following data security training. All data sharing agreements and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) documents are strictly enforced and utilized for all data sharing.

All partners expressly agree to abide by all applicable federal, state, and local laws regarding confidential information and to adhere to the same standards of confidentiality as state employees, including but not limited to: 29 U.S.C. 2935; as amended by WIOA - reports, recordkeeping, and investigations. 29 U.S.C. 2871(f)(3); as amended by WIOA - regarding confidentiality. 20 CFR Part 603 - safeguards and security requirements regarding disclosed information under Unemployment Compensation. 42 U.S.C. 503 - regarding state laws governing Unemployed Insurance operations. 20 CFR 617.57(b) - regarding disclosure of information under the Trade Act. 29 U.S.C. 491-2(a)(2); as amended under WIOA - regarding information to be confidential under the Wagner-Peyser Act. The Privacy Act (5 U.S.C. 552). The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (20 U.S.C. 1232g).}34 CFR 361.38 - protection, use, and release of personal information of Vocational Rehabilitation Services participants. HIPAA: 45 CFR 164.500 - 164.534. 2 CFR 200.303 - regarding reasonable measures to safeguard protected personally identifiable information.

Title II Adult Education has a program policy specifically on Student Confidentiality. According to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974, enacted as Section 438 of the General Education Provisions Act, student information that is

considered "private" cannot be shared with anyone who is not designated on a release of confidential information form that has been signed by the student. Examples of confidential information disclosures include disabilities, recovering substance abuse condition, AIDS/HIV, or other medical information. If the student discloses any condition or disability that falls under the Privacy Act, the disclosed information cannot be shared with anyone without a Release of Confidential Information Form, including all appropriate signatures.

Adult education and literacy council providers are responsible for securing confidential student information. The personal confidentiality statement should be completed and signed by all persons with access to student records for legitimate educational and/or reporting purposes. Care must be taken to ensure that student data is safe from access by unauthorized persons. All confidential student data should be aggressively protected, especially a student's social security number. The Adult Education Section collects social security numbers to allow for authorized use in data match with other state agencies. Students must give permission for programs to use their information for data match.

ARS ensures that only staff as part of their duties have access to confidential information. ARS conducts background checks on all employees. State networking security and firewall procedures are implemented and followed. Participant information is not shared unless the individual has given written permission.

DSB ensures that only staff who need access as part of their duties can access confidential information. DSB conducts background checks on all employees. State networking security and firewall procedures are implemented and followed for all DSB staff. DSB staff require a signed release from participants before any information is shared.

(7) Priority of Service for Veterans.

(A) Implementation of Priority of Service for Veterans

Arkansas provides veterans' priority of service as mandated by Veterans Program Letter 07-09 "Implementing Priority of Service for Veterans and Eligible Spouses in all Qualified Job Training Programs Funded in Whole or in Part by the U.S. Department of Labor" and 38 U.S.C 4215. Service is provided to ensure veterans and eligible spouses, both referred to as covered persons, receive consideration for all opportunities, for which they qualify. This increased focus includes the implementation of strategies and policies designed to ensure covered persons receive the highest level of quality service within the framework of priority of service. Arkansas increased its focus on veterans' priority of service as a direct result of federal regulations. The requirements of veterans' priority of service as promulgated in Federal regulations are communicated via a statewide Veterans Priority of Service Policy, WIOA-1-8. 2-2. Covered persons receive priority at all One Stop Career Centers to receive the full array of employment, training, and placement services available. This includes first level priority enrollment for all universal access programs funded Department of Labor and other DOL

programs if they meet the program requirements. Priority means that veterans and eligible spouses are entitled to precedence over non-covered persons for services. Under Priority of Service and veterans and eligible spouse are defined as follows:

Veteran

A veteran who is eligible or spouse of an eligible veteran who is entitled to receive priority of service is a person who has served at least one day in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released from service under any condition other than a condition classified as dishonorable is a covered person. This definition includes Reserve units and National Guard units activated for Federal Service.

Eligible Spouse

An “eligible spouse” means a spouse of any of the following:

- A spouse of any veteran who died of a service-connected disability;
- A spouse of any member of the Armed Forces serving on active duty who, at the time of application for the priority, is listed in one or more of the following categories and has been so listed for a total of more than 90 days;
 - Missing in action;
 - Captured in the line of duty by a hostile force; or
 - Forcibly detained or interned in the line of duty by a foreign government or power.
- A spouse of any veteran who has a total disability resulting from a service-connected disability, as evaluated by the Department of Veterans Affairs; or
- A spouse of any veteran who died while a disability was in existence.

DVOP Referrals

DVOP Specialists focus their efforts on assisting veterans, who meet the service requirements, that are most in need of services including eligible veterans and eligible persons with an SBE, Vietnam-era, and/or veterans between 18-24 years of age, and others designated by the Secretary of Labor as in need of services.

Local areas must ensure that covered persons, eligible veterans, and eligible persons are served first and that this protocol is addressed in functional alignment plans and customer flow processes. After the assessment, covered persons who are not eligible for DVOP service will be referred to a Wagner-Peyser funded ES Counselor, and those who meet the requirements for DVOP service will be referred to DVOP Specialists (when available) or Wagner-Peyser staff members for the provision of Individualized Career Services and other resources required to meet their goals.

During the registration process, a series of questions identifies a customer’s veteran status. Once the veteran or eligible person is identified, the first available WFC staff conducts an initial assessment. This initial assessment uses a customized intake form, to help determine if the eligible veteran or eligible person has a Significant Barrier to Employment (SBE) or that they may be a member of another special priority group;

they are only required to self-attest unless another program requires additional documentation. If, during the initial assessment it is determined to be eligible, they will be immediately referred to a Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist (DVOP) or, if not available, to other trained staff for the provision of Individual Career Services and other services the veteran may need to meet their career goals.

ADWS regularly monitors Priority of Service through scheduled trainings, calls with managers and supervisors, and when making on-site visits at the Local Workforce Centers.

Signage – Effective signage plays a pivotal role in ensuring priority of service is implemented successfully. As such, Arkansas has designed, published, and distributed appropriate signage to all centers and affiliate service sites throughout the state. Signage must be placed prominently at or near the entrance, to encourage customers to register first so that veteran status can be determined and documented as soon as possible. The placement of additional signage to support priority of service is at the discretion of the Center Manager. It is strongly advised that the additional signage be placed in strategic locations and high traffic areas throughout the center, such as resource rooms and common waiting areas.

DSB has quarterly meetings with the Disabled Blinded Veterans of Arkansas liaison to provide information and strategies to ensure this population is up to date on veterans' preference and other opportunities in the workforce. Blind veterans have access to job opportunities and training in the local workforce centers and DSB technology lab to ensure services are available in accordance with state and federal laws. The Division of Services for the Blind Board supports further coordination with other veteran-focused and veteran-serving organizations, including the federal and state offices of Veterans Affairs to aid in additional resources and supports available to veterans.

(B) Monitoring of Priority of Service Provisions for Veterans

Annual audits of all workforce development programs are conducted by ADWS internal program and financial monitors. A monitoring instrument is used to evaluate that all rules and regulations are in compliance with federal requirements. Participant records will be sampled by auditors and interviews will be conducted with staff to gauge the understanding and implementation of all requirements.

Monitor hiring practices to ensure actions align with agency policies related specifically to priority of service for veterans and eligible spouses. Monitoring includes desk audits, personnel oversight and review of annual recruitment

(C) Triage and Referral Process

Providing services to veterans is considered a privilege in Arkansas. To easily identify veterans, posters are placed at or near the front entrance of every Arkansas Workforce Center. Veterans and spouses are asked to identify themselves so they may be provided priority of service. The poster also mentions that Disabled Veterans Outreach

Program (DVOP) specialists are available to provide individualized career services to eligible veterans and spouses.

Once identified, veterans and their spouses are given a Veterans Eligibility Triage Form to complete, which is then evaluated by staff to provide priority of service. After the initial assessment and intake, Veterans are referred to various services and programs based on barriers, needs, and goals. The same process is used for veterans who simply are seeking assistance with resume' development, job search assistance and other career services.

DSB does not receive JVSG grant funds.

(8) Addressing the Accessibility of the One-Stop Delivery System for Individuals with Disabilities.

The workforce center delivery system (including one-stop center operators and the workforce delivery system partners) will comply with section 188 of WIOA and applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.) with regard to the physical and programmatic accessibility of facilities, programs, services, technology, and materials for individuals with disabilities. The State ensures that Arkansas Workforce Center system complies with section 188 of WIOA and applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 through ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 6.4 (Certification of Arkansas Workforce Centers Policy and Procedures) that outlines all requirements of the system. Reviews are conducted annually by the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services Equal Opportunity Office to make sure that workforce centers meet requirements. According to ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 6.4 (Certification of Arkansas Workforce Centers Policy and Procedures), all Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance requirements must be met before a center is eligible to receive the Arkansas Workforce Center certification or use the Arkansas Workforce Center name and logo. In addition to the annual review by the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services Equal Opportunity Office, local workforce development boards must include evaluations of how well the one-stop center ensures equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities to participate in or benefit from the one stop center services as part of their certification review every three years. Representatives of Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) and the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) who provide services in a workforce center are expected to bring to the attention of the One-Stop Operator any accessibility issues that they find in that center.

Furthermore, training is offered at least annually to equal opportunity officers of the local workforce development boards. To demonstrate compliance with this provision, the one-stop center operators and the delivery system partners will collaborate to develop and provide periodic and new-hire staff training and system-wide support for addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities. A rotating certification review team will be established, to provide scheduled evaluation, certification, and recertification of the physical and programmatic accessibility of facilities, programs, services, technology, and materials for individuals with disabilities and to address any compliance issues that

arise.

DSB offices are located in the One Stop Centers. DSB works with local partners to ensure that offices are accessible and comply with all polices and regulations. DSB staff support by providing review and testing of accommodations for those who are Blind and Visually Impaired.

(9) Addressing the Accessibility of the One-Stop Delivery System for Individuals who are English Language Learners.

The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services has contracts with various vendors to provide interpreter services in multiple languages. These interpreter services may be accessible by phone or in person, depending on the workforce centers. Workforce centers are encouraged to use the “I Speak” or other such process for assisting English-language learners. In addition, Adult Education classes are available in every local area to individuals who are English Language learners. Local areas are required follow WIOA §188 in making their activities easily assessable to individuals who are English Language learners, youth, have a disability, or have difficulties with the written language. This compliance includes writing information in plain language.

If at least 10 percent of workforce center’s targeted service area speak a particular language, the following documents are required to be available in that language: grievance procedures, application, and any documents a participant or reportable individual must sign. Workforce centers are encouraged to provide other information in languages commonly spoken in the service area.

DSB provides interpreter services for communication with persons with limited English-speaking ability on a contractual basis. A member of the Business and Technology staff is fluent in Spanish. Reader service, guide service, and any special adaptive equipment are made available to applicants for services, DSB participants, and DSB personnel. Information is also available in the medium of choice for persons making application for DSB services and for persons with disabilities who are employed by DSB.

DSB has been a long—standing partner with the Arkansas Deafblindness Project: Children and Youth with Sensory Impairment (CAYSI), formerly known as the Deaf/Blind Consortium. DSB refers participants to CAYSI and serves on its Advisory Committee, which provides training for parents and professionals to foster stronger partnerships among agencies who work with this population. The project maintains a deafblind registry and requests related information from DSB.

IV. COORDINATION WITH STATE PLAN PROGRAMS

Since implementing WIOA, the core workforce partners have participated in the WIOA Partners Roundtable, which meets regularly and includes representatives from TAA, UI, SNAP E&T, registered apprenticeship, higher education, secondary education, two- and four-year educational institutions, Carl D. Perkins secondary and post-secondary programs, career and technical education, human services, and elected officials to engage in

discussions about integration of services provided by a multitude of service providers. The WIOA Partners Roundtable has individual committees to focus on critical areas in WIOA implementation, including finance, IT system integration, policy development, core performance measures, sector strategies, and the state workforce development plan.

The WIOA Partners Roundtable also develops strategies to align programs, prevent duplication, and increase access to services for job seekers and employers.

Each year, the WIOA Partners Roundtable hosts a statewide conference for workforce system partners. Approximately 300 individuals typically attend these conferences, including representatives of state and local workforce boards and board members, core and optional workforce partner programs, secondary and higher education, state and regional economic development associations, community-based organizations, employers, and elected officials.

The Title II Adult Education director serves on the Arkansas Workforce Development Board. In addition, the Title II Adult Education Director is the co-chair of the WIOA Executive Committee, which oversees the implementation of WIOA and comprises partners in the Combined State Plan.

The WIOA Executive Committee is also responsible for updating and submitting the Combined State Plan, reviewing the local workforce development boards' plans, overseeing the WIOA subcommittees, and planning the annual WIOA Partners' Conference. Subcommittees of the WIOA Executive Committee include Strategic Alignment, Business Engagement, Performance Measures, Out-of-School Youth/Transition, Information Technology, and Communications and Logistics. These subcommittees carry forth the goals and activities of the State Plan. For example, the Business Engagement Subcommittee facilitates the understanding and alignment of partner employer services and coordinates training opportunities for business services representatives and staff. WIOA partners may also share opportunities to collaborate with an employer. For example, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services led a partnership with Amazon in which they hosted a job fair on their behalf and included the other partners who sent client referrals to the event.

The WIOA Executive Committee meets every other month. During these meetings, topics include collaboration opportunities, updates, and subcommittee report-outs. More recently, the WIOA Executive Committee discussed further collaboration efforts such as expanding pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships across the state and increasing and tracking referrals as a priority. One point of discussion was to refer those collecting unemployment insurance without a high school diploma to Adult Education. Adult Education helps individuals upgrade their academic skills, prepares them for the workforce, and connects them to job training opportunities. Local Adult Education directors are appointed to the local workforce development boards and attend regional meetings. During each WIOA Partners' Conference, at least two local workforce areas are on the agenda, giving them the opportunity to discuss regional partnerships, share best practices, and model the way for other areas.

Like the Adult Education director, the Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) commissioner an Arkansas Workforce Development Board member, is on the Division of Workforce Services senior leadership team, and serves on the WIOA Executive Committee. ARS regional managers also serve on the local workforce development boards. ARS has co-located nine of its 19 regional offices within the Arkansas Workforce Centers and has plans for additional co-locations in the coming years. Co-locations allow for more opportunities to partner when servicing individuals and employers. An effort is underway to implement a common intake form scheduled to go live in 2024. ARS leadership participates in the planning and coordination of twice-yearly meetings with core partners, one-stop partners, and other involved programs. ARS participates in the annual WIOA Partners' Conference and assists in drafting and implementing the WIOA State Plan.

Like the Adult Education director and the ARS commissioner, the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) director is a Division of Workforce Services senior leadership team member, Arkansas Workforce Development Board member, and serves on the WIOA Executive Committee. DSB also has staff serving on all ten local workforce development boards. DSB has 14 regional offices co-located with either ARS or the Arkansas Workforce Centers. DSB participates in the annual WIOA Partners' Conference and assists in drafting and implementing the WIOA State Plan.

V. COMMON ASSURANCES (for all core programs)

Assurances for each of the Titles I, II, III, IV VR, and IV DSB will be included in the WIOA State Plan portal.

<i>The Unified or Combined State Plan must include assurances that:</i>	
The State Plan must include	Please read each of the following statements and confirm if each item is included in your State Plan by selecting either 'Yes' or 'No'.
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;	<u>Yes</u>
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;	<u>Yes</u>
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;	<u>Yes</u>

<p>4. (a) The State obtained input into the development of the Unified or Combined State Plan and provided an opportunity for comment on the plan by representatives of local boards and chief elected officials, businesses, labor organizations, institutions of higher education, the entities responsible for planning or administrating 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;</p> <p>(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;</p>	<p><u>Yes</u></p>
<p>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;</p>	<p><u>Yes</u></p>
<p>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);</p>	<p><u>Yes</u></p>
<p>7. The State has taken the appropriate action to be in compliance with WIOA section 188, Nondiscrimination, as applicable;</p>	<p><u>Yes</u></p>
<p>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;</p>	<p><u>Yes</u></p>
<p>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;</p>	<p><u>Yes</u></p>
<p>10. The State has a one-stop certification policy that ensures the physical and programmatic accessibility of all one-stop centers with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA);</p>	<p><u>Yes</u></p>
<p>11. Service providers have a referral process in place for directing Veterans with Significant Barriers to Employment (SBE) to DVOP services, when appropriate; and</p>	<p><u>Yes</u></p>

<p>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.</p>	<p><u>Yes</u></p>
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VI. PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR CORE PROGRAMS

ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES UNDER TITLE I-B.

(a) General Requirements

(1) Regions and Local Workforce Development Areas.

(A) Regions and Local Workforce Development Areas Designated in the State

The ten local workforce development areas and the counties they serve are:

1. Northwest (Benton, Washington, Carroll, Madison, Boone, Newton, Marian, Searcy, and Baxter)
2. North Central (Fulton, Izard, Sharp, Stone, Independence, Van Buren, Cleburne, White, Jackson, and Woodruff)
3. Northeast (Randolph, Clay, Lawrence, Greene, Craighead, Poinsett, and Mississippi)
4. Western (Crawford, Franklin, Logan, Sabastian, Scott, Polk)
5. West Central (Johnson, Pope, Conway, Yell, Perry, Montgomery, Garland, Pike, Clark, and Hot Spring)
6. Central (Saline, Faulkner, Lonoke, Prairie, Monroe, and Pulaski, with the exception of Little Rock)
7. Little Rock (city of Little Rock)
8. Eastern (Cross, Crittenden, St. Francis, Lee, Phillips)
9. Southwest (Howard, Sevier, Little River, Miller, Hempstead, Nevada, Ouachita, Dallas, Calhoun, Lafayette, Columbia, Union)
10. Southeast (Grant, Jefferson, Arkansas, Cleveland, Lincoln, Desha, Bradley, Drew, Ashley, Chicot)

Central and Little Rock areas form the only region designated by the Governor.

(B) Process and Policy Used to Designate Local Areas and Regions.

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.

The criteria used by the governor was explained, which included:

- Reviewing each local areas' sustained fiscal integrity under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA).
- Reviewing each local areas' performance under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA).
- Reviewing each local areas' alignment with the state's existing economic development districts.
- Reviewing each local areas' existing infrastructure.

Local boards and chief elected officials were consulted during the formation of both the local workforce development areas and regions. The opportunity for public comment was also provided and many chief elected officials provided positive comments in support of the structure.

Governor's Executive Order 15-20 was signed, certifying the ten (10) local workforce development boards in Arkansas.

(C) Appeals Process and Policy Referred to in Section 106(b)(5) of WIOA Relating to Designation of Local Areas.

ADWS Policy No. WIOA I – 6.1 (Arkansas Grievance, Complaint, and Appeal Procedures for WIOA Title I Activities) outlines the grievance and appeal procedures for all WIOA title I activities administered by the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (ADWS). Some policy and procedures affect all types of grievance, complaints, and appeals.

All complaints, grievances, and appeals must be emailed to ADWS.WIOAAppeals@arkansas.gov. Appeals must be simultaneously emailed to ADWS.Tribunal.WIOA@arkansas.gov. All complaints, grievances, and appeals must meet submission timelines as described in this document.

Within 14 calendar days of receipt of the complaint/grievance/appeal, the Director of ADWS or his/her designee will acknowledge receipt of the grievance. The acknowledgement of receipt will:

- Provide a synopsis of the issues to be decided;
- Outline the steps to be taken to resolve the matter, including an attempt to reach an informal resolution;
- Notify all parties of that there will be an investigation;
- Notify the parties of the deadline to submit a position statement that details all facts of the complaint/grievance/appeal, along with all supporting documentation; and
- Notify all parties of the right to request a hearing if verbal evidence is more appropriate for the complaint/grievance/appeal than documentation.

The request for the hearing must be made within 10 days of the receipt of the letter from the hearing officer.

When statements and documentation are sent to the hearing officer, it must be simultaneously sent to the other party. No new documentation may be submitted after the deadline given by the hearing officer.

The Director of ADWS or his/her designee will conduct an administrative fact-finding investigation. The investigation will include:

- Opportunities for all parties to submit an in-depth position statement, including documentary supportive data and/or records;
- Access to and review of appropriate official records; and
- A written decision, to be made by the Director of ADWS or designee within 60 days of receipt of the grievance or complaint if the grievant or the appellant presents requested documentation on time.

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

- All documents must be presented according to the timeline given by the hearing officer in the initial letter unless an extension has been granted by the hearing officer.
- The hearing will be informal. Technical rules of evidence will not apply. Hearsay evidence will be admissible at the discretion of the hearing officer.
- Hearings will be held at a time and place determined by the Director of ADWS or his/her designee after reasonable written notice has been sent to the parties and the witnesses.
- The party requesting the hearing will have the burden of establishing the facts and the entitlement to the relief requested.
- Either party may be represented by an attorney or other representative, but no such representative is required.
- Either party may bring witnesses, but no information may be submitted that was not submitted during the investigation or written documentation. All documentary evidence must be presented during the investigation state.
- The respondent will cooperate by making available any person under his or her control or employ to testify, if appropriate.
- Either party or representative will have the opportunity to question any witnesses.
- A recording will be made of the proceedings.
- A written decision will be made by the Director of ADWS or his/her designee within 60 days of receipt of the grievance/complaint/appeal if all information required from the appellant or complainant is presented in the time requested.

A written decision will contain the following:

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

The guidelines specifically for a unit of local government that has requested designation as a local area but has been denied such designation are:

- A unit of general local government (including a combination of such units) or grant recipient that requests, but is not granted, initial or subsequent designation of an area as a local area under WIOA § 106(b)(2), WIOA § 106(b)(5), or 20 CFR 679.250 may submit an appeal to the Arkansas Workforce Development Board (State Board) within 30 days of the decision not to grant such request. The State Board may request the assistance of a hearing officer to conduct the appeal.
- The appeal must be sent simultaneously to both ADWS.WIOAAppeals@arkansas.gov and ADWS.Tribunal.WIOA@arkansas.gov.
- The State Board or the State Board's designee will investigate the appeal, including conducting a hearing in accordance with the rules outlined in Section IV.B.5 of this policy, and the State Board or the State Board's designee will make a decision within 60 days of the receipt of the appeal.
- If the appeal does not result in designation, an appeal may be made to the Secretary of Labor within 30 days of the appeal decision of the State Board. This appeal must be submitted by certified mail, return receipt requested, to Secretary of Labor at the address in Section IV.C.2.c of this policy, with a copy to the ETA Regional Administrator at the address in Section IV.C.2.c of this policy.
- A copy of the appeal to the Secretary of Labor must be simultaneously provided to the State Board at ADWS.WIOAAppeals@arkansas.gov. The appellant must establish that it was not accorded procedural rights under the appeal process set forth in this policy or establish that it meets the requirements for designation in WIOA § 106(b)(2) or WIOA § 106(b)(3), and also in 20 CFR 679.250. If the Secretary determines that the appellant has met the burden of establishing that it was not accorded procedural rights under this appeal process, or that it meets the requirements for designation listed in this paragraph, the Secretary may require that the area be designated as a local area. In making the determination, the Secretary may consider any comments submitted by the Arkansas Workforce Development

Board in response to the appeal. The Secretary will issue a written decision to the Governor and the appellant.

(D) Appeals Process Referred to in Section 121(h)(2)(E) of WIOA Relating to Determinations for Infrastructure Funding.

General rules for an appeal are listed above in VI.a.1.C. Specific policies and procedures relating to appeals and the determinations for infrastructure funding are also located in ADWS Policy No. WIOA I – 6.1 (Arkansas Grievance, Complaint, and Appeal Procedures for WIOA Title I Activities).

An Arkansas Workforce Center partner that believes the determination of the partner's portion of funds to be provided for one-stop infrastructure costs is unfair.

A required Arkansas Workforce Center partner may appeal a determination regarding the portion of funds to be provided to operate the Arkansas Workforce Center system on the basis that such determination is inconsistent with the requirements in WIOA § 121(h); the proportionate share requirements in 20 CFR 361.735(a), 463.735(a), or 678.735(a); the cost contributions limitations in 20 CFR 361.735(b), 463.735(b), or 678.735(a); or the cost contribution caps in 20 CFR 361.738, 463.738, or 678.738; or the issuances of the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (ADWS).

The appeal must be made no later than 21 calendar days after the determination regarding the infrastructure funding, and it must be sent simultaneously to both ADWS.WIOAAppeals@arkansas.gov and ADWS.Tribunal.WIOA@arkansas.gov.

The designated hearing officer will investigate the appeal, including conducting a hearing in accordance with the rules outlined in Section IV.B.5. of this policy and make a decision within 60 days of the receipt of the appeal. The decision will include instructions to the appropriate party for redistribution of funds, depending on the facts. This decision will be consistent with the requirements of 20 CFR 683.630 and the issuances of ADWS. If appropriate, a state funding mechanism may be developed.

If the appeal to the state results in a change to the infrastructure costs, the Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA) portion of the One-Stop Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) must be updated to reflect the final partner infrastructure cost contributions.

(2) Statewide Activities.

(A) State Policies or Guidance for the Statewide Workforce Development System and for Use of State Funds for Workforce Investment Activities.

Arkansas adopts the regulations cited in WIOA Law § 682, Subparts A, B, C

(B) Governor's Set Aside Funding for Mandatory and Discretionary Activities, Including Evaluations of Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Activities.

Arkansas has historically carried out all required statewide employment and training activities as described in § 682.200. In addition to all required activities, the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services plans to use governor's set aside funding for the following activities:

- Allot additional funding awards to LWDBs to assist with regional planning and services delivery efforts and to provide support for the effective development, convening, and implementation of industry and sector partnerships.
- Allot additional funding to LWDBs and employers for work-based learning projects including registered apprenticeships, incumbent working training, on-the-job training programs, and customized training.
- Fund the position of the governor's chief workforce officer to assist with strategic planning, coordination efforts amongst cabinet level departments and program awareness.
- Provide incentives for local workforce development areas that meet or exceed performance targets.
- Conduct outreach and events targeting justice-involved individuals and re-entry initiatives.
- Convene the annual WIOA Partners Conferences, which bring together stakeholders from WIOA core and non-core programs with the goal of training, development, and planning.

The Arkansas Workforce Development Board commissioned the University of Arkansas' Center for Business and Economic Research at the Walton College of Business to complete a comprehensive WIOA systems evaluation, skills gap analysis, and a series of customer surveys. This evaluation will be funded through state set aside funds.

(C) Use of Rapid Response Funds and Layoff Aversion Strategies.

Rapid Response is a pro-active, business-focused, and flexible program designed to respond to layoffs and plant closings by quickly coordinating services and providing immediate aid to companies and affected workers. The ADWS Rapid Response team works with employers and employees to quickly maximize public and private resources and minimize disruptions associated with job loss. Rapid Response can provide customized services on site at an affected company, accommodate work schedules, and assist companies and workers through the painful transitions associated with job loss.

Rapid Response coordinates with the Arkansas Workforce Centers to provide services and provides laid-off workers access to a comprehensive range of direct services, benefits, training opportunities, and income support. Assistance may include drafting résumés, interview skills workshops, career counseling, job search assistance, and information about job training opportunities. Rapid Response also provides multiple benefits to employers, including information about various layoff aversion options that may be available. Rapid Response may also facilitate access to incumbent worker training programs and skilled job seekers.

Arkansas' Rapid Response program manages a fleet of Mobile Workforce Centers. Each Mobile Workforce Center has full internet connectivity, computers, printers, copiers, and fax machines. All Mobile Workforce Centers include a computer with access to Jobs Application with Speech (JAWS) software and are accessible to individuals with disabilities. ADWS transports the Mobile Workforce Centers to locations across the state to supplement local resources.

(D) State Policies and Procedures to Provide Rapid Responses in Cases of Natural Disasters Including Coordination with FEMA and Other Entities.

Following confirmation of a natural disaster, the state Rapid Response coordinator works with local workforce development boards and ADWS leadership to quickly organize service delivery and determine if a Mobile Workforce Center is needed. ADWS staff help impacted individuals file for unemployment insurance and disaster unemployment insurance at the Arkansas Workforce Centers or via the Mobile Workforce Center. The Rapid Response coordinator also works with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) or other disaster-response organizations to assist those in the affected area. Contact will be made with the company(s) and labor officials where applicable, affected by the natural disaster to hold an Employer Meeting. This meeting can be conducted via phone or virtually as the need arises. Information will be gathered on workforce and determine the best plan for Worker Information Meetings. The company will need to send Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) to the employees' last known address, even if their homes were destroyed.

The Rapid Response coordinator contacts the company(s) and labor officials affected by the natural disaster to set up an initial meeting. During the meeting, ADWS works with employers to plan worker assistance workshops for impacted workers and determine what information and resources ADWS and partners need to provide. Typical services covered in the workshops include assistance with unemployment claims, job search, career counseling, training in a new career, and health care information. Rapid Responses invites other state agencies and community-based organizations to participate.

Attendees take a dislocated worker survey, providing ADWS with demographic information for potential emergency grant applications.

The company must send a Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification to their employees' last known address, even if the natural disaster destroys their homes.

(E) Early Intervention for TAA.

Arkansas' Rapid Response Team is comprised of individuals that provide information, resources, and services to assist affected employers and workers. The team oversees

planning implementation, and tracking/reporting of Rapid Response services, including Layoff Aversion at the local level.

The team works closely with:

- WIOA Title I
- Wagner Peyser – Title III
- Local Trade Coordinators
- Business Engagement representative
- Department of Human Services
- Adult and Basic Education
- Vocation Rehabilitation Business Services representative
- Local Veterans Employment Representative (LVER)

State and local area staff provide early intervention to impacted worker groups through a functionally aligned and coordinated effort. Delivering early intervention before and immediately following dislocations where TAA benefits may be available is essential to ensure those affected receive information detailing the comprehensive services offered through TAA and its partner programs.

The process begins with Arkansas Rapid Response and TAA program coordinators reviewing WARN notices and other layoff notifications to make an initial determination regarding potential Trade eligible factors evident in the layoff. TAA coordinators attend all initial Rapid Response meetings with company officials to explain the program's benefits and discuss the potential for a Trade certification based on the dislocation circumstances. The state TAA program coordinator submits a petition to DOL once there is evidence of impact and if a petition still needs to be filed.

TAA coordinators disseminate basic TAA program information to impacted workers at the workshops held by Rapid Response, in addition to an overview of all benefits available to dislocated workers, while emphasizing that these benefits will be accessible if the petition is certified. Additionally, all potentially-eligible workers receive a brochure containing information on TAA program benefits.

Upon certification of a Trade petition, TAA coordinators schedule workshops and conduct targeted outreach to notify impacted workers of eligibility and disseminate program information. Outreach includes letters, emails, newspaper publications, and any other means necessary to reach all workers certified under the petition. State staff coordinate with the employer and local area staff to host in-person workshops at various locations and times to ensure all workers receive the information. For example, if a manufacturing plant that runs three shifts is closing and is trade certified before the layoff occurs, TAA holds workshops on location at the plant at the beginning of each of the three shifts. Workshops also take place at the Arkansas Workforce Centers, other community locations, or virtually if needed when workshops cannot be conducted on location. These meetings provide a full presentation on all Trade benefits, including apprenticeships and on-the-job training, Job Search Assistance, Relocation Assistance, RTAA, TRA, and case management. Eligibility requirements are

reviewed and information specific to their corresponding Trade petition is provided. This comprehensive approach provides impacted workers with all essential information on the TAA program and a clear path forward to apply for and utilize the available benefits.

Due to the TAA termination provisions that took effect July 1, 2022, the Department of Labor cannot conduct new investigations or issue certifications of eligibility for new groups of workers. However, workers who were separated or threatened and covered under petitions certified on or before 06/30/2022 may still have benefits and services. Currently-enrolled participants may continue their training uninterrupted and eligible participants can apply for TAA benefits and services as usual.

(b) Adult and Dislocated Worker Program Requirements.

(1) Work-Based Training Models.

Work-Based Training Models are described in other sections of this plan.

(2) Registered Apprenticeship.

Arkansas created [Policy 3.5](#) in its WIOA Title I-B Policy Manual to address how the state incorporates registered apprenticeships into service design and delivery .

POLICY:

A registered apprenticeship program (RA) is one of the training services that may be provided with Adult and Dislocated Worker funds [TEGL 19-16]. RA may also be provided for out-of-school Youth (OSY) when the local area determines that the work experience (Program Element 3) is appropriate [TEGL 13-16].

RA combines paid on-the-job training with related instruction to progressively increase workers' skill levels and wages. It is also a business-driven model that provides a way for employers to recruit, train, and retain skilled workers [TEGL 13-16]. The U.S. Registered Apprenticeship System is authorized through the National Apprenticeship Act of 1937 (29 U.S.C. 50 et seq.). The Office of Apprenticeship (OA) in conjunction with State apprenticeship agencies is responsible for registering apprenticeship programs that meet Federal and State standards, issuing certificates of completion to apprentices, encouraging the development of new programs, protecting the safety and welfare of apprentices, and assuring that all programs provide high-quality training [TEGL 13-16].

The list of WIOA approved apprenticeship programs in Arkansas can be found at <https://www.arjoblink.arkansas.gov/training>

A pre-apprenticeship, designed to prepare an individual to enter and succeed in an apprenticeship program, is category of work experience (Program Element 3) for Youth [WIOA § 129(c)(2)(C)(ii); 20 CFR 681.480; TEGL 21-16].

(3) **Training Provider Eligibility Procedure.**

As the Governor's Administrative Entity, ADWS must establish criteria, information requirements, and procedures regarding the eligibility of providers of training services to receive funds provided under WIOA section 133 (b) for the provision of training services throughout local areas in the state after consultation with the Arkansas Workforce Development Board. [4.5 Eligible Training Provider Policy and Procedures, Change 3.](#)

An eligible training provider is the only type of entity that receives funding for occupational skills training as defined in 20 CFR 681.540. The funding is in the form of an individual training account (ITA) [20 CFR 680.410]. A training provider that is not on the Arkansas ETPL cannot receive WIOA funds for training services. (Some training interventions, including on-the-job training and customized training, are supported via contract, not an ITA, as noted below.)

In accordance with 20 CFR 680.410, an ETP must be included on the Arkansas eligible training provider list (ETPL), must provide a program of training services, and must be one of the following types of entities:

- An institution of higher education that provides a program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential;
- Entities that carry out programs registered under the National Apprenticeship Act; or
- Other public or private providers of training services that may include:
 - Community-based organizations;
 - Joint labor-management organizations; and
 - Eligible providers of adult education and literacy activities under Title II of WIOA if the activities are provided in combination with training services.

Arkansas' list of eligible training providers, training provider programs, and accompanying information must be made available in a manner that does not reveal personally identifiable information about an individual participant [20 CFR 680.500]. ADWS does not share or sell information from the WIOA and non-WIOA participants.

With the exception of Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs), Arkansas state colleges and universities, and other training providers listed in A.C.A. 6-51-603, training providers in Arkansas must be licensed by the State Board of Private Career Education in order to operate in Arkansas [A.C.A.6-51-605] and to be placed on the ETPL. It is the responsibility of the Board of Private Career Education to protect the Arkansas individuals from unethical private career schools as described in A.C.A. 6-61-601 – 623. Therefore, before training providers from other states may be placed on the ETPL, they must be approved by the State Board of Private Career Education if they would qualify for licensing by this Board if they were located in Arkansas [A.C.A. 6-61-301(a)(1)(B)].

Programs of study offered by Arkansas state-supported institutions must be approved by the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board before offering courses that lead to a degree, certificate of proficiency, or technical certificate [A.C.A. 6-61-301(a)(2)]. More information concerning degree and certificate requirements may be obtained by the

individual state-supported institutions or the Arkansas Division of Higher Education.

A postsecondary education institution in another state may be required to obtain certification from the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board before offering a course or degree in this state (either physically or online to Arkansans) unless the institution is a school that is exempted under A.C.A. 6-51-603 or a school regulated by the Cosmetology Technical Advisory Committee, or a school regulated by the State Board of Private Career Education [A.C.A. 6-61-301(a)(1)(B)]. Local areas and or ADWS must contact the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services before placing an out-of-state postsecondary education institution on the ETPL.

Except in specific circumstances listed in WIOA § 122(h), WIOA § 134(c)(3)(G)(ii), 20 CFR 680.320, TEGL 19-16, and TEGL 8-19, Occupational Skills Training is provided for WIOA title I Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Out-of- School Youth through an individual training account (ITA) that is used to purchase training from an Eligible Training Provider [WIOA § 134(c)(3)(G)(a); TEGL 19-16; TEGL 3-18; TEGL 8-19]. Eligible training providers (ETPs) must be certified by the State and local areas before they may receive funding through ITAs. Only ITAs require the use of an eligible training provider. Other training services required by contracts are not required to be certified as an ETP [TEGL 8-19].

An ITA is a payment agreement established by a local workforce development board on behalf of a participant with a training provider on the eligible training provider list (ETPL). An ITA may be used to pay for any allowable type of training, as listed in WIOA Sec. 134(c)(3)(D), 20 CFR 680.200, TEGL 19-16, and TEGL 8-19, as long as the program of study is on the state list of eligible training providers. However, ITAs are usually used for occupational skills training.

Occupational skills training is organized program of study that provides specific vocational skills that lead to proficiency in performing actual tasks and technical functions required by certain occupational fields at entry, intermediate, or advanced levels. Such training must [20 CFR 681.540]:

- Be outcome oriented and focused on an occupational goal specified in an ISS or IEP;
- Be of sufficient duration to impart the skills needed to meet the occupational goal;
- Lead to the attainment of a recognized postsecondary credential per WIOA Section 3(52);
- Meet the quality standards in WIOA section 123.

Arkansas ETPL Application and Program Instructions:

- Prospective Eligible Training Providers must apply for eligibility approval status for their programs electronically using AJL ProviderLink, a web-based training application. To be included on the ETPL, training providers must set up a user account for the ETPL application in AJL ProviderLink for the local workforce development board (LWDB) for the area where they wish to provide training services. The instructions to set up the user account for the AJL ProviderLink ETPL Application are included with this link, [**AJL ProviderLink ETPL Application and Program Instructions.**](#)

The user account is designed to enable prospective providers to simultaneously apply for program approval for the WIOA Title I Individual Training Accounts (ITAs).

Notwithstanding RAPs, being placed on the State ETPL is contingent upon the approval of a training institution's electronic application and at least one postsecondary occupational program.

Eligibility status for a training institution is one year from the date of approval by the State; however, provider and program approvals will end on a program year basis annually by July 1st thru June 30th. After the initial and first renewal or subsequent program performance reporting data is approved in AJL ProviderLink, eligibility status for a training institution can be approved for one year from the date of renewal or subsequent performance by the State.

An entity that carries out programs under the National Apprenticeship Act will be included and maintained on the ETPL for so long as their program remains registered or unless a substantial violation has occurred as described later. ADWS is responsible for advising current RAP sponsors of their automatic eligibility for the statewide ETPL and the advantages of doing so. ADWS is also responsible for establishing a mechanism to advise newly registered programs of their automatic eligibility in agreement with the State Director of the Office of Apprenticeship. The Office of Apprenticeship will verify the registration status of programs at least every two years consistent with TEG 8-19, and ADWS will ensure new RAPs are added to the statewide ETPL at least every six months.

Demand Occupations and Projected Employment Opportunities:

Local WDBs may approve a training provider program if there is a demand for an occupation. Local WDBs are responsible for giving training institutions information on occupations in-demand and sectors of the economy that have a high potential for sustained demand or growth within the labor market area. Using labor market information, a local WDB is responsible for determining occupational demand in its local area or in another local area to which a youth, adult or dislocated worker is likely to be willing to relocate. There is an exception, however, for Registered Apprenticeship programs (RAPs), which are automatically to be considered "in demand" if the program is taking applications.

Notwithstanding RAPs, local WDBs should instruct providers wishing to explore occupations in-demand in the Arkansas economy to view labor market data found on the Discover Arkansas Labor Market Information Section, *Projected Employment Opportunities List*, for the State or local area. An occupation is considered an in-demand or employment opportunity for a local area if it appears on the [*Projected Employment Opportunities List \(arkansas.gov\)*](#) for the State or local area. Occupations on an adjacent local area's list, including local areas in other states, may also be considered employment opportunities in the local area. If a local area would like to train in an occupation that is not on their local area's Projected Employment Opportunities List, but is on the list of an adjacent area, they should contact the Division of Workforce Services with the information located in the Labor Market Information section, [*"Adding to the List"*](#) of the occupation within the Discover Arkansas Labor Market Information Section

web site. For local areas in other states, the LWDB must provide the adjacent area's projected employment opportunities list, along with the adjacent state's contact information and occupations to be trained in before the occupations can be added.

Procedures:

To be included on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL), providers must submit an electronic application for each training program they wish to be included. Each occupation associated with the training program must be on the current Projected Employment Opportunities List (add link).

Generally, providers must submit the electronic application to the local workforce development board (LWDB) for the area where they wish to provide training services. However, if a training program operates in more than one local area or statewide, only one application is necessary. Also, consistent with Attachment I of TEGl 8-19, "although local boards may add some of their own restrictions and requirements in defining the list of ETPs for their local area, they may include only training providers on their list that are approved for the state ETPL." In this way, any local list must be a subset of the statewide list. With the exception of Registered Apprenticeship programs (RAPs), if a local area does not add restrictions and requirements, its local ETPL will include all ETPs on the statewide ETPL, while a local area that adds eligibility restrictions may have a subset of the state ETPL.

An entity that carries out programs under the National Apprenticeship Act will be included and maintained on the ETPL for so long as their program remains registered. These programs are placed on the statewide ETPL with the provision of minimal information as follows:

- Occupations included in the RAPs;
- The name and address of the RAP sponsor;
- The name and address of the Related Instruction provider(s) and the location(s) of instruction if different from the program sponsor's address. (Note: If the provider of Related Instruction is different from the program sponsor, cost of the instruction may be requested; this is the only time that cost pertaining to a RAP may be requested.)
- The method and length of instruction; and
- The number of active apprentices.

Required Information for Initial Eligibility [TEGL 8-19] (not including RAPs):

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

- A description of each training program to be offered, including the costs of tuition, books, and fees.
- The State's completion rate factor must be related to WIOA performance indicators.
- **To calculate:** The number of all participants who completed the program during the reporting period divided by the total number of all participants who participated in the program.

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

The Initial Eligibility Certification Process:

- Providers eligible to apply under this section will complete an online electronic application for “initial certification” through the automated Arkansas ETPL Application and Program Instructions located at <https://www.arjoblink.arkansas.gov/training>. Providers must apply for each individual program.
- The LWDBs will receive the application via AJL ProviderLink if (1) The program’s CIP Code appears on the current *Projected Employment Opportunities List* for the State or Local Workforce Development Area, and
- Required items are completed and meet minimum qualifications.
- The LWDB will electronically approve or disapprove each application received via AJL ProviderLink. The LWDB is responsible for ensuring that the provider’s performance information meets or exceeds the State minimum levels.
- Upon approval by the LWDB, the provider will be automatically placed on the AJL ProviderLink website as a WIOA Eligible Training Provider for the applicable program.

If the training provider does not have performance data because the training program is a new program, then the provider must submit the following information to the LWDB of application to include:

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

The Continued Eligibility Certification Process (does not apply to RAPs):

- Providers eligible to apply under this section will complete an online electronic application for “continued certification” through the automated AJL ProviderLink ETPL Application and Program Instructions is located at <https://www.arjoblink.arkansas.gov/training>. Providers must apply for each individual program.
- The LWDBs will receive the application via AJL ProviderLink if (1) The program’s CIP Code appears on the current Projected Employment Opportunities List for the State or Local Workforce Development Area, and
- Required items are completed and meet minimum qualifications.
- The LWDB will electronically approve or disapprove each application received via AJL ProviderLink. The LWDB is responsible for ensuring that the provider’s performance information meets or exceeds the State minimum levels.
- Upon approval by the LWDB, the provider will be automatically placed on the AJL

ProviderLink website as a WIOA Eligible Training Provider for the applicable program.

Continued Eligibility [TEGL 8-19]:

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

- The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program
- The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program
- The median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program
- The percentage of program participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, during participation in or within 1 year after exit from the program
- Information on cost of attendance, including cost of tuition and fees, for program participants
- Information on the program completion rate for program participants
- A description of how the provider provides access to training services, including to rural areas, including the use of technology
- A description of the degree to which training program(s) align with in-demand industries and occupations in the State, as identified in State and Local Plans
- Any applicable state licensure requirements of training providers and licensing status of providers of training is applicable
- A description of training provider's ability to offer industry-recognized certificates and/or credentials
- A description of training provider's ability to offer programs that lead to a recognized post-secondary credentials
- A description of the quality of the program of training services including a program that leads to a recognized post-secondary credential
- A description of the ability of the providers to provide training services that are physically and programmatically accessible for individuals who are employed and individuals with barriers to employment, including individuals with disabilities
- The timeliness and accuracy of the eligible training provider's performance reports
- Relevant information reported to State agencies on Federal and State training programs other than programs within WIOA Title I-B.

The ADWS will not limit customer choice nor decrease the number of available training providers. We will prioritize certain individual criteria elements listed above during our evaluation for continued eligibility. Our primary focus will be placed upon the WIOA performance criteria, Numbers 1-4; followed by criteria Numbers 5-8. The remaining criteria elements will be given no special emphasis.

Performance:

LWDBs have the authority to increase the levels of performance required by the State and require additional verifiable program-specific information from training providers for initial eligibility. (This does not pertain to RAPs.) The Arkansas Division of Workforce Services/Employment Assistance (EA) Section must be notified if these levels of

performance are increased.

To facilitate the public and stakeholder access to such information, training provider outcomes information will also be published on <https://www.trainingproviderresults.gov/>.

Performance Data Requirements for ETP Annual Reporting (Excluding Registered Apprenticeship programs):

- ETPs must submit accurate and timely information for participants receiving training under WIOA Title I–B.
- ETPs must provide the information necessary to determine program performance and to meet requirements per WIOA. The ETP must agree to make their data, **including participant social security numbers**, available to validate the information submitted for reporting,
- The annual performance reports must contain individual-level data for all participants in programs offered by the ETP that include at least one (1) student receiving WIOA funding.
- The performance data is due in AJL ProviderLink and ADWS between July 1 through August 31 of every year.

State Minimum Performance Standards for Training Providers

ALL PARTICIPANT PERFORMANCE MEASURES Programs must meet the State minimum level for the performance measure.		
Performance Measure	Calculation	State Minimum Level
Program Completion Rate	The number of all participants who completed the program during the reporting period divided by the total number of all participants.	19.5 %

Besides the requirements above, the State has established additional minimum performance standards to evaluate the Renewal/Continued Eligibility determination for programs at the end of each program year (July 1- June 30). The State Minimum Performance Standards implemented by State in accordance with the requirements stipulated by Section 116 of the WIOA for eligible training provider programs inclusion to the state’s ETPL for all are:

Performance Criteria for All Participants in the Program of Study:

- Credential Attainment Rate (state minimum performance level: **25%**)
The percentage of those participants enrolled in an education or training program who attain a recognized postsecondary credential or a secondary school diploma, or its recognized equivalent, during participation in or within one year after exit from the

program.

- Employment Rate 2nd Quarter after Exit (state minimum performance level: **30%**)
The percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program.
- Employment Rate 4th Quarter after Exit (state minimum performance level: **35%**)
The percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program.
- Median Earnings – 2nd Quarter After Exit (state minimum performance level: **\$1,900 per quarter**).
The median earnings of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program.

Registered Apprenticeship programs [TEGL 8-19]:

Registered Apprenticeship programs (RAPs) are automatically eligible to be included on the ETPL as previously stated. They are an exception to the initial and continued eligibility certification process and are exempt from performance and reporting-related requirements. If RAP sponsors are interested in enrolling in a training program for participants possibly being paid through WIOA funding based on a LWDB's policy, they should follow the instructions in this link, [Registered Apprenticeship - Arkansas ETPL Application and Program Instructions](#).

(4) Implementation and Monitoring of Adult Priority of Service

ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 2.3 (Eligibility for Adult Program) gives local areas the order of priority of services that is listed in TEGLS 10-09 and 19-16:

First priority of service is veterans and eligible spouses (see ADWS Policy No. 1.2 for definition) who are also included in the groups given statutory priority for WIOA Title I-B Adult formula funds. This means that veterans and eligible spouses who are also recipients of public assistance, are other low-income individuals, or are individuals who are basic skills deficient will receive first priority for individualized career services and training services provided with WIOA Adult formula funds.

Second priority of service is individuals who are not veterans or eligible spouses, but who are recipients of public assistance, are other low-income individuals, or are individuals who are basic skills deficient.

Third priority of service is given to veterans and eligible spouses who are not recipients of public assistance, are not other low-income individuals, and are not basic skills deficient.

Fourth priority of service is individuals who are not veterans, are not recipients of public assistance, are not other low-income individuals, and are not basic skills deficient, but are individuals with other barriers to employment.

The last priority of service is given to individuals who are not veterans, eligible spouses, recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, basic-skills deficient, or individuals with other barriers to employment.

ADWS Policy No. ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 2.8 (Priority for Individuals with Barriers to Employment) lists the categories of “individuals with barriers to employment,” including individuals who are basic skills deficient and low-income individuals, and the policy refers readers to the location of the definitions of each category.

ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 2.3 also requires local areas to establish written policies and procedures to ensure that the required priority for participants served in the WIOA Title I-B Adult program is followed. These policies and procedures are reviewed in the annual monitoring visit.

(5) Local Area Transfer of Funds Between Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs.

ADWS’ [Issuance PY 22-02](#) describes the state’s policy on transferring funds between adult and dislocated worker programs.

“Revision to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Funds Transfers Process”

1. Purpose: To revise the process for transferring funds between the adult and dislocated worker funding streams under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).
2. Reference: WIOA sec. 133(b)(4) provides the authority for local workforce areas, with approval from the Governor, to transfer up to 100 percent of the adult Activities funds for expenditure on Dislocated Worker Activities, and up to 100 percent of Dislocated Worker Activities funds for expenditure on Adult Activities. As the Governor’s administrative entity for the WIOA, the director of the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services has the authority to approve these funds transfers.
3. Change: Effective July 1, 2022, No funds transfers will be approved during the first program year of an award. Funds transfers will only be approved starting with the second program year of the award. This will give the LWDB’s adequate time to serve DLW participants. Local areas should make every effort to expend DLW funds in the manner in which the grant is awarded. This includes developing and executing strategic outreach and service delivery plans.
4. General Information:
Funds transfers will be processed similar to the regular adult and dislocated worker subgrant award packages and using the same forms.

(6) State Policy on WIOA and TAA Co-Enrollment

ADWS’ [Policy 6.2](#) describes the state’s policy on WIOA/TAA Co-enrollment.

POLICY: It is the shared responsibility of TAA and WIOA to attempt to determine eligibility for and to co-enroll every applicant who is laid off as a result of a permanent closure or a substantial layoff of a trade-affected company and who desires assistance in obtaining new employment, unless that person does not qualify for WIOA and/or TAA services [20 CFR 618.325]. If the applicant is eligible for only one program, the program

for which the individual qualifies is responsible for attempting to enroll the individual and to give appropriate services. The worker may enroll as a participant in WIOA as soon as he or she receives a lay-off notice or the company has made a general announcement (as defined by the local area) that the facility will close within 180 days, assuming all other eligibility requirements are met [*WIOA § 3(15); ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 2.4*]. A worker cannot enroll as a TAA participant until the company is determined trade-affected. If a trade-affected worker chooses to decline co-enrollment in WIOA, he or she may not be denied TAA benefits and services solely for declining co-enrollment [*20 CFR 618.325*]. It is the responsibility primarily of TAA and WIOA to co-enroll, and not primarily the responsibility of the individuals [*Preamble to 20 CFR 618*]. Individuals who complete an application, but are not eligible, for a program must be enrolled as Reportable Individuals for that program [*TEGL 14-18*].

It is also the shared responsibility of TAA and WIOA to work together to give co-enrolled participants the best array of services appropriate for these participants. This includes, but is not limited to, WIOA title II Adult Education and Literacy, WIOA title III Vocational Rehabilitation Services (ARS and DSB), and all other Arkansas Workforce Center (AFW) Partners [*20 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.

(7) State Strategy to Ensure WIOA and TAA Co-Enrolled Participants Receive Necessary Benefits and Services.

PROCEDURES:

A. Ongoing Strategy:

1. The local One-Stop Operator is the conduit for updating contact information, as they are responsible for the "coordination of services" in their respective local areas. Therefore, TAA, Dislocated Worker Services Unit, as well as WIOA title I-B program managers should notify their One-Stop Operator of changing Points of Contact (POCs) within their local area.

2. The flow of the enrollment and referral process for TAA and WIOA is described in detail in “Before TAA Certification of Company/Workers” (Part B of this policy).
3. TAA and WIOA front-line staff will meet regularly to discuss upcoming events, common applicants and participants, eligibility requirements, allowed services, and other topics that will help both programs to serve individuals who have been laid off because of a plant closing or downsizing.
4. TAA and WIOA will coordinate services for co-enrolled participants to give them the best mix of appropriate services, keeping in mind the requirements of each of the programs.
5. When 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 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.

B. Before TAA Certification of Company/Workers:

1. The Dislocated Worker Services Unit will notify the designated representatives for the One-Stop Operator, WIOA DLW Program, and TAA of the pending Worker Assistance Workshops as soon as the workshop is scheduled.
2. WIOA 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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.

14. WIOA will provide all appropriate services allowed in ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 3.1 (*Services for Adults and Dislocated Workers*). It should be noted that services are not limited to occupational skill training. Other services that meet the needs of the participants must be made available.

C. After the Company is Certified as Trade-affected:

1. WIOA will be allowed 10 minutes at the beginning of each Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Information Session for WIOA to present information about the DLW program.
2. The TAA lead and the WIOA case manager will check in monthly to share information about participants -- both co-enrolled participants and potentially co-enrolled participants. If needed, the OSO will convene these meetings. Information about the meetings will be documented.
3. Each participant will contact either the TAA lead or the WIOA case manager at least monthly to update him or her. The main contact person for the participant will be determined by the TAA lead and the WIOA case manager within the first month of co-enrollment. The TAA lead and the WIOA case manager will share information and documentation. Planned services must be entered on both IEPs, even though a WFC partner is providing the services.
4. Once a worker is determined to be TAA-affected, TAA is the priority source of funding if such funding is allowed by TAA.
5. Beginning with the first semester of WIOA/TAA co-enrollment, TAA will be the first funding provider for any services for which TAA is allowed to provide funds. Usually, these services include the following, when applicable: tuition, fees

- required of all students, required books, transportation (if travel is outside the normal commuting area), supplies required of all students in the training, subsistence payments, relocation allowances (90% reimbursement), job search allowances (90% reimbursement), and On-the-Job Training (OJT).
6. When training costs are paid by TAA, WIOA will pay for any appropriate costs allowed under the local and state policies that are not paid by TAA. This may include, but is not limited to, childcare, mileage not allowed under TAA, vehicle repairs, work experience, and other supportive services. WIOA may pay for supportive services only for training/career services that can be provided by WIOA, whether or not the training is paid for by WIOA.)
 7. If the participant is enrolled in occupational skills training that is allowed by WIOA title I-B, but not TAA, WIOA title I-B will pay all appropriate training or supportive services. Co-enrollment is still expected because TAA may provide other appropriate services. In addition, TAA and WIOA are also encouraged to refer the participant to other appropriate AWC partners (and other entities) that can provide needed services.
 8. If TAA begins the training funding, the training is allowed by WIOA local and state policies, and TAA has reached its maximum funding for the training, WIOA will fund the remainder of the training for the co-enrolled participant, being careful to be compliant with ADWS Issuance PY 19-09.

D. After Co-enrolled Participant Exits both programs:

1. WIOA will provide follow-up services as allowed by the local policy, in compliance with state and federal policies.
2. WIOA will give any appropriate follow-up information to their local TAA case manager. WIOA will document such services and will share these documents, as well as any other appropriate information, with TAA.

(8) Process for Familiarizing One-Stop Staff with the TAA Program.

The local One-Stop Operator is the conduit for the “coordination of services” in their respective local areas. Therefore, TAA, Dislocated Worker Services Unit, as well as WIOA title partners should work collaboratively to share resources, cross-train and refer customers.

(c) Youth Program Requirements.

(1) Youth Workforce Investment Activities Grants and Contracts.

When selecting an entity as the service provider for youth workforce investment activities, the Local WDB must consider the entity’s programmatic and fiscal integrity, compliance with public policy, record of past performance and other factors that demonstrate transparency and responsibility.

State policy requires that local boards award grants for local youth activities through a competitive procurement process in accordance with their local procurement

procedures which must be in compliance with the provisions of applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations and based on recommendations of the Local Youth Committee and/or Workforce Development Board.

The procurement must be a process that provides for full and open competition and avoids even the appearance of a conflict of interest (either individually or organizationally). Procurement actions must be conducted in a manner that provides for full and open competition and prevents the existence of conflicting roles that might bias judgment and cause unfair competitive advantage.

Such actions must assure separation of those who develop or issue the solicitation, or are involved in the selection process, from those who bid upon it. Supporting documentation of the history of each procurement action must be maintained. Such documentation must include a rationale for: the method of procurement, selection of contract type, contractor selection or rejection, and the basis for the contract price.

Such documentation also includes evaluation criteria or rating factors to support the provider's ability to perform successfully, with consideration given to integrity, compliance with public policy, record of past performance, in addition to financial and technical resources, that follow state and federal guidelines.

Contracts must be awarded based on the vendor's:

- Ability to deliver services to the targeted population in accordance with locally established guidelines;
- Experience in working with youth in similar programs and activities;
- Past and current collaboration with other service providers
- Past performance record, including both programmatic and fiscal integrity;
- Understanding of and commitment to meeting goals and objectives; and
- Demonstration of understanding of and commitment to continuous improvement methods.

(2) Assistance in Achieving Equitable Results for Out-of-School Youth and In-School Youth.

In order to improve the outreach and recruitment of out-of-school youth, the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services and its divisions will partner with the Department of Human Services, and other community-based organizations to create a streamline pathway and align services to meet the needs of youth participants. Core programs will no longer serve out-of-school youth in silos, but rather through a referral system leveraged within these partnerships. Local workforce development boards will work with referrals of able-bodied young adults in the SNAP Employment & Training sector of the Department of Human Services, juvenile offenders within the juvenile justice system, clients receiving housing assistance through the local housing authority agencies and community organizations assisting homeless youth to boost enrollment and performance in the out-of-school youth core programs. These partners may prove beneficial in addressing persons with identified and unidentified disabilities, high school equivalency credentials, leadership development and supportive service needs.

The State expects Workforce Development Boards to focus a higher percentage of Out-of-School Youth (OSY) Funding on direct costs to OSY since this population of youth is more difficult to locate, engage, and will potentially require a longer range of services to be successfully served. We also expect as a result of higher expenditure requirements of OSY funds:

- Increased collaboration amongst core partners through sharing of costs and information to ensure that youth have access to all available clusters of needs-based services.
- A focus on forming and/ or improving alliances with the Department of Education, Pre-Apprenticeship Programs, Employers, Training Providers as well as Community Based Organization which have traditional connections to disconnected youth.
- Greater disseminating of documented strategies among Workforce Development Boards that demonstrate success in locating and engaging eligible youth. The state will also support this practice by adopting best practices demonstrated by local partners and/or agencies and other nationally recognized programs that have successfully served similar populations of youth with state, federal or other limited funds.

As part of the State's overarching outreach strategy, a Targeted Populations Advisor is devoted to developing the 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.

The State is focused on its partnerships with Vocational Rehabilitation to provide transition services to youth with disabilities to ensure high school completion. Local boards will be asked to describe these proposed partnerships in their local plans.

By reviewing the plans of Adult Education and Family Literacy Act providers, local boards will also have an opportunity to drive performance toward those established for youth in the WIOA programs further enhancing coordination efforts. The state will continue to direct local staff to utilize a portion of the 75% out-of-school youth funding on re-engagement strategies and program related transitional planning for reconnecting disconnected youth to the education and workforce system.

(3) Assistance in Implementing Innovative Models for Delivering Youth Activities.

Arkansas' [Policy 3.2](#) outlines that local programs must make each of the 14 youth elements available to youth participants. Local programs may determine what services a youth participant receives based on their objective assessment results and individual service strategy. Local programs are not required to provide every element to participants and should partner with other entities to provide program elements that cannot be provided by the local program.

Work experience services including youth job shadows, internships, work experiences, on-the-job training, and pre-apprenticeship are valuable training methods. Requirements state that local youth programs must expend at least 20 percent of the youth funds allocated to them to provide in-school youth (ISY) and out-of-school youth (OSY) with paid and unpaid work experience activities.

State staff reviews ISY and OSY expenditures, to include the 20% work experience requirement, on an ongoing basis. Program and financial monitors conduct regular fiscal technical assistance sessions for all local workforce development areas. The sessions include a review of funding utilization rates and forecasts on future expenditures.

Technical assistance sessions include guidance on ways in which the local area may be able to appropriately spend their funds, as needed. Several local areas have implemented local processes for reviewing this information, such as regularly pulling financial reports and reviewing them with their local workforce development board financial committees.

Arkansas encourages a career pathway design. Career planners and participants should work together to identify appropriate career pathways by utilizing the objective assessment results. Local workforce development boards must each include in their local plan a description of the strategies and services that will be used in the local area to implement career pathways.

Provision of youth program services is reviewed through annual monitoring and ongoing data integrity analysis. Additional procedures regarding monitoring are reviewed and updated annually and included in a Title I Monitoring Guide.

Arkansas provides ongoing training and technical assistance on these topics. Training is available to all local staff.

(4) Language in 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 and for “requiring additional assistance to complete an education program, or to secure and hold employment” Criterion for In-School Youth.

Arkansas requires each local area to define “requiring additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program, or to secure and hold employment” for youth to best accommodate the needs of the local area. State policy requires that this definition be in the local plan if the local area uses the barrier.

ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 2.6 (Eligibility for Out-of-School Youth Program) contains the policy for “requiring additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program, or to secure and hold employment” criterion for out-of-school youth in its list of eligibility requirements for out-of-school youth:

“A low-income individual who requires additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment, as defined by the LWDB in the Local Plan.”

ADWS Policy No. WIOA I-B – 2.5 (Eligibility for In-School Youth Program) contains the policy for “requiring additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program, or to secure and hold employment” criterion for in-school youth in its list of eligibility requirements for in-school youth:

“A low-income individual who requires additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment, as defined by the LWDB in the Local Plan approved by the State Board (limited to 5% of the ISY participants).”

The definition in the Local Plan must include required documentation to establish eligibility for this barrier.

The State will ensure that local areas define the terms in their local plans when the State staff and the State Workforce Development Board review and approve the local plans.

State monitors will ensure that the local areas are following their own policies as part of their yearly monitoring reviews.

(d) Single-area State requirements.

N/A

(e) Waiver Requests (optional).

(1) Statutory or Regulatory Requirement for which Waiver is Requested and Intended Goals.

Waiver #1: The State of Arkansas is seeking a waiver from the WIOA Section 129(a)(4)(A) and 20 CFR Part 681.410, which require not less than 75 percent of funds allotted to states under Section 127(b)(1)(C), reserved under Section 128(a), and available for statewide activities under subsection (b), and not less than 75 percent of funds available to local areas under subsection (c), shall be used to provide youth workforce investment activities for Out-of-School Youth (OSY).

Arkansas is requesting to:

- Lower the minimum OSY expenditure requirement to 50 percent for formula funding at both the state and local levels; and
- Eliminate the minimum OSY expenditure requirement for WIOA Statewide Activities funding when providing direct services to youth.

Arkansas has continuously met the 75% OSY requirement, and although Arkansas recognizes the importance of serving the OSY population, we have also determined that a shift in being able engage more in-school youth (ISY) earlier on may help yield better results in Arkansas’ overall workforce strategies. We believe that early intervention will reduce the likelihood of youth becoming disconnected or disengaged from the labor force.

Currently, the 75% OSY requirement limits the ability of the State and local areas to:

- effectively support Governor Sanders work-based learning initiatives
- partner with state programs such as Arkansas' Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) and several CTE programs, including those who offer pre-apprenticeships that lead to registered apprenticeship programs directly after the completion of a secondary education program.
- provide valuable services to Arkansas' young adults who are at risk of becoming opportunity youth

Creating a system where unified services are available to at-risk young adults through State initiatives and programs are projected to strengthen long-term positive outcomes for this population.

Waiver #2 The State of Arkansas is seeking a waiver from the WIOA Section 20 CFR 681.550 to allow WIOA individual training accounts (ITAs) for in-school youth (ISY). This requirement impedes the ability of Arkansas to implement its plan to improve the workforce development system. The approval of this waiver will not impede the State's efforts to prioritize OSY, including outreach to the OSY population.

Arkansas is requesting to:

- waive the requirement limiting ITAs to only out-of-school youth (OSY), ages 16–24. In addition to these OSY, the State requests to use ITAs for ISY, ages 16–21.

This waiver request is in response to Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders' Executive Order (EO) 23-16, which created the Governor's Workforce Cabinet and the position of the Chief Workforce Officer (CWO) to advise the Governor on issues regarding workforce development and career education in Arkansas and to undertake the following duties:

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

Skill Gaps and Labor Force Participation: Arkansas is challenged by a noticeable skills gap, where employers struggle to find candidates with the necessary skills, especially in fast-growing industries. Additionally, labor force participation rates lagged behind national averages, pointing to untapped potential in the state's workforce.

Educational Alignment with Industry Needs: There is a growing recognition that educational pathways need better alignment with industry requirements to ensure that students and job seekers are prepared for successful careers.

(2) Actions Undertaken to Remove State or Local Statutory or Regulatory Barriers.

There are currently no state or local statutory or regulatory barriers to implementing the requested waiver. Current State of Arkansas laws, regulations, and policies follow federal law, regulations, and guidance.

(3) Goals of Waiver and Expected Programmatic Outcomes if Granted.

These waiver requests aligns with Arkansas' goals outlined in the State Plan.

Specifically, strategic goals:

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

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

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

***Strategic Goal 4:** Address Skills Gaps*

(4) Waiver Alignment with Policy Priorities.

WIOA places an emphasis on pre-employment education and training as well as access to a continuum of work-based learning opportunities. Further, as stated in TEN 31-16, Registered Apprentices is a valuable work-based training opportunity and a proven model of job preparation that combines paid on-the-job training and related instruction to progressively increase workers' skill level and wages. The approval of these waivers will provide local boards more flexibility to utilize funding to support these strategies in their schools, connecting students to the training and education they need and providing employers with an expanded talent pipeline of available workforce. Additionally, while students who are defined as "in-school" theoretically already have supports available, many students are close to disengaging from the education system and the utilization of this waiver will allow local boards to connect with those students prior to dropping out, connecting them to different education and training strategies that will increase their likelihood of success and improving job and career results.

(5) Impact of Waiver on Services for Disadvantaged Populations or Individuals with Multiple Barriers to Employment.

These waivers will provide local workforce development boards the flexibility to serve more youth and young adults in work-based learning, including apprenticeship, regardless of school status. It will facilitate the provision of the necessary funding and the ease of current regulations essential to designing programs that will aid youth and young adults in the preparation for long-term participation in Arkansas' labor force. Economic growth in Arkansas and its high-growth industries will be sustained with the infusion of skilled workers ready to fill current job openings and adequately trained for future openings. Additionally, this waiver supports Governor Sanders overall workforce vision and ensures all Arkansas students have opportunities for meaningful work-based learning experiences. Arkansas' students and eligible youth population, as well as Arkansas' employers who need immediate assistance to fill open positions and train their future workforce, will benefit from these waivers.

(6) Processes to be Used.

State staff will monitor the implementation and outcomes of this waiver through monthly tracking of youth expenditures, utilization of reporting from the statewide data management system, and through programmatic and fiscal monitoring. The 10 local workforce development boards (LWDBs) in Arkansas will be engaged in monthly technical assistance meetings. All LWDBs, business, and organized labor will be provided the opportunity to comment on the waiver request through the public comment period of the PY24-27 WIOA Combined State Plan. ADWS assures all data collected and reported, including waiver outcomes, will be included in the WIOA Annual Report as required.

(7) Most Recent Data Available for Results and Outcomes of Existing Waiver(s).

Arkansas has no existing or active waivers.

Title I-B Assurances

Adult Program Performance Indicators

Dislocated Program Performance Indicators

Youth Program Performance Indicators

The Assurances and Performance Indicators are added in the Appendix 1 at the bottom of this document and/or WIOA State Plan Portal.

WAGNER-PEYSER ACT PROGRAM (Employment Services)

(a) Employment Service Staff

(1) Staffing of Labor Exchange Services.

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) Professional Development Activities for Employment Service Staff.

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) Strategies to Support Training and Awareness Across Core Programs and the Unemployment Insurance (UI) Program and Training Provided for Employment Service 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.

(b) Providing Information and Meaningful Assistance to UI Claimants Through One-Stop Centers.

Due to 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.

(c) 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, and
- UI Review.

(d) Use of Wagner-Peyser Act Funds to Support UI Claimants.

(1) Coordination and Provision of Labor Exchange Services for UI Claimants.

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.

(2) Registration of UI Claimants with State’s Employment Service.

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.

(3) Administration of the Work Test for State UI System.

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.

(4) Provision of Referrals to and Application Assistance for Training and Education Programs and Resources.

Employment Services staff are trained and equipped to provide career services to UI claimants. Through tools such as CiviForm, the common intake and digital referral system mentioned in this plan, customers will receive services in a holistic manner. The state uses a UI call center to assist UI customers and is now exploring a model where ES staff and WIOA partners will be able to connect with customers during wait times or after the session with UI ends. This model will introduce claimants to various services and allow for a bridge or hand-off to occur in real-time.

(e) Agricultural Outreach Plan (AOP).

(1) Assessment of Need.

Arkansas is a major producer of a variety of agronomic crops. Agriculture is Arkansas’ largest industry, adding around \$16 billion to the state’s economy annually. The Natural State’s diverse landscape and climate produce a wide variety of Arkansas agricultural products. Arkansas is a major exporter of rice, soybeans, cotton, poultry and feed grains. There are 41,900 farms statewide and 96 percent of Arkansas’ farms are family-owned.

Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers (MSFWs) generally live in rural, isolated areas throughout Arkansas. Approximately 90 percent are of Hispanic/Latino origin; many are primarily monolingual in Spanish; and more than 70 percent are from Mexico. These farmworkers have several obstacles to employment which include transportation, childcare, limited English- speaking abilities and education, and job training. All of these barriers are major reasons for their lack of economic mobility.

Assessing the unique needs of the MSFW population in Arkansas, like many other states, presents several challenges. The MSFW is difficult to identify, share information with or locate. Despite high agricultural activity within the state, it appears a significant number

MSFWs pass through Arkansas for seasonal work and continue to other states, looking at Arkansas as merely a “stopover”.

In 2023, 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 MSFWs come here to work, earn their money and move to the next location. They most generally are sending a significant portion of their pay to their families and must bring in a paycheck.

They have no time for training for other employment, unless they can no longer work in the fields due to age, health or other factors. Employers, obviously, want to keep these valued workers and would be reluctant to encourage training or employment outside of meeting the agricultural needs they have. Based upon comments from our Agricultural Employers, many of these workers may benefit from ESL or "soft skills" training during their stay in this country.

Other factors such as healthcare, schooling for children, employer requirements, rights, insurance, health & safety information, availability of adequate work clothing and transportation, among others, are needs of the MSFWs. Lack of identification and contact makes it difficult to know how great the needs are. MSFWs are rarely provided transportation to be able to come to town or a career center. Career centers are not available during the hours when they are not working. The needed information must be brought to the MSFW in the fields, communities, or frequented businesses/services they utilize.

(2) Assessment of the Agricultural Activity in the State.

The main agricultural crops in Arkansas are soybeans, hay rice, corn, and cotton, with an estimated projected harvest of nearly seven million acres that were harvested in program year 2022. Most of these main agricultural crops are concentrated in Central, Eastern, and Northeastern Arkansas. While production continues year round, the heaviest months of activity are January through October.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, most of these main agricultural crops are concentrated in the following regions:

- District 60 (East Central Arkansas) — Arkansas, Cross, Crittenden, Lee, Lonoke, Monroe, Prairie, Phillips, St. Francis, and Woodruff counties.
- District 30 (Northeastern Arkansas) — Clay, Craighead, Greene, Independence, Jackson, Lawrence, Mississippi, Randolph, and White counties.
- District 90 (Southeast Arkansas) — Ashley, Chicot, Desha, Drew, Jefferson, and Lincoln counties.

These are seasonal jobs requiring more than four thousand migrant and seasonal workers to cultivate and plant, till and harvest these crops. Agricultural employers are increasingly faced with the lack of domestic labor willing and able to do these long and hard jobs outdoors in all kinds of weather. The majority of these seasonal workers are foreign born workers entering the country on H2-A Visas (temporary agriculture) and most of the returning workers are coming from Mexico and the next highest percentage of workers are traveling from South Africa. Free housing is included for these workers and any domestic worker that is unable to return to his/her home each day.

The effects of increased rainfall, flooding, and extreme temperatures have impacted and will continue to impact Arkansas' economy and agriculture production. The tightened labor market has created job opportunities with increased pay rates and additional incentives that lure farmworkers from seasonal and temporary farm labor. Agricultural employers are continuing to increase their utilization of the H-2A program annually in Arkansas.

There are estimated to be approximately 4,500 migrant and seasonal farmworkers (MSFWs) in the state at any time, most H2-A workers enter from Mexico and Spanish is the native language spoken. There was a 17 percent increase in the number of new agricultural jobs entered into the Arkansas JobLink system in PY22 from the previous year.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture - National Agricultural Statistics Services, the top five (5) labor-intensive crops, months of heavy activity, and geographic area of prime activity are detailed in the chart below.

Agricultural Activity in Arkansas – Calendar 2022

CROPS	ACRES HARVESTED 2022	PRODUCTION	DURATION OF HARVEST	GEOGRAPHIC AREA/COUNTY
Soybeans	3,180,000	163,280,000 BU	July 15 - November 15	Lee, Phillips, St Francis, Cross
Rice	1,084,000	80,340,000 CWT	August 10 - October 1	Arkansas, Monroe, Prairie
Corn	695,000	120,235 BU	June 25 - August 31	Lee, Phillips, Cross
Cotton	630,000	1,548,000 BALES	August 15 - October 21	Mississippi, Craighead, Crittenden
Hay	1,093,000	2,188,000 TON	November 30 - March 1	Lonoke, Prairie, Lee, St. Francis

(3) Assessment of the Unique Needs of Farmworkers.

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.

There may be additional MSFWs that may meet the guidelines of seasonal farm workers, based upon information from the Arkansas Human Development Corporation, the National Farmworkers Jobs Program (NFJP), Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) section 167 grantee. The partnership will continue in an ongoing effort to serve MSFWs.

Unique Needs of MSFWs

MSFWs are a unique and very important segment of Arkansas' agricultural economy as they are willing to complete the necessary harvesting and manual labor job duties. However, MSFWs also face a number of challenges seldom faced by other workers. Based upon the experience of the State's NFJP grantee and other organizations serving MSFWs, the major challenges this population faces include the following:

- Education: the education level among MSFWs tends to be low
- Language: general lack of ability to speak and read English and, at times, Spanish
- Economic Status: the income level of MSFWs frequently falls well below the poverty level
- Limited access to public transportation in most rural areas of the state

(4) Outreach Activities.

(A) Contacting Farmworkers Not Reachable through Normal Intake.

Arkansas strives to continue improvement interacting with and providing assistance to our MSFW community.

Arkansas was designated in October 2023 as a significant MSFW state. Additionally, Forrest City and West Memphis were designated as significant Multilingual One-Stop Centers.

ADWS has advertised for full-time, bilingual Workforce Specialists in Forrest City and West Memphis, and also for full-time, bilingual Workforce Specialists in Jonesboro and Little Rock to serve as MSFW Outreach Specialists.

The ADWS Targeted Populations Outreach Coordinator and State Monitor Advocate have also contacted other relevant agencies, including the 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 plan to incorporate the use of appearances at Laundromats and Grocery Stores and other 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.

(B) Provision of Technical Assistance to Outreach Staff.

ADWS developed and conducted training to our Local Office merit staff. This training included WIOA Titles I & III, including the ES Complaint system.

(C) Outreach Worker Training and Awareness.

ADWS developed and conducted training to our Local Office merit staff. This training included WIOA Titles I & III, including the ES Complaint system.

(D) Professional Development Activities for State Merit Staff Outreach Workers.

ADWS developed and conducted training to our Local Office merit staff. This training included WIOA Titles I & III, including the ES Complaint system.

(E) Coordination of Outreach Efforts.

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.

(5) Services Provided to Farmworkers and Agricultural Employers through the One-Stop Delivery System.

A) Providing the Full Range of Employment and Training Services to the Agricultural Community.

All Arkansas Workforce Centers provide core, intensive employment and training services. Staff will determine the service needs of the MSFW customers and either provide those services or direct these customers to staff who can provide the needed services. Outreach specialists will be strategically assigned to Workforce Centers for

the purpose of providing employment and training services to both agricultural employers and MSFWs.

Outreach materials are disseminated throughout the state, especially in the areas of the state where MSFWs are likely to gather and work.

Through the Arkansas Job Link (AJL) job matching system, agricultural jobs are listed statewide and are available to all jobseekers in the state as well as out of state by creating an account and searching for suitable employment. An AJL employer account provides the ability to post job openings, search resumes for qualified employees, receive emails on new jobseeker resumes and receive assistance listing the agricultural job opening. ADWS will provide agricultural employers with applicants who meet the job-related selection criteria established by the employers.

Our goal for this year is to better meet the needs of agricultural employers. As such, ADWS will continue to improve the agricultural referral process including, but not limited to, the following:

- Providing information regarding available services to workers when arriving at job sites;
- Engaging agricultural employers to determine short- and long-term employment goals;
- Providing agricultural employers with information related to farmworker rights;
- Developing strategies to facilitate and coordinate the engagement of the agricultural industry into the workforce development system; and
- Assisting agricultural employers in creating year-round, permanent jobs.

ADWS continues its partnership with the Arkansas Department of Education's Migrant Education Program (ARMEP). The Arkansas Migrant Education Division administers programs that provide supplemental academic and supportive services to the children of families who migrate to find work in the agricultural and fishing industries.

The programs are designed to help migrant children, who are uniquely affected by the combined effects of poverty, language, cultural barriers, and the migratory lifestyle, to meet the same challenging academic content and student academic achievement standards that are expected of all children. The State Monitor Advocate receives training from the Regional and National Monitor Advocates regarding the Agricultural Recruitment System and how it is used to assist employers get domestic labor prior to the introduction of H2-A worker requests.

To meet agricultural employers' needs, ADWS will continue its efforts to partner with agricultural associations 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.

(B) Marketing the Complaint System to Farmworkers and Advocacy Groups.

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 2022, all Local Offices have been trained and began using the USDOL's Complaint/Apparent Violation Form.

(C) Marketing the Agricultural Recruitment System for U.S. Workers to Agricultural Employers.

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.

(6) Other Requirements.

(A) Collaboration.

ADWS is fortunate to have strong partnerships with the NFJP programs within Arkansas. The Arkansas Human Development Corporation is col-located in many of the Arkansas Workforce Centers and staff of AHDC serve on local workforce development boards. Collaboration will continue to increase by involving non-core partners in staff briefings, meetings, events and training opportunities.

(B) Review and Public Comment.

NFJP grantees, other appropriate MSFW groups, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations and other interested employer organizations have been given an opportunity to comment on the AOP.

These groups include:

- Arkansas Human Development Corporation
- Arkansas United
- Arkansas Division of Workforce Services
- Communities Unlimited
- USDA
- U. S. Small Business Administration
- University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service

(C) Data Assessment.

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, 2022 through September 30, 2022 showed MSFWs received services equitable to those provided to non-MSFWs:

- Received Basic Career Services - Non-MSFW = 98.73%, MSFW = 96.23%
- Received Individual Career Services - Non-MSFW = 33.41%, MSFW = 43.4%
- Received Staff Assisted Job Search Activities - Non-MSFW = 8.91%, MSFW = 9.43%
- Referred to Employment - Non-MSFW = 18.72%, MSFW = 15.09%
- Individuals Placed in a Job - Non-MSFW = 70.67%, MSFW = 62.90

(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 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

Wagner Peyser Program Performance Indicators

The Assurances and Performance Indicators are added in the Appendix 1 at the bottom of this document and/or WIOA State Plan Portal.

ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAM

(a) Aligning of Content Standards.

The Adult Education Section has adopted the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE)’s College and Career Readiness (CCR) Standards for Adult Education developed by Susan Pimentel. The CCR Standards cover literacy and mathematic skills, the foundations of education. The literacy standards cover five areas: reading, writing, speaking and listening, language, and reading foundational skills. Mathematics are also broken down into specific categories covering elements of broader areas such as geometry or algebra. However, to provide an overview, the standards cover numbers and number systems, operations, expressions and equations, ratios and proportional relationships, algebra, functions, geometry, measurement and data, statistics and probability.

Over the past several years, the Adult Education Section has participated in initiatives designed to support the implementation of CCR Standards. Adult Education has had teams participate in the Cohort 1 of the Teaching Skills that Matter project in Fall 2019 as well as Cohort 6 in the Spring of 2023. Teaching Skills that Matter trains teachers to integrate the nine important skills for adults: adaptability and willingness to learn, communication, critical thinking, interpersonal skills, navigating systems, problem solving, processing and analyzing information, respecting differences and diversity, and self-awareness across the five critical topic areas of civics education, digital literacy, financial literacy, health literacy and workforce preparation. The nine skills are taught using integrated and contextualized, problem-based, and project- based learning. Teachers who participated in these trainings were able to share lessons learned with others in the state and additional sharing opportunities are planned. Adult Education Section also participated in the Student

Achievement in Reading (STAR) initiative, provided by the Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education. The STAR program has provided targeted training of teachers in reading instructional strategies.

To further support teachers in teaching the CCR Standards, the Adult Education Section provides academic software, such as Essential Education and Aztec Learning, designed to support the CCR Standards to all adult education and literacy providers it funds. These platforms support the standards being taught and are used by teachers in the classroom for distance learning students and as off-site reinforcement of in-class instruction.

Through the Arkansas Adult Learning Resource Center, several workshops were held such as the Career & College Readiness Implementation Institute for ELA/Literacy and one for Mathematics led by Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS) trainers. Each is a two-day, face-to-face, intensive training that introduces the CCR standards in the relative subject and takes participants through a breakdown of the standards, providing the methods and materials needed to impact instruction. Follow-up sessions such as the virtual Career and College Readiness Implementation Institute for Mathematics Reflection offer opportunities to deepen understanding of the material. Incorporating CCR Standards allow instructors to teach the skills students need immediately in the context of high standards. Students learn more important workplace, life, and academic skills in the process of meeting their goals. Furthermore, requiring CCR Standards in adult education helps maintain its relevance and ensure that learners have the knowledge and skills required of a high school equivalency diploma.

(b) Local Activities.

The 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 uses federal funding to provide services to individuals with disabilities. The Adult Education Section 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 Adult Education Section are required to provide the following services: adult education and literacy activities, workforce preparation, and integrated education and training (IET). As applicable, providers are also required to provide the following services: English language acquisition, Integrated English Language Literacy and Civics Education, and Correctional/Institutional instruction. Optional services that may be provided throughout the grant period include workplace classes and

family literacy activities. In addition, the Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy (WAGE™), a job readiness program for unemployed and underemployed adults, which incorporates financial literacy, digital literacy, and workforce preparation shall be integrated into the curriculum. (State Requirement).

1. Adult Education and Literacy Activities include instruction and education services below a postsecondary level in reading, writing, and speaking in English, and computing and solving problems. These services increase a student's ability to achieve a secondary school diploma or equivalent, transition to postsecondary education and training, and obtain employment.

1a. Scope: All organizations receiving WIOA Title II funds, hereinafter "local providers," will offer Adult Education and Literacy Activities.

1b. Organization: The organization of Adult Education and Literacy Activities may vary according to the population served and the resources available, but all programs will follow the state's Adult Education Policies, the Assessment Policy and Distance Learning Guidelines, which outlines enrollment, orientation, assessment, instruction, and test taking.

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

Note: Eligible providers with less than 500 adults in their county (ies) that speak English "less than very well," based on the most current census data, are not required to offer English language acquisition programs. (State requirement)

2a. Scope: All providers will offer English Language Acquisition activities if there is a sufficient number of adult English language learners in their service areas.

2b. Organization: The organization of English Language Acquisition Activities may vary according to the populations served and the resources available, but all programs shall follow the state's Adult Education Policies and the Assessment Policy and Distance Learning Guidelines, which outlines enrollment, orientation, assessment, instruction, and test taking.

3. Family Literacy Activities include interactive literacy activities between parents or family members and their children. To offer family literacy activities as defined in WIOA requires coordination with other services for the children's component. Providers will assist students in their roles as parents and family members by providing foundational skills that enable them to support their children's learning needs and 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 (IET) activities is a service approach that provides adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement.

7a. Scope: Current local providers must align their IET program(s) with the local workforce development board plan or based on the needs of a local employers. New adult education providers must have in place or be in the process of establishing an integrated education and training program by July 1, 2025. 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. Adult Education Section 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 include instruction that entails the knowledge of properly making decisions pertaining to certain personal finance areas like real estate, insurance, investing, saving, tax planning, and retirement. Financial literacy will be integrated into the curriculum to assist learners in financial matters to confidently take effective action that best fulfills personal, family, and global community goals. (State Requirement)

8a. Scope: All providers will offer financial literacy activities.

8b. Organization: The organization of workforce preparation activities may vary according to the populations served and resources available, but all programs will follow the state's Adult Education Policies, the Assessment Policy and Distance Learning Guidelines, which outlines enrollment, orientation, assessment, instruction, and test taking.

Due to WIOA standards, the 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 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 adult learners in transitioning to the workforce. Career Service Providers are trained to study each local job market and review data from the One-Stop to communicate high demand openings and career options to students as they choose a career pathway. CSPs play a key role in several programs and services offered through adult education 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, conduct mock and actual interviews onsite and assist with students' transitions into the workforce. Students who have a desire to study specific trades that offer apprenticeships receive relevant training in these occupational clusters that are vital to each local community. 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.

Funds for eligible providers 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 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 Adult Education Section will review the performance levels of providers each year to ensure continuous improvement of outcomes.

Providers serving individuals in a correctional facility must offer adult education and literacy activities leading to secondary credit and offer transition to re-entry initiatives and other post-release services to reduce recidivism. In addition, the Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy (WAGE™), a job readiness program for unemployed and underemployed adults, which incorporates financial literacy, digital literacy, and workforce preparation shall be integrated into the curriculum. (State Requirement).

Each eligible agency using funds provided under correctional education must give priority to serving those individuals who are likely to leave the correctional institution within five years of participation in the program. Providers who receive correctional education funding are expected to offer integrated education and training and develop career pathways and apprenticeship opportunities where safe and applicable in the correctional environment (State Requirement). Programs are encouraged to use guidance and supportive services where possible and to provide education and training through cooperative efforts with providers in correctional settings.

As determined through the intake process, special education will provide appropriate and effective instructional and testing accommodations for students identified as having a disability. Peer tutoring is a tutoring arrangement in which students work in pairs or on projects or assignment-based instruction to help one another learn the material or practice an academic task.

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 the confinement or rehabilitation of criminal offenders. A criminal offender is any individual who is charged with or convicted of any criminal offense.

In addition to any reports required by the Adult Education Section, 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 be limited to, activities carried out under this section, the relative rate of recidivism, enrollment, educational gains and/or High School Equivalency outcomes, employment (sustainable wage), and employment retention (length of employment).

(d) Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education Program.

The Adult Education Section operates Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) under Section 243 to provide educational services to adult English language learners (ELLs), including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries to acquire English language skills necessary to function effectively as parents, workers, and citizens. IELCE program providers are established through an open and competitive process that is direct and equitable. The Adult Education Section held a competition in February 2020 for a four-year grant from July 1, 2020, through June 30, 2024, to fund IELCE programs as an optional grant. Awarded were seven (7) local providers with Section 243 funding. The Adult Education Section will conduct its next Request for Proposal (RFP) in the 2023-2024 program year.

Several local adult education programs have collaborated with Arkansas United Community Coalition, an immigrant advocacy group, working since 2010 to provide information and resources to those entering the state. These partnerships have been helpful by making individuals familiar with Arkansas United aware of adult education services and by assisting students, including those with professional credentials in their native countries, understand their options through the legal and other services provided by Arkansas United and their other partners.

State staff has participated in webinars by Enhancing Access for Refugees and New Americans to learn how to better serve English language learners who are professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries. One of the goals of this project is to apply an immigrant integration and inclusion lens to support learners' linguistic, economic, and civic integration needs. Pillars of immigrant integration and inclusion includes civic integration, linguistic integration, and economic integration. Adult education providers can play a key role in civic integration by assisting or referring participants to agencies that can verify foreign credentials, assist with government documentation attainment, and navigate community services. In terms of linguistic integration, adult education providers can integrate multilingual strategies that assist immigrants and English language learners in improving their English and math proficiency, supporting the educational and skill achievement of parents and family members, and assisting adults to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills for employment and economic self-sufficiency. In terms of economic integration, providers can integrate workers' rights and responsibilities, workplace digital competencies, and career exploration, into the curriculum.

Local programs awarded Section 243 funds are required to offer at least one IET aligned with the needs identified by the local workforce development boards or based on the needs of local employers. Activities such as reading classes, focused on government and the United States Constitution, provide contextualized instruction opportunities designed to teach civic principles while supporting language acquisition, qualifications of U.S. citizenship, and the steps required to achieve citizenship are studied, as well as the rights and responsibilities of American citizens.

Participants are assessed to identify the level of proficiency with the English language and their academic and career aptitudes and interests. Based on the results of assessments,

students are assisted with English language instruction, workforce training, civics education, workforce preparation, financial literacy, and digital literacy. Students have participated in field trips and workshops on topics such as home ownership, utilizing the library, including completing the process of obtaining a library card, and learning of available resources there.

Providers who receive Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education must offer integrated education and training (IET) to English language learners. Adult education providers must offer students integrated education and training (IET) programs. IET is a service approach that provides adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement. An IET program must include three components: adult education and literacy activities, workforce preparation activities, and workforce training.

In addition, as part of a career pathway, the design of an IET program should support the local and state workforce development board plans as required under WIOA. Adult education providers must offer Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy (WAGE™), a job readiness program for unemployed and underemployed adults, trademarked by the Adult Education Section, to English language learners. The WAGE™ program is designed to provide workforce preparation and training for an in-demand occupation.

A career coach assists English language learners with career exploration and identifying a career pathway. Career coaches, through the National Career Development Association (NCDA) Career Service Provider course are trained in helping skills, labor market information, career assessment, employability skills, and program management to name a few. Career coaches have been very instrumental in helping individuals with job search skills, resumes, mock interviews, identifying a career pathway, and enrolling in postsecondary education and training programs. In addition, career coaches help eligible individuals reduce barriers by providing supportive services such as childcare, assistance with transportation, and tuition and supplies.

Statewide academic online software programs such as English in Action and Burlington English are supplemented to reinforce teacher-led instruction. Burlington's blended curriculum promotes academic preparation, civics knowledge, career readiness, and technology integration at all levels and areas of instruction. The IET/IELCE component of Burlington helps to prepare English language learners for a targeted career course of study. Learners are provided contextualized language, communication, and employability skills needed to help learners attain, succeed in, or transition to a new career. Burlington English includes a workforce component that makes it especially helpful in preparing students for employment. These resources can be used onsite and at home. Laptop checkout is made available to students who may not have a computer at home, providing continued access to these resources.

English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors have been trained on career pathways and career clusters to ensure that adult learners receive information on the employment options available and that career pathways are integrated into lessons. The Adult Education Section and the Arkansas Adult Learning Resource Center provide training on various methods of

team teaching. The “IET-Team Teaching Models” training provides instructors an explanation and demonstration of team-teaching methods. Implementing this training, vocational and English language instructors work together to plan and deliver instruction.

Students served with 243 funds are included in the state WAGE™ program, the workforce development arm of the Adult Education Section. The WAGE™ program prepares students with basic skills, workforce preparation, and industry-recognized certificates, and is the workforce development arm of the Adult Education Section. Students can earn a WAGE™ Level I, followed by a WAGE™ Level II certificate through which students receive the skills needed to obtain and thrive in a new career. As a part of earning a WAGE™ Level I certificate, students work with a trained Career Service Provider to identify their career interests and aptitudes, and prepare for job search as they receive practical, hands-on training on topics such as resume writing and interviewing. The Adult Education Section now provides opportunities for students to earn industry-recognized certificates in any of the 16 career pathways clusters through the WAGE™ program.

IELCE programs actively and specifically engage students by hosting guest speakers from and organizing field trips to local agencies and businesses as well as guiding students through language, civic, and employment education. Students also attend job fairs and participate in mock and actual interviews with representatives of local businesses. Career Service Providers also teach skills needed to maintain employment once hired, such as timeliness, collecting and organizing information, and teamwork. Through the WAGE™ program, students learn these and other workforce preparation skills, language instruction, and learn entry-level skills for their identified field of interest.

In WAGE™ Level II, students continue studies in their chosen field, earning industry-specific credentials to better prepare them for employment. Language instruction continues in support of student success and workforce preparation skills are more industry specific. Programs work with partner agencies such as Arkansas Rehabilitation Services and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) to fund the training and credentialing for eligible students. Students that are not eligible for assistance provided by other agencies may have these costs covered by available state funds. Local programs have had some frustration in identifying credentials for desired pathways of students who are unable to provide a social security number. Requirements of a social security number to take licensing examinations or to be employed in some roles have creating some roadblocks for students. The Adult Education Section and local programs are currently researching options to provide a clear path for students in this situation.

A statewide need for trained healthcare workers and clear career pathways have made healthcare one of the most popular career clusters in the state. Several adult education programs offer Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) training as a part of their IET offerings. Additionally, Pharmacy Technician, offered digitally through Aztec, and Phlebotomy are becoming increasingly popular offerings in the state.

Local programs partner with area business and industry to identify IETs that will provide employment opportunities with a living wage or provide stackable credentials leading to

improved employment and wage outcomes for students. To date, programs have had students prepare for careers in hospitality, health sciences, retail sales, and construction.

Adult Education services are provided in each of the 75 counties of the state. Adult Education programs operate in all comprehensive one-stop locations and in multiple affiliate sites.

Adult Education programs hold job fairs and an Open House, with participation from partner agencies. The Division of Workforce Services offers Mobile Workforce Centers, RVs and trailers equipped with computer stations with internet access, printers, copiers and manned by trained staff that are available to travel to locations throughout the state, assisting citizens with job search and resume creation. These Mobile Workforce Centers have been included in Open House and job fair events held at local adult education programs and have been a valuable resource for assisting individuals immediately.

Communication with students who have low levels of English language proficiency is addressed through several means. In workforce centers for which ten percent of population in the targeted service area speak a certain language, it is required that applications, grievance procedures, and any documents requiring a participant's signature are provided in that language. Workforce centers are also encouraged to provide other information in commonly spoken languages locally. Local adult education programs provide marketing materials in the One-Stop locations and in the communities in the most common languages spoken locally other than English. Additionally, marketing and other program materials are developed in language not to exceed the eighth-grade level.

The Adult Education Section provides both an English and Spanish version of the Intake form, as Spanish is the most common first language in the state. Documents are translated to other languages as needed in areas where there are significant numbers of people who speak other languages such as Marshallese, Vietnamese, etc. Software such as Google Translate, Microsoft Translator, and iTranslate are used to communicate with those who speak other languages to identify needs that may be addressed by participation in adult education, partner agencies, or other area resources. Several programs have staff members who can speak common languages other than English and the Adult Education Section employs two staff members who speak fluent Spanish and have assisted in some cases.

Some IELCE participants can receive the benefit of having training costs covered by Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or Arkansas Rehabilitation Services. Students seeking immediate employment are also led to the Division of Workforce Services for assistance with job search.

(e) State Leadership.

The Adult Education Section will use no more than 12.5% of State Basic federal funds grant for the following adult education and literacy activities to develop or enhance the adult education system of the state:

(A) The alignment of adult education and literacy activities with other one-stop partners to implement the strategies in the Unified or Combined State Plan as described in section 223(1)(a).

Since Fall 2015, a WIOA Executive Committee comprised of key core partners that include representatives from Titles I and III (Division of Workforce Services), Title II (Adult Education Section), Title IV (Arkansas Rehabilitation Services and Division of Services for the Blind) meet to discuss strategies in getting those with barriers to employment into the workforce and to meet employers needs in the state. In addition, representatives from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Employment and Training programs under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP E&T), Trade Adjustment Assistance for Workers, and Unemployment Insurance also participate in the WIOA Executive Committee Meetings.

Ensuring that adult education and literacy activities are aligned with core programs and One-Stop Partners are a requirement of the Request for Proposal application process for Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) funds. Local workforce development boards are allowed to review and comment on the RFP application of each eligible adult education applicant. One of the considerations is how the eligible provider demonstrates alignment between proposed activities and services to the one-stop partners. This includes how the applicant plans to align with the LWDB regarding employment, training, education, and supportive services that adult education learners need. In addition, the eligible adult education application must include the applicant's proposed activities, services, and the regional needs identified in the LWDB proposed local plan, including concurrent enrollment.

At the local level, an adult education provider serves on the local workforce development board as a representative of other adult providers in the region. In addition, adult education providers are located within most comprehensive One-Stop Centers when space is available and provide access to services at affiliate sites. For example, the UA Morrilton Adult Education program has a staff member who is physically present at the One-Stop Center in Conway, Arkansas. The staff member is appropriately trained to provide information to customers about the programs, services, and activities available through adult education. In areas of the state in which staff or space is limited, a direct link such as a telephone is provided in which customers can access services and information in real-time.

Another way in which adult education providers align services is through its integrated education and training programs (IET). IET is a service approach that provides adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement. An IET program must include three components: adult education and literacy activities, workforce preparation activities, and workforce training. In addition, as part of a career pathway, the design of an IET program should support the local and state workforce development board plans as required under WIOA.

The Adult Education Section contracts a portion of its Leadership Funds for professional development services to the Southeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative, Arkansas Adult Learning Resource Center (AALRC). With input from the state, the AALRC is responsible for facilitating professional development training to adult education providers, especially teachers, across the state. One area of trainings that the state has focused on is Career Pathways. Since 2021, over 144 professional development hours were provided in related topics such as Career Pathways, Contextualized Learning, and Integrated Education and Training (IET).

Adult education providers work closely with community colleges and other training providers to offer the training component of the IET. Community colleges serve as the fiduciary agency for 22 of the 37 adult education and literacy providers. Adult education providers rely heavily on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) and other educational entities for the training component as many adult education providers provide the workforce preparation and basic skills component of the IET. In addition, adult learners are connected to programs such as TANF, WIOA, and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services to help pay tuition costs, as Title II funds cannot pay tuition on learners' behalf. This braided funding approach allows programs to maximize the services and allows adults to be co-enrolled in multiple programs.

Adult education also provides National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) testing for Title I and Title III participants. The Arkansas Career Readiness Certificate involves collaboration between Adult Education, the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, and Arkansas Workforce Centers. Adult education programs provide basic skills improvement through regular adult education services when test takers fail the CRC twice. In addition, some providers serve as proctors and test administrators of the National Career Readiness Certificate. In recent years, this initiative has begun offering the Platinum CRC, which requires higher skill levels to earn, creating a greater need for Adult Education services. In summary, the Adult Education Section has worked in close collaboration with its partners to ensure success in implementation of the State Plan and thereby, meeting the needs of Arkansans.

(B) Establishment or operation of a high-quality professional development program as described in section 223(1)(b).

Professional development services are administered by the Arkansas Adult Learning Resource Center (AALRC), funded through the Southeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative by the Adult Education Section. The AALRC is responsible for identifying, evaluating, and disseminating materials and information to adult education and literacy programs. The Adult Education Section and AALRC provide information through email, newsletters, and discussion lists and through Zoom webinars.

The AALRC coordinates and presents in-depth professional development training that coincides with the goals and vision of the Adult Education Section and aligns with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the Title II AEFLA program. Throughout the year, the AALRC and the Adult Education Section assess the needs of local programs areas through evaluations/surveys, meetings, and general discussions

or requests by phone and email and provide any new software, materials, or resources necessary to accommodate program needs for continued progress.

The Adult Education Section hosts the Fall and Spring Administrators' Meetings through the AALRC annually. Some of the topics of the Fall meeting focused on programs being student-focused, contextualized learning, training on Integrated Education and Training, customer service training, and a discussion of using data to develop recruitment and retention plans. The Spring meeting highlighted best practices, student and teacher recruitment, motivation, and retention. The meeting also focused on the leadership development of directors and included a SWOT Analysis and components of an effective program self-study. Additionally, the Adult Education Section recognizes providers for achievements such as the highest measurable skill gains, credential attainments, and retention rate of all programs in the state. Programs who showed the greatest improvement in these areas are also acknowledged during this time.

Recognizing the lasting and profound impact that COVID-19 made on society, the AALRC continues to incorporate training on mental health and wellness, including the importance of self-care. Although the number of in-person training increased this year, the Adult Education Section and the AALRC recognized that virtual or distance learning would continue to be an essential tool for educating students and staff; as such, efforts have continued to find ways to accommodate program needs in the areas of distance learning and technology. The AALRC's plan to offer more online training has included additional self-paced course offerings added to the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) online portal for programs. The AALRC also hosts a YouTube Channel that houses recorded training on using specific software applications and other relevant training beneficial to staff. Providing easy access to these workshops allows users to review and refresh their learning at their convenience. Other online professional development forums are maintained through Canvas and LINCS as well.

Unique goals accomplished this program year through a collaborative effort include:

- Coordinated a team to participate in the Digital Resilience in the American Workforce Training (DRAW) Cohort 1. The team attended training beginning January 2023 and requested a digital literacy self-assessment from all instructors as a part of the process. The information learned was used to develop training presented during the 2023 Teachers' Summit.
- Coordinated a team to participate in the IET Advanced Basic Bootcamp Training Series, which began in April 2023.
- Coordinated a team to participate in the Teaching Skills That Matter (TSTM) Training.

Improvements and expansion of the revamped Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy (WAGE™) program continued. The WAGE™ program emphasizes basic skills, workforce preparation, and industry-recognized certificates to make it a statewide model for Integrated Education and Training (IET). Training was offered on

integrating career pathways into the curriculum. The Adult Education Section now provides opportunities for students to earn industry-recognized certificates in any of the 16 career pathways clusters through the WAGE™ program. The Adult Education Section works with local providers to place particular emphasis on developing complete career pathways programs that provide students the opportunity to earn certificates in Workforce Preparation, Hospitality and Tourism, Health Science, Business Management, Education and Training, and Manufacturing to meet the needs identified by regional workforce development boards. The Adult Education Section supports completion of these credentials by offering scholarships to students that cover course and/or material costs.

The AALRC utilizes the online ESC Works system to track the professional development activities of faculty and staff in Arkansas. Participants can manage their transcripts of courses completed through the AALRC and from outside sources (i.e., state and national conferences, LINCS, etc.) in ESC Works.

(C) Provision of technical assistance to funded eligible providers as described in section 223(1)(c).

The Adult Education staff and the AALRC provide intense technical assistance to eligible providers. Some areas in which technical assistance was provided include:

- Technical training on the agency's data management system, provided by the Adult Education Section staff.
- To improve data entry, short webinars were developed and delivered throughout the year to focus on specific areas of need as identified by questions received and issues identified through data reviews.
- Technical support provided by the AALRC's Information Technology Specialist related to software and hardware issues and questions.

The Adult Education Section will continue to offer technical assistance to eligible providers. Many program directors and teachers have registered with the Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS), which offers a plethora of resources, professional development, and an opportunity to connect with other practitioners. If the AALRC or state staff is unable to offer training or a training has passed, LINCS offers multiple training topics such as Integrated Education and Training, Career Pathways, English as a Second Language, Distance Learning, and content areas such as reading, math, and science. LINCS allow individuals to get up to speed quickly in During administrators' meetings and through the professional development resource center, AALRC, trainings by experts in the field of English as a Second Language, Learning Disabilities, Math, Literacy, Distance Education, and much more continue to be offered. These offerings have become even more important during times when onsite trainings were limited due to the pandemic.

Mandatory Administrators' Meetings are held semi-annually during which policies and procedures are discussed and information is disseminated. During the

administrators' meetings, providers also share best practices with one another as well as gain additional professional development training from staff or guest speakers. Additionally, state-level partners share pertinent information with local directors to assist with local collaboration. For safety reasons, the most recent meetings were held virtually.

The Adult Education Section staff provides technical training on the state's data management information system (LACES). The LACES trainings have been customized to fit the type of user utilizing the system. LACES- Data Entry covers the basics of entering student information, creating classes, enrolling students in classes, entering assessments, entering attendance hours, and other basic data entry topics. LACES 101 highlights the link between data and program performance and funding, running federal tables, ensuring quality data, basic data searches and reports. LACES for Directors focuses on data dives to analyze student enrollment and performance, program and class level data analysis and creating data driven queries. LACES for Instructors focuses on how instructors, specifically, can use data to track student progress as they implement instructional methods and curriculum.

Training for new local program directors is provided through a one-on-one session within a month of hire, and an annual New Administrators' 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.

The Adult Education Section provides over ten data management information systems trainings per year regionally, as well as during administrators' meetings and conferences. Staff also provides webinars and teleconference training to providers. All providers participate in at least two data management information systems trainings per year. Technical support is available for LACES via email or telephone and by request, face-to-face, and weekly LACES office hours are provided via Zoom.

(D) Monitoring and evaluation of the quality and improvement of adult education activities as described in section 223 (1)(d).

Mandatory Administrators' Meetings are held semiannually, during which policies and procedures are discussed, information is disseminated, and providers can gain additional professional development from state staff, guest speakers, and each other.

The Adult Education Section monitors local programs through submitted quarterly reports, annual one-day site visits, and intensive three-day program reviews performed on each program every four years or as determined by their level of risk. One hundred percent (37/37) of providers received an annual site visit in 2022-23. Following completion of all visits, the program review and site visit instruments were updated in order emphasize topics such as collaboration with one-stop partners,

student credential completions and the integration of career pathways, workplace literacy, digital literacy, etc. across the curriculum.

The Adult Education Section also evaluates each program annually through an E&E (Effective and Efficient) calculation, currently based upon the programs' progress on the federally negotiated benchmarks in NRS Table 4. Programs not meeting E&E are provided with intense technical assistance to develop and implement a program improvement plan, with follow-up throughout the remainder of the program year. A new calculation for E&E using all performance measures on NRS Tables 4 and 5 was developed during 2022-23 and was shared with local program directors during the Spring Administrators' Meeting for 2023-24 implementation.

Adult education state staff evaluates providers quarterly through the review of each program's quarterly report submission. In it, providers review and report progress on average attendance hours, educational functioning level (EFL) gains, number and percentage of students post-tested, changes in major demographics, GED rates, etc. Quarterly reports also allow providers to review operational aspects of the program such as the percentage of funds expended, completion of required professional development, and completed personnel activity reports. Quarterly report reviews and technical assistance calls between state staff and programs evaluate and monitor the success and performance regularly.

The Adult Education Section 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, the Adult Education Section requests a full financial audit review by the state agency's finance department.

The Adult Education Section evaluates each program annually through an E&E (Effective and Efficient) calculation, currently based upon the programs' progress on the federally negotiated benchmarks in Table 4. Programs that do not meet the determined percentage of the benchmarks are provided additional technical assistance in order to prepare a performance improvement plan. Plan implementation

is monitored throughout the year. Upon not meeting the requirements of E&E for three consecutive years, the Adult Education Section makes a recommendation to the Arkansas Workforce Development Board as to whether the program should continue to be funded.

Lastly, mandatory Administrators' Meetings are held twice a year in which policies and procedures are discussed and information is disseminated. During the administrators' meeting, providers share best practices with one another as well as gain additional professional development training from staff or guest speakers.

(e) **State Leadership.**

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. Adult education providers must integrate technology in the curriculum. The state has invested in the purchase of statewide academic and essential skills software that can be used to assess learners' digital literacy skills. In addition, the Adult Education Section requires adult education instructors to attain six hours of technology professional development annually. The state also requires every full-time teacher to become Distance Learning Certified within two years. The course, Intro to Canvas and Growing with Canvas, train teachers on how to integrate technology into the curriculum. Classes are self-paced although the state offers scheduled face-to-face training for those instructors who need more hands-on training.

(4) Developing content and models for integrated education and training and career pathways. Over the past five years, the state continues to offer professional development and technical assistance training in integrated education and training and career pathways. This past year, one of the trainings hosted included "IET-Team Teaching Models." Some instructors were challenged by the concept of how to contextualize the instruction and how to work directly with the subject matter expert in devising a curriculum and team teaching. Most, if not all, participants had a better understanding of the role of the ABE instructor as equal partner in the IET process. ABE instructors may offer basic skills support to learners outside of class to help them master challenging subject matter content.

(6) The development and implementation of a system to assist in the transition from adult education to postsecondary education, including linkages with postsecondary educational institutions or institutions of higher education. The Adult Education Section has two Career Coaches who are responsible for teaching the Career Service Provider Course. The Career Service Provider curriculum is owned and designed by the National Career Development Association. Every adult education provider is required to have a Career Coach on staff and go through the Career Service Provider course. Within the course topics such as Helping Skills, Labor Market Information and

Resources, Career Assessment, Career Development Models, Employability Skills, and more are integrated into the curriculum. The Career Coach is also trained in job search skills, resumes, mock interviews, and helping individuals to transition to post-secondary education or training. The state office has also created a Bridge Transition course in the state's learning management system, Canvas, in which Career Coaches can access PowerPoints, templates, and other resources vital to helping individuals transition out of adult education and into the workforce.

(8) Activities to promote workplace adult education and literacy activities. One of the services Adult Education provides to employers is workplace classes. Workplace classes include instruction at a workplace or an off-site location designed to improve the workforce's productivity for a company. Instruction includes contextualized literacy, writing, math, English language acquisition, and workforce preparation at Educational Functioning Levels appropriate to learners. Adult education providers have also provided computer skill-building for use on the job, specialized vocabulary relevant to the employer or industry, and basic on-the-job conduct such as being on time, attendance, and relations with peers and supervisors. The employer is a vital partner who helps guide and design the curriculum to meet the organization's needs. In addition, adult education providers also conduct literacy task analysis (LTA) on behalf of employers through the Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy (WAGE™) program. A literacy task analysis is a method of obtaining detailed information about the specific components of a job that require literacy skills such as reading, writing, computation, communication, creative thinking, problem-solving, personal management, and teamwork skills. A trained WAGE™ Coordinator consults with a manager and works with a group of employees to complete the LTA and gain an understanding of the abilities, skills, and knowledge of a specific job. The experienced employees serve as the subject matter experts who define the tasks and skills needed to perform a job successfully. Professional development activities on how to work with employers in developing workplace classes and conducting LTAs are important training mechanisms in the effectiveness in serving employers.

(9) Identifying the curriculum frameworks and aligning rigorous content standards. Since the adoption of the College and Career Readiness Standards, the state professional development has focused very heavily on training teachers on the new standards and how that information translates into the classroom. Some of the professional development trainings included Reading and Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, Science and High School Equivalency Guide for Educators. The state also incorporated Test Anxiety and Math Anxiety to better prepare learners in test taking strategies. Professional development training is also provided to English as a Second Language teachers to help English Language Learners (ELLs) progress within ESL levels to ABE levels. Civics education, workforce preparation and training are also integrated into the professional development trainings with instructors. Lastly, to help practitioners implement integrated education and training and connect with business and industry, this past year, the state focused on helping programs identify occupational and industry skills standards. Using the Competency Model

Clearinghouse as the foundation, providers are able to develop competencies needed for current or future employees and design the curriculum accordingly.

(10) Developing and piloting strategies for improving teacher quality and retention. The Professional Development Committee has created a New Teacher Orientation course in Canvas, the state's Learning Management System, for new teachers to complete. The New Teacher Orientation (NTO) is designed to provide an overview of adult education in Arkansas. This course was adapted from the New Teacher Orientation Course created by the Central Illinois Adult Education Service Center.

Objectives of the course includes understanding the structure, key elements, and priorities of adult education in Arkansas, an overview of the College and Career Readiness Standards, important components for effective instruction, and accessing important topics such as Professional Development requirements and registration, Adult Education Licensure Requirements, and teacher resources. In addition, adult education programs are required to assign new teachers mentors to support the instructor's professional growth and psychosocial development in adult education.

(f) Assessing Quality.

The Adult Education Section analytically assesses program staff and performance data in conjunction with surveys and responses to ongoing planned instruction to improve essential components related to adults in reading, language, and math. Using yearly performance trends, Arkansas Adult Education reviews the performance data in LACES of individual EFL levels associated with reading, language, and math scores of adults to measure the results. The performance results are measured with yearly negotiated benchmarks and compared to nationwide testing results and performance levels of top-performing states. Data is kept on individual providers so that results can be analyzed to determine possible influences of results.

Outside the capacity of participants to attend and make gains, individual providers and instructors have an influence on the attainability of participants. Arkansas Adult Education has identified components of education and literacy activities associated with availability and customer service levels as having an influence on the participant's attainability scope and retention. Arkansas Adult Education section reviewed the availability and hours of operation, scheduling and available courses, and enrollment peaks of participants throughout the year and on a daily schedule at each provider. Providers were made aware of the need to increase availability on nights and weekends with core subjects and low attending class schedules to increase opportunities for participants.

Associated with the availability of classes were the customer service skills of providers and instructors that can influence the success of participants. Multiple training sessions were held to share best practices in communication and follow-up methods with participants to improve customer service. Strategies were also identified in subject-specific lesson planning to focus instruction on key components in subject areas. A combination of methods is used to assess the effectiveness of professional development training to support local programs and instructors. Classroom observations, student educational gains, focus groups, and overall self-reporting tools are used to determine professional development effectiveness.

Data from the adult education management information system are utilized to evaluate and determine if and how the professional development activities impact student learning outcomes.

The Adult Education Section monitors the required training of local provider staff through annual site visits, program reviews, and desk audits. Site visits and program reviews address questions of staff training and staff performance. Staff needs are specified through local director requests, conference and training surveys, state staff assessments of performance, and professional development records of instructors at local agencies. The Adult Education Section reviews local performance, monitoring evaluations, surveys, and requests to determine how to broadcast and distribute training needed to meet adult learners' needs and address any instruction deficiencies. Communicating the needs of professional development and training is conveyed through local advisory boards, senior management meetings, focus groups, and by analyzing performance data.

Arkansas has its own professional development resource center, The Arkansas Adult Learning Resource Center (AALRC). The coordination of the Adult Education Section's professional development programs is managed by the 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 identifying, evaluating, and disseminating materials and information to adult education/literacy programs. The AALRC is located in Little Rock, Arkansas, and has seven full-time employees, which include a Director, Professional Development Coordinator, Information Technology Specialist, Disabilities Project Manager, Media Coordinator, Secretary, and Administrative Assistant. State funds support employee salaries, while federal funds are used for the fulfillment of our mission.

Except in specific circumstances approved by the Adult Education Section, 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>).

The Adult Education Section has adopted the College and Career Readiness (CCR) Standards set forth by the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education. State staff, teachers, and directors from the field examined each CCR standard to align materials used in the field. Subject-focused trainings are provided to assist teachers statewide in delivering high-quality instruction based on the CCR Standards.

During the 2017 legislative session, the Arkansas General Assembly passed Act 1061 (the Right to Read Act). Beginning with the 2021-2022 school year, all kindergarten through sixth-grade teachers and kindergarten through 12th-grade special education teachers must show proficiency in scientific reading instruction (evidence-based practices that teach a

student how to learn to read). All other teachers must demonstrate an awareness. In addition to Act 1063, Act 416 of 2017 requires education preparation programs to teach scientific reading instruction. Since adult education teachers must have a current Arkansas teacher's license, they will also have to meet the Department of Education requirements to maintain their license. The AALRC also offers professional development training in other content areas, such as math, science, and social studies.

The AALRC supports practitioners and trainers through professional development opportunities at state and national conferences. Those include the Arkansas Association for Continuing and Adult Education & Adult Literacy Alliance (AACAE/ALA) Conference, Learning Disabilities Association (LDA), Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE) Conference, Hot Springs Institute for Technology, and California State University Northridge (CSUN) Assistive Technology Conference. The AALRC also supports local programs by maintaining a current library of materials, providing research support/information, purchasing/distributing software and materials, and upgrading/redistribution of equipment.

The AALRC uses a variety of methods to ensure that local program directors and staff are aware of professional development activities. An email is sent to the program directors explaining each training event, and event information is included on the AALRC website (www.aalrc.org) under the professional development heading. Information regarding training activities is also included in the AALRC newsletter, which is published quarterly. The newsletters are available on the website and mailed to each local program. For those attending training sessions, the AALRC pays travel expenses according to the state travel guidelines for those participants paid with adult education funds.

The AALRC uses a system called ESC Works to track activities and participants. Educators in the State of Arkansas must register for and track professional development events with this online system. Participants are able to manage their own transcripts in the system to add professional development attended outside of the AALRC (i.e., state conference or national conference). Arkansas Adult Education has begun to require providers to list the certificates, credentials, and professional development training of staff for each provider in LACES. Local providers and state staff can monitor staff training and licensing using the LACES data management software.

To assess the quality of its professional development programs, the AALRC uses Guskey's model for the Five Critical Levels of Professional Development Evaluation. Evaluations are aggregated and evaluated to determine the quality of training, and adjustments are made according to the results to improve the effectiveness of the professional development provided by the state through the AALRC and the impact on student learning outcomes.

Additionally, to improve the quality of adult education activities in the state, 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 is also collected on each instructor/tutor, including personal data, title, certification, participation at conferences and required training, classes assigned, 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 who enter post-secondary education or gain employment are tracked.

All adults who have received services and completed intake forms are entered into LACES whether or not an assessment has been administered and recorded on Table 2a. All adults who receive services from adult education and literacy programs are considered Reportable Individuals. Individuals 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) and recorded on Table 4. 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 for the previous month's data by the 22nd of each month. This includes student participation and attendance, pre-test and post-test scores. Students with both a pretest and post-test will be recorded in NRS Table 4B, which is a required federal table. In addition, all assessment scores in the system should be dated on the exact date the test was given. Test documentation must be available in the students' files and is subject to monitoring during site visits and program reviews.

Each program is required to maintain and follow a written policy and procedure for data entry that includes checks and balances for data collection steps, personnel responsible for entering data, and personnel who check and verify data that aligns with the state's assessment policy. Adhering to a written policy that aligns with the state's assessment policy is expected and monitored for all adult education providers, regardless of location. Verification of data is checked through desk audits, quarterly reports, and on-site visits by state program advisors.

According to Assurance 13 of the 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.

The Adult Education Section staff reviews and analyzes data in LACES regularly throughout each year to monitor change, assess trends, and address anomalies and factors of performance. Adult Education monthly reports, administrator meetings, advisory board meetings, WIOA monthly meetings, Senior Management meetings, desk audits, LACES pieces of training, quarterly reports, and other associated projects all encompass sharing regularly monitored and analyzed data with the field. As data is monitored and analyzed, the Adult Education Section reviews best practices and ways to address improving aspects of performance and improve the quality of adult education activities in the state whether through training, site visits, desk audits, or other assistive strategies.

When the Adult Education Section analyzes and identifies sub-performing data, meetings are held to address ways to improve performance and offer technical assistance. The Adult Education staff addresses key indicators of data affected and attends to strategies local providers can manage to improve areas of performance that were identified and addressed. Utilizing a team approach of state program advisors, regular meetings are scheduled with local providers where issues are addressed. Goals are set to correct and enhance the delivery of adult education services to participants. Adult Education staff continue to meet regularly with local providers until goals are satisfied and aligned to improve the quality of adult education activities in the state.

When common data trends are identified, the Adult Education Section prepares technical assistance strategies to address those trends. Utilizing webinars and Zoom training, issues can be addressed quickly, while Administrators' meetings and other conference dates are used to develop specific pieces of training to address issues. Regional LACES trainings are also held throughout the year to address local and regional providers. These regional pieces of training target a myriad of well-developed LACES training while including site-specific and regional-specific strategies for improvement.

The Adult Education Section uses annual site-visits monitoring reports to assess and assist local programs with key areas of program performance. Each area of compliance on the site-visit form is aligned to assist local providers in meeting the 13 Adult Education Assurances. Areas of compliance include; reviewing student data kept on file that match data in LACES; the number and percentage of missing Social Security Numbers; manual outcomes completed, valid IET, compliance with the Assessment Policy, Advisory Board compliance, managed enrolled classes being offered; the usage of technology and software; providing evidence of preparing students for the workforce, the analysis of GED®'s, WAGE™ certificates, and credentials; recruitment and retention efforts; post-test rates; and among other compliance issues, how programs are working with WIOA partners.

The Adult Education Section addresses the Site-Visit forms annually after the site-visit season and reviews common findings, issues, and areas for improvement. These site-visit forms are adapted to curb trends and address key indicators of a healthy well-run program while addressing non-compliance issues across the state. State staff review economic trends, possible legislation, business and industry needs, and local and regional workforce development needs to help programs establish valid IET programs leading to certifications and credentials. The Adult Education Section continues to strive to improve opportunities and quality of adult education activities in the state.

Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program Certifications
Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program Assurances
Authorizing or Certifying Representative
Adult Education and Literacy Program Performance Indicators

The Assurances and Performance Indicators are added in the WIOA State Plan Portal.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM ACTIVITIES AND ASSURANCES:

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS)

(a) State Rehabilitation Council.

Arkansas has established a State Rehabilitation Council.

Composition of Council.

The SRC recognizes that it has positions that need to be appointed or reappointed and is working with the Governor's office to insure this occurs.

Council Representative	Current Term Number/ Vacant	Beginning Date of Term Mo./Yr.
Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)	1	2/21
Parent Training and Information Center	2	2/22
Client Assistance Program	NA	2/18
Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor (Ex Officio if Employed by the VR Agency)	2	2/22
Community Rehabilitation Program Service Provider	1	2/20
Business, Industry, and Labor	1	2/22
Business, Industry, and Labor	2	2/22
Business, Industry, and Labor	2	2/22
Business, Industry, and Labor	2	2/22
Disability Advocacy Groups	1 1	2/21 2/22
Current or Former Applicants for, or Recipients of, VR services	2 1 1	2/20 2/21 2/22
Section 121 Project Directors in the State (as applicable)	NA	
State Educational Agency Responsible for Students with Disabilities Eligible to Receive Services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	1	2/21
State Workforce Development Board	2	2/20
VR Agency Director (Ex Officio)	NA	

Composition and Meeting Requirements.

The bylaws of the Arkansas State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) indicate the Council is to meet the third Thursdays of March, June, September, and December of each year and for special meetings as called by the Chair. During PY 2022 the SRC met September 15, 2022, December 15, 2022, March 16, 2023, and June 15, 2023.

Summary of Council's Input to State Plan.

The Arkansas State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is a Governor appointed citizen advisory council 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.

As the State has recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic, the SRC transitioned from an exclusive virtual meeting application to a combination face-to-face/virtual format when conducting both quarterly and called meetings. The SRC provided input regarding the following:

- The most recent comprehensive statewide needs assessment.
- An approved list of impartial hearing officers.
- The Rehabilitation Services Administration monitoring of ARS and resulting Corrective Action Plan.
- The development and implementation of a new Client Satisfaction Survey.
- The development of new goals and priorities for the PY2024-2027 State Plan.

Response to Council's Input and Recommendations.

ARS values its relationship with the Council and the input and recommendations provided by SRC members. During the December 2022 quarterly meeting, the SRC discussed the two Client Satisfaction Surveys utilized at plan development and closure and determined they provided insufficient data to assess client satisfaction. As a result, an SRC sub-committee was formed with select agency staff assigned to provide support. After multiple subcommittee meetings a new Client Satisfaction Survey system was developed and presented at the March 2023 quarterly meeting. Following discussion and approval by the full SRC, ARS accepted the new survey system with the understanding that it would be implemented on a pilot basis to determine whether it achieved desired results. ARS appreciates the hard work of the SRC members that participated in this project.

ARS did not reject any input or recommendations from the SRC.

(b) Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA).

In spring 2022, ARS, in agreement with the State Rehabilitation Council, contracted the University of Arkansas at Little Rock to conduct the most recent Arkansas Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. A mixed method approach was utilized to collect relevant and applicable data including surveys, questionnaires, focus groups, and telephone and face-to-face interviews of ARS' current and previously served clients, ARS staff including senior leadership, vendors, business partners, and other relevant stakeholders.

Key Findings:

Internal constituencies perceived those individuals who require long-term support and

extended services to maintain employment and those individuals with an undiagnosed/diagnosed psychiatric/mental health disability were most likely to have unmet needs. Results indicated that for those with unmet needs, the lack of supportive services likely impacted clients with the most significant disabilities and with multiple disabilities. There were several potential areas where those Individuals with the Most Significant Disabilities, Most Complex, or Multiple Disabilities may have unmet needs or additional needs beyond the general client population. External constituencies were split on whether there were barriers to accessing Arkansas Rehabilitation Services for clients with the most significant disabilities or those with multiple disabilities. However, there was consensus that those populations have additional barriers when it comes to achieving employment goals. Some external participants noted that there were additional needs in the areas of transportation, information about ARS services and programs, and technology access for those with the most significant, most complex, or multiple disabilities.

Recommendations:

- Transportation for those with the most significant disabilities is an issue for the vocational rehabilitation services sector nationwide. A consideration for this and other research questions is to address clients' needs for transportation to and from ARS services and places of employment – particularly in the rural areas of the state.
- Focus on building opportunities for real-world work experience for individuals with the most significant disabilities through volunteer and/or internship opportunities with businesses in their communities. This focus on real-world skills and experiences not only benefits individuals but can serve to both educate and potentially address social stigmas and perceptions businesses and the community may have about employing individuals with complex or significant disabilities.
- Individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program;

Key Findings for Individuals with Disabilities Who Are Minorities:

A review of environmental scan data over the past decade shows slight shifts for the state's racial and ethnic demographics where a growth rate of the population of people identified as White was 2%, while the growth rate of the population of people identified as belonging to another racial category was 10%. Although the overall percentage of Arkansans identifying with another racial category increased by just 1% between 2010 and 2019, the overall percentage of Arkansans identifying as Hispanic/Latino increased by 1.4% (from 6.4% to 7.8%). Similarly, increases in proportions of Hispanic/Latino-identifying Arkansans living in rural counties occurred between 2010-2019. Along with increases in rural counties, Hispanic/Latino-identifying Arkansans grew in urban areas and the highlands, with urban areas growing the most of any region during the decade. Additionally, most of the Marshallese population in the U.S. now reside in the Midwest with a significant number residing in Arkansas. Particular attention should be given to access barriers to ARS services found within these growing and potentially underserved populations.

Recommendations:

- There have been noted increased efforts at providing translation services for non-English speakers or English as Second-Language speakers. There were multiple considerations that arose from the various methodologies related to language barriers.

The following may serve to address these issues: hiring more bilingual employees that offer translation services or that primarily serve Spanish-speaking populations, providing other interpretation/translation services (e.g., technology investments), having multi-lingual resources that span administrative silos, or providing resources that assist clients with issues related to documentation.

- A narrower recommendation related to recruitment is the need to employ a workforce representative of the population it serves that may help bolster confidence/trust in the process of service delivery and better represent minority interests related to performance outcomes and fairness of service delivery.

Key Findings for Individuals with Disabilities Who Have Been Underserved or Unserved:

Arkansas is a largely rural state, even with the recent population declines for the state's rural areas. There was almost uniform consensus across constituency groups that a potentially underserved area/population for the state were rural areas with primary agreement on the need to address the underserved Mississippi Delta Region. Reviewing the county unemployment data, responses from staff perceptions about underserved geographic regions, and other confounding factors related to rurality (e.g., transportation, technology access, limited resources, and employment options) of this region of the state it becomes evident that there is a need for concerted effort to target services to this area. Additionally, the environmental scan data revealed mental disorders represented a large portion of the disabled beneficiaries in the state. Internal and external respondents noted the need to provide services to those with developmental disabilities, cognitive impairments, and other mental health/'invisible' disabilities. Additionally, respondents noted additional potentially underserved Arkansas client populations could include those individuals requiring long-term support and extended services to maintain employment – primarily those within adult populations.

Recommendations:

- Given that issues related to rurality and geographical regions of the state were the largest areas of consensus there are multiple potential areas to consider for recommendations including addressing: issues related to transportation, providing access to technology to bridge employment and locality service gaps, and expanding business and service provider networks to improve better access to ARS services and bridge existing gaps.
- Given that there were some expressed concerns related to specific disability diagnostic groups, there are several potential considerations which are proposed including:
 - Improving connections with hospitals, social work departments, and acute care organizations to better reach adults and those with acquired disabilities.
 - Cross-training and procedural coordination with ARS service partners to make sure that both primary and secondary disabilities are being adequately addressed and not lost between multiple agencies.
 - Partnering with academic entities and health sciences (e.g., University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences) for continuing education courses to better understand treatment options and specific disability types/issues.
 - Partnering with graduate programs in counseling/rehabilitation to provide continuing education around rural services as well as adding this focus to graduate training course content.

Key Findings Regarding Centers for Independent Living

While nearly two-thirds of ARS staff understand what the Centers for Independent Living (CILs) in Arkansas do, a third are unsure or unaware of their scope of services offered. Since the Centers for Independent Living in Arkansas operate autonomously and in coordination with ARS this is not surprising from an external evaluation perspective. Similarly, only a third of staff respondents partnered with CILs in Arkansas for their work. Of those ARS staff, the response was that CILs: (1) provide valuable services to citizens with disabilities; (2) offer benefits counseling that is both readily available and accessible; and (3) holistically do a good job of meeting the needs of Arkansas citizens with disabilities. The core services which were deemed to be most effective included information and referral and independent living skills advocacy training.

Key Findings:

Regarding integration into the Division of Workforce Services there is seemingly equivalent or better integration and physical proximity between ARS and the parent agency. Internal respondents noted that top-down leadership was collaborative, the relationship was productive, and there have been local integrations into workforce boards. Integration is continuing as ARS is a more specialized workforce entity comprised largely of full-time employees.

The relationship with the Division of Services for the Blind was also examined. While both Arkansas Rehabilitation Services and Services for the Blind are administratively housed in the same location, share policies with performance measures, are appropriated from the same budget, and are focused on vocational rehabilitation, there are numerous areas where the two agencies are incommensurable. Division of Services for the Blind has its own governing board rather than an advisory board, are extremely specialized in-service delivery, and operate under a distinct administrative culture and history from Arkansas Rehabilitation Services.

Recommendations:

Division of Workforce Services:

- Utilization or standardization of practices with a common referral form would be beneficial to make sure potential clients are properly referred to ARS and other providers.
- More regular meetings and communication between institutional partners.
- Common and established deadlines between ARS and DWS may help align varied institutional priorities and processes.
- Given different employee requirements and focuses, continue to utilize ARS expertise of field employees and DWS broad business network and other internal referral processes/databases.

Services for the Blind:

- More regular meetings and communication between institutional partners.
- It may be beneficial for both ARS and Division of Services for the Blind to collaborate to receive more clients, and ARS would gain greater access to additional rehab services.

Key Findings:

Transition-aged youth (14-24) and Pre-employment transition aged students (16-21) were routinely noted as the most served (i.e., least underserved populations).

The number of actively engaged schools, the overall favorable view of Arkansas Career Development Center (ACDC) in its expanded role for this population, the success in educational support and measurable skill gain programs, and the number of clients served under the age of 24 years-of-age all point to the success of ARS in addressing the needs of youth with disabilities and students with disabilities. The positive gains and outcomes can be largely attributed to an expansion of the mission, more pressures on internal organization with coordinated budgets/ overlapping expenditures and utilizing ACDC to facilitate programming.

Despite the numerous improvements there were some noted difficulties having access to training or education programs related to the physical location of field offices or youths not being able to both travel and stay at remote training/education programs. Additionally, given the focus on job exploration there are potentially avenues for additional training and support in the field for staff related to understanding job exploration and communicating with students, parents, and youth about paths for employment and how to build student's preferences, interests, strengths and needs.

Recommendations:

- ARS should offer more training to the field counselors and staff that specifically focuses on assisting clients in job exploration and coordinating with parents/caregivers to develop clear employment objectives. Ongoing communications with students and parents starting early can assist in determining paths for employment outcomes.
- Continue exploring online/remote programming as alternatives to traditional face-to-face programs/credentials.
- Identify the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State.

Key Findings:

Stakeholders mentioned they need more regular communication from ARS. Stakeholders also mentioned they need more referrals and more talented job coaches. Service providers want to continue to work with counselors they have established relationships with, so an external recommendation from stakeholders/partners was focused on ARS staff retention to maintain service quality and existing network relationships. Internally it was noted that ARS needs to get more feedback from its partners about the skills and abilities they are looking for in potential employees. ARS could use this information on skill and ability preferences to fine-tune the services offered to clients so that they will be able to properly match clients with businesses.

Recommendations:

- ARS should assign a schedule for regular check-ins between field counselors and partners/stakeholders. As part of this check-in process, ARS should gather feedback from partners to ascertain what skills and abilities they are looking for in prospective employees.
- ARS should offer incentives to attract and retain skilled job coaches and counselors to assist

with job development, placement, and training.

Findings Regarding the Arkansas Career Development Center

Internally, the Arkansas Career Development Center, and the services offered, were generally considered to be effective and important for ARS' clients. Through surveys, interviews, and focus groups, the internal populations noted positive programming and related outcomes. While all programs were generally well regarded, the Pre-Employment Transition Services and transition services for students with disabilities were generally more lauded than career and technical education programs. While there have been significant improvements for options with distance learning modalities, some respondents indicated that the Center was geographically removed and not an option, statewide, given the travel requirements. Respondents noted preferences for more short-term and online-training since the commute and physically staying at the Center's accommodations are not feasible or accessible for their client populations.

Recommendations:

- Continue expanding the online/distance learning and short-term programming to overcome barriers related to accessing services.

(c) Goals, Priorities, and Strategies

(1) Jointly Developed Goals, Priorities, and Revisions.

ARS and the State Rehabilitation Council developed and agreed upon goals and priorities based on the 2022 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment and the RSA 2021 Monitoring Report.

ARS will utilize PY2023 data as a baseline when evaluating effectiveness of goals, priorities, and strategies.

(2) Measurable Goals and Priorities.

Goal 1: ARS will meet State and Federal accountability and performance requirements.

- Priority 1: ARS will meet and monitor established performance accountability measures on a quarterly basis to determine progress in meeting federal/state requirements.
 - Strategy 1: Utilize the new Quality Assurance review tool and corrective action process to ensure case management quality and compliance with federal standards, and to address and remedy violations to federal/state requirements in a timely manner.
- Priority 2: ARS will provide career counseling to 14(c) program participants to meet Section 511 requirements.
 - Strategy 1: Track annually the number of individuals receiving career counseling.

- Strategy 2: Utilize counselors to meet with individuals at the 14(c) to complete the application process within a month of receipt of referrals from career counseling.
- Strategy 3: Track competitive integrated employment (26 closures) outcomes data annually from career counseling referrals.
- Strategy 4: Collaborate with the Helen Keller National Center to assure clients who are deaf-blind receive the employment supports needed by 2027.
- Priority 3: ARS will implement additional strategies focused on RSA identified areas of weakness to strengthen data verification requirements.
 - Strategy 1: Assess randomly selected cases at various stages in the VR process to identify areas of non-compliance to detect and incorporate the necessary instruction, training, guidance, etc. with the intent to strengthen data verification requirements.
- Priority 4: ARS will ensure current ARS policy aligns with Federal Requirements.
 - Strategy 1: Review and modify the current ARS policy to ensure it aligns with Federal requirements by October 1, 2024.
 - Strategy 2: After the initial policy modification, periodically assess and identify, and address in a timely manner areas of weakness, imprecision, and lack of compliance with Federal requirements.

Goal 2: ARS will reserve and use a portion of its funds for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of vocational rehabilitation services.

- Priority 1: ARS will develop and implement a comprehensive marketing plan.
 - Strategy 1: Inform potential clients, including those who are unserved or underserved of various racial, ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds about the services available through ARS.
 - Strategy 2: Leverage existing partnerships and develop new ones with WIOA partners, employers, secondary/postsecondary educators, and other organizations that provide services to individuals with disabilities to inform them of the different services and programs available through ARS' Field Services, Access and Accommodations, Arkansas Career Development Center, and the Business Engagement Unit.
 - Strategy 3: Utilize innovation and expansion dollars to support the Arkansas State Rehabilitation Counsel and the Arkansas Independent Living Council.

Goal 3: ARS will provide pre-employment transition and transition services to students with disabilities as outlined in WIOA.

- Priority 1: ARS will continue to expand Pre-ETS services through initiating engagement of students prior to the age of 16.
 - Strategy 1: Provide Pre-ETS services to students with disabilities starting at age 14 and begin the VR process at the onset of the students' junior year in high

- school.
 - Strategy 2: Work with human resources to review vacant positions for reclassification to transition counselors to assist with bridging the gap between Pre-ETS to VR.
- Priority 2: ARS will transition at least 15% of the students served to VR.
 - Strategy 1: Introduce students with disabilities to VR services starting at age 14 and begin the VR process at the onset of the students' junior year in high school.
 - Strategy 2: Work with human resources to review vacant positions for reclassification to transition counselors to assist with bridging the gap between Pre-ETS to VR.
- Priority 3: ARS will expand Pre-ETS, utilizing data, to unserved/underserved populations across the state by adding up to ten (10) new schools per year.
 - Strategy 1: Continue to partner with vendors and schools in all regions to provide Pre-ETS services to unserved/underserved areas.
 - Strategy 2: Continue to partner with Career and Technical Education (CTE) and Arkansas Transition Services (ATS) to launch exploration programs for students starting at age 14 and provide Work-Based Learning experiences in partnership with local community colleges and employers.
- Priority 4: ARS will increase the number of students engaged in Work-Based Learning, Pre-apprenticeships, and On-the-Job trainings by 15%.
 - Strategy 1: Continue to work with vendors and schools to provide Work-Based Learning, Pre-Apprenticeships, and On-the-Job trainings through informed choice and partnerships with CTE, ATS, and employers.
 - Strategy 2: Engage a minimum of five seniors per year in OJT and Apprenticeship opportunities.
- Priority 5: ARS will increase the number of Transition students that enter employment by having students work-ready upon completion of high school and/or postsecondary training by a target goal of 50% of the total students served and exiting high school.
 - Strategy 1: Work with schools, vendors, and the business engagement team to create and provide more work-based learning activities for students beginning as early as age 14, along with engaging students in more CTE opportunities while in high school to assist with vocational goal setting after exit from high school.

Goal 4: ARS will increase competitive integrated employment for Arkansans with disabilities.

- Priority 1: ARS will increase the utilization of apprenticeships and on-the-job trainings by 10%.
 - Strategy 1: Continue to strengthen collaboration efforts with the ARS Business Engagement team to identify potential employers.
 - Strategy 2: Work with the Business Engagement team to place a minimum of ten

- individuals with disabilities per year into an OJT or apprenticeship program.
 - Strategy 3: Continue to work with WIOA partners including local boards, Office of Skill Development, Arkansas Apprenticeship Coalition, and businesses that provide apprenticeships to identify potential apprenticeship opportunities and individuals for service.
- Priority 2: ARS will increase referrals and competitive integrated employment case closures by 10% through collaborative partnerships with WIOA partners.
 - Strategy 1: Continue to work with WIOA partners to implement a common intake process to help identify potential referrals.
 - Strategy 2: Increase the use of the short referral form to initiate services and decrease attrition.
 - Strategy 3: Adopt the rapid engagement method to move individuals through the VR process in an expediated manner through increased client engagement.
- Priority 3: ARS' Business Engagement Unit will increase referrals from businesses by 10% annually.
 - Strategy 1: Collaborate with Chambers of Commerce, WIOA partners, businesses, and community partners about Work-Based-Learning, On-the-Job-Trainings (OJT), AT@Work and Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work, and Disability Etiquette training by providing access to the Business Engagement Short Form Referral.
 - Strategy 2: Collaborate with Chambers of Commerce, WIOA partners, and community leaders to identify skills development training and/or employment referral opportunities for clients that are referred to the BEU from Field Services counselors.
- Priority 4: ARS will increase utilization of VR funds to 90% or higher of the authorized funding.
 - Strategy 1: Work with an outsource entity to assist with research of similar VR programs and rate setting.
 - Strategy 2: Utilize technical assistance to provide training to staff regarding fiscal spending and period of performance.
 - Strategy 3: Revise the current budget allotment structure to remove budget constraints.
- Priority 5: ARS will increase services provided to employers by increasing referrals to the Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work (SAW/RTW) programs by 10% with the goal of retaining employees with disabilities on the job.
 - Strategy 1: Utilize the SAW/RTW program to participate in, at minimum, one public marketing event per quarter.
 - Strategy 2: Increase services provided to employers by increasing referrals to the Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work (SAW/RTW) programs.
 - Strategy 3: Utilize the SAW/RTW program to provide semi-annual trainings to field staff across the state on how to incorporate the SAW/RTW program into their current caseloads.
- Priority 6: ARS will provide training to field service staff on the appropriateness and

implementation of assistive technology and services throughout the rehabilitation process.

- Strategy 1: Utilize AT@Work to provide one training per year to each field services region.
 - Strategy 2: Utilize Access and Accommodation staff to present content with regards to the identification and implementation of accommodations at minimum one event widely attended by field services staff.
 - Strategy 3: Utilize ICAN and AFP staff to provide updates on services quarterly to field services district managers during their monthly meetings.
- Priority 7: ARS will increase services provided to unserved/underserved populations by 15%. Services include transportation, access to technology, and expanding business and services provider network to bridge gaps.
 - Strategy 1: Continue to work with WIOA partners to implement a common intake process to help identify potential referrals.
 - Strategy 2: Develop new itinerary points and outreach activities to increase awareness with unserved/underserved populations.
 - Strategy 3: Utilize the 2022 CSNA as a baseline for unserved/underserved populations.
 - Strategy 4: Increase the use of the short referral form to initiate services and decrease attrition.
 - Strategy 5: Adopt the rapid engagement method to move individuals through the VR process in an expedited manner through increased client engagement.
 - Priority 8: ARS counselors will maintain a 90% rate for IPE development.
 - Strategy 1: Increase the use of the short referral form to initiate services.
 - Strategy 2: Adopt the rapid engagement method to move individuals through the VR process in an expedited manner through increased client engagement.
 - Strategy 3: Monitor percentage rates quarterly and continue to provide weekly updates on action alert items.

Goal 5: ARS will increase successful employment outcomes utilizing Community Rehabilitation Program and Supported Employment vendors.

- Priority 1: ARS will reach the national average for supported employment closures by PY2027.
 - Strategy 1: Reduce time from vendor referral to IPE development and service initiation to 60 days or less by PY2025.
 - Strategy 2: Revise Supported Employment Services policy and procedures based on direction from the Rehabilitation Services Administration monitoring plan by 2026.
 - Strategy 3: Convene CRPs to participate in identifying, sharing, and promoting supported employment services and the development of a methodology to determine reasonable and effective rates based on direction from the Rehabilitation Services Administration monitoring plan by PY2026.
 - Strategy 4: Collaborate with CRPs on contract changes that incentivize/reward higher quality outcomes based on established outcome measures by PY2027.

- Strategy 5: Host a Supported Employment training opportunity for ARS staff, CRPs, individuals, and families annually by PY2027.
 - Strategy 6: Research digital technology innovations for supported employment and accessibility supports to pilot by PY2027.
 - Strategy 7: Provide region-based training opportunities specific to the new Extended Services policy for ARS staff, CRPs, individuals, families, and other stakeholders once the new policy has been promulgated.
 - Strategy 8: Provide education opportunities on the availability, utilization, and funding of Youth Extended Services by PY2026.
 - Strategy 9: Meet with non-VR funding entities to leverage resources and assure the Extended Services funding available meets the prevailing wage or higher by PY2025.
 - Strategy 10: Produce information on Extended Services and funding sources for youth, individuals, families, and providers including but not limited to Ticket to Work-Employment Network partnerships, natural supports, and Social Security Work Incentives by PY2026.
 - Strategy 11: Request technical assistance support from the Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management (VRTAC) on supported employment and extended services.
- Priority 2: ACDC will increase its number of competitive integrated employment outcomes by 10%.
 - Strategy 1: Increase the number of distance learning options by two per year to increase accessibility of training statewide.
 - Strategy 2: Expand public outreach to increase knowledge of ACDC services.
 - Strategy 3: Continue to participate in apprenticeship/pre-apprenticeship committees and network with the entities that develop and provide apprenticeships.
 - Strategy 4: Initiate conversations regarding disabilities and ACDC services to a minimum of three schools with alternative programs per year.

(d) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals.

(1) Progress in achieving the goals and priorities identified for the VR and Supported Employment Programs.

Goal 1: ARS will meet performance accountability measures as outlined in WIOA.

- 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 will obtain 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 is ongoing to reduce errors in the case management system and to ensure more accurate reporting. A new monitoring tool for all performance measures was developed in FY2023 and is now in full production.
- Priority 2: ARS will provide career counseling to 14(c) program participants to meet Section 511 requirements.
 - ACDC and the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville annually host virtual sessions on career counseling and referral. Career Counseling Information and Referral (CCIR) individuals were referred to the ARS Field for services. The Field and the Community Program Development administrative specialist utilized MS Team for real time updates on referrals and quality assurance of actions by the ARS field related to CCIR referral.
 - 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 2023, 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. The revised QA monitoring tool will be integrated into the new CMS scheduled to go live in spring 2024.
 - ARS set the strategy to train personnel on acceptable data verification criteria and documentation. Training was provided to personnel on acceptable data verification criteria and documentation. Additional training was provided upon request and remedial training was provided based on case review.

Goal 2: ARS will provide pre-employment transition and transition services as outlined in WIOA.

- 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. For school year 2022-2023, ARS had 44 schools participating in WOLF, 16 schools enrolled in WIN, and 99 schools enrolled in a vendor program. ARS served an average of 1,318 students.
 - ARS set the strategy to expand Pre-ETS programming into underserved populations and regions of the state by increasing availability of service providers and increasing the number of school districts participating in Pre-ETS programming. ARS opened the Pre-ETS vendor application to provide services in counties located in south and southeast Arkansas. ARS accepted an additional

- five schools into the WOLF and WIN! Programs from south Arkansas.
 - ARS set the strategy to identify industry recognized curriculums and train counselors to provide direct services to students. This is a work in progress. There are several mechanisms of access to industry recognized curriculum and opportunities that lead to 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 at the local level by contacting Special Education personnel in schools and by attending school functions including student IEP meetings. ACDC contacted schools and asked to attend meetings and offered services. ARS Pre-ETS counselors participated in cross trainings with local school districts throughout the state at Cadre Meetings sponsored by Arkansas Transition Services. ARS Pre-ETS counselors were invited to participate in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) trainings held across the state with CTE and Special Education. Pre-ETS counselors are added to every special education team that registers and attends the Transition Summit sponsored by Arkansas Transition Services.
 - ARS set the strategy to create standards and 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 evaluation criteria have been developed and incorporated into the yearly Pre-ETS monitoring process and monthly reporting forms are utilized to evaluate student progress.
 - ARS set the strategy to increase awareness of viable work options within career fields associated with Career and Technical Education, through a summer pilot program in partnership with CTE and Saline County Career & Technical Center. ARS in association with core partners provided an exploration camp for 15 students entering the ninth grade (age 14) with IEPs.
 - 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 April 2024.
 - ARS participated in intensive technical assistance provided by NTACT and continued to support and work within the state team to implement strategies to support students with disabilities as agreed upon on by all parties on the state team.
 - The ARS state transition teams met every quarter to work on goals identified on the Transition State Plan. The state team has identified the following areas as needs and is actively working on developing strategies to meet the following goals: Meaningful engagement with parents and students; increased interagency collaboration at the local level; and data sharing agreements at the state level.
- 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 met the requirement to spend 15% of VR case services budget on Pre-ETS.
 - 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 was accomplished through ACDC programming and the CTE Career Exploration camp. ACDC students are provided information regarding CTE classes and encouraged to participate. Certificate trainings in Servesafe, OSHA, CPR and Professional Guest Services were provided via distance learning to high schools and juvenile justice facilities.
- ARS is required to provide students in Pre-ETS with paid and unpaid work experiences. This is occurring in Pre-ETS through the WOLF, WIN! and Vendor programs at participating high schools. In school year 2022-2023, 159 schools across the state participated in school-based programs. ARS served an average of 1,378 students.
 - 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 clients and monitor results. ARS Pre-ETS counselors were provided training, resources, and a streamlined process on engaging Pre-ETS participants in the VR process as soon as a need for VR services was identified. Counselors begin initiating the application process at the onset of a student's second semester of their junior year through the first semester of their senior year.
 - ARS will provide support and assistance to students and school districts across the state that are currently participating in and who have agreements to implement CIRCLES (communicating interagency relationship and collaborative linkage for exceptional students) to facilitate transition of students from secondary education to employment and/or post-secondary education. For the last six years ARS has been one of the leading states in the CIRCLES program implementation. Through CIRCLES, ARS engages students and school districts in collaborating with community providers such as mental health agencies, DDS, employers, DHS, Workforce, etc. to provide wrap around services for students with disabilities. ARS uses this program to connect with providers and parents to inform them about VR service, how VR services can help the student, how to apply for VR services, and how we work as a team with other participating supports to assist students with transition from high school to employment or post-secondary training.
- 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 increased distance learning training options to expand service reach statewide.
 - ACDC facilitated work readiness programming and work-based learning activities with juvenile justice incarcerated youth, which expanded from one juvenile justice facility to four.
 - ACDC piloted a hybrid Business/Logistics CTE class for high schools. The first class was conducted with Alma high school seniors in 2021-2022. It was well

- received and is in its third year at Alma. Students who participated in the class and the on-the-job work-based learning were eligible for class credits and industry recognized credentials. Due to the success of the class in preparing youth for employment and developing job opportunities for the graduates, ACDC is exploring other CTE class options.
- ACDC staff worked with juvenile justice clients, who are Pre-ETS students, and facilitated a pre-apprenticeship program. The Juvenile Justice Program includes work-based learning and work-readiness activities. In PY 2021-2022, there were 24 participants and in PY 2022-2023, there were 99 participants.
- 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. ARS supported pre-apprenticeships, internships, and OJTs for students. A Certified Nursing Aid pre-apprenticeship was initiated in collaboration with Fayetteville High School, and internships for Logistic Technicians were initiated in collaboration with Alma High School. In 2022-2023, four out of six students in the Logistics Technician program were employed following graduation.
 - ARS set the strategy to increase credential attainments in high school by moving Pre-ETS-VR ready students to VR services prior to graduation. ARS provided training and continues to provide training to field staff on capturing Performance Measures data as it relates to credential attainment and measurable skill gains. In PY2022, 371 students transitioned to VR services prior to graduation.
 - 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 WOLF, WIN!, and ACDC Pre-ETS services. There were 39 students who obtained direct employment from their Pre-ETS WBL sites during school year 2022-2023.

Goal 3: ARS will create effective partnerships to advance employment for Arkansans with disabilities.

- 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. In 2022, 1,731 face-to-face visits occurred with 876 as primarily marketing ARS services. In 2023, the BEU met with 2,070 business and community leaders with 1,263 focused on marketing of ARS services. This has provided a higher number of small to medium businesses with more resources to find and retain people with disabilities.
 - ARS set the strategy to maintain its partnership with Disability: IN-Arkansas and

- assist in membership recruitment by leveraging partnerships with existing business customers. Disability:IN-Arkansas along with the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities and sponsors held a NDEAM Business Summit with over 65 businesses present. Disability:IN-Arkansas is currently in the planning stages for future events.
- 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.
- 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. The BEU began meeting face-to-face with WIOA partners after the COVID ban was lifted.
 - 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 (Arkansas Adult Education, Planning and Development Districts, Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Blind Services, and Division of Workforce Services) regarding employment of people with disabilities through scheduled meetings, events, and meeting the needs of business to increase outcomes 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 with ARS representatives participating virtually.
 - ARS set the strategy to develop products and services that meet individual business customer needs. ARS utilized results of the comprehensive statewide needs assessment finalized in PY 22 to address this strategy. During PY22 BEU met with 1,731 business customers to provide various services training, recruitment, and referral.
 - ARS set the strategy to work with local workforce boards to identify local in-demand occupations. BEU staff attended monthly meetings of WIOA partners, Chambers of Commerce, and business/partner events to help determine local/regional labor market information and sector strategies, communicating high demand high pay job opportunities to ARS counselors and clients to meet employer needs.

- 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. During the years 2021-2022, OJT and apprenticeship forms and applications were updated and provided to BEU staff in April 2023.
- 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 FY2019 to 9 in FY2020 and maintained at 9 in FY2021. ARS served 65 total clients for job retention in FY2021 compared to 72 in FY2020. The SAW/RTW team closed 23 client cases in FY2022 and 26 cases in FY2023 with 26 currently open cases. These numbers indicate that the word is getting out about our services and numbers are continuing to increase as we partner with more and more businesses across the state. We served 122 job retention cases in FY2022 and 129 job retention cases in FY2023 both of which are all time highs for the programs.
 - ARS set a strategy to increase the number of employer referrals for SAW/RTW. ARS increased the number of employers served in FY2021 to 43 from 35 in FY2020. Access and Accommodations currently has the largest number of active cases from outside employers with 14. We currently have 26 active cases, all from outside employers. We served 91 new employers in FY2022 and an additional 61 new employers in FY2023. With our additional collaboration with business engagement, we hope to increase those employer referrals in the coming years.
 - 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. There has been little movement to report in this area. In FY2022 and FY2023, SAW/RTW participated in two joint events marketed to businesses and three employer meetings that were initiated by business engagement. We anticipate more collaboration in this area with the new strategic goals requiring collaborative meetings with measurable requirements on the number and frequency of those events.

Goal 4: ARS will increase effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery.

- Priority 1: ARS will determine effective methods to serve the underserved/unserved populations.

- ARS is working with the IT Committee for the finalization of the common intake process set to go live in 2024.
 - ARS partnered with DWS to host two trainings in PY2022 focusing on service and performance.
 - 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, Fayetteville, Helena, West Memphis, Russellville, and El Dorado.
 - ARS collaborated with WIOA core partners to host two state-wide meetings PY2022 with a focus on TANF, Unemployment Insurance, career readiness certificate, and offender re-entry programs.
 - ARS set the strategy to partner with local Hispanic and Marshallese communities to increase awareness and availability of services. ARS set up itinerary points in Jonesboro, Fort Smith, and Fayetteville to reach those who may not have access to traditional field offices.
 - ARS hosted a resource fair in PY2022 focusing on vendors and partners providing services to the deaf and hard-of-hearing community.
 - ARS implemented an AR Deaf Community newsletter providing information on services, resources, assistive technology, and upcoming events.
 - ARS continues to partner with Centers for Independent Living to provide information about ARS services throughout the state. Presentations are provided at local office meetings by the CILS for updates on core services provided. These activities provide opportunities for access to services such as advocacy, information and referral resources, independent living skills training, peer support, and transition services.
 - ARS set the strategy to partner with Centers for Independent Living to provide information about ARS services in the geographically underserved areas. In PY 2021-2022 CILS provided training at the local offices in counties covered by the CILS. ARS assigned counselors to serve as CIL liaisons who partnered with the CILS in resource fairs.
 - ARS utilized Project AWIN to provide benefits counseling to any Pre-ETS student receiving disability benefits who consent to receiving the service. Counseling is provided one on one with the student, guardian, and a Project AWIN CWIC and through group presentations about the advantages of participating in benefits counseling.
 - ARS set a strategy to provide training on special populations to include those with serious mental illness and autism spectrum disorders. ARS placed a spotlight on mental health awareness month for PY2021 and PY2022 by providing information and training from the National Alliance on Mental Illness, training opportunities for mental health first aid certification through Goodwill Industries, and training on Autism was offered through National Pathways to Transition, Emporia State University. ARS spotlights April as Autism awareness month. ARS provided training opportunities for counselors to obtain continuing education in the area of mental health.
- 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. Once Covid restrictions lifted in 2021, the BEU attended 63 Expos and Chamber events. By 2022, the BEU met and made connections through 137 Expos/Chamber events with RAMs or Field Staff attending 32, leading to a greater understanding of ARS services.
 - ARS set a strategy to participate in monthly “Core Four” partner’s meetings with other WIOA partners. The BEU acts as a point of contact for Core Four business services team members meeting monthly with the WIOA business services team discussing the needs of business.
 - 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. BEU resumed these activities once the pandemic regulations were lifted. BEU collaborated and held multiple meetings with Amazon that also included WIOA partners: Field Services, Adult Education, Workforce, and Central Planning and Development District. The hiring event for the underserved/unserved population resulted in the hiring of seven people with disabilities. BEU also held NDEAM events across the state and attended 28 joint business customer meetings with RAMs and counselors to identify high-demand, high pay employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
 - 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 is ongoing. Field managers are members of local WIOA boards and attend meetings to determine programs funded at the local level. Information is passed on to the counselors as a resource for similar benefits. Rehab area managers continue to serve on local WIOA boards that allow information and resources sharing.
 - ARS set the strategy to conduct partner meetings with educational training providers on a quarterly basis.
- 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. For PY2022, referrals totaled 163; 95 attended and completed Job Club; and 27 completed and became employed for 90 days or more.
 - ARS provided training to counselors about using LMI to assist clients in IPE development. LMI assists VR counselors in guiding ARS clients in career choices to promote the achieving of WIOA employment standards.
 - As a result of the combined efforts of VR counselors and Business Engagement Unit, in PY2020-2021 there were 458 referrals with 271 successful closures. In PY2021-2022, there were 163 referrals with 97 successful closures. In PY2022-2023, there were 204 referrals with 50 successful closures.
 - 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.

- ARS has established a continuous partnership with the Bank OZK and Amazon to review employer needs for increased job matches and employment outcomes.
- 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. ACDC provided presentations and training on accessing registered apprenticeship. The process is on-going.
 - ARS hosted on-site training for OJT in PY2022.
 - ARS staff participated in virtual training for apprenticeships/pre-apprenticeships and OJT through VR-TAC.
- 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.
 - 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.
 - 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.

Goal 5: ARS will increase the utilization of Community Rehabilitation and Supported Employment providers to achieve employment outcomes.

- Priority 1: ARS will increase the effectiveness of current and new external Employment/Supported Employment providers.

During PY2021, ARS Community Program Development:

- Cohosted the Biennial AR APSE Conference with 113 participants, which covered such topics as Medicaid Working Disabled (Keeping Your Insurance), Waiver funded/ARS Supported Employment, Life Charting and Transition Services.
- Participated in a Supported Employment Virtual meeting with ARS Rehabilitation Area Managers to discuss the impact of furloughed provider employment staff during COVID, that SE closures were less than 4%, the lack of referrals and how to locate referrals, vendor recruitment, family member support, career counseling, information and referral at 14(c)s, and Independent

Living Services.

- Trained approximately 20 ARS field staff on a PPTX MS Teams and The Box related to CCIR tracking referrals in the Excel spreadsheet.
- Trained field staff on “Why Counselor Liaison Reports Are Necessary.”

During PY2022, ARS CPD:

- Participated in two Medicaid Waiver Employment Summits with statewide participants committed to employment of individuals with the most significant disabilities.
- Participated in a quarterly meeting of the Deaf-Blind Interagency Committee hosted by Children and Youth with Sensory Impairments (CAYSI) and other disabilities, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), Special Education Unit. ARS, DSB, Education, parents, and teachers attended training by Griffin Hammis on the Discovery Process.
- Certified seven new employment service vendors. Currently, ARS has 80 vendors.
- Trained 610 participants including ARS field staff, vendors, and Medicaid Waiver managed care funders referred to as PASSEs. The topics included External Employment Services 101: E1st services, Supported Employment Services, Individual Job Coaching, and external Job Placement Services.
- Surveyed 28 attendees to evaluate the External Employment Services Training 101 and for additional input on their training needs. Based on the input training was developed to provide in-person interactive training on the Discovery Process and How to complete the Discovery Staging Record. ARS trained 70 participants.
- Hosted a Supported Employment meeting with ARS Self Employment Consultant, Empower Healthcare funder of Medicaid Waiver, SE provider and RSA funded Griffin Hammis Self Employment Center staff.
- ARS provided Career Counseling Information and Referral services virtually in PY2021 2,175 and PY2022 2,366 subminimum wage employees. ARS received 497 referrals. The CPD team monitored individuals requesting to work through referral to ARS.

Project SEARCH@:

- During school year 2021-2022, 72 individuals entered the Access programs and 59 graduated. In school year 2022-2023, 70 individuals entered the program and 56 graduated.
 - During school year 2021-2022, 14 individuals entered the Friendship Community Cares, Inc. program and 13 graduated. In school year 2022-2023, 20 individuals entered the program and 15 graduated.
- 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.

During PY2021, CPD:

- Surveyed CRPs and the ARS field staff about training needs.

- Provided employment services trainings per region for 544 participants consisting of ARS staff, providers, and other stakeholders.

During PY2022:

- Added seven new CRPs.
- Job Coaches certified 146 in PY2022 and 107 in PY2023
- Provided technical assistance related to employment for all, which included numerous meetings related to Employment First, the DOL ODEP System change grant, and the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities grant. Products of these activities included a white paper compilation on E1st activities in Arkansas, and a E1st bill. Surveyed 99 CRP staff with 11 responses received to collect information related to the number of employment staff and job coaches, job duties, agency costs, and communication with ARS field counselors or managers. CRPs were asked to provide outreach suggestions, training needs and challenges, and general input. Information provided was used to develop training modules on employment services and career counseling.
- Surveyed ARS field staff with 40 responses related to CRPs. The survey collected information on the field's connection with providers, counselor caseload identifier related to E1st and Supported Employment, input on building better relationships between the CRPs and ARS, outreach to get referrals, connection to referral sources like high school Special Education teachers, training needs related to Supported Employment Services, E1st Services, Job Placement and ARS' role in Career Counseling, Information and Referral. Information provided was used to develop training modules on employment services and career counseling.
- 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 increased distance learning training options to expand service reach statewide.
 - ACDC facilitated programming with juvenile justice incarcerated youth. The program grew from one juvenile justice facility to now four. Programming provides work readiness and work-based learning activities.
 - ACDC piloted a hybrid Business/Logistics CTE class for high schools. The first class conducted with Alma high school seniors 2021-22. The class was well received and is now going into the third year at Alma. Students who participated in class and on the job work-based learning were eligible for class credits and industry recognized credentials. Due to the success of the class in preparing youth for employment and developing job opportunities for the graduates, other CTE class options are being requested and explored by ACDC.

Outreach: Strategy: ARS provides outreach activities to individuals from minority backgrounds, individuals with the most significant disabilities, and others who are unserved or underserved.

- 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.

- 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. Partnered with DWS to create an internal referral process for UI applicants who have indicated they have a disability.
- Implemented and hosted Spring into Service events providing information on ARS services and employment opportunities.
- ARS hosted a resource fair in PY2022 focusing on vendors and partners providing services to the deaf and hard-of-hearing community.
- ARS implemented an AR Deaf Community newsletter providing information on services, resources, assistive technology, and upcoming events.
- ARS established a rapid engagement process, *Fast Wednesdays*, to take application, determine eligibility, and develop a plan onsite.

(2) Performance on the Performance Accountability Indicators and Discrepancies.

ARS achieved the following levels on the performance measures as reported on the PY2022 ETA-9169.

	Negotiated	Actual
Employment Rate Second Quarter After Exit	60.5	65.2
Employment Rate Fourth Quarter After Exit	57.3	64.6
Median Earnings	\$5,697.00	\$6,728.84
Credential Rate	28.9	35.5
Measurable Skills Gain	55.6	59.4

(3) The use of funds reserved for innovation and expansion activities.

During PY2022, ARS utilized I&E dollars to support the State Rehabilitation Council, the State Independent Living Council, and to support marketing activities targeting potential Pre-ETS students as well as unserved/underserved populations. Marketing activities included radio and television broadcasting, bus advertising, and social media posting.

(e) Supported Employment Services, Distribution of Title VI Funds, and Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services.

(1) Acceptance of title VI funds:

VR agency requests to receive title VI funds.

(2) Specific Goals and Priorities for Distribution of Title VI Funds.

ARS listed the specific goal to increase successful employment outcomes utilizing Community Rehabilitation Programs and Supported Employment vendors along with priorities and strategies and with respect to the distribution of title VI funds received under section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of supported employment services on page 13.

(3) Supported Employment Services Provided with Title I or VI Funds Following Placement of Individuals with the Most Significant Disabilities in Employment.

Quality

ARS refers individuals for Supported Employment services to one of 69 certified CRPs. Supported Employment services are provided to individuals with a most significant disability, including youth with a most significant disability. The services are individualized and customized, consistent with the unique preferences, interests, needs, supports (PINS), and informed choice by the individual. Supported Employment processes assist job seekers with job development, job placement, stabilization on the job, transition to Extended Services for 90 days or more to successful employment. Extended services are funded by other entities or by ARS for a youth under 25.

Scope of Services

ARS determines eligibility for SE services then develops a SE IPE with the milestones. ARS refers the client to the CRP services set out in the plan. CRPs provide the SE services toward competitive integrated employment. The CRPs are funded based on Milestone outcomes listed below.

Milestone 1 – Referral/Job Development (VR funded): A CRP meets with the client and the jointly agree to work together. The CRP accepts the referral by sending a Referral Acceptance Memo to ARS. During this service, the CRP provides career readiness activities (seeking employment, filling out applications, and interviewing skills, etc.) and assistance in the development, creation, or identification of paid competitive integrated work in a community business or self-employment setting.

Milestone 2 – Job Placement (VR funded): CRPs assist an individual in obtaining a job in a competitive integrated setting based on his/her interests, abilities, needs, and informed choice. The individual is placed in a competitive integrated employment setting with supports for a period of time needed and is compensated commensurate with others in the same position at minimum wage or above.

Milestone 3 – Stabilization (SE/VR funded): This service time frame assures an individual has learned their essential job functions with supports to meet the demands of

the competitive integrated work setting in assurance of long-term job success. The individual works successfully for the minimum number of hours per week that the individual has agreed upon in the IPE or amendments. ARS assures the transition to Extended Services for 90 days or more.

Extended services begin after supported employment services are completed and when the individual is stable on the job. ARS works with the client and others to identify the funding source. ARS may be the extended services provider to a youth with a most significant disability until the youth reaches age 25 or has received four years of extended services. Once ARS can no longer provide extended services directly to a youth with a most significant disability, ARS will seek funding from another service provider to continue the services.

The counselor and the client jointly determine the need for Extended Services and the appropriate funding stream at the original IPE development. The individual will complete the vocational rehabilitation funded supported employment services when placed in employment. The transition to the extended services occurs after the individual has become stable in the work setting meeting the essential job functions for the hours stated in the original IPE and/or amendments. After the transition to extended services, the individual must maintain employment for 90 days or more before the individual's case is a successful closure.

ARS Youth Extended Services policy allows ARS to fund support services for up to four years or age 25 if funding is not available through another source. ARS will fund Youth Extended Services through Individualized Job Coaching Services on an as needed basis after job placement. The Extended Services supports youth to ensure on-going stability, job longevity and includes onsite visits twice a month with the individual and the employer. Once the individual reaches the age of 25, ARS must assure extended service funding resources or natural supports are available through another source.

Youth receiving extended services funded by ARS will remain in stabilization status until the service is no longer needed and the youth is considered successfully employed or until four years of this service expires or the youth reaches the age of 25.

Once the case is closed successful (status 26), and support services are still needed, this service is transitioned to the entity responsible for funding, which may include payment through the individual's Home and Community Based services waiver plan for employment funded by the Provider-led Arkansas Shared Savings Entity (PASSE), the provider in kind donation, SSA Work Incentive Programs, Employment Networks, or other identified supports.

(4) Efforts to Identify and Arrange Other State Agencies and Entities to Provide Supported Employment Services.

The provision of SE services including extended services is addressed in the MOU and the SE provider contract.

(f) Annual Estimates.

(1) Estimates for next Federal fiscal year

(A) VR Program

Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under VR Program	Costs of Services using Title I Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
N/A	270,410	11,498	\$29.3 Million	N/A

(B) Supported Employment Program

Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under Supported Employment Program	Costs of Services using Title I and Title VI Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
N/A	12,200	521	\$1,425,000	N/A

(g) Order of Selection.

The VR agency is **not** implementing an order of selection and all eligible individuals will be served.

(1) For VR agencies that have defined priority categories:

(A) Justification for the order

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services is not under an Order of Selection.

(B) Order (priority categories) to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services ensuring that individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services is not under an Order of Selection.

(C) Goals for serving individuals in each priority category, including how the agency will assist eligible individuals assigned to closed priority categories with information and referral, the method in which the VR agency will manage waiting lists, and the projected timelines for opening priority categories.

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services is not under an Order of Selection.

(2) Has the VR agency elected to serve eligible individuals outside of the order of selection who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment?

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services is not under an Order of Selection.

(h) Waiver of Statewideness.

Not applicable.

(i) Comprehensive System of Personnel Development.

(A) Analysis of Current Personnel and Projected Personnel Needs.

Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed	No. of Personnel Currently Needed	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years
Access and Accommodation	Total 24 – Administration (0) Evaluation (15) Admin. Support (3) Extra Help (1) Vacant (5)	Total 24 – Administration (1) Evaluation (19) Admin. Support (3) Extra Help (1)	Total 24 – Administration (1) Evaluation (19) Admin. Support (4)
ACDC	Total 23 – Administration (1) Counseling (1) Training (4) Evaluation (0) Other (3) Admin. Support (1) Vacant (13)	Total 23 Administration (2) Counseling (2) Training (10) Evaluation (3) Other (3) Admin. Support (3)	Total 23 – Administration (2) Counseling (2) Training (10) Evaluation (3) Other (3) Admin. Support (3)
Field Services	Total 225 – Administration (7) Managers (13) Counselors (78) BERs (12) Interpreters (1) Admin. Support (56) Extra Help (8) Vacant (50)	Total 225 – Administration (7) Managers (16) Counselors (94) BERs (14) Interpreters (4) Admin. Support (82) Extra Help (8)	Total 196 – Administration (8) Managers (14) Counselors (94) BERs (14) Interpreters (4) Admin. Support (58) Extra Help (4)
Central Office –	Total 66 –	Total 66–	Total 65–

	Commissioner's Office (2) PPD&E (12) IT (14) Finance (9) Communication (5) HR (8) Admin. Support (3) Extra Help (3) Vacant (10)	Commissioner's Office (3) PPD&E (13) IT (14) Finance (15) Communication (5) HR (9) Admin. Support (4) Extra Help (3)	Commissioner's Office (3) PPD&E (13) IT (14) Finance (15) Communication (5) HR (8) Admin. Support (4) Extra Help (3)
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Ratio of qualified VR counselors to clients: 138.

Projected number of individuals to be served in 5 years: 17,247.

(2) Data and information on personnel preparation and development, recruitment and retention, and staff development.

(A) A list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program; the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and the number of students who graduated during the prior year from each of those institutions with certification or licensure, or with the credentials for certification or licensure, broken down by the personnel category for which they have received, or have the credentials to receive, certification or licensure.

Institute of Higher Education	Type of Program	No. of Students Enrolled	No. of Prior Year Graduates
University of Arkansas - Fayetteville	MRC	36 (FT) 12 (PT)	6
University of Arkansas - Little Rock	MRC	79 (FT) 118 (PT)	5

(B) Plan for recruitment, preparation and retention of qualified personnel, which addresses the current and projected needs for qualified personnel; and the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the VR agency and institutions of higher education and professional associations to recruit, prepare, and retain personnel who are qualified, including personnel from minority backgrounds and personnel who are individuals with disabilities.

ARS focuses on the successful recruitment, preparation, and retention of qualified personnel, and maintains a working relationship with colleges, universities, and higher education programs within the state. ARS provides information about agency benefits such as tuition assistance and loan forgiveness to partner universities that have vocational rehabilitation programs.

ARS provides opportunities for students with an appropriate VR background preparing for a career in the field of vocational rehabilitation. Practicum and Internships are available state-wide.

ARS is planning to propose other initiatives to attract and retain skilled employees, such as telework and leadership development that is inclusive of a class and compensation grid to allow for professional growth.

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.

(C) Staff development policies, procedures, and activities that ensure all personnel employed by the VR agency receive appropriate and adequate training and continuing education for professionals and paraprofessionals.

ARS utilizes an online learning management system for continuous training. Currently, ARS is in the process of migrating to a new platform. 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, certification and licensure training in the professions, and training provided internally by the agency in case management and policy and procedures compliance.

Access and Accommodations works with counselors in collaboration with ICAN and community partners to provide training about assistive technology and related programs and services available to clients to assist in the home, at work, or in school.

Training and alliances with local and national organizations are used for the acquisition of significant knowledge. Information gained through training and development is shared at all levels of leadership and staffing through various platforms, including department meetings, annual managers meetings, email communications, and site visits. Policy updates, federal mandates, training information, targeted informational tops, and other significant information are shared

through “BLAST” announcements, newsletters, and weekly communication within the agency from the Commissioner. This dissemination of information addresses the important changes in the agency, upcoming events, and staff milestones and birthdays. The Commissioner also ensures the staff is provided CSAVR updates.

(3) Policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) to ensure that VR agency professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared.

The State of Arkansas has minimum standards for the vocational rehabilitation counselor position. ARS has a goal for all rehabilitation counseling positions to meet the master’s degree in Rehabilitation Counseling with Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) standard. The agency seeks to hire MRC/CRC counselors as a priority. In situations where the agency is unable to recruit and hire an MRC/CRC, ARS has a minimum hiring standard of a master’s degree in a field of study related to vocational rehabilitation counseling or a baccalaureate degree in a field of study reasonably related to vocational rehabilitation plus a minimum of three 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.

ARS provides staff training, especially to those providing direct services to clients. Professional qualifications for counselors are monitored to ensure current certification and to track educational progress for those achieving certification. Counselors access continuing education hours and CRC credits through the cloud-based learning management system.

The Deputy Chief of Field Services reviews curriculum for rehabilitation counseling higher education programs and provides input on current educational needs for incoming counselors.

The ARS Commissioner is a member of the WIOA Board, the Chief of Field Services is a member of the executive WIOA Committee, and rehab area managers are members of the local workforce boards. These individuals provide updates on labor force initiatives at both the state and local levels to agency personnel. They also have the responsibility of educating other board members about the needs of individuals with disabilities.

(4) Method(s) used to ensure that personnel are able to communicate in appropriate modes of communication with or in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability.

ARS provides access and contracts as needed to employ personnel or obtain outside sources who communicate in the native languages of applicants and clients with limited English-speaking ability. ARS also provides special communication modes such as interpreters, captioned videos, specialized telecommunication services, and materials for individuals who are deaf and deaf-blind, as well as other specialized media systems for individuals with disabilities. Interpreters are provided for the deaf and hard of hearing.

Sign language skills are included as a minimum qualification for positions providing services to persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

(5) Procedures and activities to coordinate the comprehensive system of personnel development with 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 attends the annual National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) Conference. In addition, they help plan, coordinate, and facilitate the bi-annual State Transition Summit, and help lead the planning and coordination of local transition fairs and parent's nights with assistance from rehab area managers and local VR counselors. Counselors receive educational information and training on providing transition services to students with disabilities through the learning management system.

COOPERATION, COLLABORATION, AND COORDINATION

(j) Coordination with Education Officials.

(1) Plans, policies, and procedures for coordination between the designated State agency and education officials responsible for the public education of students with disabilities, that are designed to facilitate the transition of the students with disabilities from the receipt of educational services in school to the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services, including pre-employment transition services.

A pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) counselor is assigned to the high schools in each county. Counselors provide direct services to students in the school setting under the core service categories for Pre-ETS. They also provide counseling and guidance and assist with transitioning potentially eligible students to VR services prior to exiting secondary education.

ARS partners with private vendors to provide Pre-ETS services to schools. Vendors submit an application to provide services. The application is reviewed by the Pre-ETS leadership team. If approved, an agreement to operate within the school system is developed and approved by the vendor, school, and the local Pre-ETS counselor. Vendors are required to submit monthly progress reports documenting students' progress, attendance, and services (activities) provided. Vendors are monitored up to twice per year to review curriculum and quality of services.

ARS partners with school systems to provide Pre-ETS school-based programs such as Work-based Learning Opportunities Leading to Future Employment (WOLF) and Working for Independence Now (WIN!). School systems complete proposals to provide services, which delineate Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and WIOA responsibilities. The partnership includes measurable criteria, a reporting structure, and a monitoring guideline.

- ARS is responsible for transition planning and vocational rehabilitation services for

eligible and potentially eligible youth and Pre-ETS counselors make every effort to develop and maintain cooperative working relationships with state and local secondary education staff, post-secondary education staff, workforce development partners (e.g., Workforce Development Centers), and other vocational service providers to coordinate pre-employment transition services.

- Provides outreach and coordination activities that include, but are not limited to:
 - Participating in Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings for eligible, not yet eligible, and potentially eligible students. Staff participate in person or by teleconference, when invited and available.
 - Attending person-centered planning meetings for students (i.e., Wraparound).
 - Encouraging referral sources to refer students with disabilities in secondary education at least two years prior to high school exit or earlier as outlined in the ARS Pre-ETS Policy Manual.
 - Assigning counselors as liaisons and points of contact for each public high school in Arkansas.
 - Providing accurate information to referral sources, students, and families regarding the referral and application process for vocational rehabilitation services and for Pre-ETS.
 - Attending local career fairs.
 - Working with other WIOA programs and employers to develop work-based learning experiences for students with disabilities.
- School officials are responsible for providing a free and appropriate public education to include transition services required under IDEA.

Referral Process for Pre-ETS:

Pre-ETS counselors directly assigned to the school provide Pre-ETS referral packets to all students and schools. Students who are interested in services complete the referral packet with their parent/guardian with assistance from the Pre-ETS counselor. The Referral packet includes:

- Pre-ETS Program Participation & Referral Form
- Benefits Planning Consent Form (if applicable)
- Social Security Administration 3288 Consent Form (if applicable)

Procedures for Timely Development and Approval of Individualized Plans for Employment for Transition Students

The Pre-Employment Transition counselor attends the potentially eligible student's IEP meeting. During this meeting, the counselor explains how the student can benefit from VR services, the VR process, and documentation required for the student to apply for VR services.

The Pre-Employment Transition counselor facilitates a referral to the vocational rehabilitation counselor for transitioning from Pre-ETS to general VR.

Age for Pre-Employment Transition Services

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services and the Division of Services for the Blind Arkansas have agreed to begin Pre-Employment Transition Services as early as age 14 through age 21.

(2) Current status and scope of the formal interagency agreement between the VR agency and the State educational agency.

ARS has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education for students in public schools. The parties agree to participate in technical assistance and in-service training to assist educational agencies in planning and coordinating services to ensure eligible individuals receive timely and appropriate supports and services. ARS Transition policy requires counselors to engage school personnel to generate student referrals and to develop an IPE for each student determined eligible. ADE is financially responsible for the delivery and coordination of secondary education as set forth through IDEA. ARS is responsible for coordinating Pre-ETS services, initiating the VR application process, determining eligibility, and providing vocational rehabilitation services for individuals determined eligible for general VR services. The Memorandum of Understanding between the agencies was signed by the Department of Education, Special Education Unit on 12/13/17, by the ARS Commissioner on 1/11/18, and the Division of Services for the Blind on 1/30/18, effective 1/30/18 when the last party signed.

Consultation and Technical Assistance

To improve the transition of students with disabilities from school to postsecondary education and employment, ARS and DSB support the following transition services to vocational rehabilitation personnel, the Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education, and the local education agencies by:

- Providing instruction to vocational rehabilitation counselors, school transition personnel, and other persons supporting students with disabilities through group conferences, instructional materials and guidelines, reporting forms, webinar training, and telephone/email communications.
- Coordinating public speaking and training activities on transition services provided by local education agencies under IDEA.
- Developing model transition demonstration projects and establishing or supporting partnerships involving the local education agencies to achieve the goals of improved transition outcomes.
- Expanding Pre-ETS in schools throughout the State and at the Arkansas Career Development Center (ACDC). ACDC provides training and services to support VR clients and/or students with disabilities to successfully reach the milestones of their individual plans for employment.

ARS, LEAs, ADE, and VR service providers receive technical assistance and professional development from the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: the Collaborative (NTACT: the Collaborative) on topics like implementing evidence-based

practices and preparing graduates for success in postsecondary education and employment.

ARS provides eligibility determination according to ARS policy, and consultation and technical assistance to educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including VR services when requested and appropriate. ARS counselors meet with special education teachers during the school year and provide information to schools about VR services, and ensure schools have appropriate forms and information for students to apply for services. ARS works with schools to assist the student with significant disabilities in identifying, selecting, and pursuing appropriate career objectives.

Partner high schools agree to work cooperatively with ARS to provide appropriate transition services to students to equip them for entry into the workforce, postsecondary education or training, and independent living. Schools carry out all required transition planning provisions mandated by the IDEA and state regulations, conduct regular staff development training regarding transition requirements and include ARS counselors in the training when appropriate, provide referrals to counselors, provide private space for counselors to meet with students, include counselors in students' IEP meetings with authorization by parents or guardians and student knowledge, communicate regularly with counselors, and provide copies of school records.

ARS provides accommodations as needed to aid in successful completion of the vocational education program for VR eligible youth in accordance with their respective IPEs unless these accommodations are the responsibility of the LEA pursuant to Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) regulations. ARS provides technical assistance to local education agencies to ensure all youth and students with disabilities have equal educational opportunities to participate in programs, activities, and job opportunities, and to analyze, identify, and change policies and activities that impede the achievement of equal opportunities for all individuals.

The Interagency Agreement between the Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education Unit – Arkansas Transition Services, Division of Career and Technical Education, and ARS defines each party's responsibilities to ensure FAPE for eligible students, ages 16-21, and younger when appropriate, which are identified as having a disability in accordance with IDEA.

Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education, ARS, and DSB jointly agree to the following:

- The Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education is the agency responsible for ensuring that FAPE is made available to eligible students pursuant to IDEA (20 U.S.C. § 1412(a)(1)).
- School districts have the primary planning, programmatic, and financial responsibilities for the provision of education transition services and related services for students as a component of FAPE and these services are provided to eligible students with disabilities, ages 16 to 21, and younger when determined

appropriate through the implementation of the IEP. The parties acknowledge Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education has general supervisory responsibility over the educational program of any public agency providing FAPE to individuals with disabilities, ages birth to 21, as defined in state and federal statutes.

The distinction between transition and related services that are the planning, programmatic, and financial responsibility of the school district is determined based on a delineation of the customary services the school provides under IDEA Part B. These distinctions describe the activities, supports, and funding ARS provides to support Pre-ETS in partner school settings or during the school day.

ARS is financially responsible for providing Pre-ETS to students who meet the definition of students with a disability as defined by WIOA. ARS works cooperatively to ensure individuals with disabilities have access to the training and necessary supports to transition successfully from secondary school to postsecondary activities, including but not limited to vocational training and employment, and completing an IPE before leaving the school setting. ARS agrees the student and/or designated party has informed choice in the development of the IPE.

ARS counselors attend IEP and transition planning meetings, career fairs, back to school nights, group orientations, and transition fairs, and make presentations to schools and families throughout the year with partner agencies like Arkansas Transition Services, Department of Youth Services, Department of Human Services, Adult Education, Workforce Services, and the Division of Services for the Blind. ARS collaborates with partner agencies through shared recruiting and the application processes for special programs outreach. These outreach efforts provide creative programs like the Youth Leadership Forum, the Inclusion Film Camp, the Transition Employment Program, and the Work-based Learning Opportunities Leading to Future Employment to identify students and get them interested in work and in participating in the full array of transition services. ARS goes directly to educational settings in Department of Youth Services facilities, where youth who are at-risk are identified and provided Pre-ETS and are given an opportunity to apply for full vocational rehabilitation services. ARS provides brochures and introductory meetings to explain available services for youth seeking competitive-integrated employment outcomes.

Transition stakeholders and partners participate in NTACTION: the Collaborative's sponsored capacity building activities, such as *The Capacity Building Institute* and related regional and/or national meetings. Arkansas utilizes a state implementation team to support personnel development opportunities for Arkansas educators and service providers. The implementation team participates in data review, problem solving, and strategic planning that informs personnel development opportunities.

Number of Potentially Eligible in the State

Each school year, ARS requests data from the Arkansas Office of Information Technology that provides a total count of students, aged 16-21, on Individual Education Plans and on

504 plans within the Arkansas public school system.

Set-aside Process for Authorized Activities

Each state fiscal year, ARS utilizes the technical assistance centers' guidance formulas for determining the total amount of funds that can be expended on authorized activities. First, the total number of students with disabilities in the state which includes those students eligible for the VR program as well as those "potentially eligible" students with disabilities is determined using data collected from the Arkansas Department of Education Statewide Information System. Next, ARS determines the number of students with disabilities that need pre-employment transition services (required and coordinated activities) and subtracts the percentage of those who are not receiving services. ARS then finds the cost per student on coordination and core services using expenditures from the prior fiscal year. Funds used on auxiliary aids and services (34 CFR 361.65(a)(3)(i)) needed by a student with a disability to access pre-employment transition services are applied to the cost per student for coordination and core services. The cost of the following services used to support eligible students to receive core Pre-ETS services are also factored into the cost per student: transportation, assessment, maintenance, PCA services, rehabilitation technology, family services, and coaches for work-based learning. Next, ARS multiplies the cost per student by the total number of potentially eligible individuals. This amount is subtracted from the funds reserved from the VR grant for the provision of Pre-ETS. If the result is negative, ARS focuses on core and coordination activities, without expanding to authorized activities. If the amount is positive, then ARS moves to authorized activities. In all events, ARS ensures the state-wideness of the program in the provision of required activities, provides core services directly from counselors assigned to the public high schools in each school district to provide direct services, and provides fee-for-service vendors throughout the state to offer core services.

Pre-ETS Students and Section 511

- ARS has developed a subminimum wage flow process and forms located on the ARS shared drive. If a youth with a disability is seeking subminimum wage and has completed secondary education and is 24 years old or younger, he/she cannot start working for less than minimum wage until he/she has had the opportunity to:
 - Receive Pre-employment transition services under WIOA, or
 - Transition services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA)
 - Applied for ARS services, in accordance with 34 CFR 361.41(b), and determined—
 - Ineligible for vocational rehabilitation services in accordance with 34 CFR 361.43;
 - Eligible for vocational rehabilitation services, in accordance with 34 CFR 361.42; and
 - The youth with a disability had an approved individualized plan for employment, in accordance with 34 CFR 361.46; and
 - The youth with a disability was unable to achieve the employment outcome specified in the individualized plan for employment, as described in 34 CFR 361.5(c)(15) and 361.46, despite working toward

the employment outcome with reasonable accommodations and appropriate supports and services, including supported employment services and customized employment services, for a reasonable period of time; and

- The youth with a disability's case record, which meets all of the requirements of 34 CFR 361.47, is closed.
- ARS has a contract in place to ensure that youth with disabilities receive career counseling, and information and referrals supports designed to enable the individual to explore, discover, experience, and attain competitive integrated employment.

Section 511 Documentation and Assurances

Once ARS determines a student cannot benefit from services leading to competitive integrated employment in the community, the following is provided to the student before he/she leaves the school setting:

1. Documentation of the completion of appropriate pre-employment transition services and/or transition services (ARS Transition Form 511/SMW-1).
2. Documentation from the appropriate school personnel responsible for the provision of transition services to the VR counselor of the receipt of transition services under IDEA. This documentation must be provided to the VR counselor when a case is opened and may include a copy of the IEP and progress reports on transition services received.
3. Documentation of the application of VR services with the result that the student was either determined ineligible for VR services or determined eligible and had an approved individualized plan for employment but was unable to receive the employment outcome and the case was closed.
4. Documentation from VR of receipt of career counseling and information and referral to other federal and/or state programs. This is completed using ARS Transition Section 511 SMW-2 form Career Counseling, Information and Referral, Student/Youth Services.
5. Documentation of the refusal of services; ARS Transition Section 511 SMW-3 form completed for those students, parents, and guardians that refuse services.

The following assurances are in effect:

1. The SEA nor the LEA will enter into an arrangement with an entity holding a special wage certificate under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act for the purposes of operating a program in which students or youth with disabilities are paid subminimum wage.
2. Before a 14(c) entity may begin compensating a youth with a disability at subminimum wage, the youth must complete Pre-Employment Transition Services through VR or the youth must present documentation showing completion of transition services under IDEA from the school system.
3. The LEA will refer a student with a disability known to be seeking subminimum wage employment to the VR program prior to referring that student to a subminimum wage program.

(k) Coordination with Employers.

The Business Engagement Unit (BEU) is responsible for employer outreach. The BEU builds relationships with industry leaders through Chambers of Commerce, local workforce development boards, personal business visits, career expos, and/or job fairs to identify and provide solutions to assist businesses in overcoming the challenges of recruiting, retaining, and developing talent, and provides disability awareness and sensitivity training. 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.

The BEU markets ARS to businesses and community members to increase awareness of ARS services to businesses, people with disabilities, and community partners.

The AT@Work and Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work programs are designed to assist ARS clients and referring vocational rehabilitation counselors in selecting and obtaining the appropriate assistive technology to facilitate the achievement of the clients' established vocational goals and attain successful, competitive integrated employment outcomes. Services through the AT@Work program include assistive technology and accommodation evaluation and assessment, assistive technology device selection and procurement, training and technical assistance, and occupational abilities assessments. These services are primarily directed as it relates to education, school, training programs, vocational and technical education programs, and job retention efforts. AT@Work is a statewide program staffed by occupational therapists and an accommodations specialist.

The SAW/RTW program is designed to provide support to employers and employees when an employee is experiencing an injury or illness that results in a disabling condition, inhibiting the employee from remaining at work or returning to work as soon as it is safe and medically feasible. Program staff include a SAW/RTW coordinator and an administrative assistant. They can also recruit the assistance of evaluation staff located in the AT@Work program.

SAW/RTW provides access to professionals who have expertise in the areas of: vocational counseling to assist an employee in the process of adjusting to a disability and the importance of remaining positive as it relates to stay-at-work/return-to-work efforts; specialized vocational assessments that help identify an employee's vocational strengths and weaknesses as it relates to successful job performance; job site assessment to determine how an employee's presenting disability interferes with task performance and with the identification of potential modifications to the work environment; job analysis to identify the specific functions of a job and the mental and/or physical requirements needed for successful job performance; and individualized employee training regarding the correct use of any new technology or equipment introduced to assist in work performance. Staff can also provide general ergonomic assessments and training targeted toward employees in jobs that may present the likelihood of occurrence of injury or illness that leads to disability.

The SAW/RTW coordinator works with the employee and the employer to develop a SAW/RTW plan that, if required, addresses the need for accommodation in the workplace;

identifies successful performance indicators with employer assistance; outlines the process to return or maintain the employee's employment; or after investigation may determine potential assignments for transitional employment.

ARS provides and/or procures transition services including Pre-ETS for students and youth with disabilities through community rehabilitation programs and local education agencies that place students into paid work experiences with employers throughout the state depending on the vocational interests of the student or youth. Pre-ETS counselors, vendors, and school-based providers, facilitate opportunities in group settings and individually with job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, and workplace readiness training. Employers are contracted to provide on-the-job training experiences, job placement, supported employment, and customized employment opportunities. ARS provides assistive technology assessments and training to assist students transitioning from school to postsecondary training or to work.

(I) Interagency Cooperation with Other Agencies.

1. State programs 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.

2. 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. ARS field offices collaborate with local SNAP liaisons to provide updates to field staff on SNAP processes.

3. Non-educational agencies serving out-of-school youth.

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

4. State use contracting programs.

ARS has no state use contracting programs.

5. State agency responsible for administering the State Medicaid plan under title XIX of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1396 et seq.).

The Arkansas Department of Human Services operates the State Medicaid program. ARS, the State Medicaid program, and other agencies have in place a MOU that delineates roles and responsibilities related to referrals and sequential funding for combined waiver programs for individuals participating in employment related activities under WIOA.

6. State agency responsible for providing services for individuals with developmental disabilities.

The Department of Human Services – Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS) is responsible for providing services to individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. ARS, DDS, and other agencies collaborate as members of the APSE Association and the Employment First Committee initiatives. ARS, DDS, and the other agencies have in place a MOU that delineates roles and responsibilities related to referrals and sequential funding for combined waiver programs for individuals participating in employment related activities under WIOA.

7. 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 a MOU that delineates roles and responsibilities related to sequential funding for combined waiver programs for individuals participating in employment related activities under WIOA. DAABHS offers very limited employment service opportunities. The funding source for Medicaid Waiver services is through the PASSEs.

8. Other Federal, State, and local agencies and programs outside the workforce development system.

ARS collaborates and coordinates services with federal, state, and local agencies that contribute to the vocational rehabilitation and independent living of Arkansans with disabilities.

- Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education – Arkansas Transition Services
- Department of Human Services - Division of Adult, Aging and Behavioral Health Services, Working Disabled Medicaid Program, and Division of Developmental Disabilities Services.
- Community Rehabilitation Programs Developmental Disability Providers
- Supported Employment Vendors

- Arkansas APSE
- Social Security Administration Ticket to Work
- Arkansas Spinal Cord Commission
- Centers for Independent Living

9. Other private nonprofit organizations.

ACCESS Group, Inc. Project SEARCH® sites:

- UAMS -Little Rock
- ACH – Little Rock
- CHI St. Vincent – Hot Springs
- Mercy Hospital – Fort Smith
- St. Bernards Regional Medical Center – Jonesboro
- Ouachita County Medical Center – Camden
- UAPB – Pine Bluff

Friendship Community Cares, Inc.

- Saint Mary’s Regional Medical Center – Russellville
- Embassy Suites NW – Rogers

REHABILITATION CERTIFICATIONS AND ASSURANCES CERTIFICATIONS

States must provide written and signed certifications that:	
1.	The Arkansas Rehabilitation Services is authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act), as amended by title IV of WIOA, ^[1] and its State Plan supplement under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act;
2.	In the event the designated State agency is not primarily concerned with vocational and other rehabilitation of individuals with disabilities, the designated State agency must include a designated State unit for the VR program (Section 101(a)(2)(B)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act). As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of VR services, Division of Workforce Services ^[2] agrees to operate and is responsible for the administration of the State VR Services Program in accordance with the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan ^[3] , the Rehabilitation Act, 34 CFR 361.13(b) and (c), and all applicable regulations ^[4] , policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available to States under section 111(a) of the Rehabilitation Act are used solely for the provision of VR services and the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan;
3.	As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act for supported employment services, the designated State agency or the designated State unit when the designated State agency has a designated State unit, agrees to operate and is responsible for the administration of the State Supported Employment Services Program in accordance with the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan ^[5] , the Rehabilitation

	Act, and all applicable regulations ⁶¹ , policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available under title VI are used solely for the provision of supported employment services and the administration of the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan;
4.	The designated State unit, or if not applicable, the designated State agency has the authority under State law to perform the functions of the State regarding the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, and is responsible for the administration of the VR program in accordance with 34 CFR 361.13(b) and (c);
5.	The State legally may carry out each provision of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement.
6.	All provisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement are consistent with State law.
7.	The Commissioner, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services 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;
8.	The Commissioner, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services has the authority to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and the supplement for Supported Employment 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.

The State Plan must provide assurances that:

1.	Public Comment on Policies and Procedures: The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.
2.	Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement: The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a Unified State plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 C.F.R. 76.140.
3.	Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan: The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. the establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act.B. either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act.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.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).E. as applicable, the local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.F. as applicable, the shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act.G. Statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act.H. the requirements for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.I. all required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act.J. the requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act.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.L. the reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities as set forth in section 101(a)(18)(A).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:

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(E) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act. 2. 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. 3. provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act, as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services or, if implementing an order of selection, in accordance with criteria established by the State for the order of selection as set out in section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act. 4. determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act. 5. comply with the requirements for the development of an individualized plan for employment in accordance with section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act. 6. 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. 7. 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. 8. comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by sections 101(a)(14) and 511 of the Rehabilitation Act. 9. (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. 10. (j) with respect to students with disabilities, the State: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (i) has developed and will implement, <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (A) strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and (B) strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and (ii) has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15),101(a)(25), and 113). (iii) shall reserve not less than 15 percent of the allocated funds for the provision of pre-employment transition services; such funds shall not be used to pay for the administrative costs of providing pre-employment transition services.
5.	<p>Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement to the State plan:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 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. 2. The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act separately for individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act.

6.	<p>Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program (Title VI):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The designated State agency assures that it will expend no more than 2.5 percent of the State's allotment under title VI for administrative costs of carrying out this program; and, the designated State agency or agencies will provide, directly or indirectly through public or private entities, non-Federal contributions in an amount that is not less than 10 percent of the costs of carrying out supported employment services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved for such purpose under section 603(d) of the Rehabilitation Act, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(H) and (I) of the Rehabilitation Act. 2. 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.	<p>Provision of Supported Employment Services:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The designated State agency assures that it will provide supported employment services as defined in section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act. 2. The designated State agency assures that the comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act an individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(7)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act.

Appendix 1: Performance Goals for the Core Programs

	Vocational Rehabilitation Program			
	Program Year: 2024		Program Year: 2025	
	Expected Level	Negotiated Level	Expected Level	Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit) ²²	64%		65%	

Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit) ²²	63%		65%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit) ²¹	\$6,800		\$6,870	
Credential Attainment Rate	35.5%		36%	
Measurable Skill Gains	57.5%		58%	

	All WIOA Core Programs			
	Program Year:		Program Year:	
	Expected Level	Negotiated Level	Expected Level	Negotiated Level
Effectiveness in Serving Employers				

Additional Indicators of Performance
1.
2.
3.
4.

EQUITY FOR STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, AND OTHER PROGRAM BENEFICIARIES

OMB Control Number 1894-0005 Expiration 02/28/2026

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA Section 427 Form Instructions for State Applicants

State applicants must respond to the following four questions:

1. Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.
2. Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?
3. Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?
4. What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?
 - Applicants identify any barriers that may impede equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity, including, but not limited to, barriers based on economic disadvantage, gender, race, ethnicity, color, national origin, disability, age, language, migrant status, rural status, homeless status or housing insecurity, pregnancy, parenting, or caregiving status, and sexual orientation.
 - Applicants use the associated text box to respond to each question. However, applicants might have already included some or all this required information in the narrative sections of their applications or their State Plans. In responding to this requirement, for each question, applicants may provide a cross-reference to the section(s) in their State Plans that includes the information responsive to that question on this form or may restate that information on this form.
 - Applicants are not required to have mission statements or policies that align with equity to apply.
 - Applicants that have already undertaken steps to address barriers must still provide an explanation and/or description of the steps already taken in each text box, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement.
 - Applicants that believe no barriers exist must still provide an explanation and/or description to each question to validate that perception, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement.

Please refer to [GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package](#)

1. DESCRIBE HOW YOUR ENTITY'S EXISTING MISSION, POLICIES, OR COMMITMENTS ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO, AND EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION IN, THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY.

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services' (ARS) mission is to prepare Arkansans with disabilities to work and lead productive and independent lives. ARS is governed by rules and regulations as outlined by the reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 included as part of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Enacting state legislation indicates the policy and scope of ARS shall be to provide increased employment of individuals with disabilities through the provision of individualized training, independent living services, educational and support services, and meaningful opportunities for employment in integrated work settings to maximize employment, economic self-sufficiency, independence, and integration into society. Pursuant to this, rehabilitation services shall be provided to citizens throughout the state and the rehabilitation plan adopted shall be in effect in all political subdivisions of the state. Consistent with ARS policy, program eligibility requirements will be applied in compliance with Titles VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act, The Americans with Disabilities Act, and without regard to age, religion, disability, sex, race, color, or national origin. Eligibility

requirements are applicable without regard to the particular service need or anticipated cost of services required by an applicant or the income level of an applicant or applicant's family. ARS does not impose a residence duration requirement.

2. BASED ON YOUR PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY, WHAT BARRIERS MAY IMPEDE EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, OR OTHER BENEFICIARIES?

The most recent Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment identified barriers to populations ARS serve, specifically individuals with disabilities including those with significant disabilities and individuals with disabilities who are unserved or underserved. Barriers identified were specific to an individual or population but could also be common to other individuals or populations within the state. They include such things as lack of adequate transportation, lack of technology access, lack of or difficulty accessing programs, social biases, or communication/language barriers. ARS is also confronted with the barrier of adequate staffing as is common with a significant number of other state vocational rehabilitation programs. It includes both the hiring of qualified staff and staff retention.

3. BASED ON THE BARRIERS IDENTIFIED, WHAT STEPS WILL YOU TAKE TO ADDRESS SUCH BARRIERS TO EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY?

While specific barriers might affect other populations, ARS can only address such barriers on an individual basis consistent with the implementation of an Individual Plan for Employment. Barriers faced by individuals not eligible for ARS services would require intervention by another program or through a local or state government initiative.

As to staffing, ARS understands that part of the issue is pay. It is anticipated that a labor market survey will be completed to determine adequate compensation. If the need for additional compensation is indicated, ARS will request assistance from the Office of Personnel Management to determine how to proceed with implementation. ARS also recognizes that making sure that staff are sufficiently trained to do their job well can be an issue. This will be addressed as part of the implementation of our new electronic case management system.

4. WHAT IS YOUR TIMELINE, INCLUDING TARGETED MILESTONES, FOR ADDRESSING THESE IDENTIFIED BARRIERS?

ARS will address barriers for individuals eligible for services throughout the life of the Individual Plan for Employment, which may continue beyond the new state plan time frame.

ARS is currently working to resolve the staffing issues; however, the labor market survey will be completed after July 1, 2024, and before the end of program year 2025. ARS will evaluate the staff training issues before the two-year state plan update, which will begin as soon as the new case management system is in place.

**VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM ACTIVITIES AND ASSURANCES:
Division Services for the Blind (DSB)**

(a) State Rehabilitation Council.

Arkansas has an independent State commission.

Composition of the Council.

Council Representative	Current Term Number/ Vacant	Beginning Date of Term Mo./Yr.
Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)		
Parent Training and Information Center		
Client Assistance Program		
Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor (Ex Officio if Employed by the VR Agency)		
Community Rehabilitation Program Service Provider		
Business, Industry, and Labor		
Business, Industry, and Labor		
Business, Industry, and Labor		
Business, Industry, and Labor		
Disability Advocacy Groups		
Current or Former Applicants for, or Recipients of, VR services		
Section 121 Project Directors in the State (as applicable)		
State Educational Agency Responsible for Students with Disabilities Eligible to Receive Services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)		
State Workforce Development Board		
VR Agency Director (Ex Officio)		

Composition and Meeting Requirements.

The Division of Services for the Blind is an independent consumer-controlled commission.

Summary of Council's Input and Recommendations.

The Division of Services for the Blind is an independent consumer-controlled commission.

Response to Council's Input and Recommendations.

The Division of Services for the Blind is an independent consumer-controlled commission.

(b) Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA).

(1) Needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the state.

(A) Individuals with the most significant disabilities and their need for supported employment.

In 2022, the UA Little Rock Survey Research Center conducted the Arkansas Division of Services for the Blind Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). A mixed method approach was utilized to collect relevant and applicable data for the comprehensive needs assessment. The UA Little Rock Survey Research Center distributed five surveys to different constituent groups which represented 164 total responses across the various internal and external stakeholders (DSB Staff survey, n=45; Business survey, n=1; & Partners survey, n=18; Open Consumers (During Service), n= 63; Closed Consumers, n=37). In addition to the surveys, a series of face-to-face interviews and focus groups were conducted via zoom online technologies; phone interviews/ contacts; and typed responses from those unavailable to schedule for an interview or focus group. Focus groups were held for Field Counselors, Field Managers, Partners, and Board Directors, while interviews were held with all Senior Management members. Additionally, questionnaires were distributed to those populations for data collection purposes if they wanted to participate but were unable to join the scheduled focus groups. To conduct the internal and external environmental scan, researchers collected demographic and population characteristic estimates through publicly available datasets and analyzed Division of Services for the Blind administrative data.

(B) Individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program.

Underserved/ Unserved Populations:

Findings: The surveys, focus groups, and interviews noted participating respondents indicated the following populations were underserved for the state of Arkansas (Note: presented in no specific order and that listings are not mutually exclusive):

- i. Racial and/or ethnic minorities
 - Black/African American
 - Native American & People Indigenous to the United States
 - Hispanic/LatinX
 - Marshallese population
- ii. Other Blind/ Severely Visually Impaired Specific Disability Statuses

- Hearing-Impaired
 - Deaf-Blind/Multiple disabilities
 - Individuals diagnosed with psychiatric/mental health disabilities
 - Individuals requiring long-term support/extended services
 - Individuals with most-significant disabilities
- iii. Underserved geographic areas (e.g., Rural areas; & Delta region/ Southern Arkansas)
- iv. Age-related
- Youth & Pre-ETS
 - Older Individuals Who are Blind
- v. Veterans

Potential Recommendations & Considerations

- Constant and continuous engagement and communication with underserved/unserved populations.
- Representative hiring may be an avenue to engage underserved populations. Specific attention should be paid to hiring blind or severely visually impaired individuals.
- The Transition-aged youth and Pre-ETS disparity was often related to turnover among staff for the schools – primarily related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The issue of not having a person in place to coordinate between the students and DSB was seen as a barrier to accessing services. Additional administrative measures related to this issue may be needed.
- Education of existence/services/marketing (particularly in rural areas) as an avenue to engage populations not currently engaged. Expanding the reach and awareness of DSB could include but is not limited to (1) expanding the social media presence and online informational materials; (2) updating information in the handouts and providing materials that are translated or focused for specific ethnic and racial minorities; and engaging at other less traditional venues for employment services (e.g., Marshallese festival, faith-based community events; etc.).
- Assessment of the services which were deemed readily available across the geographic areas of the state to evaluate adequacy of services available to individuals across the wide range of disabilities/needs noted above.
- Consumer barriers were noted as the biggest external perception as to why consumers were not having their needs met. Additional review and evaluation of external barriers may help address serving currently underserved populations.

(C) Individuals with disabilities served through other components of the workforce development system.

Statewide transformation has created new and/or combined administrative pathways and current work practices requiring additional coordination with other state agencies. These cross-institutional administrative practices present unique issues with dual case classification at the consumer level. Additionally, the transformation

included a consolidation and reorganization of physical office spaces which has resulted in a closer physical proximity between entities – this is not necessarily denoted as a positive or negative but denotes changes at the organizational level. Additionally, respondents noted that DSB leadership and administration and service delivery components were doing exemplary in this arena for navigating the transformation and coordination with parent- and sister-agencies. One noted area of concern was responses that the statewide transformation has resulted in some employee retention & turnover.

Potential Recommendations & Considerations

- Universally implemented policy manual/process to determine primary versus secondary disabilities with other state agencies.
- Way to improve referral service/phone directory
- Improved communication between state agencies or a determination process establishment to coordinate agency processes (flowchart diagram/process flow map/ decision tree)
- Creation of a DWS-wide Organizational chart
- Focus on building middle-management infrastructure as way to better connect field with administration.
- Greater awareness of DSB within DWS
- Improvements in computer/data sharing across agency entities

(D) Youth with disabilities, including students with disabilities and their need for pre-employment transition services, include an assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition career services and pre-employment transition services, and the extent to which such services are coordinated with transition services provided under idea.

The Needs Assessment results suggest that the length of time required for the program are typically or generally open longer which impacts the metrics and programmatic outcomes for DSB. DSB has updated job requirements that differentiates the metrics and outcomes for Pre-Employment Transition Services. A focus or emphasis on vocational training and more career counseling may serve as a complement or alternative to existing focuses on professional training and college enrollment for consumers. The expansion of pre-employment transition services such as work-place readiness skills, work-based learning experiences, counseling on post-secondary enrollment opportunities, and career exploration were also identified as program needs.

(2) Need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State.

Needs Assessment results suggest that community rehabilitation programs within the State need to establish, develop, and improve in efforts to provide job services and

independent living skills. Consumers stated the need for trainers for skill development for job placement, mental health services, soft skills and job skills training, mobility and self-independence training. It is noted that consumers who are served by the VR program need effective job services such as workplace readiness skills, job placement, and on-the-job training. Additionally, it is stated that independent living skills may present a barrier in consumers obtaining effective job services. However, the surveys of partners and staff suggest that the limited availability of service providers may hinder effective rehabilitation for VR consumers.

(c) Goals, Priorities, and Strategies

(1) Jointly developed goals and priorities and any revisions.

The DSB Board, an independent commission, approved the goals and priorities.

(2) Measurable goals and priorities.

DSB developed the following goals, strategies, and performance measures for PY2024 and PY2025 based on the comprehensive statewide needs assessment, the agency's performance on WIOA performance measures, guidance from RSA, and recommendations from the DSB Board. The goals were approved by the DSB Board.

Goal 1: DSB will continue to improve outreach across the State of Arkansas including in underrepresented areas.

- VR Counselors will conduct at least two employer meetings per month to connect with businesses in their area and be aware of opportunities for their consumers.
- DSB's Outreach Coordinator will attend events across the state to inform consumers and their communities about the services DSB will offer by 1) attending at least 3 events each month 2) attending events in every region of the state each quarter.
- DSB's Business Engagement Coordinator will participate in Job Fairs, Business Expos, and Chamber of Commerce Events to make connections with employers that lead to employment opportunities for consumers. This will include 1) maintaining membership with the State Chamber of Commerce 2) maintaining memberships with local Chambers of Commerce 3) connecting with at least 5 employers each month to discuss possible job openings and opportunities.

Goal 2: DSB will increase the number of Rehabilitated Closures for the agency working toward a target of 200 Rehabilitated Closures per program year.

- VR counselors will work to place consumers in careers that meet their goals by 1) moving consumers who are ready to look for work into Job Ready Status in AWARE to allow for support in Job Placement Activities 2) providing the Business Engagement Coordinator with a list of consumers and their skills who are Job Ready to allow for assistance in Job Placement.
- DSB will work with the Office of Skills Development to improve referrals to

Apprenticeships, including working to build upon the Apprenticeship Pilot that began in PY2022.

- DSB's Business Engagement Coordinator will cultivate list of jobs and related skills available in each region, updated quarterly.

Goal 3: DSB will increase the availability of Pre-ETS services and opportunities for Students with a Disability.

- DSB will continue to partner with Children and Youth with Sensory Impairments (CAYSI) to identify students who will benefit from Pre-ETS.
- DSB will offer the annual Jump Start Camp both virtually and in person for students to gain valuable Work-Based Learning Experiences.
- DSB will work with partners and resources to continue to identify additional service opportunities and programs for Students, such as the College Experience Camp to increase opportunities.
- DSB's Transition Manager will meet quarterly with the state Educational Services for the Visually Impaired (ESVI) and Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ASBVI) to identify students, opportunities, and needs for Pre-ETS services.

Supported Employment Goal

Goal 1: Increase the number of successful rehabilitated closures of consumers receiving Supported Employment Services, including those for Youth with a Disability.

- VR Counselors will receive training on DSB's Supported Employment Policy and procedures and identifying consumers who need SE services.
- DSB will develop vendor training and outreach to increase the number of available SE vendors working with the VRTAC-QE.
- DSB will send staff to the annual APSE conferences to learn more about Supported Employment.

(d) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals.

(1) Progress in achieving the goals and priorities identified for the VR and supported employment programs.

Goal 1: DSB will continue to improve outreach across the State of Arkansas including in underrepresented areas.

- VR Counselors will conduct at least two employer meetings per month to connect with businesses in their area and be aware of opportunities for their consumers.
- DSB's Outreach Manager will attend events across the state to inform consumers and their communities about the services DSB will offer by 1) attending at least 3 events each month 2) attending events in every region of the state each quarter.
- DSB's Business Engagement Coordinator will participate in Job Fairs, Business Expos, and Chamber of Commerce Events to make connections with employers that

lead to employment opportunities for consumers. This will include 1) maintaining membership with the State Chamber of Commerce 2) maintaining memberships with local Chambers of Commerce 3) connecting with at least 5 employers each month to discuss possible job openings and opportunities.

Evaluation of Progress PY22-23: DSB hired an Outreach Manager to improve outreach efforts and ensure all regions of the state were covered. DSB counselors continue to conduct employer meetings monthly to assist with placing consumers. DSB's Business Engagement Coordinator has joined the State Chamber of Commerce and 51 local Chambers of Commerce and continues to work to connect with employers.

Goal 2: DSB will increase the number of Rehabilitated Closures for the agency working toward a target of 200 Rehabilitated Closures per program year.

- VR counselors will work to place consumers in careers that meet their goals by 1) moving consumers who are ready to look for work into Job Ready Status in AWARE to allow for support in Job Placement Activities 2) providing the Business Engagement Coordinator with a list of consumers and their skills who are Job Ready to allow for assistance in Job Placement.
- DSB will work with the Office of Skills Development to improve referrals to Apprenticeships, including working to build upon the Apprenticeship Pilot that began in PY2022.
- DSB's Business Engagement Coordinator will cultivate list of jobs and related skills available in each region, updated quarterly.

Evaluation of Progress PY22-23: DSB has developed a relationship with the Office of Skills Development (OSD) and partnered with them in a pilot apprenticeship related to Information Technology skills and placement. Currently DSB has one consumer moving forward in the program and is working with OSD and their partners to continue to expand opportunities. In PY22, DSB had 148 rehabilitated closures compared to 145 in PY21.

Goal 3: DSB will increase the availability of Pre-ETS services and opportunities for Students with a Disability (SWD).

- DSB will continue to partner with Children and Youth with Sensory Impairments (CAYSI) to identify students who will benefit from Pre-ETS.
- DSB will offer the annual Jump Start Camp both virtually and in person for students to gain valuable Work-Based Learning Experiences.
- DSB will work with partners and resources to continue to identify additional service opportunities and programs for Students, such as the College Experience Camp to increase opportunities.
- DSB's Transition Manager will meet quarterly with the state ESVI and ASBVI to identify students, opportunities, and needs for Pre-ETS services.

Evaluation of Progress PY22-23: DSB has Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) in place with CAYSI and Helen Keller National Center to improve outreach and service availability to Students with a Disability (SWD). DSB offered the first College Experience Camp for SWD in July 2023 and is working with colleges to be able to expand this program to more locations and more students. DSB's Transition manager continues to meet regularly with ESVI and ASBVI staff.

Supported Employment Goal

Goal 1: Increase the number of successful rehabilitated closures of consumers receiving Supported Employment Services, including those for Youth with a Disability.

- VR Counselors will receive training on DSB's Supported Employment Policy and procedures and identifying consumers who need SE services.
- DSB will develop vendor training and outreach to increase the number of available SE vendors working with the VRTAC-QE.
- DSB will send staff to the annual APSE conferences to learn more about Supported Employment.

Evaluation of Progress PY22-23: DSB worked with the Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Employment (VRTAC-QE) to improve the Supported Employment program. DSB staff participated in full day training in December 2023 on updated Supported Employment Policy and practices. DSB and VRTAC-QE are developing a vendor training and outreach event to help identify additional vendors. DSB continues to participate in APSE and will send staff to the conferences.

(2) Performance on the performance accountability indicators.

DSB has worked with RSA, the Technical Assistance Centers, and our case management system to improve the accuracy and quality of the data submitted to RSA. As part of this process, DSB has made changes to the case management system and is working with staff to ensure they understand how to correctly input all necessary elements for accurate reporting of performance measures. Since Arkansas is a state with 2 VR agencies, the actual performance levels for DSB and the state are different. DSB improved Credential Attainment rates from 0% in PY21 to 40% in PY22. As a state, Arkansas exceeded on all RSA performance assessments provided. DSB continues to work to enhance progress on all measures.

Performance Measure	DSB Actual Rate	State Negotiated Rate	State Actual Rate	Performance Assessment
Measurable Skill Gains	19.0%	57.6%	57.5%	N/A
Employment Rate 2nd Quarter After Exit	44.8%	60.5%	63.5%	101.1%

Median Earnings	\$7,949	\$5,697	\$6,767	109.2%
Employment Rate 4th Quarter After Exit	35.1%	57.3%	61.7%	105.2%
Credential Attainment	40.0%	28.9%	35.5%	102.5%

(3) The use of funds reserved for innovation and expansion activities.

DSB used innovation and expansion funding to support the funding of our Statewide Independent Living Council. DSB will continue to provide funding to support technology updates within the NFB Newslines application provided to all Arkansans, including now being able to live stream the service.

(e) Supported Employment Services, Distribution of Title VI Funds, and Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services.

(1) Acceptance of Title IV Funds.

(A) VR agency requests to receive title VI funds.

(2) Specific Goals and Priorities with Respect to the Distribution of Title VI Funds.

DSB's goal for the Supported Employment Program is to increase the number of successful rehabilitated closures of consumers receiving Supported Employment Services, including those for Youth with a Disability. To accomplish this goal, DSB will use the following strategies:

- VR Counselors will receive training on DSB's Supported Employment Policy and procedures and identifying consumers who need SE services.
- DSB will develop vendor training and outreach to increase the number of available SE vendors working with the VRTAC-QE.
- DSB will send staff to the annual APSE conferences to learn more about Supported Employment.

DSB has worked directly with the VRTAC-QE to provide updated policy and procedures for staff and to begin development of a vendor training for SE services. This work is designed to increase both staff and vendor capacity to serve individuals with the most significant disabilities.

In addition, DSB will only use Title VI funds to pay for supported employment services after the individual is placed on the job (e.g., after the individual's employment start date). Prior to job placement (employment start date), DSB will pay for 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.

(3) Supported employment services provided with Title I or Title VI funds following placement of individuals with the most significant disabilities in employment.

Supported Employment is for individuals with the most significant disabilities who have been determined eligible for VR services. Supported Employment should be considered when the comprehensive assessment of the rehabilitation needs of the individual demonstrate the need for extended services in order to maintain the individual's employment goal consistent with his/her unique strengths, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice. Supported employment services are based on a determination of the needs of an eligible individual as specified in the individualized plan for employment (IPE) and are provided by the VR agency for a period of not more than 24 months, unless under special circumstances the eligible individual and the rehabilitation counselor jointly agree to extend the time to achieve the employment outcome identified in the IPE.

Prior to job placement in supported employment, individuals with the most significant disabilities receive VR services identified in the IPE, and which the VR counselor and the individual have determined will lead to achievement of the supported employment outcome. Supported employment services, also identified on the IPE, begin at the time of the individual's job placement. Ongoing services are furnished by DSB, using funds under the Supported Employment program and/or the VR program, from the time of job placement until the transition to extended services. Extended services means ongoing support services and necessary services that are: a) needed to support and maintain an individual with a most significant disability including a youth with a most significant disability, in supported employment b) organized or made available, singly or in combination, in such a way as to assist an eligible individual in maintaining supported employment c) based on the needs of an eligible individual, as specified in an individualized plan for employment d) provided by a State agency, a private nonprofit organization, employer, or any other appropriate resource, after an individual has made the transition from support from the designated State unit.

Extended services to transition youth can be provided for a period of time not to exceed 48 months or until such time that a youth reaches the age of 25 and no longer meets the definition of a youth with a most significant disability. DSB funds can be provided for extended services to youth when there is no other source available. Funds may not be used to provide extended services to individuals who do not meet the definition of a youth with a most significant disability.

(4) Efforts to identify and arrange other state agencies and other appropriate entities to provide supported employment services.

DSB works with vendors to provide Supported Employment Services and Extended Services to consumers with most significant disabilities, including youth with most significant disabilities. As part of the intensive agreement with the VRTAC-QE, DSB is developing a vendor recruitment and training event to identify and develop agreements with additional vendors to ensure services are provided statewide. DSB continues to partner with Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, Goodwill Industries, World Services for the Blind, Easter Seals, and Arkansas Support Network to support individuals with most significant disabilities.

Supported employment is integrated competitive employment, or an individual working in an integrated employment setting on a short-term basis towards integrated competitive employment. This includes customized employment. Each of the SE services providers provides supported employment services for up to 24 months or longer, as needed. Extended services may be provided and funded by a provider for as long as the individual is employed; however, the VR agency may only fund extended services for youth for a period not to exceed four years or until the youth reaches age 25, whichever occurs first. Half of the funds that Arkansas receives under the supported employment grant must be used to support youth with the most significant disabilities.

(f) Annual Estimates.

(1) Estimates for next federal fiscal year

(A) VR program.

Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under VR Program	Costs of Services using Title I Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
N/A	315	315	\$3,639,499.71	0

(B) Supported employment program.

Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under Supported Employment	Costs of Services using Title I and Title VI Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)

		Program		
N/A	15	5	\$40,000	0

(g) Order of Selection.

The VR agency is not implementing an order of selection and all eligible individuals will be served.

(1) For VR agencies that have defined priority categories:

A. The justification for the order.

This is not applicable as DSB is not under an Order of Selection.

B. The order (priority categories) to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided vr services ensuring that individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities.

This is not applicable as DSB is not under an Order of Selection.

C. Goals for serving individuals in each priority category, including how the agency will assist eligible individuals assigned to closed priority categories with information and referral, the method in which the VR agency will manage waiting lists, and the projected timelines for opening priority categories.

This is not applicable as DSB is not under an Order of Selection.

(2) Has the VR agency elected to serve eligible individuals outside of the order of selection who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment?

No

(h) Waiver of Statewideness.

DSB has not requested a waiver of statewideness.

(i) Comprehensive System of Personnel Development.

(1) Analysis of current personnel and projected personnel needs.

Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed	No. of Personnel Currently Needed	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5
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			Years
Counselors	16	10	5
Field Administration	3	3	0
Regional Managers	6	0	2
Field Services Administrative Support	12	5	4
Director's Office	7	0	3
Finance	2	1	0
Quality Assurance	2	2	1
Central Office Administrative Support	2	0	1
Business and Technology	5	2	3

Ratio of qualified vr counselors to clients:

DSB currently has 14 VR counselors and 2 Older Individuals who are Blind Counselors (OIB) providing services to DSB consumers. DSB also has 8 VR counselor vacancies and 2 OIB counselor vacancies. At this time DSB is recruiting counselors who are certified or willing to attend school to obtain their certification to ensure that DSB maintains an adequate counselor to consumer ratio. DSB is currently serving 520 OIB consumers, 948 VR consumers, 52 potentially eligible consumers. Counselors are supported by administrative staff and area managers to ensure client services are provided timely and effectively.

Projected number of individuals to be served in 5 years:

In Program Year 2022, DSB served 1021 participants up from 932 in Program Year 2021 in the VR Program. Historically, DSB has reported 45-60% of individuals served as minorities. DSB has increased outreach efforts and work to reach more consumers. DSB expects to serve approximately, 1100 participants a year in the next 5 years. Of those DSB expects approximately 450 to be minorities.

(2) Data and information on personnel preparation and development, recruitment and retention, and staff development.

(A) Institutions of higher education in the state that are preparing vr professionals, by type of program; the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and the number of students who graduated during the prior year from each of those institutions with certification or licensure, or with the credentials for certification or licensure, broken down by the personnel category for which they have received, or have the credentials to receive, certification or licensure.

Institute of Higher Education	Type of Program	No. of Students Enrolled	No. of Prior Year Graduates
University of Arkansas - Fayetteville	MRC	36 (FT); 12 (PT)	6
University of Arkansas - Little Rock	MRC	79 (FT); 118 (PT)	5

(B) Plan for recruitment, preparation and retention of qualified personnel, which addresses the current and projected needs for qualified personnel; and the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the vr agency and institutions of higher education and professional associations to recruit, prepare, and retain personnel who are qualified, including personnel from minority backgrounds and personnel who are individuals with disabilities.

DSB has cooperative agreements with each of the 3 colleges/universities in Arkansas in order to promote the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the designated state unit and institutions of higher education.

To address current needs for qualified personnel, DSB posts vacancies on the state employment website arstatejobs.com, the statewide newspaper, Workforce Services offices, other state agencies, and college and university recruitment bulletins. It also sends job notices to the Arkansas American Council of the Blind and the National Federation of the Blind for distribution. Recruitment efforts are ongoing to the 15 fully accredited graduate programs within TACE Region VI, including Arkansas colleges and universities in the region and those with a historically predominate minority enrollment.

Effective July 1, 2019, all DSB vocational rehabilitation counselors were reclassified as either grade level GS06 Rehabilitation Counselor or GS08 Certified Rehabilitation Counselor. The GS08 Certified Rehabilitation Counselor classification requires CRC certification. According to state Office of Personnel Management (OPM) requirements, DSB now advertises for a GS08 position with the preferred qualification being a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and CRC certification. State hiring policy authorized by OPM allows DSB to hire graduates with Bachelor's degrees in Rehabilitation for GS06 positions when there is no suitable applicant with a Master's degree with the condition the person will seek and obtain a Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling within seven years of employment and will meet CRC certification or become eligible to sit for CRC certification within one year of receipt of the Master's degree.

Bachelor's degree or non—MRC Master's degree — L051C Rehabilitation Counselor/GS06 — \$36,154.98 (annual) — \$17.3822 (hourly)

Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling (MRC)/CRC — L098C Certified Vocational Rehab

Counselor/GS08 — \$45,009.95 (annual) — \$21.6394 (hourly)

The Staff Development section reviews the current training levels of all personnel and develops and monitors agency policy and procedure for training and retaining qualified personnel meet standards required by the Department of Education and other federal/state requirements. All DSB employees receive an annual personnel performance evaluation from their immediate supervisor, which is reviewed and approved by DSB Director. The evaluation considers the training each employee needs to fulfill job duties in providing services to our consumers.

DSB will continue to work closely with the universities to provide internship and practicum opportunities for students and notify universities when job openings become available. Students are recruited from university and college rehabilitation programs within the state to seek employment with DSB upon graduation. DSB maintains communication with the university programs including the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville (U of A), the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR), The University of Wisconsin-Stout, and the University of North Texas.

The agency actively recruits minorities and students with disabilities. Students, including minorities, are encouraged to join professional rehabilitation organizations such as the National Rehabilitation Association (NRA) and the National Association of Multicultural Rehabilitation Concerns (NAMRC). These rehabilitation professional organizations provide scholarship opportunities to individuals, including minorities, who major in the field of rehabilitation.

DSB revised VR Counselor job descriptions to update roles and responsibilities due to increasing duties, and also to assist with increasing salaries for DSB VR Counselors competitive to surrounding regions. DSB continues to update functional job descriptions with help from staff. DSB leadership is working with the VRTAC-QM as part of the employee retention pilot to improve employee engagement and retention.

(C) Staff development policies, procedures, and activities that ensure all personnel employed by the VR agency receive appropriate and adequate training and continuing education for professionals and paraprofessionals.

DSB staff must possess specific knowledge concerning the problems of blindness and be allowed the opportunity for career development as related to the delivery of vocational rehabilitation services. DSB actively assesses the training needs of its employees and solicits their input regarding training needs. DSB surveys staff annually to determine the training or resources they require to perform their duties more efficiently and effectively. DSB also uses a state—approved personnel performance evaluation document to review an employee’s performance and to identify individual training needs.

Leadership development and capacity – building opportunities are offered through a wide variety of methods:

- U of A CURRENTS periodically surveys rehabilitation staff regarding training needs and develops courses and conferences based on the results or upon requests by DSB and other agencies. In the last fiscal year, CURRENTS offered face-to-face trainings on topics to include: DISC Leadership Styles Training, Why Leadership Matters, Leadership Empowerment, Collaboration and Delegation, Communications and Feedback, The Five Dysfunctions and Team Assessment, Building Trust – Personal Histories, Accountability and Blocked Perspectives, We Are All In – A Well Oiled Machine.
- VRTAC-QM offered Kotter’s 8-Step Process to Leading Change, What Are We Urgent About, Communicating Our Shared Sense of Urgency, Creating a Change Vision, Organizational Change, Employee Engagement, Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team, 360 Assessment, Mission, Vision, and Values.
- STOUT Vocational Rehabilitation Institute offered Customer Service and Consumer Engagement.
- VRTAC-QE offered training on Supported Employment and worked with DSB leadership on the Supported Employment Pilot Program.

In-house training is provided through DSB’s Quality Assurance Coordinator, Field Administrator, and other experienced, credentialed professional staff; DSB’s annual Statewide meeting; the annual Field Services meeting; periodic training meetings; and one-on-one training which is made available to all staff depending upon the need. Information is distributed at Director’s meetings, Supervisors’ meetings, emails and the agency website. Training is also purchased from outside sources, such as the Older Individuals Who Are Blind Training provided by Mississippi State University.

Staff are encouraged to participate in professional, service, and consumer organizations, such as the National Rehabilitation Association, Lions Clubs, the National Federation of the Blind, the American Council of the Blind, and the Arkansas Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER), and opportunities are available to attend organizations’ state and national conferences.

Retention of qualified personnel is addressed through CEU credit for staff training, as well as opportunities for expanding skills and knowledge in a variety of areas.

(3) Policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(b) to ensure that VR agency professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared.

The Arkansas Office of Personnel Management (OPM) continues to recommend the minimum qualifications, job descriptions and salary rates for specific classifications,

based upon labor market surveys, which are then reviewed and approved by the legislature. The spring 2019 legislative session gave DSB the authority to pay tuition for its VR Counselors working on their CRCs. DSB is exploring ways to assist Area Field Supervisors with the costs of tuition to meet CSPD standards.

Internships are available to students in the rehabilitation programs across the state. DSB will have a new intern beginning January 2024.

DSB recruits, and, to the degree possible, hires counselors with a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or other closely related degree. DSB implements individual education plans for existing personnel to be retrained to meet certification standards for Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) and Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC). Counselors have seven years to meet CSPD requirements from date of hire.

(4) Method(s) the VR agency uses to ensure that personnel are able to communicate in appropriate modes of communication with or in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability.

provides interpreter services for communication with persons with limited English-speaking ability on a contractual basis. A member of the Business and Technology staff is fluent in Spanish. Reader service, guide service, and any special adaptive equipment are made available to applicants for services, DSB participants, and DSB personnel. Information is also available in the medium of choice for persons making application for DSB services and for persons with disabilities who are employed by DSB.

DSB has been a long—standing partner with the Arkansas 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.

(5) Procedures and activities to coordinate the designated state unit's comprehensive system of personnel development with personnel development under the individuals with disabilities education act.

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.

COOPERATION, COLLABORATION, AND COORDINATION

(j) Coordination with Education Officials.

(1) Plans, policies, and procedures for coordination between the designated state agency and education officials responsible for the public education of students with disabilities, that are designed to facilitate the transition of the students with disabilities from the receipt of educational services in school to the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services, including pre-employment transition services.

The state of Arkansas has an agreement/MOU in place to facilitate the coordination of plans, policies and procedures for the state VR agencies and education officials. The agreement/MOU between the Arkansas Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Division of Learning Services, Special Education Unit- hereafter referred to as Special Education, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services and the Division of Services for the Blind establishes a collaborative partnership that will facilitate the coordination and delivery of pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities between the ages of 16 and 21, and also, the transition of high school students from secondary school to the achievement of their desired post-secondary outcomes, with a focus on post school outcomes and working towards the students' career goals.

The specific purposes are: 1) to strengthen shared efforts to prepare students with disabilities for successful careers, community jobs and independent living; 2) outline a collaborative framework for coordinating State and local services and resources; and 3) provide guidance in coordinating plans, policies and procedures developed to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including the receipt of transition services as described in IDEA, pre-employment transition services and vocational rehabilitation transition services leading to employment.

All parties will collaborate to foster a common understanding of transition requirements and responsibilities to build a partnership between transition counselors, transition personnel, school districts and vocational rehabilitation counselors throughout the State in order to enable students with disabilities to successfully transition from school to employment. This agreement reflects the federal requirements and provides the objectives and joint responsibilities of each party.

(2) Current status and scope of the formal interagency agreement between the VR agency and the state educational agency.

The parties will collaborate to provide the following consultation and technical

assistance activities to promote students to move to transition and post-school outcomes:

- Providing direct instruction to vocational rehabilitation counselors, school transition personnel, and other persons supporting students with disabilities through group conferences, providing instructional materials and guidelines, reporting forms, training through webinars, and fielding telephone/email communications;
- Coordinating public speaking and training activities on transition services provided by local education agencies under IDEA;
- Developing model transition demonstration projects, and establishing or supporting partnerships involving the local education agencies to achieve the goals of improved transition outcomes.

The following are the responsibilities of the - Arkansas Division of Services for the Blind and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services regarding transition planning and vocational rehabilitation services for eligible youth:

- Staff will attend Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings when invited by any method that is most appropriate for the student.
- Staff will review Pre-Employment Transition activities, vocational interests, and progress and share it IEP planning meetings to facilitate discussions of student's goals, needs, and objectives.
- Staff will support student employment goals by providing supplemental services that work with the IEP to achieve student success.
- Facilitate the identification of youth with disabilities who may benefit from vocational rehabilitation by the academic year in which the student is turning 16.
- Make relevant data available about eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services and track information about employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. ARS and DSB will data share yearly at the end of the state fiscal year those students served jointly that have achieved competitive integrated employment by extracting WIOA post exit information from each agencies case management system and providing that information to the Special Education Unit.
- Make LEA personnel, students, and their families aware of the vocational rehabilitation program, including VR eligibility requirements (in accordance with 34 CFR 361.42), the application procedures and scope of services (in accordance with 34 CFR 361.48) that are provided to all eligible or potentially eligible individuals.

The Special Education Unit, Arkansas Division of Services for the Blind and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services jointly agree to the following

- The Special Education Unit is the agency responsible for ensuring that a free appropriate public education (FAPE) is made available to eligible students pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. § 1412(a)(1)).
- School districts have the primary planning, programmatic, and financial responsibilities for the provision of education transition services and related

services for students as a component of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and these services are provided to eligible students with disabilities, ages 16 to 21, and younger when determined appropriate through the implementation of the Individualized Education Program (IEP). The parties acknowledge that the Arkansas Division of Elementary and Secondary Education-Special Education Unit, has general supervisory responsibility over the educational program of any public agency providing FAPE to individuals with disabilities, ages birth to 21, as defined in state and federal statutes.

- The distinction between transition and related services that are the planning, programmatic and financial responsibility of the school district will be determined based on a delineation of the customary services that the school provides. These distinctions will be made in coordination with the individual school district through an engagement and agreement process to work with Arkansas Rehabilitation Services and/or the Division of Services for the Blind towards describing the activities, supports, and funding that ARS will partner with the school district on to provide pre-employment transition services in the school setting or during the school day.
- Arkansas Division of Services for the Blind and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services are financially responsible for providing pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities.
- Arkansas Division of Services for the Blind and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services are the agencies financially responsible for providing vocational rehabilitation, job training, and placement services pursuant to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, 20 U.S.C. § 701, *et seq.*
- Assistive Technology devices and services needed for individual students to operate in the classroom towards educational goals are the primary financial responsibility of the school system. However, vocational rehabilitation financial assistance may be used under an approved plan for services in instances where the assistive technology is required for work purposes outside of the school setting.
- The parties acknowledge that the goals of Arkansas Division of Services for the Blind and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services are to ensure that all students with disabilities have access to pre-employment transition services, as well as traditional vocational rehabilitation transition services, while in secondary school.
 - LEAs will work cooperatively with ARS and DSB Pre-Employment Transition Counselors to allow access to students during the school day on days and times coordinated with the schools in order provide direct services.
 - LEAs will notify ARS and DSB Pre-Employment Transition Counselors of upcoming Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) meetings in order to ensure there is adequate planning for all students with disabilities to achieve post-secondary success in training, post-secondary education, or employment.
 - DSB and ARS will ensure that all students who have been found eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation Transition Services will receive a Plan for Employment that aligns with the student's interests and informed choice per the Individualized Education Plan prior to exiting the secondary school setting.

Outreach efforts will include a description of the vocational rehabilitation program, including the pre-employment transition program and the transition program within vocational rehabilitation. The potentially eligible definition, the eligibility requirements, the application procedures, and the scope of services that may be provided to students with disabilities will be included in outreach efforts.

Outreach efforts include but are not limited to attendance at IEP and transition planning meetings, career fairs, back to school nights, group orientations, transition fairs, and presentations coordinated throughout the year. The process includes:

- Transition counselors to identify and outreach to all students with disabilities to make available the five required pre-employment transition services.
- Outreach to students with disabilities as defined under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), students with disabilities for purposes of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, students with disabilities receiving school psychological, health, nursing, or social work services; and students with disabilities enrolled in an educational program and not in receipt of disability-related services from the educational program.
- Coordination with the Department of Education, Special Education Unit to outreach to youth in Department of Youth Services settings, youth who have dropped out of an education program, and students who are at risk of dropping out of high school.

Documentation requirements under section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act for students with disabilities seeking subminimum wage employment. Under section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act, as amended by WIOA, 14(c) businesses referred to as "employers" are prohibited from employing any individual with disabilities who is 24 years of age or younger at subminimum wage, unless the individual has received documentation from DSB or ARS upon completion of all the following activities:

- Pre-employment transition services under the Rehabilitation Act, as amended by WIOA, or transition services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and
- Apply for vocational rehabilitation services and the individual was determined:
 - Ineligible for vocational rehabilitation services.
 - Eligible for vocational rehabilitation services, had an approved individualized plan for employment, and
 - the individual was unable to achieve an employment outcome in competitive, integrated employment after a reasonable period of time, and his/her case was closed.
- Career counseling and information and referral services to federal and state programs to help the individual discover, experience, and attain competitive integrated employment and the counseling and information was not for employment at sub-minimum wage. These requirements will be shared by the SEA with LEAs, parents, guardians, teachers, and students. DSB and ARS will maintain the

documentation and provide a copy to the individual within the timelines identified as specified under 34 CFR part 397. Any of the services identified above that the LEA provides must be documented by the LEA and provided to the student and DSB and ARS, as appropriate. DSB and ARS in consultation with the LEAS, will document the completion of this process at quarterly team meetings where the individual participant needs and next steps are discussed and documentation is shared, consistent with the confidentiality requirements of the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (20 USC 11232g(b) and 34 CFR 99.30 and 99.31) and IDEA (20 USC 1417(c) and 34 CFR 300.622) pursuant to section 511(d) of the Act and §397.10.

- Neither the SEA nor the LEA will enter into an arrangement with an entity holding a special wage certificate under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act for the purposes of operating a program in which students or youth with disabilities are paid subminimum wage
- Before a 14(c) entity may begin compensating a youth with a disability at subminimum wage, the youth must complete Pre-Employment Transition Services through VR or the youth must present documentation showing completion of transition services under IDEA from the school system. The section titled *Documentation Requirements for Section 511* details the forms used for this process
- The LEA will refer a student with a disability known to be seeking subminimum wage employment to the VR program prior to referring that student to a subminimum wage program.

(k) Coordination with Employers.

In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(11)(E) of the Rehabilitation Act, describe how the VR agency will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of VR services; and transition services for youth and students with disabilities, including pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities.

DSB counselors serve as business consultants, because they are most familiar with the skills, training, and capabilities of their clients. DSB counselors must complete a minimum of 2 employer meetings per month. This activity is done with the interest of the participant in mind. Counselors seek out employers who have career matches that meet the interest and abilities of the participant, or it is done with the aspirations and future goals of the participant in mind.

DSB has a Business Engagement Coordinator who networks with employers to identify needs and opportunities for DSB to serve both employers and participants. DSB's Business Engagement Coordinator also works with the Pre-ETS team to identify employers to speak with students about opportunities as well as to offer Work-Based Learning opportunities for students with a disability. The Business Engagement Coordinator is responsible for developing and maintaining the relationships with the State and local Chambers of

Commerce and building relationships across the state with employers and other state agencies to promote employment opportunities for individuals who are Blind or Visually Impaired.

DSB and other WIOA partners work together on the WIOA Business Engagement Committee to share information and provide information to employers on hiring individuals with disabilities. DSB staff participate in local Business Engagement Partner meetings at the one stop centers.

(I) Interagency Cooperation with Other Agencies

(1) State programs (designate lead agency(ies) and implementing entity(ies)) 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.

Additionally, DSB has an assistive technology lab to assist consumers who are blind or visually impaired. The Technology Director works closely with ICAN. DSB has referred consumers to ICAN to borrow equipment while waiting on theirs to be delivered and to assist consumers in repairing their equipment. DSB participates in ICAN's quarterly meeting and their yearly training with NanoPac. When a consumer being served by DSB's technology lab has secondary disabilities, ICAN assists the lab in identifying additional technology resources.

The DSB Business and Technology Unit has tested accessibility on the AWARE data management system project, Office 365, and 508 Enhancements, a national project that will assist individuals who are blind or visually impaired in using Microsoft Share products. The DSB State Rehabilitation Technologist has been involved in testing some of the DWS Office 365 cloud programs. Assessments for assistive technology are completed by the DSB Business and Technology Unit, which has helped VR Counselors install computer equipment and perform other technology related tasks, so that they can provide basic technology support to participants in their respective geographic areas statewide. This initiative has also expanded the capacity of the DSB Business and Technology Unit.

(2) 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).

(3) Non-educational agencies serving out-of-school youth.

DSB maintains an active presence on numerous councils and committees, including: Arkansas Interagency Transition Partnership, Arkansas Workforce Development Board, The Arkansas Independent Living Council, Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE), The Governor's Commission on People with Disabilities, Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program, and local workforce development boards across the state.

DSB's Transition Manager and Field Services Administrator serve on the WIOA Partner Transition and Out of School Youth Subcommittee to assist with sharing resources and programming to reach out of school youth.

(4) State use contracting programs.

DSB has no state use contracting programs.

(5) State agency responsible for administering the state Medicaid plan under title xix of the social security act (42 u.s.c. 1396 et seq.).

DSB will continue its close working relationships with the DHS Division of Medical Services (DMS), which houses Medicaid; the DHS Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDS); and the DHS Division of Aging, Adult, and Behavioral Health Services (DAABHS). DSB has cooperative agreements outlining responsibilities and the provision of services of each agency to initiate Employment First activities. Each agency agrees to serve individuals with disabilities with a goal of competitive integrated employment. DSB partners with ARS with dual caseloads that has a similar agreement for the provision of services to State Medicaid recipients. DSB coordinates services with DBHS, DMS, and the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences.

(6) State Agency Responsible for Providing Services for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities.

DSB will continue active working relationships with the DHS Division of Medical Services (DMS), which houses Medicaid; the DHS Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDS); and the DHS Division of Aging, Adult, and Behavioral Health Services (DAABHS). DSB has cooperative agreements outlining responsibilities and the provision of services of each agency to initiate Employment First activities. Each agency agrees to serve individuals with disabilities with the goal of competitive integrated employment with the DDS and DAABHS. DSB partners with ARS with dual caseloads that has a similar agreement for the provision of services to State Medicaid recipients. DSB coordinates services with

DAABHS, DMS, and the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences DSB and the DHS Division of Developmental Disabilities serve on the Arkansas Interagency Transition Partnership (AITP), which coordinates transition services and discusses education—related issues. DSB also partners with DDS on Employment First Initiatives and APSE.

(7) State agency responsible for providing mental health services.

DSB will continue active relationships with the DHS Division of Medical Services (DMS), which houses Medicaid; the DHS Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDS); and the DHS Division of Aging, Adult, and Behavioral Health Services (DAABHS). DSB has cooperative agreements outlining responsibilities and the provision of services of each agency to initiate Employment First Activities. Each agency agrees to serve individuals with disabilities with the goal of competitive integrated employment. DSB along with ARS, DDS, and DAABHS have worked with DOL ODEP consultants to improve supported employment services for individuals with mental health issues. DSB coordinates services with DAABHS, DMS, and the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences

(8) Other federal, state, and local agencies and programs outside the workforce development system.

The Division of State Services for the Blind (DSB) cooperates with other WIOA partners and can make referrals for adult literacy, higher education, DHS programs, and other services as needed. DSB and ARS have shared cooperative agreements with the 33 Institutions of Higher Education. DSB works in close partnership with schools, especially the Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired to provide vocational rehabilitation services and Pre-ETS to students. DSB also coordinates with the Department of Education's Educational Services for the Visually Impaired (ESVI) to serve high school students who are blind or visually impaired. DSB has an MOU with the American Indian Center of Arkansas to provide services to dual clients more effectively. DSB has agreements with Children and Youth with Sensory Impairments (CAYSI) and Helen Keller National Center to provide services for individuals who are Deafblind.

DSB shares broadcast engineering services and uses facilities at the Arkansas Educational Television Network to provide DSB's Arkansas Information Reading Services (AIRS) and Newslines. 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. Newslines enables people who are blind or visually impaired to access over 300 newspapers and magazines via phone, Internet, digital talking-book player and MP3 players.

DSB works cooperatively with service organizations and non-profits to raise awareness of blindness issues and promote the independence of people who are blind or visually impaired. These organizations include Arkansas Lions Clubs, the National Federation of

the Blind Arkansas Chapter, the American Council of the Blind Arkansas Chapter. The Arkansas Lions Eye Bank and Laboratory at UAMS, Mid-South Sight and Hearing, the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) and the Arkansas Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.

(9) Other private nonprofit organizations.

DSB develops agreements in response to: (1) state and federal laws and regulations, (2) results of needs assessments, (3) suggestions from consumer groups, and (4) recommendations of staff and stakeholders including those in the Workforce Services arena. DSB uses the RSA guideline template to develop cooperative agreements.

DSB has been a long-standing partner with the Arkansas Deaf blindness Project: Children and Youth with Sensory Impairment (CAYSI), formerly known as the Deaf/Blind Consortium. DSB refers participants to CAYSI and serves on its Advisory Committee, which provides training for parents and professionals to foster stronger partnerships among agencies who work with this population. The project maintains a deafblind registry and requests related information from DSB. DSB has worked with the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) to improve services for those consumers who are deaf-blind and to provide training for DSB staff, including a pilot with ARS, DSB, HKNC, and CAYSI for Deafblind Students with a Disability. DSB operates the Arkansas Information Reading Services (AIRS), which is a service to groups as authorized under 34 C.F.R. § 361.49(a)(3).

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (DSB) CERTIFICATIONS AND ASSURANCES

ASSURANCES

The State Plan must include
1. Public Comment on Policies and Procedures: The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.
2. Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement: The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a Unified State plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140.
3. Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan: The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to:
3.a. the establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as

required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.b. either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.c. consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.d. the financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3).
3.e. as applicable, the local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.f. as applicable, the shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.g. statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.h. the requirements for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.i. all required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.j. the requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.k. the compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.l. the reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities as set forth in section 101(a)(18)(A).
3.m. the submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4. Administration of the Provision of VR Services: The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will:
4.a. comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(E) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.b. impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.c. provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services or, if implementing an order of selection, in accordance with criteria

established by the State for the order of selection as set out in section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.d. determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.e. comply with the requirements for the development of an individualized plan for employment in accordance with section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.f. comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.g. provide vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the State, in accordance with section 101(a)(13) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.h. comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by sections 101(a)(14) and 511 of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.i. meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act if the State elects to construct, under special circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs.
4.j. with respect to students with disabilities, the State:
4.j.i. has developed and will implement,
4.j.i.A. strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and
4.j.i.B. strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and
4.j.ii. has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15), 101(a)(25) and 113).
4.j.iii. shall reserve not less than 15 percent of the allocated funds for the provision of pre-employment transition services; such funds shall not be used to pay for the administrative costs of providing pre-employment transition services.
5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement to the State plan:
5.a. The designated State unit assures that it will include in the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan all information required by section 606 of the Rehabilitation Act.
5.b. The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act separately for individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act.
6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program (Title VI):
6.a. The designated State agency assures that it will expend no more than 2.5 percent of

the State's allotment under title VI for administrative costs of carrying out this program; and, the designated State agency or agencies will provide, directly or indirectly through public or private entities, non-Federal contributions in an amount that is not less than 10 percent of the costs of carrying out supported employment services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved for such purpose under section 603(d) of the Rehabilitation Act, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(H) and (I) of the Rehabilitation Act.

6.b. The designated State agency assures that it will use funds made available under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act only to provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, who are eligible to receive such services; and, that such funds are used only to supplement and not supplant the funds provided under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, when providing supported employment services specified in the individualized plan for employment, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(A) and (D), of the Rehabilitation Act.

7. Provision of Supported Employment Services:

7.a. The designated State agency assures that it will provide supported employment services as defined in section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act.

7.b. The designated State agency assures that the comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act an individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(7)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act.

Do you attest that these assurances will be met?

Yes

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (BLIND) CERTIFICATIONS

States must provide written and signed certifications that:	
1.	The Division of Services for the Blind is authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act), as amended by title IV of WIOA, ^[1] and its State Plan supplement under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act;
2.	In the event the designated State agency is not primarily concerned with vocational and other rehabilitation of individuals with disabilities, the designated State agency must include a designated State unit for the VR program (Section 101(a)(2)(B)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act). As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of VR services, Division of Workforce Services ^[2] agrees to operate and is responsible for the administration of the State VR Services Program in accordance with the VR services portion of the Unified or

	Combined State Plan ^[3] , the Rehabilitation Act, 34 CFR 361.13(b) and (c), and all applicable regulations ^[4] , policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available to States under section 111(a) of the Rehabilitation Act are used solely for the provision of VR services and the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan;
3.	As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act for supported employment services, the designated State agency or the designated State unit when the designated State agency has a designated State unit, agrees to operate and is responsible for the administration of the State Supported Employment Services Program in accordance with the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan ^[5] , the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations ^[6] , policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available under title VI are used solely for the provision of supported employment services and the administration of the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan;
4.	The designated State unit, or if not applicable, the designated State agency has the authority under State law to perform the functions of the State regarding the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, and is responsible for the administration of the VR program in accordance with 34 CFR 361.13(b) and (c);
5.	The State legally may carry out each provision of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement.
6.	All provisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement are consistent with State law.
7.	Cassandra Williams-Stokes, at Division of Services for the Blind 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;
8.	The Director, Division of Services for the Blind has the authority to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and the supplement for Supported Employment 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.

CERTIFICATION SIGNATURE

Signatory information	Enter Signatory information in this column
Name of Signatory	Cassandra Williams-Stokes
Title of Signatory	Director
Date Signed	[Enter date here]

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Effectiveness in Serving Employers

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	64.0%		65.0%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	63.0%		65.0%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	6,800.0		6,870.0	
Credential Attainment Rate	35.5%		36.0%	
Measurable Skill Gains	57.5%		58.0%	
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹

EQUITY FOR STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, AND OTHER PROGRAM BENEFICIARIES

OMB Control Number 1894-0005 Expiration 02/28/2026

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA Section 427 Form Instructions for State Applicants

State applicants must respond to the following four questions:

1. Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.
2. Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?
3. Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?
4. What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

- Applicants identify any barriers that may impede equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity, including, but not limited to, barriers based on economic disadvantage, gender, race, ethnicity, color, national origin, disability, age, language, migrant status, rural status, homeless status or housing insecurity, pregnancy, parenting, or caregiving status, and sexual orientation.
- Applicants use the associated text box to respond to each question. However, applicants might have already included some or all this required information in the narrative sections of their applications or their State Plans. In responding to this requirement, for each question, applicants may provide a cross-reference to the section(s) in their State Plans that includes the information responsive to that question on this form or may restate that information on this form.
- Applicants are not required to have mission statements or policies that align with equity to apply.
- Applicants that have already undertaken steps to address barriers must still provide an explanation and/or description of the steps already taken in each text box, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement.
- Applicants that believe no barriers exist must still provide an explanation and/or description to each question to validate that perception, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement. Please refer to [GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package](#)

1. DESCRIBE HOW YOUR ENTITY’S EXISTING MISSION, POLICIES, OR COMMITMENTS ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO, AND EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION IN, THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY. ***Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a)*** applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity. [GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package](#)

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The first of four questions is:

Describe how your entity’s existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.

2. BASED ON YOUR PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY, WHAT BARRIERS MAY IMPEDE EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, OR OTHER BENEFICIARIES?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

[GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package](#)

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The second of four questions is:

Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?

3. BASED ON THE BARRIERS IDENTIFIED, WHAT STEPS WILL YOU TAKE TO ADDRESS SUCH BARRIERS TO EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The third of four questions is:

Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?

4. WHAT IS YOUR TIMELINE, INCLUDING TARGETED MILESTONES, FOR ADDRESSING THESE IDENTIFIED BARRIERS?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The final of four questions is:

What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

GEPA 427 FORM INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLICATION PACKAGE - SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

EQUITY FOR STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, AND OTHER PROGRAM BENEFICIARIES

OMB Control Number 1894-0005 Expiration 02/28/2026

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA Section 427 Form Instructions for State Applicants

State applicants must respond to the following four questions:

1. Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.
2. Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?
3. Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?
4. What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

- Applicants identify any barriers that may impede equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity, including, but not limited to, barriers based on economic disadvantage, gender, race, ethnicity, color, national origin, disability, age, language, migrant status, rural status, homeless status or housing insecurity, pregnancy, parenting, or caregiving status, and sexual orientation.
- Applicants use the associated text box to respond to each question. However, applicants might have already included some or all this required information in the narrative sections of their applications or their State Plans. In responding to this requirement, for each question, applicants may provide a cross-reference to the section(s) in their State Plans that includes the information responsive to that question on this form or may restate that information on this form.
- Applicants are not required to have mission statements or policies that align with equity to apply.
- Applicants that have already undertaken steps to address barriers must still provide an explanation and/or description of the steps already taken in each text box, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement.
- Applicants that believe no barriers exist must still provide an explanation and/or description to each question to validate that perception, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement. Please refer to [GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package](#)

1. Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

[GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package](#)

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The first of four questions is:

Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.

2. Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State

applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

[GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package](#)

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The second of four questions is:

Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?

3. Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

[GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package](#)

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The third of four questions is:

Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?

4. What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

[GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package](#)

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The final of four questions is:

What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

^[1] Public Law 113-128.

^[2] All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

^[3] No funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

^[4] Applicable regulations, in part, include the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 76, 77, 79, 81, and 82; 2 CFR part 200 as adopted by 2 CFR part 3474; and the State VR Services program regulations at 34 CFR part 361.

¹⁵¹ No funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved supported employment supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.
¹⁶¹ Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in footnote 4, as well as Supported Employment program regulations at 34 CFR part 363.

- b. GEPA 427 Form Instructions for Application Package - Vocational Rehabilitation
 - a. [1. Describe how your entity’s existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.](#) *Draft*
 - b. [2. Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?](#) *Draft*
 - c. [3. Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?](#) *Draft*
 - d. [4. What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?](#) *Draft*
- c. GEPA 427 Form Instructions for Application Package - Supported Employment
 - a. [1. Describe how your entity’s existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.](#) *Draft*
 - b. [2. Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?](#) *Draft*
 - c. [3. Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?](#) *Draft*
 - d. [4. What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?](#) *Draft*

VII. PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR COMBINED STATE PLAN PARTNER PROGRAMS

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING (SNAP E&T) and WORK PROGRAMS authorized under Sections 6(d)(4) and 6 6(o) of the FOOD AND NUTRITION ACT of 2008

(a) General Requirements.

(1) Nature of E&T Components.

SNAP E&T State Plan submitted and approved by FNS in separate State Plan. Component details follow:

Non-Education, Non-Work Component Details

Details: Supervised Job Search (SJS)

Summary of the State guidelines implementing SJS: Each E&T provider has been approved by the State Agency to provide this component. Providers will be responsible for tracking this information with SNAP Works and monitoring by the State Agency. Supervised Job Search will only account for less than 50% of all activities because this is a non-qualifying component for an Able-Bodied Adult subject to RTW. Each provider designates specific days and times each month that allows each participant assigned to this component to search for jobs with guidance and

feedback from the provider. This is the criteria used to establish each provider as an approved site for this component. This allows all work registrants the opportunity to seek, and possibility obtain employment, which leads to the start of self-sufficiency. Each E&T participant in this component is expected to complete between 10-12 hours per month.

Direct link: Providers assist the participants in the following ways: assistance in completing applications and resume preparation, job search skill development, interview coaching and providing specific job leads and referrals the provider and participant deem appropriate. Each provider works with participants to help establish and meet employment goals, thereby increasing their employment potential and opportunities. Each participant's employment history and criminal background are considered when coaching the participant in this component. The provider will host virtual and in-person to assist with job searches.

Target population: SNAP recipients who volunteer to participate in Employment and Training.

Criteria for participation: Reading and computer knowledge are necessary for this component.

Geographic area: This component is available in all 75 counties in the State.

Projected annual participation: 533

Estimated annual component costs: \$1,836,225.68

Details: Job Search Training (JST)

Description of the component: Job Search Training is a component that enhances the job readiness of participants by teaching them job-seeking techniques, increasing job search motivation, and boosting self-efficacy and self-confidence. This component will offer one-on-one help with resume development, procuring job leads, interview coaching (including mock interviews), skills testing, employment counseling, motivational techniques, effective job search methods, and instruction in group settings. Participants in this component must be willing and able to participate on the days and times specified by the provider. Participation in this component can be in-person or remote. Although non-ABAWD participants have no limitation to the number of hours they may spend in this component, they are expected to participate in this activity 10 hours weekly when assigned. Non-ABAWDS are allowed 80 hours per month of participation in this component.

Target population: SNAP recipients who volunteer to participate in Employment and Training.

Criteria for participation: All participants with a High School Diploma or GED or a higher may participate in this component.

Geographic area: This component is available in all 75 counties in the State.

Projected annual participation: 150

Estimated annual component costs: \$535,902.11

Details: Job Retention (JR)

Description of the component: Job Retention consists of cash payments to vendors on

behalf of former E&T participants to support job retention. This supportive service is available for a minimum of 30 days and up to 90 days to individuals who have secured employment. The State's providers are required to track employment data for 90 days after the completion of the E&T program. Job retention information will be entered into the State's MIS system, SNAP Works, where E&T Central Office personnel may view and compile reports on the Job Retention status of each provider. Participants in this component must be employed.

Target population: SNAP recipients who volunteer to participate in Employment and Training.

Criteria for participation: Only individuals who have received other E&T services under the E&T program and are currently employed are eligible for job retention services.

Geographic area: This component is available in all 75 counties in the State.

Projected annual participation: 50

Estimated annual component costs: \$196,392.03

Educational Program Details

Details: Basic/Foundational Skills Instruction (includes High School Equivalency Programs) (EPB)

Description of the component: Educational programs or activities designed to assist in improving basic skills including literacy, reading and math programs to the functional level or to obtain a GED or high school equivalent certificate. Participants assigned to this component are those seeking their GED or equivalent, or have scores in reading, math, or literacy below the required standard. Clients are expected to participate in this activity 20 hours per week.

Target population: SNAP recipients who volunteer to participate in Employment and Training.

Criteria for participation: Participants who do not have a High School Diploma, GED, or score on the TABE test indicating that additional literacy skills are needed.

Geographic area: This component is available in all 75 counties in the State.

Projected annual participation: 310

Estimated annual component costs: \$1,079,118.22

Not supplanting: Members of this component will receive basic education activities that is designed to improve literacy and math skills in addition to acquiring their GED (if needed). This component will be monitored and reviewed by the State Agency to ensure compliance with state and federal guidelines. The state's E&T Unit will monitor this component as part of the normal M/E process and guidelines.

Cost parity: The State Agency will conduct reviews of all E&T providers each fiscal year to ensure compliance with this federal guideline. The state's E&T Unit will monitor this component as part of the normal monitoring process and guidelines.

The provider will verify the costs for E&T participants vs. non-E&T participants.

Details: Career/Technical Education Programs or other Vocational Training (EPC)

Description of the component: Career/Technical Educational program is short-term

competency-based, with a hands-on experience emphasis and a quantifiable measurement of success that is designed to prepare people for work in a trade or craft, such as a technician, nurse, or welder. It may also include work keys or self-guided computer-assisted learning programs. Participants would need to commit to attending scheduled classes that could range from 4-8 weeks, depending on the type of training.

Target population: SNAP recipients who volunteer to participate in Employment and Training.

Criteria for participation: Participants who do not have a high school diploma or GED, or whose score on the TABE test indicate that additional literacy skills are needed.

Geographic area: This component is available in all 75 counties in the State.

Projected annual participation: 452

Estimated annual component costs: \$1,561,222.53

Not supplanting: Members of this component will receive the skills necessary to enter the workforce through a specific trade. The costs of these classes are not covered by any other funds (state or local government) and must be paid before classes can begin. The State Agency will conduct reviews of all E&T providers each fiscal year to ensure compliance with this federal guideline. The state's E&T Unit will monitor this component as part of the normal monitoring process and guidelines.

Cost parity: The State Agency will conduct reviews of all E&T providers each fiscal year to ensure compliance with this federal guideline. The state's E&T Unit will monitor this component as part of the normal monitoring process and guidelines.

The provider will verify the costs for E&T participants vs. non-E&T participants.

Details: English Language Acquisition (EPEL)

Description of the component: English Language Acquisition is designed to help participants improve their ability to speak, read, listen, and write the English language. The participant must commit to attending scheduled classes on specific days and times set by the provider. This can be in-person or virtual.

Clients are expected to participate in this activity 40 hours per month (10 hours per week).

Target population: SNAP recipients who volunteer to participate, particularly non-English speaking refugees and immigrants.

Criteria for participation: A participant must speak limited English or none to participate in EPEL component.

Geographic area: This component is available in all 75 counties in the State.

Projected annual participation: 2

Estimated annual component costs: \$6,790.20

Not supplanting: Activities in this component are not covered by any state or local government funds and are offered to the participant at zero cost. The State Agency will conduct reviews of all E&T providers each fiscal year to ensure compliance with this federal guideline. The state's E&T Unit will monitor this component as part of the normal monitoring process and guidelines.

Cost parity: The State Agency will conduct reviews of all E&T providers each fiscal year

to ensure compliance with this federal guideline. The state's E&T Unit will monitor this component as part of the normal monitoring process and guidelines. The provider will verify the costs for E&T participants vs. non-E&T participants.

Details: Work Readiness Training (EPWRT)

Description of the component: Occupational Skills/Work Readiness are activities designed to help the participant gain general occupational skills, which may include refresher courses, employment counseling, work keys, and self-guided computer-assisted learning programs. Participants in this component should have access to a computer or adequate mobile device or be willing and able to participate in person. Participants are expected to complete 10 hours per week.

Target population: SNAP recipients who volunteer to participate.

Criteria for participation: Participants assigned to this activity may lack a high school diploma, GED or show a lack of a strong work history.

Geographic area: This component is available in all 75 counties in the State.

Projected annual participation: 146

Estimated annual component costs: \$522,321.71

Not supplanting: Activities within this education component are not covered by any other federal, state or local funds. Costs associated with some of these activities are at the expense of the participant. The State Agency's E&T Unit will conduct reviews of all E&T providers each fiscal year to ensure compliance with this federal guideline.

Cost parity: The State Agency will conduct reviews of all E&T providers each fiscal year to ensure compliance with this federal guideline. The state's E&T Unit will monitor this component as part of the normal monitoring process and guidelines.

The provider will verify the costs for E&T participants vs. non-E&T participants.

Work Experience

Details: Work Activity (WA)

Description of the component: Work activity is a program designed to help SNAP recipients gain skills, training, or work experience that will improve their likelihood of obtaining regular employment. Some of the services include internships, volunteering to complete administrative duties, etc. This component is planned and structured and is meant for participants to gain experience for a specific amount of time. The hours of participation are calculated by dividing the household's authorized monthly SNAP benefit amount by the current state or federal minimum wage.

Target population: SNAP recipients who volunteer to participate.

Criteria for participation: Participants assigned to Work Activity do not have a strong work history, as determined by the assessment. The State Agency will monitor all providers that provide this activity to ensure compliance with all federal and state guidelines.

Geographic area: Statewide

Projected annual participation: 25

Estimated annual component costs: \$111,514.52

(2) 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.

Tables below for SNAP E&T FFY24 Operating Budget

Partner or Contractor Name	Amount of 100 percent Federal Funds	Total Amount of 50/50 Funds	Total Subgrant
Adult Education	\$186,459.00	\$1,216,111.88	\$1,402,570.88
Shorter College		\$62,693.50	\$62,693.50
Our House		\$146,520.00	\$146,520.00
AR Employment Career Center		\$551,097.80	\$551,097.80
AR Northeastern College		\$141,341.50	\$141,341.50
Maximus (Outreach)		\$1,396,860.00	\$1,396,860.00
Medlinc		\$145,518.00	\$145,518.00
Gateway Allied Health		\$240,613.90	\$240,613.90
Trinity Truck Driving School		\$327,617.50	\$327,617.50
Total Contractual Costs			\$4,414,833.08

Expense Category	Non-Federal Share	Federal Share	Total
I. Direct Program and Admin Costs			
Salary/Wages (State agency only)		\$ 329,846.47	\$ 329,846.47
Fringe Benefits - provide approved fringe benefit rate percentage in line 8 below. Or provide total fringe benefits in line 9 if multiple rates are used by the State agency			
40.00%	\$ -	\$ 131,939.00	\$ 131,939.00
Fringe Benefits -			\$ -
Non-capital equipment		\$ 494,883.84	\$ 494,883.84
Materials		\$ 28,000.00	\$ 28,000.00
Travel	\$ -	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 10,000.00
Building Space	\$ -	\$ 40,833.24	\$ 40,833.24
Equipment and other capital expenditures			\$ -
Subtotal - State agency costs only	\$ -	\$ 1,035,502.55	\$ 1,035,502.55

Contractual Costs: Is prepopulating from Contract-Partnerships Table, must not include Participant reimbursements.	\$ 4,228,374.08	\$ 4,414,833.08	\$ 8,643,207.15
County Administered Program Admin Cost, if applicable: Is prepopulating from Tab D - Optional County Admin Budget.	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
County Administered Direct Program Admin Cost, if applicable. Enter County costs here if Tab D - Optional County Admin Budget table is not used.			\$ -
Total Direct Program and Admin Costs	\$ 4,228,374.08	\$ 5,450,335.63	\$ 9,678,709.70
II. Indirect Costs - using indirect cost rate: Indirect costs are only calculated on the subtotal of State agency costs shown on Row 15.			
Indirect Costs - provide approved indirect cost rate percentage in line 23 below.			
	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Indirect Costs - using Federally Approved Cost Allocation Plan.			
Federally Approved Cost Allocated Costs - State agency only.		\$ 233,056.45	\$ 233,056.45
County Administered Allocated Costs (only applicable to County Administered Programs)			\$ -
Total Allocated Costs based on Cost Allocation Plan	\$ -	\$ 233,056.45	\$ 233,056.45
III. In-kind contribution			
State in-kind contribution	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Administrative Costs	\$ 4,228,374.08	\$ 5,683,392.08	\$ 9,911,766.15
IV. Participant Reimbursements			
Dependent Care (including costs from contracts/partners and county administered programs)	\$ 19,375.00	\$ 19,375.00	\$ 38,750.00
Transportation & Other costs (including costs from contracts/partners and county)	\$ 216,538.00	\$ 216,538.00	\$ 433,076.00

administered programs)			
State Agency Cost for Dependent Care	\$ -		\$ -
Total Participant Reimbursements	\$ 235,913.00	\$ 235,913.00	\$ 471,826.00
V. Total Costs	\$ 4,464,287.08	\$ 5,919,305.08	\$ 10,383,592.15

(3) The categories and types of individuals the State agency intends to exempt from E&T participation, the estimated percentage of work registrants the State agency plans to exempt, and the frequency with which the State agency plans to reevaluate the validity of its exemptions.

SNAP recipients who are receiving TEA or Unemployment Benefits are excluded from E&T participation. 100% of work registrants are exempt from mandatory E&T but may volunteer to participate.

(4) The characteristics of the population the State agency intends to place in E&T.

SNAP recipients who volunteer to participate per 7 CFR 273.7(e)(5)(i).

(5) The estimated number of volunteers the State agency expects to place in E&T.

The state expects approximately 1668 participants in FY24.

(6) The geographic areas covered and not covered by the E&T Plan and why, and the type and location of services to be offered.

All 75 counties are covered. All components are available for assignment in all counties, though services will vary by location and availability.

(7) The method the State agency uses to count all work registrants as of the first day of the new fiscal year.

Active SNAP recipients as of 10/01/XX who are assigned an applicable Work Participation Characteristic, which is not an exempt from Work Registration.

Exempt from Work Registration and thus not counted as work registrant:

- Under age sixteen (16) or age sixty (60) or older.
- Age sixteen (16) or seventeen (17) and living with a parent or attending a school or training program on at least a half-time basis.
- Receiving Transitional Employment Assistance (TEA) Cash Assistance.
- Caring for a dependent child under age six (6) or an incapacitated person.
- Receiving unemployment benefits.

- Currently participating in a treatment program for alcoholism or drug addiction.
- Employed or self-employed on a full-time basis(thirty (30) hours or more).
- A student enrolled at least half-time in any recognized school, training program, or institution of higher education.

(8) The method the State agency uses to report work registrant information on the quarterly Form FNS-583.

Line 1: Active SNAP recipients as of 10/01/XX who are assigned an applicable Work Participation Characteristic, which is not an exempt from Work Registration.

Line 2: Distinct count of active SNAP recipients with non-exempt Work Participation Characteristics at the end of each month.

Non-duplicated count (count only once per FY).

(9) The method the State agency uses to prevent work registrants from being counted twice within a Federal fiscal year. If the State agency universally work registers all SNAP applicants, this method must specify how the State agency excludes those exempt from work registration under 7 C.F.R. §273.7(b)(1). If the State agency work registers nonexempt participants whenever a new application is submitted, this method must also specify how the State agency excludes those participants who may have already been registered within the past 12 months as specified under 7 C.F.R. §273.7(a)(1)(i).

SNAP applicants are assigned a Work Participation Characteristic at eligibility determination. All non-exempt recipients are automatically work registered. The assignment of the Work Participation Characteristic is completed via program rules based on policy compared against the information recorded in the eligibility system. The prevention of duplicated count of work registrants is completed via the exclusion of previously reported client identification criteria in the data report.

(10) 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.

The program is jointly administered by the Office of Program Policy and Community Grant Services (OPPCGS) and the Office of Field Operations (OFO). Within OPPCGS, the E&T unit is responsible for the contracting of E&T services, support, and monitoring of the contracted community providers and the SNAP Policy unit is responsible for establishing E&T policy. The OFO is responsible for SNAP certification. Communication between the providers and certification unit is achieved via Arkansas's MIS SNAP Works in which providers enter participation data and tasks are created in ARIES (Arkansas Integrated Eligibility System). A Program Eligibility Specialist will then process the task

to address any eligibility changes. ARIES will then issue the update to SNAP Works for the provider (if applicable).

(11) 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 will utilize a combination of 100% E&T Funds and 50/50 Funding streams. 50/50 consists of reimbursement of 50% invoiced expense from the third-party provider. The State Agency will draw the funds from FNS. The State Agency has the following E&T providers to administer services to all eligible SNAP participants across the entire state. Current FY24 E&T providers are:

- Adult Education
- Arkansas Employment Career Center (AECC)
- Shorter College
- Our House
- Arkansas Northeastern College
- Gateway Allied Health
- Medlinc Inc.
- Trinity Truck Driving School
- Maximus Inc. (Outreach Services)

(12) 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

(13) 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.

Not applicable

(14) 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.

Not applicable. Dependent care is a participant reimbursement.

(15) 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.

\$900 annually combined all participant reimbursements.

(16) 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.

Allowable Participant Reimbursements	Participant Reimbursement Caps (optional)	Who provides the participant reimbursement?	Method of disbursement
Transportation (and other allowable transportation costs).	\$900 annually	State Agency	Reimbursement for actual expenses
Allowable educational expenses (testing costs, books, licensing, etc.	\$900 annually	State Agency	Reimbursement for actual expenses
Allowable employment costs (background checks, licensing, uniforms, personal safety items, etc.)	\$900 annually	State Agency	Reimbursement for actual expenses
Dependent Care	\$900 annually	State Agency	Reimbursement for actual expenses

(b) Able-bodied Adults without Dependents (ABAWD).

Not applicable

(c) Optional Workfare.

(1) Operating Budget.

Workfare program submitted as a separate State Plan approved by FNS. Budget details follow:

Category	Total	Match (Provided by Vendor)	Federal Cost Paid by DHS	
Salary/Wages	\$ 29,216.00	\$ 14,608.00	\$ 14,608.00	Stone Co Workfare Administrator
Fringe Benefits 42.586%	\$ 12,442.00	\$ 6,221.00	\$6,221.00	Social Security matching, retirement, health insurance, workers comp and unemployment comp

Total Compensation	\$ 41,658.00	\$ 20,829.00	\$ 20,829.00	
Non-capital Equipment and Supplies	\$ 500.00	\$ 250.00	\$ 250.00	General office supplies
Travel	\$ 200.00	\$ 100.00	\$ 100.00	Participant Reimbursements
Building/Space	\$-	\$ -	\$-	
Equipment & Other Capital Expenditures	\$ 200.00	\$ 100.00	\$ 100.00	Repair and parts
Other Direct Cost	\$ 1,200.00	\$ 600.00	\$ 600.00	Telephone
Total Reimbursables	\$ 2,100.00	\$ 1,050.00	\$ 1,050.00	
Total Subgrant	\$ 43,758.00	\$ 21,879.00	\$ 21,879.00	

(2) Political Subdivisions.

Stone County is the only political subdivision in Arkansas operating a workfare program.

(d) Voluntary Workfare.

Workfare State Plan approved by FNS for FY24. Both Formal and Comparable Workfare are voluntary programs. There are no sanctions for noncompliance. However, if the individual is an able-bodied adult who has received 3 months of SNAP benefits while not meeting the RTW then he or she will no longer be eligible to participate in SNAP until they meet the RTW, become exempt from the RTW, meet an exemption from the RTW, or the current 3-year compliance period ends. The eligibility worker will take the appropriate action to either close or reduce the household's SNAP benefits as outlined in SNAP 3521. The household must also be notified via instructions at SNAP 3764 .

(e) Comparable Workfare.

The Comparable Workfare participation will begin with the entity and the date shown on the DCO-261. Participants may be reimbursed (not to exceed \$25 per month) for transportation. Reimbursements for transportation may include but are not limited to the use of the participant's private vehicle and public transportation, provided the cost per month does not exceed \$25. If the eligibility worker becomes aware that a participant, at any time, failed to comply with the RTW without good cause as outlined in SNAP 3762-3763, the worker must determine if any past months should have been considered as one of the three countable months in the three-year period. If so then the eligibility worker will request that the Program Eligibility Analyst (PEA) make a correction to the individual's countable months in the eligibility system.

In order for an individual to participate in Comparable Workfare with any church, local government agency, or other non-profit organization, the entity must be willing to supervise the individual's work and be willing to be responsible for verifying hours and participation as needed. The Comparable Workfare sponsor must maintain records of Workfare activity for each participant. At a minimum, these records must contain job sites, hours assigned, and hours completed. Both Formal and Comparable Workfare are voluntary programs. There are no sanctions for noncompliance.

However, if the individual is an able-bodied adult who has received three months of SNAP benefits while not meeting the RTW then he or she will no longer be eligible to participate in SNAP until they meet the RTW, become exempt from the RTW, meet an exemption from the RTW, or the current three-year compliance period ends. The eligibility worker will take the appropriate action to either close or reduce the household's SNAP benefits as outlined in SNAP 3521. The household must also be notified via instructions at SNAP 3764.

(f) Process.

The State agency will submit amendments to the state plan for FNS approval at least 30 days prior to the planned implementation.

(g) Plan Modifications.

The State agency will submit amendments to the state plan for FNS approval at least 30 days prior to the planned implementation.

TRADE ADJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE

There are no program-specific state planning requirements for TAA. If the state includes TAA in a Combined State Plan, the state must incorporate TAA in its responses to the common planning elements in sections II, III, IV, and V of the WIOA State Plan requirements instrument.

JOBS FOR VETERANS STATE GRANTS

(a) Provision of 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 serve in a dual role as DVOP specialists 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 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 members determine the eligible person's purpose for registering. The intake staff member, serving as the "greeter," is usually the first person that a veteran or other eligible person interacts with at an Arkansas Workforce Center (AWC). Once the Veteran or other eligible person is identified, the Workforce Center Staff conducts an initial assessment. This initial assessment uses a customized veteran intake questionnaire to help determine if the veteran or other eligible person has an SBE or if they are a member of another special priority group. If a determination is made that the client is 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 are provided on a priority-of-service basis.

(c) 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.

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.

(Local Veterans Employment Representative (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 veterans.

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) 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 30th of each year and expended by December 31st 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 4th Quarter of each year. Any part of the 1% of these funds that is not obligated by the 4th Quarter will remain unobligated at the grant closeout.

Overview

The overall goal in utilizing the Incentive Awards is to motivate JVSG 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:

Improve and modernize employment and placement services, as well as training

opportunities for veterans and other eligible persons. (e.g., virtual platforms, social media).

- Outstanding case management process.
- Providing the provision of “Priority of Service” and integration of services to veterans and other eligible persons at Arkansas Workforce Centers.
- Improve outcomes for veterans and other eligible persons. (e.g., vocational rehabilitation & Homeless Veterans Reintegration Programs (HVRP), Arkansas Department of Veteran Affairs (ADVA))
- 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.
- Community outreach- VSO, DAV, VFW, American Legions etc.
- Direct employer marketing
- Other State Agencies
- Area Chambers of Commerce
- Develop innovative approaches and best practices, that demonstrate the excellence in provision of quality employment and training services to Veterans and other eligible persons.
- WIOA Partners
- Office of Apprenticeship
- Office of Skills Development
- 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:, 42% of award / 5

Second Place:, 32% of award / 5

Third Place:, 26% of award /5

Award Planning Disbursement Processing

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.

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.

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:

- The 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, (2) employment placement services, and (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.

(g) The hire date along with mandatory training completion dates for all DVOP specialists and LVER staff.

Per VPL 01-22, a response to this section is not required.

(h) 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

(a) Contents of a Complete UI SQSP Package.

(1) Transmittal Letter.

The signed copy of the transmittal letter is maintained with the Agency and the Regional Office.



Sarah Huckabee Sanders
GOVERNOR

Hugh McDonald
SECRETARY OF COMMERCE

September 8, 2023

Nicholas Lalpui, Regional Administrator
U.S. Department of Labor
Employment and Training Administration
Dallas Regional Office
525 South Griffin Street, Room 317
Dallas, Texas 75202

Submitted on behalf of the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (ADWS)

Dear Mr. Lalpui:

Enclosed are copies of the State Quality Service Plan (SQSP), accompanying narrative and staff charts, and UI Integrity Action Plan for Fiscal Year 2024. The SQSP identified ADWS' performance during the most recently completed Secretary's Year. Our Alternate Year 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' SQSP and UI Integrity Action Plan will be submitted in accordance with Unemployment Insurance Program Letter (UIPL) No. 17-22.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Kristen Rhodes-Berry at 501-683-5366.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Hugh McDonald', written over a faint blue line.

Hugh McDonald
Secretary

Enclosures

Arkansas Department of Commerce
1 Commerce Way, Suite 601 · Little Rock, AR 72202
ARKANSAS.GOV

(2) Budget Worksheets/Forms.

The signed copy of the transmittal letter is maintained with the Agency and the Regional Office.

(3) State Plan Narrative.

BIENNIAL STATE QUALITY SERVICE PLAN ARKANSAS – FY 2024

During FY 2024, 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 cloud-based 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. As of February 2022, ADWS successfully transitioned to the service center model from the local office driven model. This has removed 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 challenging, while keeping costs to provide services cost effective.

Improving Processes

ADWS is continuing to work with the business community and is in the process of creating enhancements to current employer facing systems, to streamline requirements and increase participation by submitting quality electronic responses to needed information to maintain the integrity of the UI program. This includes scheduling employer training sessions to explain the benefits of the updated processes, the ability to upload additional documentation to the Tax21 system for notice to last employers (separation reasons), benefit charge notices, and adjudication questionnaires. By giving employers one location to submit new hire registry updates, quarterly UI contribution reports, responses to UI benefit notices and reporting suspected UI fraud, we hope to encourage employer compliance and active participation.

ADWS currently accepts electronic applications for UI benefits through the EZARC (online claims filing system), and in person at local offices around the state. Each local office has a computer lab linked to the EZARC application and staff able to assist claimants filing claims using electronic or paper applications. UI has transitioned to a one phone number format and both employers and claimants are able to gain assistance with UI questions or issues via the service center toll free number. This has added the ability to leverage current staff to assist in all areas of the state and continue to provide services although nine local offices have been closed. This is a much more economical method for providing quality and consistent service across the state.

ADWS participated in the Claimant Experience Pilot and was the first state to

implement both the Login.gov and United States Postal Service (USPS) pilot processes for ID verification. This has been a hugely successful endeavor and has assisted Arkansas claimants with providing the required verification while reducing the travel time needed to fulfill the obligation and maintaining the integrity of the UI trust fund.

As all states experienced during the pandemic, Arkansas dealt with the extreme increase of claims, and struggled with that volume while having difficulties retaining staff. Through facing those challenges ADWS is refocused on providing more in-depth training to new hires and developing incentives to retain those well experience staff. Staff for the service center (entry level staff) go through a three-day classroom setting, training with source materials to use as reference. This is followed by 2 days of in person training with UI Technical staff, working and filing claims as a group and then individually with one-on-one assistance as needed. New staff then process claims of varying difficulty for two to three weeks to gain a better knowledge on what is required by claimants and employers, and these claims are then reviewed by supervisors for quality. Once it is determined that they have mastered this skill, they move on to phone call training. This begins with listening to recorded calls and working though the issues as a group in the system. They then move forward to one-on-one real time call observation while they sit with a seasoned staff member and see it in action. They are then prepared to handle Tier One calls that are simpler issues and have quick access to supervisors and other members of their team via chat functions, to handle any issues as they arise.

We are holding monthly training sprints on a variety of topics to keep staff informed of changes to the program and to prevent fraud as well as weekly emails from UI management, addressing issues as they happen. We are also prioritizing staff to complete the training sections available through the National Association of State Workforce Agencies' (NASWA) learning management platform which has been successful with training new Benefits Accuracy Management (BAM) and Data Validation (DV) staff. ADWS also utilizes the good working relationship with our DOL regional office that provides excellent guidance on a variety of topics.

Training and retention continue to be issues of emphasis for ADWS to cultivate and maintain a well-trained and experienced staff. ADWS continues in its mission of cultivating staff with a focus on succession planning. ADWS continues to utilize the National Integrity Academy as a tool for staff development and improvement for UI Administration management staff. 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 regarding Core Measures and Integrity efforts.

As ADWS staff has transitioned all UI staff reporting to UI Admin as opposed to the local office managers, a newly invigorated training system has been developed and implemented to ensure a constant voice of the UI program and relating program goals and expectations to staff. Existing staff are also getting refresher training to ensure a thorough understanding of not only their own department but also how the individual departments fit together to create the life cycle of the UI program.

Timely Delivery and Backlog

As all states have, Arkansas has been affected by the backlog of claims from the pandemic period, and the retroactivity needed to return to compliance with DOL requirements. This coupled with continued staff turnover has created additional challenges with the 21-day first pay timeliness measure. We recently received approval to increase financial incentives for staff to become expert adjudicators (which typically takes two plus years of experience to master). This update to the pay scale and injection of new employees in the service center will allow ADWS to return to its pre-pandemic high standards within all DOL core measures.

During the 2024 fiscal year, ADWS will be transitioning away from the existing in-house supported imaging system and continuing to enhance the Docuware system and adding additional documents to the logic used to auto image to claims. As the UI program is dependent on images to make quality decisions and ensure the integrity of the UI trust fund, accurate, expedient, and dependable imaging and retaining of source documents is vital. We are working towards transitioning from bar codes to QR codes for efficiency and less human touch needed while reducing error rates.

Plans for Increased Equitable Access

ADWS received approval of the Equity Grant, and is working to implement that plan, to allow for more claimant self-service options, by re-writing all claimant facing notices to 9th grade reading level, providing the updated versions in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Marshallese and Laotian through paper correspondence and electronic communications. We feel this will allow more equitable access to services, and reduce the number of days to issue decisions, as information will be more easily understood by claimants reducing wait time for eligible benefits.

ADWS will update the wording on the EZARC (online application system), mailed correspondence for the initial application process, additional requests for information, determinations and filing weekly certifications by using the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Readability Test. This system allows suggested wording to be entered and assigns a reading grade level based on sentence length and word length. ADWS currently has approximately 9,644 forms that will be updated.

The present methods of tracking education levels on EZARC or the initial application document will be revised to allow for more accurate data that

can be used to easier track claimants and their understanding of Division documents. For example, claimants who only finished 1st – 5th grade, 6th – 9th grade, 10th – 12th grade in primary or secondary schools, different levels or degrees of college or university, and any Certificates of Completion by claimants who have cognitive disabilities.

Currently, the UI Service Center uses Wrap Up Codes to identify broad reasons for incoming calls and we are unable to assess how many calls are related to questions about forms. Prior to the starting date of the grant, special Wrap Up Codes will be created to track calls related to documents received by claimants and employers. Once these documents have been revised, focus panels comprised of the various departments under the Department of Commerce, and not familiar with Unemployment Insurance, will be asked to review the documents for comprehension and readability.

ADWS will also produce a series of YouTube videos that will include an overview of the UI process from initial claim to decision, application creation demonstration, how to complete a weekly certification, the determination process, and the appeals process. The scripts for the YouTube videos will also be written using the Felsch- Kincaid Grade Level Readability Test. Tracking of YouTube complete or partial views will be done through the YouTube account.

This will Improve claimant communications and enhance customer service to claimants from the applications process though the appeals process in both written and enhanced audio-visual format. Revised documents will be tracked quarterly for any new documents added to the library.

Tracking of the improved documents will be demonstrated by using the first pay timeliness reports for those claimants identified as a target demographic to reflect that the “easier to understand information” provided back was enough to prevent adjudicators from having to make, third and fourth attempts for additional information.

Supporting Reemployment

RESEA

All UI claimants are scored based on a set of demographic variables to determine those most likely to exhaust benefits before returning to the workforce. When claimants are selected, they are required to attend an initial RESEA review, where they meet one-on-one with an ADWS reemployment specialist. The participants must meet certain RESEA program requirements such as completing a Career Action Plan (CAP), conducting labor market research, tracking work search activities, creating or providing a resume, and participating in ongoing reemployment services.

All program requirements are explained in the initial review. Failure to

comply with the RESEA program requirements will result in a delay or loss of unemployment benefits.

Short-Term Compensation

Arkansas is an active participant in the Short-Term Compensation (STC) program often referred to as shared work. This program gained visibility with employers during the pandemic period where Arkansas had record participation. ADWS continues to support employers and claimants through the STC process by explaining the program, and the benefits to employers to maintain employee's connection to the workforce and avoid layoffs.

Work Search

ACT 587 amends Arkansas code §11-10-507 and, effective January 1, 2024, increases the number of job search contacts to 5 per week for each current claimant and further defines what constitutes a required work search contact as well as sets a requirement for ADWS to audit 100 work search logs submitted by claimants each week. This will further protect the integrity of the UI trust fund and assist to ensure that only eligible claimants will continue to receive benefits.

To more seamlessly combine the UI program requirement to register for work, Wagener-Peyser Requirements to provide work search assistance, WIOA opportunities for training, and the additional ACT 587 requirements for work search audit, ADWS is scheduled to implement the ARLAUNCH system that will assist those looking for work as well as UI claimants more quickly find work. This system uses a combination of Labor Market Information (LMI) data, wage information, and work experience, to suggest alternate suitable work. Combining this tool along with the existing UI systems, ADWS is working to develop a Certification Hub that integrates the work search tracker and the weekly certification process while improving data collection for auditing.

This new digital work search tracking tool stood up for constituents to log and monitor their progress towards work search requirements, will be mobile friendly have a consistent look and feel. Integration & compatibility will incentivize its use along with improved data collection on back end to ensure the auditing processes are as seamless as possible for claimant and ADWS staff. This will work with the existing mainframe integration but will be compatible with cloud-migration and have a single sign-on utilizing Login.gov for enhanced security, so users can seamlessly move between the tools and there is no "wrong" point of entry.

UI Program Integrity

As further explained in the Integrity action plan, ADWS continues to expand controls used in the UI program to deter the onslaught of UI claim fraudulent activities. One method ADWS is utilizing to minimize UI fraud is the continued partnership with the employer community. Fostering these relationships with the Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce and Society for

Human Resource Management (SHRM), continuing to offer training and gain insight on what is needed by the business community, greatly assists in identifying potential separation, wage earnings, and identity theft related claim fraud.

ADWS participated in the Login.gov and USPS ID verification which has assisted in locating and stopping fraudulent payments from being processed for those claims while meeting all DOL requirements for due process. We continue to utilize data analytics to identify patterns and connect fraudulent claims.

ADWS utilizes the Integrity Data Hub (IDH) via once-a-week file transmissions, to identify potential fraud during the waiting week. Moving forward we are investigating what is needed to fully leverage the IDH processes to move to a real time data comparison to further stop potential fraud schemes.

Like the UI State Information Data Exchange System (SIDES), ADWS' Adjudication (AAS) system is web- based and designed to streamline and increase the efficiency of the nonmonetary determination process. Since AAS was implemented in Arkansas, ADWS has continued to enhance the system to further streamline the adjudication process. Through the electronic response system employers receive and respond to Notices to Last Employer, Notices to Base Period Employer, and questionnaires regarding nonmonetary issues via the Internet. ADWS is aware that the United States Department of Labor (USDOL) encourages states to fully implement SIDES; however, ADWS' Automated Adjudication System and electronic response system for employers, which is based upon our own state UI law, enables Arkansas to maintain the same functionality as SIDES along with ability to tailor questionnaires designed to elicit more information from employers with no additional subscription costs to the agency. ADWS will consider incorporating SIDES into its modernized benefits system.

Worker Misclassification

ADWS has continued to struggle with the identification of misclassified workers. Retaining well qualified staff has been challenging as they have more financial incentive for leaving ADWS and moving to other state agencies and completing similar work requirements. We recently received approval to increase the pay grade for senior field tax representatives that complete misclassification investigations as well as audit employers for compliance. We believe this enhancement for staff as well as continued use of technology to simplify audit processes will assist in the identification of misclassified employees and meeting the audit core measures with DOL.

Required Reporting

As all states have suffered through the pandemic period, we have seen large turnovers through attrition of well qualified UI reporting staff. The reporting

requirements are complex and interwoven creating additional challenges for unseasoned staff. This as well as staff shortages in the budget units, financial management service and UI core program units has stressed this difficult situation. ADWS continues to face the issues of timely reporting and is in the process of hiring additional support staff to assist with these processes.

Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) Percent of Interstate Payments Made Timely

To meet target, the state must have an average greater than 87% for all intrastate first payments for full weeks of Unemployment Compensation (UC) made within 21 days from the week ending date of the first compensable week. ADWS is currently at 74.15%, or 12.85% less than the given target. This is directly related to staffing issues that are in the process of being addressed for both the Service Center and Adjudication sections. Dropping below ideal levels in both departments had slowed processing on initial and additional claims, and greatly increased the number of days to issue a decision.

Detection of Recoverable Overpayments

To meet target, the state must have a detection rate of recoverable overpayments greater than 57.5%. ADWS for the grading period detected 204.92% of collectible overpayments, which is much larger than typical years, as staff are continuing to identify and issue decisions for claims during the pandemic period.

Employer Tax Liability Decision Made Timely

To meet target, the state must have an average greater than 90% for all employer tax liability determinations made timely, within 90 days of the end of the first quarter of liability. ADWS is currently at 87.92%, or 2.08% less than the given target. This as well as many other issues are related to staff shortages across the UI program. This challenge is in the process of being addresses by hiring additional staff and reorganizing the field tax, employer accounts, and quarterly report processing sections.

Core Measures

The Detection of Overpayments Measure

This measure is the percentage of detectable/recoverable overpayments estimated by the Benefit Accuracy Measurement (BAM) survey that was established for recovery through regular UI Benefit Payment Control (BPC) program operations. The performance period for the BPC component is the three-year period ending March 31, 2023; the performance period for the BAM component is the three-year period ending September 30, 2022. The Arkansas rate for the appropriate BPC and BAM reporting periods was 64.97%, well between the requirements of above 50% and below 95%, no corrective action plan is currently needed, although ADWS has prioritized this measure to ensure continued protection of the security of the UI trust fund.

Effective Audit Measure

The Effective Audit Measure, as noted in UIPL No. 03- 11, is a blended measure of the following four factors:

- Percentage of Contributory Employers Audited Annually
- Percentage of Total Wage Changed as a Result of Audit
- Percentage of Total Wages Audited
- Average Number of Misclassifications Detected Per Audit

Each of the four factors has a minimum standard score that states must meet to pass the Effective Audit Measure, as well as an overall combined score that must be achieved. The measure also requires each state to direct additional emphasis to the factor(s) that state personnel deem important to the state. An additional two points must be earned among any of the four factors to attain the overall passing score of at least 7.0. A CAP is required for states that do not meet the measure based on calendar year 2022 data. ADWS did fail this measure for the 2022 calendar year with the following scores:

- Employers Audited (penetration rate) 0.9% which is below the required 1.0% but well above the national average of 0.7%.
- Change in Total Wages from Audits (picking up wages during the audit process), 4.6% which is above the requirement of 2.0%.
- Total Wages Audited, 1.1% which is above the required 1.0% and slightly below the national average of 1.2%
- Average Number of Misclassified Employees Detected per Audit, 1.9% which is above the required 1.0%.
- Total of all Factors, 8.5% which is well above the required 7.0% total score for the measure.

ADWS failed this grouped measure, based on not meeting the total number of employers audited by 0.10% or 85 audits over the calendar year, and therefore failed the total group although three of four individual measures passed.

As all states, ADWS redirected staff to claims processing during the pandemic period and lost seasoned audit staff through attrition and moving on to more financially incentivized positions. To address this issue Department of Commerce approved four additional grade-seven positions. The department previously had twelve grade-six positions. To bridge the gap in funding, the total staff will be reduced to ten, with four grade-seven and six grade-six positions managed by one grade-eight position. This has been accomplished by reducing the administrative tasks associated with these positions and focusing solely on the audit requirements. These new positions, which are in the process of being advertised and hired, are expected to be in place mid to late November 2023. We strongly believe that making career paths with additional financial incentive will assist in retaining highly skilled staff, and enticing new staff, and will increase scores

and allow ADWS to pass this core measure in the future. As the new positions are late in the calendar year, while we continue to increase the number of audits, we do not think we will pass this measure for calendar year 2023 but will for 2024.

Improper Payments Measure

The Improper Payments Measure is defined as Unemployment Compensation (UC) overpaid plus UC underpaid divided by the total amount of UC paid. It is based on estimates from the results of the BAM survey of paid UC claims in the State UI, Unemployment Compensation for Federal Employees, and Unemployment Compensation for Ex-Servicemembers programs. The Payment Integrity Information Act (PIIA) requires agencies to examine the risk of erroneous payments in all programs and activities they administer. This Federal law defines the term improper payment as:

- Any payment that should not have been made or that was made in an incorrect amount, including an overpayment or underpayment, under a statutory, contractual, administrative, or other legally applicable requirement; and
- Includes—
 - Any payment to an ineligible recipient
 - Any payment for an ineligible good or service
 - Any duplicate payment
 - Any payment for a good or service not received, except for those payments where authorized by law
 - Any payment that does not account for credit for applicable discounts.

PIIA requires Federal programs to report an annual improper payment rate. It also requires agencies to include all identified improper payments in the reported estimate, regardless of whether the improper payment in question has been or is being recovered (see UIPL No. 09-13, Change 1 for ETA's approved improper payment rate computation methodology).

States are expected to maintain an improper payment rate of less than 10% for covered UC programs. This ALP is applicable to the 2022 PIIA performance period (July 1, 2021, to June 30, 2022). A state failing to meet the ALP for the 2022 PIIA performance period will be expected to develop a CAP as part of the FY 2024 SQSP.

ADWS had an effective improper payment rate of 11.64% for the BAM effective period of July 2021-June 2022 which is slightly higher than the required 10% or less and is significantly lower than the national average of 14.924%. The score of 11.64% places Arkansas as 20 of 52 or in the top performing 38% of all states.

This corrective action was met and cleared by regional DOL office based on four quarters below the requirement as of the second quarter of 2023

submission. This was possible through concerted efforts from UI staff to prioritize quality decisions, and timeliness of wage-earning investigations. With wage earnings investigation creating 44.104% of all overpayments for the period, this is a key area for system enhancement. ADWS is currently working with partners to write an updated system to create the wage earnings audit the day the wages are received from the employer in the Tax21 system as opposed to the current process of cross matching once each quarter after all contributions reports for the quarter have been processed. This new system and continuing to work with the employer community will assist in ADWS continuing to meet this core measure.

UI Overpayment Recovery Measure

As explained in UIPL No. 09-13, the recovery rate is “the value of improper overpayments recovered divided by the value of improper overpayments identified.” The ALP for the recovery rate measure is 68 percent for the 2022 PIIA performance period. Pursuant to the UI Reports Handbook (ET Handbook No. 401, 5th edition), the June quarter ETA 227 reports are due August 1st each year. A state failing to meet 19 the ALP for the 2022 PIIA performance period will be expected to develop a CAP as part of the FY 2024 SQSP.

ADWS’ UI overpayment recovery measure of 54.69% for the July 2021-June 2022 time frame is 13.31%, lower than the required 68%. During the pandemic period ADWS could not focus resources on the creation of overpayments as all focus was forced to the issuing of payments to those claimants in desperate need and stopping fraudulent claims from being paid in real-time. We have circled back and are creating large volumes of overpayments for prior periods, due in part to vendor issues and the retroactivity required to clear all remaining audit finding related to CARES act funds. With this renewed focus on collections from prior periods and clearing that backlog of work, we believe ADWS will regain is pre-pandemic levels well above the required 68%.

Secretary Standards

Data for the most recent secretary’s year April 2022 through March 2023 was as follows.

1. First Payment Promptness, Intrastate 14/21 days: 74.15%, less than 87% or above requirement.
2. First Payment Promptness, intrastate 35 days: 94.31%, greater than the required 93% or greater requirement.
3. First Payment Promptness Interstate 14/21 days: 74.43%, greater than the 70% or greater requirement.
4. First Payment Promptness Interstate 35 days: 95.64%, greater than the 78% or greater requirement.
5. Lower Authority Appeals 30 days: 61.89%, greater than the 60% or greater requirement.
6. Lower Authority Appeals 45 days: 78.27%, less than the 80% or

higher requirement.

First Payment Promptness percent of all first payments within 14/21 days after the compensable week. ADWS is making great strides but continues to struggle with this measure. For the period April 1, 2021, through March 31, 2022, at 62.82% or 24.18% less than the required level of performance. While we increased for the period of April 1, 2022, through March 31, 2023, to 74.99% we remain 12.01% lower than the requirement of 87%. This is due to staffing struggles and the inability to retain seasoned well-trained staff. Adjudication is a difficult position to train and on average takes two years beyond service center experience to gain the depth of knowledge to make expedient and accurate expert level decisions.

Through assistance from the Department of Commerce, we have retained an additional seven grade-seven positions, for a total of twelve expert level adjudicators. We are in the process of advertising and hiring for these positions, which is expected to be completed mid November 2023. We expect this enhanced career path option will entice new staff and assist in retaining experienced staff to the Adjudication department which will increase our timeliness measures and retain our high-quality.

Average Age of pending lower authority appeals time lapse less than 45 days from the filing date. ADWS is making great strides but due to the period has not yet increased to greater than 80% of all pending decision less than 45 days from the filing date. For the period April 1, 2021, through March 31, 2022, ADWS was at 59.37% or 20.63% lower than the required 80% measure. For the period April 1, 2022, through March 31, 2023, ADWS was at 78.27%, or 1.73% lower than the required 80% measure. Appeals Tribunal staff is working to correct these issues and is working through the backlog of pandemic period claims as quickly as possible. A large employer in the state had all staff with pandemic related claims with the same issue concerning one week of benefits. These hearings have now all been completed. A blanket waiver was requested and approved for these claimants. The 2022/3 numbers are in compliance, but the rolling quarterly average will take time to adjust back to normal levels. The volume of appeals has reduced and, as of June 2023, is back to ALP standards for the 12-month rolling average.

UI Programs

State Directory of New Hires (SDNH)/National Directory of New Hires (NDNH)

ADWS' Benefit Accuracy Measurement (BAM) Unit is compliant with the NDNH matching requirements as set forth in ET Handbook No. 395, 5th Edition, Chapter VI, UIPL 03-07, and UIPL No., Change 1.

Benefit Accuracy Measurement (BAM)

State BAM operations or operational components that are not compliant with investigative and/or method and procedure requirements established in ET Handbook No. 395, 5th Edition, and through findings established

through ET Handbook No. 396, 4th Edition monitoring reviews (based on the annual determination letter issued on or before May 1, 2023), are expected to be addressed in a CAP. This includes paid and denied claim population variances outside established control limits.

ADWS suffered a great loss of staff in the BAM unit with a combined experience of over fifty years in January 2022. This created a significant need to hire new staff from within the UI program and provide several sections of additional training with no financial incentive for staff. In June 2023 with the assistance of the Department of Commerce we were able to retain four grade-seven positions, to complete this task. We hope that creating these career paths will assist in retaining seasoned staff and enticing new staff to the BAM unit.

With assistance from our regional DOL partners, and utilizing NASWA's training modules for BAM, we have been able to successfully implement the new processes to reduce administrative tasks and increase the case completion rate although we are not at the required measures contained in the 2023 BAM annual determination letter.

- BAM Operations Complaint 60 day paid timeliness must be greater than 70%. For the 2022 determination letter, ADWS was at 66.67% and dropped to 39.38% for the 2023 determination letter. ADWS has exceeded this measure for the last three quarters at the following rates: 2022/4: 75.42%, 2023/1: 91.38%, 2023/2: 94.21%. With one more quarter above the required measure this CAP will be satisfied.
- BAM Operations Complaint 90 day Paid Timeliness must be greater than 95%. For the 2022 determination letter ADWS was at 91.25% and dropped to 80% for the 2023 determination letter. ADWS has exceeded this measure for the last three quarters at the following rates: 2022/4: 99.15%, 2023/1: 99.14%, 2023/2: 100.00%. With one more quarter above the required measure this CAP will be satisfied.
- BAM Operations Compliant 60 day monetary Timeliness must be greater than 60%. For the 2023 determination letter ADWS was at 46.36% or 13.64% less than required. ADWS has exceeded this measure for the last three quarters at the following rates: 2022/4: 94.44%, 2023/1: 88.37%, 2023/2: 86.05%. With one more quarter above the required measure this CAP will be satisfied.
- BAM Operations Complaint 90 day Monetary Timeliness must be greater than 85%. For the 2023 determination letter ADWS was at 83.44% or 1.56% less than required. ADWS has exceeded this measure for the last three quarters at the following rates: 2022/4: 100.00%, 2023/1: 100.00%, 2023/2: 95.35%. With one more quarter above the required measure this CAP will be satisfied.

- BAM Operations Complaint 60 day Separation Timeliness must be greater than 60%. For the 2023 determination letter ADWS was at 42.38% or 17.62% less than required. ADWS has exceeded this measure for the last three quarters at the following rates: 2022/4: 100.00%, 2023/1: 97.37%, 2023/2: 94.74%. With one more quarter above the required measure this CAP will be satisfied.
- BAM Operations Complaint 90 day Separation Timeliness must be greater than 85%. For the 2023 determination letter ADWS was at 81.46% or 3.54% less than required. ADWS has exceeded this measure for the last three quarters at the following rates: 2022/4: 100.00%, 2023/1: 100.00%, 2023/2: 97.37%. With one more quarter above the required measure this CAP will be satisfied.
- BAM Operations Complaint 60 day Nonseparation Timeliness must be greater than 60%. For the 2023 determination letter ADWS was at 52.32% or 7.68% less than required. ADWS has exceeded this measure for the last three quarters at the following rates: 2022/4: 100.00%, 2023/1: 94.74%, 2023/2: 94.74%. With one more quarter above the required measure this CAP will be satisfied.
- BAM Operations Complaint Paid Comparison reports must be greater than -10% and less than 5%. For the 2022 determination letter ADWS was at -21.27% and increased to -19.75% for the 2023 determination letter. ADWS has met this measure for the last three quarters at the following rates: 2022/4: 4.31%, 2023/1: 5.08%, 2023/2: -9.03%. With one more quarter meeting the required measure this CAP will be satisfied.
- BAM Operations Complaint Monetary Sample Selection must be 150. Due to a system programming issue with pulling claims that were PEUC incorrectly, only 143 samples were selected instead of the 38 per quarter for a total of 152. This was corrected in the 2023/2 quarter with the following results. 2023/2: 36 samples, 2023/2: 41 samples. With two more quarters above the minimum sample, we will meet the requirement of 150. This issue will be corrected more efficiently once ADWS is off the mainframe system and migrated to a cloud-based environment. Updating the current system is cost prohibitive and cumbersome. We are scheduled to be in the cloud by December 2024, allowing these needed updates to be completed.

Tax Performance System (TPS)

ADWS' UI Tax Operations follow Federal reporting and oversight requirements. Unfortunately, ADWS failed all sections of the TPS review as issues with the benefits imaging system prevented the reviewer from accessing the images needed to prove the samples were correct. This was also identified in the onsite TPS review process and corrections are in the process of being implemented. This includes a temporary stop gap measure where staff imaging daily account updates as they are worked. During the

2023 fiscal year, ADWS will be transitioning away from the existing in-house supported imaging system and continuing to enhance the Docuware system and adding additional documents to the logic used to auto image to claims. As the UI program is dependent on images to make quality decisions and ensure the integrity of the UI trust fund, accurate, expedient, and dependable imaging and retaining of source documents is vital. We are working towards transitioning from bar codes to QR codes for efficiency and less human touch needed while reducing error rates.

Data Validation (DV)

ADWS submitted all DV items for validation and certification by June 10, 2023. All DV elements in tax passed with no issues. Population 4 of Data Validation for benefits failed and was determined to be a timing issue. There are four sections within the Data Validation population related to Payments: First Payments, Continued Weeks Payments, Combined Wage Claims First Payments all passed, but Report Validation failed. We believe this has to do with the way the sample is pulled and timing for the cutoff from one quarter to another. This is related to the difficulty and prohibitive cost to update the programming of the main frame backend system. We are working with IT staff to better time the pull of the population for DV as it relates to batch processing.

Other UI Performance

UI Reporting Requirements

The spreadsheet provided for creating the SQSP included a listing of missing and untimely submitted reports for the reporting period.

- AF 227 for 12/31/2022 was submitted 2 days late in error.
- Am227 for 09/30/2022 was submitted on 10/20/2022 (timely) please see attached copy of 227 from the state portal.
- AM227 for 12/31/2022 was submitted on 01/11/2023 (timely) please see the attached copy of the 227 from the state portal.
- AM227 for 03/31/2023 was submitted on 04/06/2023 (timely) please see the attached copy of the 227 from the state portal.

We believe the AM227 reports are reading in the system as not submitted as all values are 0.00. ADWS has had no overpayments for the MEUC program.

- AR204 was submitted late due to a technical difficulty with negative charges from the prior year. ETA regional helped work through that issue and it was submitted with an additional technical assistance.
- AR204R has not been able to be manually entered and ADWS has had issues submitting it through the upload process. We continue to work on issues with the 204-reporting process.
- AR2112: for 12/31/2022 was submitted one day late on 02/02/2023. This is due to staff issues in the budget and financial management units that are being addressed currently.
- AR581 for 09/30/2022, submitted one day late.
- AR581 for 12/31/2022, submitted one day late.

This this staff member is no longer with the agency, and additional checks have been added to ensure timely submission in the future.

- AR586 for 09/30/2022 was submitted four days late due to a technical difficulty with the batch job that creates this report. This will be addressed in the migration to a cloud-based environment.
- AR8401 for 12/31/2022 was submitted one day late due to staff shortages in UI accounting.
- AR9048 for 09/30/2022 was not submitted.
- AR9048 for 12/31/2022 was not submitted.
- AR9048 for 03/31/2023 was not submitted.

The 9048 reports are no longer used as the RES program evolved into the RESEA program and these reports no longer exist.

- AR9056 for 12/31/2022 was submitted one week late due to technical difficulties with the state portal, please see attached email chain.
- AR9056 for 03/31/2023 was submitted 3 weeks late due to technical difficulties with the state portal.
- ARUI3 for 09/30/2022 was submitted on 11/21/2022, 20 days after the due date, due to staffing shortages in the budget unit.
- ARUI3 for 03/31/2023 was submitted on 05/24/2023 23 days late due to staffing shortages in the budget unit.
- AW9050 for 04/30/2023 was submitted on 07/03/2023 42 days late due to a technical issue with the file on the mainframe system.

There were several reports that were submitted untimely due to high staff turnover. We are working to put failsafe measures in place to prevent this from occurring in the future.

Issue Detection Dates

ADWS acknowledges it did not meet the acceptable level of performance of 95% for issue detection dates during the period of April 1, 2022, through March 31, 2023. This is tied to an increase in retirements, relocation, and resignations of more experienced and supervisory staff and the hiring of staff with little or no prior experience in unemployment insurance and/or adjudication processes and practices. Out of seventeen adjudicators currently assigned to the unit, ten have been hired within the past two years. Additionally, two out of four adjudication supervisors were hired within the past two years. Inexperience, coupled with the backlog due to the pandemic and continued higher than average pre-pandemic numbers, has presented significant challenges for ADWS in meeting this performance measure.

ADWS plans to improve the issue detection date measures by providing in-depth and ongoing refresher Benefits, Timeliness and Quality (BTQ) training regarding issue detection dates to all adjudication staff, as well as quarterly refresher material on issue detection dates. The unit will evaluate quarterly BTQ grading results and provide feedback to all adjudication staff on any issue detection date errors each quarter. Adjudication Supervisors will continue to grade random cases for quality and correct issue detection dates

and provide corrective action to adjudicators monthly. Additionally, beginning September 2023, each supervisor will begin evaluating additional determinations for each adjudicator monthly, and provide feedback regarding their findings on application of issue detection dates for both separation and non-separation issues. Issue detection dates are also a major component of adjudication staff's annual performance appraisals. With this internal standard for performance appraisals, it should continue to help increase the accuracy of issue detection dates, along with reminders and training to all adjudication staff, will help ADWS move this performance measure closer to the acceptable level of performance of 95%.

Tiger Teams

Arkansas was unable to participate in the Tiger Team initiatives as funding was withdrawn before the assessment period began. Although Arkansas did show interest in the Tiger Team initiative, we were unable to participate in the time frame given due to competing priorities.

Waiving Recovery of Overpayments

ADWS submitted and received approval for one blanket waiver request for a specific group of claimants, who through no fault of their own received UI benefits incorrectly using UPIL 20-21 Change 1 Attachment II.

We are also utilizing the blank waiver for those claimants that were paid in error using PUA funds but were eligible for the UI program. As the PUA program had a higher weekly benefit amount than the Arkansas UI program, several claimants were overpaid the weekly difference for the life of the claim. These overpayment balances are currently being created and waived by BPC staff. Due to vendor issues, this process is time consuming, but required as part of our CARES act retroactivity to regain DOL compliance.

Coordinating with DOL and OIG

ADWS actively works with OIG on fraud schemes both reporting to OIG when suspicious activity has been identified and receiving information from OIG and identifying in our system claims associated with larger fraud schemes. The working relationship has benefited ADWS by bringing press attention to efforts to criminally prosecute offenders and deter future fraud attempts.

ADWS complies with all OIG requests for information and provides all data to the best of our ability to continue to combat fraud in the UI program.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

WIOA is designed to provide job seekers with increased access to employment, education, training, and other support services to succeed in the labor market, match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete, improve the coordination of employment and training services and resources, and strengthen collaboration with state and local partners. The State of Arkansas elected to coordinate and integrate as many workforce development programs as possible, and therefore, elected to submit a

combined state plan designed to streamline the investments in our workforce development system. The combined plan integrates and streamlines the services provided by program partners: ADWS and its Arkansas Rehabilitation Services and Adult Education Services Divisions, the Division of Services for the Blind, and the Arkansas Department of Human Services. As part of this effort, ADWS hosts biannual statewide partner meetings each spring and fall. These training and strategy sessions included workforce development partners and stakeholders, including employers, economic developers, Workforce Development Board Members, and community college representatives with the goal of developing broader and deeper partnerships, integration of programs and services within their regional area to help prepare Arkansas' workforce to meet the needs of current and potential employers.

Additionally, our workforce development partners present their programs' information to the Arkansas Workforce Development Board at their quarterly meetings to increase the level of integration of the state's workforce program. Moving forward, ADWS plans to continue our efforts in collaborating with private sector employers, non-profit organizations and stakeholders who can assist us in maximizing the full potential of the Arkansas' workforce system.

To ensure that claimants are aware of the array of services provided through the workforce center, claimants are required to obtain ES services as part of their initial claim filing process. Specific enhancements made by UI include notification to claimants with inactive Arkansas Job Link (AJL) accounts of the requirement that their accounts be activated and current, including a resume. Resumes uploaded to an individual AJL account are then searchable by employers. A current AJL account ensures that claimants have maintained their work registrations and are able to access services offered through the Arkansas Workforce Centers.

UI Technical Assistance Resources

ETA Regional Office

ADWS maintains a close working relationship with our regional partners and has regular meetings to go over concerns and seek additional guidance with reorganization and modernization challenges. This has been especially beneficial as our UI Assistant Director is relatively new to the role and is working to update processes.

Tiger Teams

Arkansas was unable to participate in the Tiger Team initiatives as funding was withdrawn before the assessment period began. Although Arkansas did show interest in the Tiger Team initiative, we were unable to participate in the time frame given due to competing priorities. We are looking forward to researching and better understanding the implantation results fully on the three pillars of the program, Equity and Accessibility, Timeliness and Backlog

and Fraud Prevention and Detection. These are issues that every state is dealing with, and the creative answers and guidance of this program is helpful to all states.

UI Integrity Center

ADWS currently utilizes features of the UI Integrity center in behavioral insights, state services, the integrity data hob, national integrity academy, and knowledge exchange library. These tools have been used to train new and existing staff and help staff better identify potentially fraudulent activity. We use the library to research additional ideas on our planned modernization efforts and our plan to continually assess and improve the Arkansas UI processes and systems.

Office of Unemployment Insurance Modernization

We have worked with this office on the implementation of the Login.gov and USPS programs of which Arkansas was the pilot state. These efforts to assist states with modernization projects in a “plug and play” methodology is helpful without a large financial outlay.

UI Information Technology Support Center

The ITSC was utilized when Arkansas was on the road to a vendor-based solution and was helpful in the RFP process. Much of what Arkansas learned in this process assisted ADWS in coming to the decision that an iterative process would work better with our resource limitations and had a higher success rate as a long-term solution.

Prisoner Update Processing System

ADWS sees the value in this system and has applied for access. The process for approval is arduous and requires members from the UI and IT teams and multiple submissions of documents, and approval wait times are still ongoing. Once implemented in Arkansas this will assist in identifying fraudulent claims more quickly for those that are currently incarcerated.

Maintaining Solvency of the State’s Trust Fund

The continued strengthening of Arkansas’ labor market since the pandemic to pre-pandemic levels is reflected in the current LMI data. Arkansas’ Unemployment Insurance program served as an important safety net for thousands of Arkansas families during the pandemic. Unlike the prior recession, the increase in demand for unemployment claims did not exhaust the program’s trust fund. Arkansas did not need the assistance of Title XII Advances to pay UI Benefits. ADWS projects a trust fund balance of \$950,000.00 at the end of CY 2023.

During the 2023 Arkansas legislative session, ADWS sought to ease the tax burden on employers by pursuing the following legislation.

- ACT 106 (HB 1197) Failure to appear for Job Interviews.
 - §11-10-515 Creates a benefit disqualification for failing without good cause and without notice to attend two scheduled job interviews

with the same employer. To satisfy the disqualification, a claimant will be required to have thirty (30) days of covered employment. Effective date January 1, 2024.

- This creates an additional measure of security to ensure that claimants receiving benefits are in fact eligible and looking for work.
- Act 196 (HB 1430) Taxable Wage Base, Max UI Benefit Duration, New Employer Tax, Administrative Assessments, Deficit Rated Employer Tax
 - §11-10-215 Sets the taxable wage base at \$7,000 when the UI Trust Fund is in excess of \$600,000,000 as of June 30 of the most recently completed state fiscal year and limits increases to the taxable wage base to \$2,000 each year. Effective January 1, 2024.
 - §11-10-504 Reduces the maximum weekly UI benefit duration from sixteen to twelve weeks. Effective for initial claims filed on or after January 1, 2024.
 - §11-10-704 Reduces the new employer tax rate from 2.9% of the taxable wage base to 1.9%. Effective January 1, 2024.
 - §11-10-705 Recharacterizes stabilization as an administrative assessment set at 0.125% of the taxable wage base for the period of July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024, and at 0.1% of the taxable wage base thereafter. Provides that for each fiscal year, 60% of the administrative assessment collections (limited to \$6,000,000) shall be deposited into the DWS Unemployment Insurance Administration Fund for personal services and operating expenses.
 - Requires portions of the administrative assessment collected through June 30, 2024, to be set aside for modernizing UI information technology systems and hardware.
 - Allows up to \$2,500,000 per fiscal year to be deposited into the DWS Training Trust fund should collections be sufficient (after funding administration and modernization) and for any other remaining administrative assessment collections for the fiscal year to be deposited into the Unemployment Compensation Fund.
 - Eliminates the 12% and 14% tax rates for deficit rated employers. Effective January 1, 2024.
- ACT 587 (HB 1575) Work Search Requirements.
 - §11-10-507 Provides that, unless excused from work search, a claimant shall be ineligible for UI benefits for any week during which five (5) work search contacts are not made. Effective date January 1, 2024.
 - Requires DWS to audit at least one hundred (100) work search reports each week. Effective date January 1, 2024.
- ACT 854 (HB 1840) Fraud Penalty
 - §11-10-519 Provides that UI fraud overpayments of \$1,000 or more require a disqualification period of ten (10) years. Effective date October 1, 2023. Requires DWS to audit at least one hundred (100) work search reports each week. Effective date January 1, 2024.

ADWS matches claims with the state payroll system, AASIS, to detect improper payments to state employees as quickly as possible. The crossmatch returns weekly earnings for the match weeks, eliminating the

need to send wage audit requests to individual agencies.

In March 2022 ADWS was the pilot UI program to verify identity electronically using Login.gov. This system uses one account for secure, private access to participating government agencies with multifactor authentication and is currently in the process of being implemented in other state agencies. The success of this pilot led to a stronger working relationship with ADWS and DOL, continuing into the USPS pilot program that allows claimants to verify their identity by receiving a bar code, that is then proved to any of the 200+ USPS locations who can then visually verify that the individual proving the bar code is in fact the individual on the identification, and includes the address information provided on the application for benefits.

ADWS strongly believes that in person verification is the most secure, and partnering with DOL and the USPS allows that level of security while reducing the travel needs for claimants.

Assurances

By signing the SQSP Signature Page, ADWS certifies that it will comply with the assurances listed in Handbook 336, 18th Edition. ADWS will institute any plans or measures necessary to comply with the requirements.

Additionally, UIPL 25-21 requires information for Assurance “H”, “Assurance of Contingency Planning”; and Assurance “J”, “Assurance of Automated Information Systems Security.

H. Assurance of Contingency Planning:

- Date IT Contingency Plan Implemented: 2004
- IT Contingency Plan Reviewed/Updated: Biannual
- IT Contingency Plan Tested: Scheduled for April 2024

J. Assurance of Automated System Security

- Date Risk Assessment Conducted: April 2024
- System Security Plan Reviewed/Updated: Biannual
- System Security Plan implemented: 2004

Assurance of Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA)

- DUA training was last completed in April 2023 and will be completed each year.
- The Standard Operating Procedures for the DUA program are included in the DUA handbook made available to staff.

(4) Corrective Action Plans (CAPs).

(5) UI Program Integrity Action Plan (UI IAP).

State Quality Service Plan (SQSP) Integrity Action Plan (IAP)

Accountable Agency Official(s).

List the person or persons accountable for ensuring integrity in the state’s unemployment insurance (UI) program.

Name: Kristen Rhodes-Berry

Title: Assistant Director of Unemployment

Insurance Email: Kristen.rhodes@arkansas.gov

Phone: 501-683-5366

***Note:** Unemployment Insurance Program Letter (UIPL) No. 09-23, issued on June 30, 2023, makes reference to UIPL No. 22-21, Change 2, throughout the guidance. However, on July 13, 2023, the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) issued UIPL No. 10-23, which rescinded UIPL No. 22-21, Change 2. UIPL No. 11-23, also issued on July 13, 2023, changed the amount of the integrity grant funding originally issued under UIPL No. 22-21, Change 2, but maintained the guidance on required and recommended fraud prevention and detection and overpayment recovery activities.

- **(Topic #1: National Priority) – Ensuring UI program integrity by assessing and evaluating fraud risks, implementing, and maintaining sufficient controls to effectively mitigate the likelihood and impact of fraud, and reducing improper payments.**
 - In evaluating fraud risks, states should consider both eligibility fraud risks and identity (ID) fraud risks.
 - **State plans to evaluate UI fraud risks and implement and maintain sufficient controls to effectively prevent fraud and reduce improper payments, including state actions to develop their own state-specific antifraud strategy.**
 - Key elements of an antifraud strategy include:
 - **Who** is responsible for fraud risk management activities? Arkansas’ fraud risk management is a team effort and includes but is not limited to UI claims processing and Administration, Benefits IT staff running data analytics, Contributions IT staff running data analytics, Internal Audit and fraud prevention staff working with law enforcement and OIG.
 - Establish roles and responsibilities of those involved in fraud risk management activities, such as the antifraud entity and external parties responsible for fraud controls and communicate the role of the Office of Inspector General (OIG) to investigate potential fraud.
 - **UI Claims processing staff:** Report suspicious activity with the claims filing process. For example, consistent

email address or employer combinations, incorrect geographic information, (City, County, and Zip Code do not reconcile.)

- **UI Administration:** Writing policy and procedures to report employer or claimant potential fraud schemes.
- **Benefits IT staff:** Ensure geofencing is actively working to deter foreign threats. Data Analysis that looks for the same employer account number, claims with no addresses, signs of inaccurate geographic information (City, State, Zip not matching area of employer)
 - **Contributions Staff:** Ensuring payment is received when an employer is attempting to create an account more than 6 months in the past. Looking for consistent wages across multiple quarters, and geographic information on claim vs employer account, filing reports and not submitting payments, with claims.
- **Internal Audit Staff:** Researching account number and large scheme issues, and patterns for potential fraud.
- **What is the program doing to manage fraud risk?**
 - ADWS takes possible fraud identification seriously and is of the utmost importance in the UI program. We complete data analytics on demographic information, including geographic information on each claim, and utilize the Integrity Data Hub, to pull information reported by other states.
 - Implemented staff training designed specifically on identifying potential fraudulent claims and ID verification. These are completed in sprints and refreshed every six months.
 - Describe the program's activities for preventing, detecting, and responding to fraud, as well as monitoring and evaluation.
 - - ADWS currently utilizes:
 - Social Security crossmatch during the application process verifies:
 - Legal Name
 - Date of Birth
 - SSN
 - DOL sponsored solutions such as Login.gov and USPS for ID verifications as well checking IDs in person at Local offices.
 - Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlement (SAVE) - SAVE verifications are executed after the application is completed by the non-citizen claimants and while staff are processing the claim.
 - Department of Corrections and Department of Community Corrections - Crossmatches run each week against applications and weekly certifications.
 - Interstate Connections Network (ICON) - All claims are checked though State Identification Subsystem (SIDI) and the Interstate

- Benefits Inquiry (IBIQ), to ensure there are no claims in other states for the same claim period, or overpayments to be collected in other states utilizing the benefits offset process.
- Internet Protocol (IP) Addresses are monitored, and multiple claims submitted by the same IP address (other than our workforce centers who are whitelisted) are watched.
 - Data Analytics are used and no more than 4 claims can have the same first line address, bank routing information, or e-mail address.
 - Integrity Data Hub is used for:
 - Suspicious Actor Repository (SAR)
 - Multi-State Crossmatch (MSCM)
 - Identity Verification (IDV)
 - Bank Account Verification (BAV)
 - Fraud Alerts
 - Foreign Internet Protocol (IP) Address Detection
 - Suspicious Email Domains
 - Geofencing to exclude foreign IP addresses.
 - Receives and uses examples from the Fraud Alert System as teaching tools.
 - National Integrity Academy. ADWS encourages staff to complete modules in their career tract and to learn more about other positions and sections.
 - The Internal Audit section is currently utilizing the additional funds made available for researching federal program fraud and actively working with the Office of Inspector General (OIG) on prosecutions.
- **When** is the program implementing fraud risk management activities?
 - Create timelines for implementing fraud risk management activities, as appropriate, including monitoring and evaluations.
 - **Where** is the program focusing its fraud risk management activities? ADWS is currently focusing on ID verification and employer fraud schemes. Working with DOL and the USPS for ID Verification at no additional cost to the state has been a beneficial process and a great learning tool. ADWS looks forward to partnering with DOL in the future on additional “plug and play” solutions.
 - Partnering with OIG on large prosecutions where possible and connecting theft of public benefits with larger criminal activity rings for longer periods of incarceration and restitution has created press coverage in efforts to deter possible future bad actors.
 - Demonstrate links to the highest internal and external residual fraud risks outlined in the fraud risk profile. ADWS continues its commitment by demonstrating the concern from upper management and the Governor’s office with fraud, waste, and abuse in the UI program. Continued training occurs with all UI staff in monthly sprints and a report on progress in reducing fraud is

submitted to the Governor's office each quarter.

- **Why** is fraud risk management important?
 - Communicate the antifraud strategy to employees and other stakeholders, and link antifraud efforts to other risk management activities, if any. ADWS continues to place the utmost importance on identifying fraud in the UI program to maintain the integrity of the UI Trust Fund.
 - See A Framework for Managing Fraud Risks in Federal Programs at <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-15-593sp.pdf> for additional information.
- **State use of tools, services, strategies, process improvements, and/or procedural changes adopted by the state to combat fraud, verify identities, and enhance recovery efforts. States must identify which tools, solutions, and service provider(s) are used in the state's fraud management operations, including but not limited, to the following areas: data analysis, risk-based ID verification, fraud prevention and detection, and cybersecurity.**
- Include strategies, solutions, and/or activities using funds the Department has made available to states for combatting fraud and strengthening UI program integrity under UIPL Nos. 28-20; 28-20, Change 1; 28-20, Change 2; 28-20, Change 4; 22-21; 11-23; and 02-22.

Fraud Prevention and detection

- As part of the online EZARC application, a check with the Social Security Administration that verifies the following data elements match:
 - Social Security Number
 - Legal Name
 - Date of Birth
- A Notice to Last Employer (5013 form) is sent to each employer listed on the claim.
 - The employer must be selected from a list created in the Contributions system (Tax21).
 - If employer information entered is not in the Tax21 system, the pseudo account number 999999999 is inserted.
 - A staff member researches pseudo account numbers for possible misclassification of wages, fraudulent claim, or possible employer fraud before the claim can be processed.

- The responses to these notices are sent to a queue that staff work and set issues to move through the adjudication process for a decision with appeals rights.
- Employers can indicate “Employee does not work here” or “Employee is still employed here” on that form which assists in identifying fraudulent claims.
- A Notice to Base Period Employer (550 form) is submitted to all employers in the base period.
 - The base period employers are identified in the wage file and submitted by employers on quarterly wage reports (209B).
 - If a fraudster lists an incorrect last employer, that employer can select “Claimant is still Employed” or provide additional information to assist in locating possible fraud.
- Cybersecurity:
 - EZARC, the online claim system, and the ARKNET weekly certification systems, are both geofenced which allows access to IP addresses that are only from within the US.
 - The vendor and the Department of Information Services (state IT group) monitor the systems for suspicious activity.
 - Data analytic reports, (for example numerous claims being filed with the same IP address in short time frames) are reported to ADWS who then researches the claims involved.
 - ARKLine (phone weekly claim system)/ARKNet (internet based weekly claim system) are no longer able to use the most common pins (ie 0000, 1111, 1234, last four of SSN or Date of Birth Month and year.)
- Provide details on overpayment recovery efforts including:
 - Actions with banks, financial institutions, and with Federal law enforcement’s forfeiture and seizure efforts. Recovery Efforts:
 - Collection letters mailed to claimants from the Benefits Payment Control systems.
 - Federal Treasury Offset Program (TOPS) to recover overpayments on claims.
 - Arkansas State Income tax offset through the Department of Finance Administration.
 - Interstate Reciprocal Overpayment Recovery Arrangement (IRORA) to collect for other overpayment balances due in other states or territories as well as encourage other states and territories to collect for Arkansas balances due.
 - Contact banks on fraudulent claims to recoup funds paid.
 - Wage garnishments and assessments are filed to collect overpaid funds.
 - Assessments filed securing real property.
 - Possible Criminal Prosecution.
 - Working with OIG on larger fraud schemes.
 - Information on how the state is using waivers of recovery of overpayments both for regular UI and temporary UC programs created by the CARES Act, including if the state is using approved blanket waivers as described in UIPL No. 20-21, Change 1.
 - ADWS applied for and received one blanket waiver approval via DOL.

- ADWS does have a CARES act related finding that requires retroactivity to determine if claims that should have been paid using UI funds instead of PUA funds. As the weeks have been moved to the UI program ADWS has identified several claimants that would have been paid less in UI benefits than they received as part of the PUA program. We are in the process of data entering these balances due and waiving them per guidance in UIPL 20-21.
- The remaining Cares Act issues, when bad actors have been identified are currently being setup for active collections.
- How the state is using the Treasury Offset Program (TOP) for benefit overpayment recovery, how the state is ensuring covered debts are being submitted, and any barriers/challenges in working with TOP.
 - ADWS actively uses the TOP program as well as State income tax for offsetting both claimants and employers balance due. Both efforts have been successful, although burdensome with the IRS additional requirements to safeguard Federal Tax Information. This has required ADWS to have a separate and even more secure system, where only three individuals have access to meet the Pub 1075 requirements. While the trust fund benefits from collecting in this fashion, additional funds are not provided in the operations budget for the arduous task, and UI Admin spends additional funds to meet the requirements of Pub 1075.
- **State use of UI Integrity Center resources, with a particular focus on state connection to the Integrity Data Hub (IDH) and use of its datasets to crossmatch unemployment compensation (UC) claims and aid in the prevention and detection of fraud and improper payments (see Training and Employment Notice (TEN) No. 24-21);**
- Discuss the state's connection to the IDH, including frequency of IDH use.
 - Does the state submit all initial and continued claims for IDH cross-matching? If not, what is preventing the state from sending all claims? Yes, all claims info is submitted each week.
- If the state is not connected to the IDH and/or is connected but not regularly submitting UI claims data through a webservice/real-time connection to IDH, provide details on the state's plan for how to increase usage and an anticipated timeline to:
 - Connect to the IDH. ADWS currently connects and submits files to IDH.
 - Increase frequency of IDH use. Yes, ADWS is currently researching a real-time approach. When claimants apply for benefits through the online system, and before staff process the application, the score would be populated so staff can go through additional ID verification efforts at that time as opposed to retroactively, to further reduce the improper payment rate.
 - Fully leverage all available IDH capabilities. IDH capabilities include:
 - Suspicious Actor Repository (SAR) Utilized
 - Multi-State Crossmatch (MSCM) Utilized
 - Identity Verification (IDV) Utilized
 - Bank Account Verification (BAV) Utilized
 - Fraud Alerting Utilized
 - Foreign Internet Protocol (IP) Address Detection Utilized
 - Suspicious Email Domains and Patterns Utilized
 - Update the IDH connection to a webservice/real-time connection. ADWS is currently researching a real-time approach. When claimants apply for benefits through the online system, and before staff process the application, the score would be populated so staff can go through additional ID verification efforts at that time as opposed to retroactively, to further

reduce the improper payment rate. If this cannot be accomplished due to current system limitations, we will create the file daily in the future.

- Identify barriers to using any of the available IDH capabilities. ADWS is researching connecting to IDH in real-time to stop payment from being issued and stopping needed retro activity. We are currently still utilizing the mainframe system, which makes adapting the data to new solutions burdensome and financially prohibitive. The work to move to a cloud-based infrastructure is currently planned to be completed by the end of calendar year 2024.
- If the state has not executed IDH Participation Agreement - Version 5.0 (see TEN No. 24-21), provide details on the anticipated timeline to update to IDH Participation Agreement - Version 5.0.

Discuss the state's use of the UI National Integrity Academy's virtual trainings and/or eLearning lessons. ADWS currently utilizes these tools in training.

We are encouraging staff to complete the training sections available through the National Association of State Workforce Agencies' (NASWA) learning management platform which has been successful with training new Benefits Accuracy Management (BAM) and Data Validation (DV) staff. ADWS also utilizes the good working relationship with our DOL regional office that provides excellent guidance on a variety of topics.

- Discuss the state's use of UI Integrity Knowledge Exchange Library resources, including the Behavioral Insights Toolkit (see TEN No. 15-21). Yes, we utilize the toolkit and implement the suggestions as possible.
- Discuss the state's participation in State Consultative Services. ADWS has used state consultant services especially for the prior RFP. This service was extremely helpful and beneficial to our modernization efforts.

Note: The IDH Team has a one-page dashboard report for each state summarizing current IDH utilization and areas where IDH use might be expanded. Please reach out to IDHTeam@naswa.org to request a copy of your state's IDH utilization dashboard report.

- **State use of required and recommended integrity controls and overpayment recovery activities as outlined in UIPL No. 11-23, including any additional effective cross-matching and overpayment recovery activities and identified best practices.**

- Provide details regarding the state's use of each cross-match/integrity control and overpayment recovery activity (required and recommended) as outlined in UIPL No. 11-23. Include details on the frequency of crossmatch/integrity controls use (e.g., conducted on all initial claims, all continued claims, only when suspicious activity is identified?) and frequency of overpayment recovery activities.
- Crossmatches/integrity controls and recovery activities include:

Crossmatches/Integrity Controls

- ID Verification; At each initial, reopened, and additional UI claim for benefits.
 - National Directory of New Hires (NDNH); Weekly against current claims.
- Quarterly Wage Records Crossmatch; Currently quarterly but transitioning to daily in March of

2024.

- Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlement (SAVE); At each Initial, reopened, and additional claim.
- Referral of allegations reasonably believed to constitute UC fraud, waste, abuse, mismanagement, or misconduct to DOL-OIG; As identified.
- UI Integrity Center's IDH; Currently weekly, researching lift needed to go to real time as initial, additional and reopened claims are filed.
- Digital Authentication, such as Multifactor Authentication (MFA); Currently used via Login.gov and USPS, or in person at the local office, by providing physical ID.
 - Device Fingerprint/Reputation Management; Not currently utilizing.
 - Fraud Risk Scoring (*i.e.*, Case Management Prioritization); Via IDH currently each week.
 - Comparisons and crossmatches that detect shared characteristics, Each night as part of batch processing.
 - Social Security Administration crossmatches (*i.e.*, Unemployment Insurance Query (UIQ), Prisoner Update Processing System (PUPS), Death Master File); Weekly, for others, still working on getting PUPS up in AR.
 - Federal, state, and local incarceration crossmatches; Weekly.
 - Deceased Records crossmatches; Weekly.
 - Vital Statistics crossmatches; Weekly
 - State Directory of New Hires (SDNH); Weekly but transitioning to daily in March 2024.
 - Department of Motor Vehicle crossmatch; Not currently participating.
 - Interstate Benefits (IB) crossmatch; At the initial, reopened, or additional claims.
 - State Identification Inquiry (SID) and IB8606 enhancements made to the Interstate Connection (ICON) network crossmatch to prevent concurrent claim filing in multiple states; At the initial, reopened, and additional claim.
 - Use of a unique identifier to identify claimants instead of using the full SSN; Currently using full SSN.
 - Fictitious employer crossmatches; Researching to create solution, to run as employer accounts are created.
 - Periodic IT security assessments and audits consistent with National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)-compliant information technology security guidelines; Quarterly, and as fraud schemes are identified.
 - Adequate internal controls to protect the integrity and security of state assets; Quarterly, and as fraud schemes are identified.
 - Implement a cross-functional integrity task force to develop and implement state-specific action plans to reduce UI improper payments.
 - Promising practices:
 - Working with DOL and the USPS for ID Verification at no additional cost to the state has been a beneficial process and a great learning tool. ADWS looks forward to partnering with DOL in the future on additional "plug and play" solutions.
 - Partnering with OIG on large prosecutions where possible connecting theft of public benefits with larger criminal activity rings for longer periods of incarceration and restitution. This has created press coverage in efforts to deter possible future bad actors.

Overpayment Recovery Activities

- Benefit Offsets; As identified in overnight batch processes.
- TOP; Balances reported annually and increase and decreases for additional interest and payments made outside of the OTP system weekly.

- Cross Program Offset Recovery Agreement (CPORA); Daily.
- Interstate Reciprocal Offset Recovery Arrangement (IPORA); Daily
- Negotiating repayment plans; ADWS is unable to take settlement and compromise for benefits balances due.
- Accepting repayments through various methods (*e.g.*, online, via debit/credit card); Currently accept cash and check. Working to implement online payment method but stalled with vendor issues.
- State Income Tax Offset Program: Balances are submitted once each year, and updates are submitted weekly for interest and payments made outside of the system. Payments are received from the Department of Finance and Administration monthly for balances collected.
- Wage garnishments: As identified as part of the quarterly cross match process. We are planning for this feature to be done as the wages are reported by employers.
- Property liens and assessments; As the appeal period has exhausted for balances over \$200.00.
- Offsets of lottery winnings, homestead exemptions, and other benefits; Does not currently participate, no ability in current Arkansas Law.
- Active participation in probate and/or bankruptcy proceedings; Yes, for balances over \$500.00 where fraud has been assessed.
- Skip tracing; Does not currently participate.
- Work proactively and collaboratively with banks and financial institutions; Yes, as possible and over the \$500.00 threshold when an assessment has been field.
- Civil actions; Yes, as needed.
 - Credit bureau referrals: This would be handled at the county level if an assessment has been filed.
 - State/federal prosecution As needed for fraud over payments over \$5,000.00 threshold.
 - Penalties and interest on overpayments in compliance with state and federal law; yes 15% penalty then 35% additional penalty for fraudulent if not paid within 30 days. Interest added each month at 10% per year.
 - Collection agency referrals; Does not currently participate.
 - Implementing a voluntary fraud self-disclosure program; Yes, claimants can indicate that they committed fraud on wage earnings investigations notices, or by calling the service center.
 - Other recovery methods as determined by state law or policy.
- Identify any additional integrity controls or recovery activities the state uses that are not listed in UIPL No. 11-23. Actively engaging with the employer community and fostering that relationship to ensure employers fully understand the requests for information, to stop separation fraud, wage earnings investigations, failure to attend a scheduled interview, work search audits, failed to pass a pre-employment drug screen.
- Provide promising practices. ADWS has recently integrated the New Hire Registry reporting requirement, into the employer reporting system. We are planning on running New Hire cross matches daily, to as quickly as possible identify potential wage earnings issues.
- Identify challenges with crossmatches or in overpayment recovery activities. Crossmatches are great, but they are all retroactivity based. Once a claim is in pay status per the JAVA rule, they must remain in pay status, even though they appeared on a verified crossmatch. It would benefit the improper payment rate, if we were able to stop payments once identified, and resume if the claimant is found to have not committed fraud. Also, the requirement to reach back out to the

employer after the submission of a new hire entry, with the same individual, Date of Birth and Legal name seems excessive, and leads to the claimant receiving additional benefits that they are most likely ineligible to receive.

- If the state does not currently use one of the integrity controls or recovery activities listed in UIPL No. 11-23, provide the state's plan and anticipated timeline to request and obtain access to the cross-match/integrity control or to implement the overpayment recovery activity.

Note: If the state does not plan to obtain access to a crossmatch/integrity control or implement a specific recovery activity, please explain.

- **State use and employer participation in State Information Data Exchange System (SIDES) (see TEN No. 12-16).**

➤ Provide details on the state's current usage of SIDES.

- Like the UI State Information Data Exchange System (SIDES), ADWS' Adjudication (AAS) system is web-based and designed to streamline and increase the efficiency of the nonmonetary determination process. Since AAS was implemented in Arkansas, ADWS has continued to enhance the system to further streamline the adjudication process. Through the electronic response system employers receive and respond to Notices to Last Employer, Notices to Base Period Employer, and questionnaires regarding nonmonetary issues via the Internet. ADWS is aware that the United States Department of Labor (USDOL) encourages states to fully implement SIDES; however, ADWS' Automated Adjudication System and electronic response system for employers, which is based upon our own state UI law, enables Arkansas to maintain the same functionality as SIDES along with ability to tailor questionnaires designed to elicit more information from employers with no additional subscription costs to the agency. ADWS will consider incorporating SIDES into its modernized benefits system.

➤ If the state does not currently use all available SIDES exchanges, provide the state's plan for how to connect to all SIDES exchanges and an anticipated timeline to implement each SIDES exchange. Sides Exchanges include: ADWS does not currently participate in any of the below listed SIDES programs but is considering after we move to a more modernized cloud-based system.

- Separation Information
- Monetary & Potential Charges
- Additional Fact-Finding
- Determinations & Decisions
- Earnings Verification
- Benefit Charges

30 Identify any barriers to SIDES exchange participation, either in state promotion or in employer adoption. Due to the ADWS's current state on the mainframe, integrating additional items with the mainframe is cost prohibitive and overly complex. Once we move to the cloud-based environment, we will consider joining SIDES.

a. State strategies designed to facilitate claimants' compliance with state work search requirements while also supporting their reemployment such as adoption of the work search requirements in the Model Work Search Legislation (see TEN No. 17-19).

- (a) Outline the state's work search requirement and explain state challenges with work search improper payments. The Arkansas Legislature passed additional legislation to increase the number of work search activities each week, and better define in statute what is considered work search activity, as well as increased the number of work search audits UI staff must perform each week. ADWS is a work search warning state, which assists with this measure. We are working towards transitioning to a more updated claims filing system that will require work search activity to be entered in the weekly certification process. This will greatly increase the quality and quantity of the information received and reduce staff time needed to complete the required audits.
- (b) Discuss the state's plan to improve work search compliance by reducing work search errors and strengthening reemployment. ADWS UI is more fully integrating with the RESEA program to better facilitate job search and access to supportive services. We are also working with a vendor to require work search specific reporting at the time of weekly certification filing. The new system to report work search activity will include current LMI information as well as designated training providers for those needing training or re-training, to better re-attach to the workforce. This new system will allow UI staff to reach out to Arkansas employers immediately as opposed to requesting the work search log from the claimants after they have been selected for audit. Fostering a good working relationship with the employer community is key to the success of this project.

- **(Topic #2) – State plans and actions to address the state's top three improper payment root causes in Payment Integrity Information Act (PIIA) 2022.**

- Identify the state's top three improper payment root causes.
 - Separation Issues 44.1% of improper payments,
 - Wage Earnings Issues 40.8% of improper payments
 - Other issues 6.67% of improper payments
- Explain the state's challenges in reducing improper payments in the top three root cause categories.
 1. Separation issues, are most directly tied to staffing issues in the Adjudication department. As all states have experienced ADWS had large staffing turnovers during the pandemic period and is working to incentivize retention of existing staff while enticing additional staff to come to the UI program. Adjudication takes an average of 2 years to absorb the knowledge needed to make quality decisions. The quality of our decisions is well above the required measures, due to a dedicated effort by management, but timeliness continues to be a challenge for the limited number of experienced staff. If the issue is not heard timely and was in pay status, per the JAVA rule, they must remain in pay status until a decision is made, increasing the amount of the overpayment.
 2. Wage Earnings Issues: As all are crossmatched, we are identifying the problem after it has occurred. We are working with the employer community to redesign the wage earnings detection system, to enable audit notices to be created the day the wages are reported by the employer. By encouraging employers to report wages as close to the end of the quarter as possible and allowing them to postdate the accompanying payments not due for 30 days after the end of the quarter, we expect to identify wage earnings issues more quickly and further reduce the improper payment rate.

3. Other issues: These are a combination of responsibilities and the time required to work the items submitted by employers. We are working with the employer community to ease the burden on submitting additional documentation utilizing the online systems and reduce the staff touch needed to add the items to the official record. We believe this will reduce the lag time to set issues, for decisions, to during the waiting week, and before the claim is in pay status.

Discuss the state's plan to reduce improper payments in each root cause category. Listed above by root cause.

(Topic #3) – State coordination and collaboration with the DOL-OIG and other state and Federal law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute UI fraud and recover overpayments. This should also include state plans to continue providing all confidential UC information to DOL-OIG for purposes of both investigating fraud and performing audits.

ADWS has an active relationship with OIG and works to submit all fraud to OIG for possible prosecutions. This has been most beneficial when they can tie UI fraud to other fraud rings for larger criminal charges, including multi state schemes, human trafficking, illegal drug sales and smuggling.

Criminal prosecutions from claims related to the pandemic period are proving difficult to criminally prosecute due to statute of limitations, and staff time constraints. With the recent legislative changes reducing the maximum benefits amount to 12 compensable weeks of at max benefits \$5,412.00 in UI benefits. At this dollar value of benefits, we have had challenges working with employers to participate in the criminal prosecution process. While the funds collected will assist in keeping the trust fund at the optimal balance, this does not provide additional funds for this staff intensive processes, which would be charged to UI Administration funds, which is already stretched thin.

(Topic #4) – State plans to strengthen program integrity in UI tax operations, including current activities and plans to identify and prevent worker misclassification, State Unemployment Tax Act (SUTA) Dumping, and fictitious employer schemes, and development/use of effective employer audit strategies (i.e., use of remote audits).

Identify current activities and plans to address:
Worker Misclassification

ADWS has continued to struggle with the identification of misclassified workers. Retaining well qualified staff has been challenging as they have more financial incentive for leaving ADWS and moving to other state agencies and completing similar work requirements. We recently received approval to increase the pay grade for senior field tax representatives that complete misclassification investigations as well as audit employers for compliance. We believe this enhancement for staff as well as continued use of technology to simplify audit process will assist in the identification of misclassified employees and meeting the audit core measures with DOL.

SUTA Dumping:

ADWS currently uses the SDDS (SUTA Dumping Detection System) but has not identified many instances of true SUTA dumping. We have been successful with educating employers to better understand the requirements, which may then lead to a transfer of experience and the creation of a payment plan, to assist the employers in correcting the identified issues.

Fictitious employer schemes

UI Claims processing staff: Report suspicious activity with the claims filing process. For example, consistent email address or employer combinations, incorrect geographic information, (City, County, and Zip Code do not reconcile.)

UI Administration: Writing policy and procedures to report employer or claimant potential fraud schemes.

IT staff: ensure geofencing is actively working to deter foreign threats. Data Analysis looking for the same employer account number, claims with no addresses, signs of inaccurate geographic information (city, state, zip, not matching area of employer), IP address tracking.

Contributions Staff: Ensuring payment is received when an employer is attempting to create an account more than 6 months in the past. Looking for consistent wages across multiple quarters, and geographic information on claim vs employer account, filing reports and not submitting payments, with claims.

Internal Audit Staff: Researching Account number and large scheme issues, and patterns for potential fraud.

Development/use of effective employer audit strategies (including, but not limited to, use of remote audits).

- **(Topic #5) – State plans and actions to strengthen internal security and ensure that all appropriate internal controls and processes are in place and are adequate to assess internal risks and threats, ensure program integrity, and minimize program vulnerabilities (see UIPL No. 14-17).**
- **(Topic #6) – State plans and actions to evaluate the effectiveness and equity of fraud prevention and detection, ID verification, and improper payment reduction activities. State should include strategies to ensure that processes used to detect and prevent fraud are effective and do not limit the ability for a legitimate claimant to apply for and become eligible for UC. States implementing or using facial recognition technology in their ID proofing processes must also report findings from bias testing and provide updates on efforts to mitigate biases or barriers in this section of the IAP.**
 - Identify potential barriers that are created by fraud prevention and detection functions for legitimate claimants. Provide plans and actions designed to mitigate such risks. ADWS has claimants who are unable to be approved through the Login.gov online based ID verification tool for a variety of reasons. This may be through the phone number not being in the claimant’s name, or not having a current Driver’s License or state issued ID card. Alternate options are available for in person verification at 200+ post offices, through the USPS pilot program, and additional types of documentation are acceptable to be utilized at the local office including military ID and mortgage paperwork for example. Then, additional options of identification can be provided at the local office including, expired DL or state issued ID, State issued school ID with picture, Concealed Carry License or Medical card.
 - As required in UIPL No. 11-23, states must ensure there is at least one timely, effective, and accessible non-digital alternative to online ID verification, which should not be overly

burdensome on applicants, limit access to public benefits programs or the timely receipt of benefits, or stigmatize members of the public in any way. Provide details on the state's non-digital ID verification option(s).

Alternate options are available for in person verification at 200+ post offices, through the USPS pilot program, and additional types of documentation are acceptable to be utilized at the local office including military ID and mortgage paperwork for example. Additional options of identification can be provided at the local office including, expired DL or state issued ID, State issued school ID with picture, Concealed Carry License or Medical card.

- Include how the state flags cases for suspected fraudulent activity and how investigation resources are assigned, including:
 - A. What risk scoring elements and/or prioritization elements are used. Multistate state claims and suspicious actors, bank accounts reported by IDH, incorrect geographic information on the claim (for example City and Zip Code do not match, or residential address and selected County do not match.)
 - B. How the risk scoring elements and/or prioritization elements are weighted. Via IDH score methodology.
 - C. How the state evaluates the weights based on false positives and negatives.
 - D. How risk scoring elements and/or prioritization elements are updated. Via IDH
 - E. How the state ensures the fraud risk scoring and/or prioritization of cases does not negatively affect legitimate claimants. A requirement to contact the service center is issued, giving the claimant 10 days to report to a USPS location or local office to prove ID in person. If this is not completed in the 10 days, then an issue is set for failed to report, and is sent to adjudication for a decision including appeal rights.
- i. Include details on how the state measures claimants' usage of both digital and non-digital identity verification options, how the state reviews digital services for false positive and false negatives, and how the state ensures legitimate claimants have alternative paths to prove their identity and/or resolve issues, including providing a possible recourse. If a claimant selected Login.gov, and was unsuccessful, a requirement to contact the service center is issued, giving the claimant 10 days to report to a USPS location or local office to prove ID in person. If this is not completed in the 10 days, an issue is set for failure to report, and is sent to adjudication for a decision including appeal rights.

• **(Topic #7) – State plans and actions to mitigate negative consequences for victims of UI ID fraud, including ensuring simplified processes to remove the victim's liability for overpayments resulting from ID fraud.**

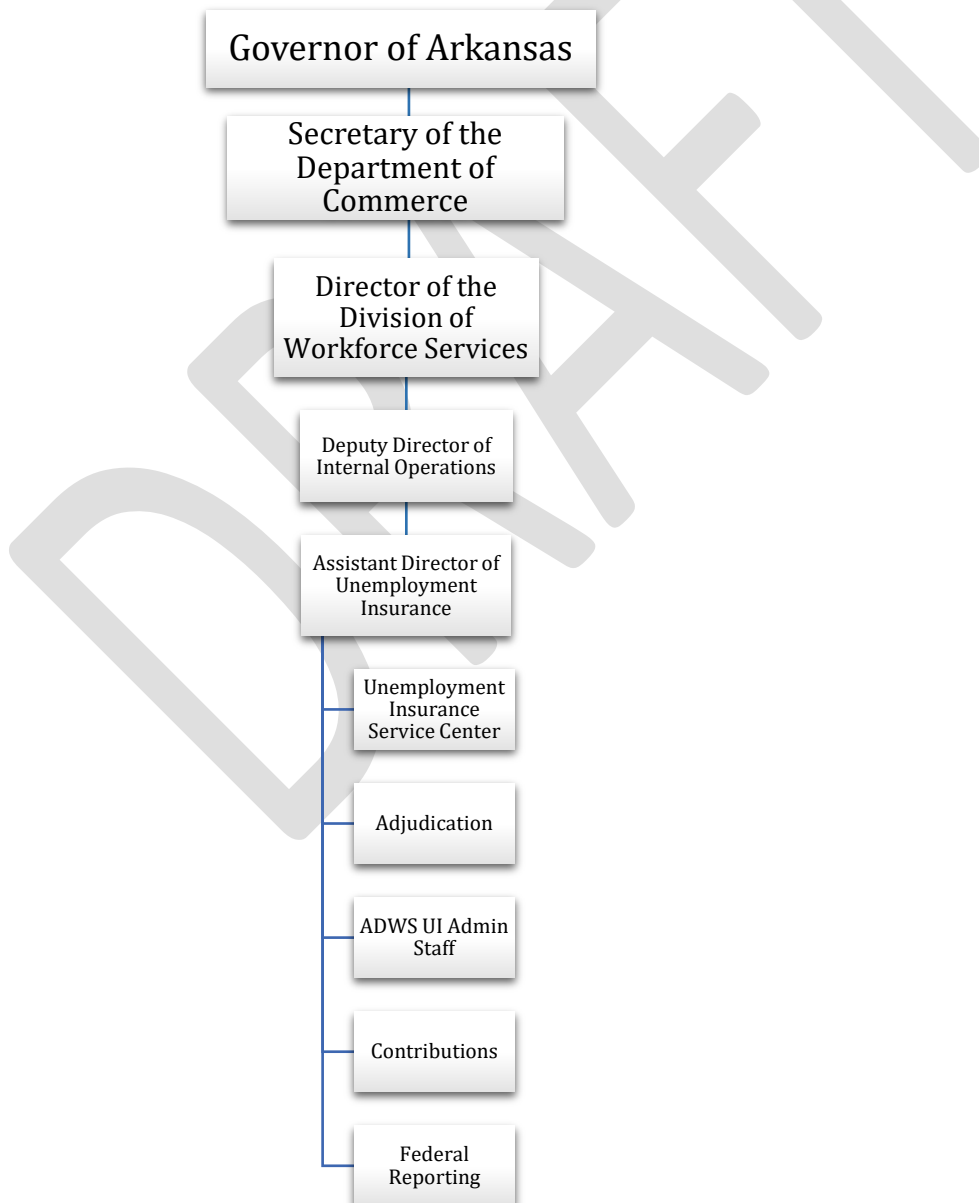
- Include details regarding how the state provides a reporting mechanism for UI ID fraud on their websites, communicates status updates for such investigations, and takes action to protect the victim when the state determines that UI ID fraud has occurred (*see UIPL No. 11- 23* for more details on protecting victims of ID fraud). All information is available through the ADWS website and the Attorney General's office websites. Claimants are required to file a police report in their local jurisdiction that a claim was filed using their identity without their consent. The bank account and other information on the claim are researched via the internal fraud unit and bank subpoenas. A decision is then issued to the claimant at the correct contact information and the false address information, including appeal rights. If it was determined to be an identity theft claim, the overpayment is moved to a pseudo SSN in case the bad actor is identified in the future. This stops all collections

efforts against the identity theft victim.

- Include the state's procedures for mitigating negative impacts on the UI ID fraud victim (*e.g.*, establishing a pseudo claim record, temporarily marking the overpayment as "uncollectible", etc.). Listed above.

- **(Topic #8) – If the state has not provided complete and accurate overpayment reporting on the ETA 227 reports (Overpayment Detection and Recovery Activities), and the ETA 902P report (Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Activities), the state must provide information on plans for improvement, including timeframes and milestones, for addressing the issue and ensuring complete, accurate, and timely reporting in FY 2024.**
- If the state has submitted all data for the ETA 227 or 902P reports, this section is not applicable, and the state can input "N/A". All ADWS corrections have been submitted for the 227 reports and 902P reports.

6.) Organizational Chart



APPENDIX I: Performance Goals for the Core Programs

Each state submitting a Unified or Combined State Plan is required to identify expected levels of performance for each of the primary indicators of performance for the first two years covered by the plan. The state is required to reach agreement with the Secretary of Labor, in conjunction with the Secretary of Education, on state-negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the plan.

For Program Year (PY) 2016-2019 plans, the Departments used the transition authority under section 503(a) of WIOA to designate certain primary indicators of performance as “baseline” indicators to ensure an orderly transition from the requirements of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 to those under WIOA. A “baseline” indicator was one for which states did not propose an expected level of performance and did not come to agreement with the Departments on negotiated levels of performance because sufficient data was not available to establish such performance levels. As a result, “baseline” indicators were not used in the end of the year adjustment of performance levels and were not used to determine failure to meet adjusted levels of performance for purposes of sanctions. The Departments designated indicators as “baseline” based on the likelihood of a State having insufficient data with which to make a reasonable determination of an expected level of performance.

For PYs 2020-2023 Plans, Title I programs (Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth) and the Title II program (Adult Education and Family Literacy Act) will have two full years of data available to make reasonable determinations of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Credential Attainment Rate; and
- Measurable Skill Gains

The Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program, authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by title III of WIOA, will have two full years of data available to make a reasonable determination of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit); and
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)

The Credential Attainment Rate and Measurable Skill Gains indicators do not apply to the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program; therefore, this program will not submit expected levels of performance for these indicators.

For the first two years of PYs 2020-2023 Plans, the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, authorized under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA, will have two full years of data available for the Measurable Skill Gains indicator only. Therefore, the Departments will designate the following indicators as “baseline” for the VR program for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);

- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit); and
- Credential Attainment Rate

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ADULT – Performance Expected Level has been added with PY2022 negotiated level since we will negotiate with DOL for PY2024.

	Title I – Adult Program			
	Program Year: 2024		Program Year: 2025	
	Expected Level	Negotiated Level	Expected Level	Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)	83.0%		83.0%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)	82.0%		82.0%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)	\$6,649.00		\$6,649.00	
Credential Attainment Rate	81.0%		81.0%	
Measurable Skill Gains	71.0%		71.0%	
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹ The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

DISLOCATED WORKER – Performance Expected Level has been added with PY2022 negotiated level since we will negotiate with DOL for PY2024.

	Title I – Dislocated Worker Program			
	Program Year: 2024		Program Year: 2025	
	Expected Level	Negotiated Level	Expected Level	Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)	83.0%		83.0%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)	85.0%		85.0%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)	\$7,227.00		\$7,227.00	
Credential Attainment Rate	79.0%		79.0%	
Measurable Skill Gains	68.5%		68.5%	
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹ The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

YOUTH – Performance Expected Level has been added with PY2022 negotiated level since we will negotiate with DOL for PY2024.

	Title I – Youth Program			
	Program Year: 2024		Program Year: 2025	
	Expected Level	Negotiated Level	Expected Level	Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)	73.0%		73.0%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)	76.0%		76.0%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)	\$3,700.00		\$3,700.00	
Credential Attainment Rate	62.0%		62.0%	
Measurable Skill Gains	59.0%		59.0%	
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹ The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

	Title II – Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program			
	Program Year: 2024		Program Year: 2025	
	Expected Level	Negotiated Level	Expected Level	Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)	43%		44%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)	36%		37%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)	\$4,700		\$4,800	
Credential Attainment Rate	41%		42%	
Measurable Skill Gains	53%		54%	

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	Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service Program			
	Program Year:2024		Program Year:2025	
	Expected Level	Negotiated Level	Expected Level	Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)	69.5%		69.5%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)	69.5%		69.5%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)	\$5,477		\$5,477	
Credential Attainment Rate	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Measurable Skill Gains	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

	Vocational Rehabilitation Program			
	Program Year: 2024		Program Year: 2025	
	Expected Level	Negotiated Level	Expected Level	Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit) ²²	64.0%	Baseline	65.0%	Baseline
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit) ²²	63.0%	Baseline	65.0%	Baseline
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit) ²³	\$6,800	Baseline	\$6,870	Baseline
Credential Attainment Rate ²²	35.5%	Baseline	36.0%	Baseline
Measurable Skill Gains	57.5%		58.0%	

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	All WIOA Core Programs			
	Program Year:		Program Year:	
	Expected Level	Negotiated Level	Expected Level	Negotiated Level
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable

ADDITIONAL INDICATORS OF PERFORMANCE

States may identify additional indicators in the plan, including additional approaches to measuring Effectiveness in Serving Employers, and may establish levels of performance for each of the state indicators. Please identify any such state indicators under Additional Indicators of Performance.

Additional Indicators of Performance
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

OTHER APPENDICES