



Regional and Local Plans

Minnesota's Workforce Development System Under WIOA

Program Years 2016 & 2017

Submitted by

RWDA:	WIOA REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AREA 5
	SOUTH CENTRAL/SOUTHWEST
LWDA:	SOUTH CENTRAL WORKFORCE COUNCIL
	&
	SOUTHWEST MN WORKFORCE COUNCIL

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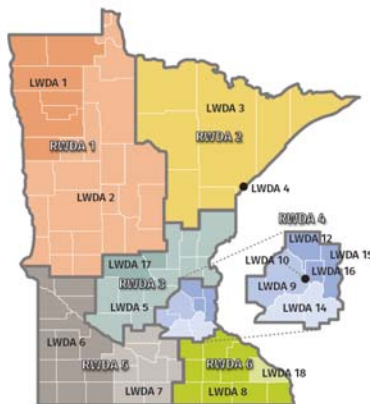
INTRODUCTION

The purposes of the WIOA are the following:

- (1) To increase, for individuals in the United States, particularly those individuals with barriers to employment, access to and opportunities for the employment, education, training and support services they need to succeed in the labor market.
- (2) To support the alignment of workforce investment, education and economic development systems in support of a comprehensive, accessible and high-quality workforce development system in the United States.
- (3) To improve the quality and labor market relevance of workforce investment, education and economic development efforts to provide America's workers with the skills and credentials necessary to secure and advance in employment with family-sustaining wages and to provide America's employers with the skilled workers the employers need to succeed in a global economy.
- (4) To promote improvement in the structure of and delivery of services through the United States workforce development system to better address the employment and skill needs of workers, jobseekers and employers.
- (5) To increase the prosperity of workers and employers in the United States, the economic growth of communities, regions and states and the global competitiveness of the United States.
- (6) For purposes of subtitle A and B of title I, to provide workforce investment activities, through statewide and local workforce development systems, that increase the employment, retention and earnings of participants, and increase attainment of recognized post-secondary credentials by participants, and as a result, improve the quality of the workforce, reduce welfare dependency, increase economic self-sufficiency, meet the skill requirements of employers and enhance the productivity and competitiveness of the Nation.

Workforce Development Areas

Minnesota has designated six Regional Workforce Development Areas (RWDAs) in the state that represent a combination of Local Areas, as defined in WIOA, and Economic Development Regions, as defined in other federal law. These Workforce Development Areas have been approved and adopted by the Governor and the chief local elected officials of the Local Areas.



Each Regional Workforce Development Area is responsible for submitting a Regional Plan, inclusive of the Local Plans of the Local Workforce Development Areas. The Regional and Local Plans will align with the strategic vision set by the Governor, address the regional needs of the workforce and business communities and comply with the planning requirements as determined by the State of Minnesota's Department of Employment and Economic Development and the U.S. Department of Labor and applicable federal and state statutes.

Minnesota's Vision for the Workforce Development System

Vision Statement:

A healthy economy, where all Minnesotans have or are on a path to meaningful employment and a family sustaining wage, and all employers are able to fill jobs in demand.

This vision statement was developed through Minnesota's participation in the National Governor's Association's Policy Academy on Career Pathway Models. Minnesota's effort engaged seven state agencies and has influenced workforce development thinking at the system level. It is fitting to continue to move forward with pursuing the implementation of WIOA under this inclusive effort.

Mission:

The creation of a Career Pathway System that aligns local, state and federal resources, policies and services to meet the workforce needs of business and industry and improves access to employment, education and training services for Minnesota's current and future workforce.

Rationale:

The economic conditions of the 21st century require a more responsive approach to meeting the needs of business and industry; and the growing diversity of the workforce population. As economies become more global, competition will continue to increase and pressures on the inputs of production, specifically the timing, availability and skill base of the workforce. Rediscovering the value proposition of the Workforce Development System is critical to responding to the 21st century economy.

A Career Pathway System approach will position the needs of a skilled workforce at the center of the system, recognizing the important role of a "dual customer" approach – businesses and workers. Businesses will lead sector strategies that address the most critical growth needs in occupations that support family sustaining wages. The diverse needs of workers will impact the design and delivery of employment and training programs and services to fulfill these employment needs and their career goals.

SECTION A: REGIONAL PLAN

REGIONAL LEADERSHIP APPROACH

The regional leadership approach describes how the local area boards within each regional workforce development area will define and coordinate the strategic priorities established by the Governor under WIOA.

1. Describe the selection process for the membership who will provide the leadership to oversee the development and coordination of the regional plan.

The selection process for the Regional Workforce Development Area #5 (RWDA #5) leadership team was discussed and approved by both the South Central Workforce Council and the Southwest Workforce Council. The RWDA #5 leadership team is comprised of eight (8) members including the Chair and Vice-Chair of each of the Local Elected Official Boards and the Chair and Vice-Chair of each of the Local Workforce Council's. The Board will be staffed by the Executive Director of each Board.

The Chair of the two Workforce Councils will serve as co-chairs.

The make-up of the Board provides a strong mix of private sector and elected officials. Membership represents healthcare, manufacturing, agriculture services, as well as the local elected official's perspectives.

June 2015 - The South Central & Southwest Local Elected Official Boards and the Workforce Councils identified and signed the resolution outlining the regional approach and identification of membership.

April 2016 – The Regional Leadership Team was established and an operational agreement was put in place.

January 2017 - The Memorandum of Understanding between the South Central & Southwest LWDB's was finalized.

March 2017 (on-going) – The Regional Leadership Team will continue to review the Team membership structure and identify opportunities to engage diverse populations in future strategic planning. The team will continue to identify on-going opportunities for expanded individual and partnership engagement and coordination.

2. Describe how the selected organizations from the region will provide oversight to development and implementation of the regional plan. Complete **Attachment A – Regional Oversight Committee**.

Two regional planning meetings were held in RWDA #5 in Fall 2015. The purpose of the meetings was to gain input from business and major stakeholders throughout the 23-county region. The information/feedback gained from the planning sessions will be used to develop the regional plan and identified the strategic goals and strategies.

The leadership team met on April 13, 2016 to finalize the operational/governance structure of the committee. The leadership team will meet – at a minimum – two times per year.

The local representatives will be charged with communicating back to each local board to ensure all members are kept informed and have the opportunity to provide feedback and recommendations to any regional initiatives that may develop.

The first task of the Regional Leadership Team is to review and analyze the regional priorities and strategies (based on information gathered at the Fall Planning Sessions), and approve the Regional Plan. Following that step, the Plan will be sent back to each local Board for final review and approval for submittal.

Future responsibilities of the Team may include:

- Bi-annual (minimum) meetings
- Assure regional strategies are clearly defined and measurable
- Monitor progress
- Review and approve potential areas of collaboration
- Review and approve regional initiatives
- Convene and engage key stakeholders, individuals from diverse groups, and others experiencing barriers to assist in developing and implementing regional strategies

Board Development: The Leadership Team will review and implement opportunities to increase the diversity of the Region 5 Leadership Team; local WDB's; and working committees by:

- **Hosting “How to be a Board Member” information sessions with community partners semi-annually;**
- **Follow up and engage individuals who indicated interest in working with workforce boards/committees at the Marnita's Table events;**
- **Continue to engage individuals who expressed interest in being involved in the regional planning process at the 2015-WIOA Regional Planning events (Mankato & Redwood Falls) to broaden the network and open opportunities for expanded engagement and diversity.**
- **Setting up satellite board meeting sites to improve board member access and attendance to board and committee meetings – in accordance with the Public Meeting requirements.**
- **March 2017 – June 2018: Implement strategies to recruit diverse populations as LWDB vacancies occur.**
- **June 2018 – review engagement of diverse populations and set goals/strategies for PY18-19.**

3. Describe how the approach used will ensure that partner engagement includes diverse representation, specifically among populations experiencing barriers to employment.

Based on labor market information and demographics, the leadership team will focus on assuring that, to the extent possible, the populations experiencing barriers to employment are engaged in both the regional and local workforce development area meetings, discussions, goal setting, strategy development and implementation strategies.

Engaging stakeholders and individuals from diverse backgrounds and populations, as well as those experiencing barriers to employment is critical in establishing the goals and strategies that will lead to success.

Assuring that the diverse demographic make-up of the RWDA #5 area is strategically involved in the identification of issues and solutions, goal setting and strategy development broadens the scope of success and advancement of workforce development in the region.

Included in the partner engagement will be individuals, decision makers representing specific populations and other key stakeholders including, but not limited to: individuals with disabilities; tribal communities; communities of color; K-12; higher education; individuals involved and/or representing the criminal justice system; and representatives specifically focused on addressing employment and education disparities.

The Boards and staff will make a concerted effort in designing and implementing programming that will directly engage diverse populations and groups experiencing specific barriers to employment. Both organizations practice and are compliant with equal opportunity hiring practices and will assure that appropriate outreach for employment opportunities is shared and targeted to special populations.

Hosted two Marnita's Table Events – February 15, 2017 – Worthington; February 22, 2017 – Mankato. As a result of the events, Region 5 has identified the following opportunities:

- 1) Collaborate with community partners to offer at least two community engagement events each year to develop and strengthen involvement of communities of color in workforce development issues. (i.e. – potential continuation of Workforce Development Summits with emphasis on Inclusiveness and Diversity in partnership with Initiative Foundations, Education Service Cooperatives, Employers and organizations representing communities of color).**
- 2) March 2017 – June 2018: Implement strategies to recruit diverse populations as board vacancies occur.**
- 3) June 2018 – review and benchmark engagement of diverse populations and set goals/strategies for PY18-19 related to targeted recruitment and engagement.**
- 4) Review options to communicate “hiring/retention tips” to business, such as the importance of conducting recruitment and job announcements via many modes (paper, online, social media, etc.) and in several languages, specifically being available in English and Spanish.**
- 5) Explore ways to “Meet customers where they are” culturally – to adapt schedules to the specific needs of students, interns and employees;**
- 6) Assist employers in trying to find resources to be able to provide on-the-job**

interpreters, ESL courses and other supportive resources as a benefit to employees;

- 7) Focus on strategies and practices for more equitable and inclusive hiring;
- 8) Offer employers sessions on 'intentional hiring practices designed to pursue equitable representation in the workforce in accordance with local demographics;
- 9) Work with employers to build relationships with formal and informal community liaisons and connectors who can help facilitate the free-flow of networks and professional social capital in order to better support individuals in navigating hiring and on-boarding processes and the successful management of employer expectations.

4. Describe how performance negotiations will be managed among the local workforce development areas within the region.

Describing the management of performance negotiations at this time is difficult to outline due to lack of WIOA rules and regulations. Therefore, RWDA #5 will be addressing this question in more detail following release of specific guidance. At a minimum, we anticipate that the RWDA #5 leadership team will be responsible for the review and oversight of the negotiations. Each LWDB will conduct negotiations with the partners in the local area. Results of the negotiations will be reviewed by the Regional Leadership Team. Staff will continue to work with GWDB, DEED and MWCA to develop a comprehensive plan for negotiations – again pending regulations. Further specifics are pending awaiting final regulations.

The Region 5 Leadership Team has identified the South Central & Southwest WDA Executive Director's as the identified individuals to be involved in the performance negotiations.

5. Describe any additional goals being set by the regional leadership or individual local area boards.

The regional leadership team is in the process of outlining the two year plan strategies and direction at their April 13, 2016 meeting. At that time they will prioritize and attach timelines to the identified goals and strategies that resulted from the Fall 2015 regional planning sessions.

Goals/Priorities that will be addressed include:

- Focus on final rules & regulations and assuring all aspects of WIOA implementation, governance and delivery are finalized and ready for full implementation on July 1, 2017;
- Assure that the two LWDB boards understand the structure and make up of each other; that the strategic design for the Region is clear and agreed upon;
- Advance Career Pathways as a system throughout the region;
- Strategize on methods to assist populations experiencing employment &

- education disparities;
- Address shortage of skilled workforce; provide skills training in demand occupations
- Increase career awareness for youth/parents and adults on demand occupations
- Expand connections between education and businesses
- Develop marketing/outreach strategies on workforce programs, services, & resources available in the region.

Region 5 Leadership Team has identified the following as Goals for the July 2016 – June 2018 Plan. Strategies are identified and outlined throughout this document and on the Region 5 WIOA Regional Work Plan Template.

Goal 1: Establish Regional Leadership Approach (Regulation 679.510 a.1.i/v)

Goal 2: Establish an Agreement for Negotiating local levels of performance (Regulation 679.510 a.1.vii)

Goal 3: Identify and Implement three (3) Regional Services (Career, Training and/or Support) Alignment Goals (Regulation 679.510 a.1.ii/vi)

Goal 4: Coordinate with Economic Development Services and Providers (Regulation 679.510 a.1.vii)

Goal 5: Identify the Populations Experiencing Inequities in Educational and Employment Outcomes (State Plan Goal #1)

Goal 6: Create 1-3 Business Led Sector Partnerships (Regulation 679.510 a.1.iii/iv/vii and State Plan – Strategic Element #1)

Goal 7: Stakeholder Engagement (State Plan – Strategic Element #2)

Goal 8: Submission of Local Plans that Align with the Regional Plan (Regulation 679.510.2.ii)

6. Describe how the local area boards will direct system alignment within the region through shared policies and practices.

The local area boards will direct system alignment within the region as follows:

- Review the established policies and practices of each local workforce development area, determine opportunities for shared policies and practices as appropriate; while maintaining the intent of each local board to maintain their unique and independent operations;
- Review the current Program Operator model (Consortia Model) in each LWDA, to determine any opportunities for enhancement on a regional basis;
- Review direct delivery of services models in each area to determine potential opportunities for best practices and collaboration;

- With the addition of the Rural Career Counseling Coordinator (RC3) position – the LWDBs have the opportunity to review the data and results of the asset mapping and gap analysis process and then provide direction on opportunities to broaden alignment with multiple partners and stakeholders and drive best practices and bring them to scale across the region;
- The One-Stop Operating Teams – (comprised of Job Service, Rehabilitation Services, Title I provider, and ABE) in LWDA 6 & 7, meet regularly to address operational issues which may include: staffing or programmatic items; collaborative opportunities; up-dates; customer access to programs and services; new grant/programming opportunities; policy development and/or clarifications and other issues. The One-Stop Operating Teams are aligned with the vision & mission as outlined by the local Boards. The One-stop Operating Teams look to the LWDB's to provide direction related to issues and/or opportunities resulting from the One-Stop Operating Team meetings;
- Reports from other partner teams are shared with the LWDB's to assure that the Boards are kept informed and have the opportunity to assure that the team efforts are in line with the vision and direction of the boards. Examples of partner teams include, but not limited to: Business Services Team; Pathways to Prosperity Partnership; Youth Standing Committees; and Project Operator Team.

Regional Services Alignment Goal 1

Address the shortage of skilled workers through sector-based career pathway approaches including:

- Expanded outreach & marketing to business & target populations – December 2016 – December 2017;
- Expand representation on career pathway partnerships – August 2016 – February 2017;
- Develop strategies to increase awareness of importance of education/training for target populations – December 2016 – December 2017;
- Develop and implement strategies to increase awareness of the benefits of hiring target populations – December 2016 – June 2017;
- Support work-based training & career academies – December 2016 – June 2018;
- Develop common evaluation tools – June 2017; Evaluate Quarterly.

Regional Services Alignment Goal 2

Expand partnership with local school districts to increase career awareness and career counseling opportunities for students and parents. Process will include:

- Contact all local ISDs in Region to complete asset map and marketing career counseling/workforce services – May 2016 to June 2018 (77 School Districts in Region 5);
- Develop and implement strategies to disseminate career information & services – September 2016 – June 2018;
- Develop process for tracking & reporting partnerships with school districts – October 2016;

- Provide reports to local WDBs, LEOs, MN DEED & legislators – January 2017 – January 2018.

Regional Services Alignment Goal 3

Complete asset-map and gap analysis of career and workforce development services in the region utilizing results to broadly inform the region on services available and to align/target resources to fill gaps. Steps to achieve include:

- Contact key stakeholders & identify career/workforce development services available to complete asset map process by – June 2017;
- Conduct best practice & gap analysis/develop white paper – August 2017;
- Communicate gaps, duplication, and best practices to regional stakeholders – January 2017 – January 2018;
- Develop & implement strategies to align resources to address gaps – March 2018;
- Develop & implement marketing and regional awareness of services and best practices – June 2018.

7. Describe any cooperative service arrangements being planned for the region and how they will promote consistency within the regional workforce development area and with state policy.

Each local area has well established cooperative agreements in place with multiple partners/stakeholders and those will continue.

The funding establishing the RC3 position does provide potential opportunity to expand and strengthen the existing agreements. This will become more evident once the asset mapping and gap analysis are completed.

Southern Minnesota LWDB's (SC, SE, SW & Winona) have an established Southern MN Development Team that provides education and training opportunities for all partner staff on a bi-annual basis. The southern LWDB's intend to continue the staff development opportunity.

In addition, the following area, that currently exist at each local area level, may be strengthened or broadened across the region and are currently being explored and viewed as potential expansion opportunities:

- Monitoring
- Policies
- Program development and career exploration activities/events
- Marketing programs, services and region
- Grant writing
- Professional development
- Best practices
- Legislative activity

Regional Goal

Establish Cooperative Alignment of Administrative Processes Between South Central and Southwest Workforce Development Boards to Promote Consistency within the regional workforce development area and with state policy.

- South Central & Southwest Workforce Development Boards will enter into Memorandum of Understanding (completed December 2016);
- Align identified and appropriate local workforce development policies by December 2017;
- Connect with and inform local legislators on workforce issue by May 2017 and on-going;
- Engage stakeholders through regional forums (conducted in October 2016); Plan for future forums
- Joint hire and direction to Rural Career Counseling Coordinator (completed February 2016);
- Provide professional development to southern MN Workforce Development Specialists through the Southern MN Professional Development Team (WDA 6, 7, 8 & 9) (Conducted bi-annually [more frequently if need] – last training held September 2016)
- Jointly respond to grant opportunities – July 2016 – June 2018 (Region 5 received 2 Equity Grants – December 2016)
- Explore coordinated regional monitor teams – July 2017
- Explore joint marketing – Fall 2017

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REGIONAL STRATEGIC PLANNING

The strategic planning component of the Regional Plan addresses three elements: strategic analytics, strategic approach and strategic operations. The overarching theme is to engage regional stakeholders in the process of establishing the strategic plan and to ensure that decisions are data driven and that the data can be used to measure gains and identify needs for improvement.

Strategic Analytics: *The assessment of the regional workforce development area focuses on key conditions. These conditions are detailed in the following response needs.*

8. Describe the condition of the regional economy and cite the sources of data and analysis.

Regional Workforce Development Area #5 (RWDA #5) consists of the 23-county area of south central and southwest Minnesota. The region includes three economic development regions (Regions 6, 8 and 9) and one metropolitan statistical area (greater Mankato/North Mankato).

The RWDA #5 economy was analyzed by a thorough review of labor market information through our MN DEED Labor Market Analysts; engaging board members, partners and community in a dialogue about workforce and economic development needs; and input from local employers. This approach gives us a good understanding of the region by combining what statistics reveal with the real-time knowledge of local employers and community partners. The Regional Profile for the 23-county labor market area is

attached (Attachment 1). Sources of data and analysis are notated on the attached profile. Below is a summary of the data.

Industry Employment: During the recession, RWDA #5 lost over 7,000 jobs. By the end of 2014, the region was back to 2004 employment levels. The region must gain back 3,800 jobs to return to its 2008 peak employment level of 178,000 jobs (see Table 10, page 11 of Attachment 1). The manufacturing industry was particularly impacted by the recession.

The labor market in RWDA #5 is characterized by a diverse industry base built largely on manufacturing, health care/social assistance, and retail trade (see Table 13, page 12 of Attachment 1). The top industries in the region that continue to experience employment gains include: manufacturing, health care/social assistance, construction, transportation/warehousing, agriculture, and professional/technical services.

Distinguishing Industries: RWDA #5 stands out in the state for its higher concentrations of employment in manufacturing and agriculture (see Table 14, page 13 of Attachment 1).

Industry Projections: The RWDA #5 is projected to grow in employment almost 3% from 2012 to 2022. Most of the employment gains is expected to be in health care/social assistance, particularly in nursing and residential care, but also including hospitals, ambulatory health care services and social assistance (see Table 15, page 13 of Attachment 1). Significant employment growth is also projected in construction, professional and technical services, administrative support and waste management, and trade.

Job Vacancies: Regional employers reported 7,245 job vacancies during the 4th quarter of 2014, which is a 52% increase compared to the previous year. Almost half of the openings were part-time. Full-time vacancies reported included transportation and material moving, production, installation/maintenance and repair, office and administrative support, architecture and engineering, construction, and business & financial operations occupations (see Table 10, page 9 of Attachment 1).

Our local employers report that they are having a difficult time finding skilled labor. Specific occupations that were identified as difficult to find were: maintenance/boiler operators, skilled trade occupations, truck drivers, lab technicians, physical therapists, physicians, nurses/nursing assistants, and social service technicians/social workers.

Occupations in Demand: There are well over 200 occupations showing relatively high demand in RWDA #5. Almost half of the occupations in demand require a high school diploma or less, while a little over half require some post-secondary training or degree. Many of the jobs are concentrated in the region's major industries: manufacturing, health care and transportation (see Table 11, page 10 of Attachment 1).

Employments Projections: The MN DEED Employment Outlook reports the region is expected to gain about 5,685 new jobs from 2012-2022, and at the same time will also need to fill 48,000 replacement openings for existing jobs left vacant by retiring baby boomers and other career changers during that period (see Figure 9, page 10 of Attachment 1). Occupations projected to have the most job openings include: sales,

office & administrative support, food preparation & service, production, management, personal care & service, transportation & material moving, healthcare, and installation, maintenance & repair.

Income and Wages: Median household incomes are lower in the region than the rest of the state. Median household incomes ranged from a low in Faribault County of \$44,264 to a high in Nicollet County of \$60,115. Well over half (54.7%) of the households in the region had incomes below \$50,000.

According to DEED's Cost of Living tool, the basic needs budget for an average family (2 adults with 1 child, with 1 full-time and 1 part-time worker) in the region was \$41,352, which is the lowest in the state. However, the monthly costs for housing, child care, taxes and transportation are also lower than the rest of the state. In order to meet the basic cost of living in the region, the full-time and part-time worker in the family would need to earn at least \$13.25 per hour (see Table 7, page 7 of Attachment 1).

The median hourly wage for all occupations in the region is \$15.48 per hour, which is the second lowest wage level of the 6 planning regions (see Table 8, page 8 of Attachment 1). Only Northwest Minnesota has a lower median hourly wage level at \$15.42 per hour. Wages are most competitive in social assistance, agriculture, protective services and production occupations. The lowest paying jobs are concentrated in food preparation and serving, personal care and service, sales and maintenance occupations. The highest paying jobs are found in management, legal, architecture and engineering, computer, business and finance, healthcare practitioners, and social science occupations.

9. Describe the condition of the regional workforce and cite the sources of data and analysis.

Although RWDA #5 has experienced population declines in past decades, it is projected to increase in population in the next 20 years. Regional workforce demographics are included in the Regional Profile attached (Attachment 1). Sources of data and analysis are notated on the attached profile. Below is a summary of the data.

Population Change: According to 2014 census data, RWDA #5 is home to 392,415 people (see Table 1, page 2 of Attachment 1). The region as a whole experienced a small 0.5% decline in population over the past 14 years, primarily due to larger losses in economic development regions (EDR) 6 and 8. These losses were nearly offset by a 3.7% increase in population in EDR 9. Five of the 23 counties in the region gained population during this period, including Blue Earth and Nicollet counties (greater Mankato area), LeSueur County (borders the 7-county metro area), Lyon County (Marshall area), and Nobles County (Worthington area).

Population by Age Group: RWDA #5 has an older population than the rest of the state, with 17.6% of the population ages 65 years and over, compared to 13.9% statewide. The region has a lower percentage of the age 25-64 population; however, the region has a higher percentage of people ages 15-24 due to numerous post-secondary institutions in the region. More than one-fourth of the region's population was part of the Baby Boomer generation, which is creating a significant shift in the population over time (see Figure 2, page 2 of Attachment 1).

Population Projections: Population projections reported by the MN State Demographic Center reveal that RWDA #5 is expected to gain nearly 23,000 net new residents from 2015 to 2035, a 5.7% increase. This population growth is expected to be in the under 5 age group as well as the 25-44 and 65+ age groups (see Figure 3, page 3 of Attachment 1).

Population by Race: Although RWDA #5 is less diverse than the state as a whole, it is becoming more diverse over time. In 2013, nearly 94% of the region's residents report White alone as their race, compared to 85.6% of residents statewide. While overall numbers are low, the region is experiencing significant percentage increases in Black or African American populations, Asian & Pacific Islanders, and two or more races (see Table 2, page 3 of Attachment 1). Nobles County and Watonwan County have the first and second highest percentage of residents reporting Hispanic origin in the state at 26.3% and 21.4% respectively. Just under 22,000 individuals with Hispanic or Latino origin live in the region. Blue Earth, Lyon, and Nicollet counties have experienced an increase in African immigrants settling in the area.

Population by Educational Attainment: RWDA #5 has four MnSCU institutions (8 campuses) and numerous private post-secondary institutions providing a fairly educated workforce ages 25-64. Almost 63% of this age group has some post-secondary education (38.2%) or a Bachelor's degree or higher (24.7%). However, 5.6% (or 9,332 individuals) has less than a high school diploma.

Labor Force Change: RWDA #5 experienced substantial fluctuations in labor force during the 2001 and 2007 recessions; however, overall from 2000 to 2014 the region lost about 1,400 workers (see Figure 4, page 4 of Attachment 1). As the region has recovered from the latest recession, the labor market in the region has been getting tighter, with only 9,000 unemployed workers that were actively seeking work in 2014. During the recession, there were 9.5 unemployed individuals for every job vacancy. This past year, the ratio decreased to 1.3 unemployed people for every job vacancy.

Labor Force Projections: According to labor force projections, the region is expected to experience a slight decline in labor force from 2015-2025 of -0.3% (a decrease of 629 workers). This will likely lead to an even tighter labor market in the future (see Table 3, page 4 of Attachment 1).

Unemployment Rates: With our diverse industry base, RWDA #5 has reported lower unemployment rates than the state and the nation. The region had a 3.9% unemployment rate in 2015 (see Figure 5, page 5 of Attachment 1). The region was home to seven of the 15 lowest county unemployment rates in the state in June 2015, led by Rock County at 2.3%.

Employment Characteristics: Although unemployment rates are low in RWDA #5, not all populations are benefiting from low unemployment rates. Populations experiencing unemployment rate disparities were highest among young people, minorities, individuals with disabilities, veterans, and people with lower educational attainment (see Table 4, page 5 of Attachment 1). Unemployment rates for these populations include:

- Youth ages 16 to 19 (14.5%)
- Young people ages 20 to 24 (8.7%)
- Black or African American (21.2%)

- American Indian & Alaska Native (9.7%)
- Asian/Pacific Islanders (7.0%)
- Hispanic or Latino (12.2%)
- Veterans (6.9%)
- Individuals with disabilities (10.4%)
- Individuals with less than high school diploma (10.3%)

Commute and Labor Shed: The vast majority of workers who live in the region also work in the region (76%). However, the region is a net exporter of labor, with 38,445 commuting into the region for work while 45,562 commute outside the region for work.

10. Describe the condition of the regional workforce development system and cite the sources of data and analysis (SWOT analysis).

The South Central WorkForce Council and the Southwest MN Workforce Council convened over 145 stakeholders at two regional planning events in Mankato and Redwood Falls. The majority of those attending were representatives from business and also included representatives from education (secondary, post-secondary, and ABE), economic development, partner/service agencies and elected officials.

Stakeholders were asked to identify and prioritize current workforce issues. Priorities identified by stakeholders to be addressed included:

- Shortage of skilled workers
- Need to expand career awareness/career counseling for students, parents and job seekers on demand occupations
- Need to develop more connections between business community and education for career awareness and work-based learning opportunities.
- Need to address populations experiencing employment disparities including: immigrants, individuals with disabilities, low-income populations, minority populations, offenders, older workers, veterans, and youth.
- Need to market the programs, services and resources available in the region.

Strengths and opportunities of the regional workforce development system were identified through the regional planning process in the context of our capacity to address the priorities identified above.

Key strengths of RWDA #5 :

- **Local Workforce Development Boards:** Two employer-driven boards with vast experience in convening stakeholders to identify and address workforce priorities. These boards are instrumental in aligning resources and services to address workforce needs and are respected in the region.
- **Local and Regional Collaborations:** The regional workforce development system has developed strong local and regional collaborations built on trust that aligns resources and expertise to implement workforce strategies. Collaborations include Adult Basic Education, Carl Perkins partners, community organizations, economic development, human services, labor unions, local elected officials, post-secondary institutions, and workforce

partners (including veteran and vocational rehabilitation services).

- **Workforce Development Career and Training Services:** The regional workforce development system has vast expertise in delivering quality career and training services for youth and adults built upon a solid understanding and connection to the local/regional labor market. The workforce system also has vast experience in serving targeted populations and addressing barriers by providing additional supports and connections to community resources. The regional workforce development system consistently meets and exceeds performance outcomes (MN DEED WIA Annual Reports).
- **Access to post-secondary career and technical education:** The region has two MnSCU community and technical colleges with six campuses. The workforce development system has strong connections with MN West and South Central Community & Technical Colleges in supporting their capacity to provide career and technical education programs and serves as a liaison for meeting the skill needs of area employers and training needs of job seekers. Our MnSCU partners have been very responsive to the needs of the region.
- **Career Pathways:** The region was an early implementer of FastTRAC/Career Pathway programs that align the expertise and resources of Adult Basic Education, MnSCU, and workforce development system for key industries in the region (health care, manufacturing and transportation). The career pathway system includes career exploration, contextualized basic skills instruction, stackable credits and industry-recognized credentials in demand occupations that lead to family-sustaining wages.

Opportunities identified:

- **Capacity to meet needs:** Although the regional workforce development system has vast experience and success in providing career services, it does not have the capacity to provide these services for all high school students and job seekers in the region.
- **Stability of funding sources:** Current funding sources for providing career services for high schools and career pathway development is based on competitive funding. It is difficult to plan long-term, make system changes and to recruit staff based on unstable funding sources.
- **Asset map and gap analysis:** The asset map of career and workforce development services being developed by our Rural Career Counseling Coordinator will enable the region to market services available in the region, align services, avoid duplication of services and target limited resources to fill gaps in services.
- **Increase employer engagement:** The region has a great opportunity at this time to increase employer engagement through: their need for skilled workers, sector-based career pathway strategies, career exploration

activities, and work-based learning strategies such as transitional jobs, internships, apprenticeships and incumbent worker training. The recent infusion of funding from the DOL NEG grant and TAACCCT MnAMP grant, in addition to career pathway development, provide an opportunity to engage more employers in the region in sector-based strategies.

- Increase community engagement: The region has an opportunity to expand community engagement as we focus on populations that are experiencing employment disparities.
- Marketing the region: With declining population in our rural counties, the region has an opportunity to market the quality of life in the region (including job opportunities) to attract and retain talent.
- Technology: The region will support efforts of the State to provide services to a broader audience through technology, especially for those customers who have limited barriers and are able to self-serve. In addition, we will be exploring as a region the opportunity to develop an on-line application for easier access to services.

11. Describe the regional workforce development area's vision for a skilled workforce.

RWDA#5 has adopted the state's vision:

The vision of Rural Workforce Development Area #5 is a healthy economy where all Minnesotans have – or are on a path to – meaningful employment and a family sustaining wage, and where all employers are able to fill jobs in demand.

This vision expresses our intent to “leave no populations behind”, ensuring all individuals have the resources and services they need to make informed career choices, obtain the skills necessary to compete for demand occupations with family sustaining wages, based on sector-based career pathway approaches that meets employers’ needs for a skilled workforce.

In order to accomplish this vision and in response to regional priorities identified by stakeholders, RWDA #5 has identified five goals:

1. Address the shortage of skilled workers through sector-based career pathway approaches.
2. Increase service levels and outcomes for individuals experiencing employment disparities, focusing on racial disparities, but also including individuals with disabilities, low-income populations, offenders, older workers, veterans and youth.
3. Expand partnerships with local school districts to increase career awareness and career counseling opportunities for students and parents.
4. Increase employer engagement through sector based career pathways, career awareness opportunities and work-based learning activities.
5. Complete asset-map and gap analysis of career and workforce development services in the region utilizing results to broadly inform the region on services available and to align/target resources to fill gaps.

In order to compete for high growth, high demand jobs that pay a livable wage, our target populations need to acquire the skills and industry-recognized credentials required by employers in high-demand industries. RWDA #5's vision and goals will address the needs of our target populations by providing pathways to skill training that leads to stackable credits, credentials, and the skills necessary to compete for employment in high-demand industries that lead to self-supporting wages and also meets the needs of employers for a skilled workforce.

In addition to addressing the priority issues of regional stakeholders, these goals also align with the mission and goals of the state.

Strategic Approach: *The core areas of the strategic design focus on priorities of the Governor and the system of service delivery.*

Area 1 – Sector Partnerships

12. Describe how the region will use the labor market information and conduct outreach to business and industry to select the targeted sectors for developing career pathways for occupations in demand that provide family sustaining wages. If sectors and occupations have been already selected, describe them within this response. Complete **Attachment G – Local Workforce Development Area Key Industries in Regional Economy**.

RWDA #5 has utilized labor market information and input from business and industry to identify our key industries and to select the targeted sectors for developing sector-based career pathways.

Local Workforce Development Area (LWDA) Key Industries identified by our local boards were based on input from employers, stakeholders and a review of labor market information and are as follows (see also Attachment G):

- South Central LWDA: agriculture, business/professional services, construction, health care/social assistance, manufacturing, and transportation/warehousing.
- Southwest LWDA: agriculture, health care/social assistance, manufacturing, and transportation/warehousing.

RWDA #5 will focus on the four key industries the local workforce development areas have in common: **agriculture, health care/social assistance, manufacturing, and transportation/warehousing.**

RWDA #5 career pathway sector strategies during the first 2-years of this plan will focus on our top three industry employment sectors: manufacturing, health care and trade/transportation/utilities (focusing on transportation) industries. As noted in the labor market information above and on Attachment A, manufacturing is the largest employment industry in the region employing 31,654 workers and health care/social assistance is the second largest employment industry employing 25,529 workers. These three career pathways address 13 of top 30 demand occupations in the region and half of the top 10 job vacancy occupations. In addition, these three pathways

address occupations employers indicate they struggle to find skilled workers: nursing, health care & social service technicians, industrial maintenance technicians, machinists, welders, and truck drivers.

13. Describe how the make-up of the sector partnerships will be determined and the expertise and resources they bring to the partnership.

The South Central and Southwest Workforce Councils each convene a sector-based career pathway partnership, [which includes business](#). Key partners are identified based on those with the expertise, resources and interest in supporting career pathway development.

Participating partners include:

- Adult Basic Education
- Community Based Organizations
- Economic Development
- Employers
- Human Services Agencies
- Post-Secondary Institutions
- Workforce Center Partners (including Job Service, Vocational Rehabilitation Services and WIOA providers)

Goal – Conduct targeted marketing and outreach to increase representatives of targeted populations experiencing employment disparities – April 2017 and on-going.

Roles and responsibilities of participating partners are delineated in our career pathways plan and through a Memorandum of Understanding with the partners. Roles and responsibilities for each partner include:

Adult Basic Education:

- Participate in career pathway planning and development
- Outreach and referral of adult learners, including targeted populations
- Conduct program intake and eligibility
- In partnership with Navigator, screen/assess adult learners, including basic skills pre- and post-assessment
- ESL/GED/high school diploma instruction
- Development and delivery of bridge curriculum including contextualized basic skills instruction and exposure/exploration of industry specific career pathways
- Engage employers in career awareness activities
- Provide integrated technical skills training instruction for “gateway” courses determined by partners, reinforcing skill concepts and providing instructional support.
- Data collection utilizing ABE's MABE/MARCS data management system

Community Based Organizations:

- Participate in career pathway planning and development
- Outreach and referral of adult learners, including targeted populations
- Inform partnership on the needs of targeted populations

- Career counseling
- Case management to address barriers
- Support services
- Job search assistance

Economic Development:

- Participate in career pathway planning and development
- Outreach and referral of employers
- Inform partnership on business development and expansion opportunities
- **Engage economic development professionals in WIOA regional planning forums – September & October 2015 (Mankato & Redwood Falls);**
- **Participate as an active stakeholder in the development and approval of the Comprehensive Economic Development (CEDs) Plans in Region 6W, Region 8 and Region 9 - On-going;**
- **Engage economic development professionals in career pathway sector partnerships as members of Career Pathway Partnerships and/or on Ad Hoc Sector Workgroups/Teams – On-going;**
- **Local WDB Board members and staff serve on Regional Development Commission Boards (Region 6W, Region 8, and Region 9) and committees including the Southern Minnesota Economic Development Professionals Group – On-going;**
- **Region 5 WIOA representatives will continue to be active partners with economic development, by serving on Economic Development and RDC led initiatives/committees that are addressing issues such as transportation and child care, that were identified at the WIOA Regional Planning Forums – December 2016 – June 2018.**

Employers:

- Participate in career pathway planning and development
- Inform partnership on industry and occupational skill needs
- Provide career awareness activities: guest speaker in classroom, industry tours, job shadowing opportunities
- Provide work-based learning opportunities: transitional jobs, internships, apprenticeships
- Provide employment opportunities for graduates
- Provide professional development funds for next steps in career pathway
- **Region 5 is committed to participating in DEED technical assistance to increase employer engagement by utilizing the consulting services of Maher & Maher. We anticipate that following the consultations, Region 5 will identify, develop and implement additional strategies for increased business engagement. One outcome may be the establishment of training opportunities or development of resources for business that will result in increased hiring and retention of communities of color.**
- **Throughout the process, Region 5 will identify best practices of regional businesses and utilize their expertise to advance increased hiring and retention of individuals from communities of color.**
- **Region 5 will have their first consultation meeting with Maher & Maher representative on April 7, 2017.**

Human Service Agencies:

- Participate in career pathway planning and development
- Outreach and referral of adult learners, including targeted populations
- Alignment with MFIP/DWP/SNAP cash assistance programs
- Support Services

MnSCU Community & Technical Colleges:

- Participate in career pathway planning and development
- Outreach and referral of adult learners, including targeted populations
- Develop stackable credits and credentials for career and technical education in demand occupations
- Provide transition assistance with college enrollment and financial aid application
- Provide credit for prior learning
- Provide training facilities, equipment and instructors
- Provide integrated instruction for credit, in partnership with ABE, for “gateway” courses determined by the partners, resulting in industry-recognized credentials
- Engage employers in work-based learning opportunities
- Data collection utilizing MnSCU ISRS data management system

Workforce/WIOA Providers:

- Participate in career pathway planning and development
- Outreach and referral of adult learners, including targeted populations
- Conduct program intake and eligibility
- Provide “Navigator” services, serving as the central point of contact for adult learners and providing wrap around supports as necessary
- Provide connections and engage local employers
- In partnership with ABE, screen and assess adult learners for program participation
- Administer National Career Readiness assessment as appropriate for adult learners in bridge course
- Provide career counseling including career pathway and labor market information for adult learners in bridge classes and development of an employment plan
- Provide access to WIOA and other funding sources, for support services and training costs, including access to other community resources
- Provide additional “navigation” support during transition periods (i.e. completion of bridge course, completion of integrated instruction, etc.)
- Provide job search and job placement assistance
- Provide follow-up and retention services
- Data entry and tracking on Workforce One data management system

Workforce Development Boards:

- Convene and provide staff support for career pathway partnerships
- Participate in career pathway planning and development
- Provide labor market information (through MN DEED) for the identification of industry sectors and occupations in demand.

- Outreach and referral of adult learners, including targeted populations
- Provide career pathway administration and oversight
- Liaison with the MN Department of Employment and Economic Development and other career pathway funders
- Complete required reports
- Serve as fiscal agent for the partnership.

Representatives from Targeted Populations:

- Participate in career pathway planning and development
- Assist with outreach, marketing and recruitment

14. Describe how the partnership(s) will work toward developing and implementing a career pathway sector strategy during the two years of this plan. If sectors and occupations have not been selected, address the process for these decisions within this response.

As indicated earlier, both the South Central and Southwest Workforce Development Areas were early implementers of career pathways. The health care and manufacturing career pathways in the region are very mature in their development as well as partnership relationships. Throughout the years numerous system and process improvements have been made. The two local partnerships have been asked to share their career pathway development as a best practice regionally, statewide and nationally. The career pathway partnerships continue to develop continuous improvement strategies for these two industry sectors, and are especially focused on outreach and recruitment strategies to ensure that the cohorts of adult learners are sufficient enough to implement sustainability strategies and on expanding the partnership to include partners that can contribute expertise and resources in serving populations experiencing employment disparities. It is also important to note that career pathway development is very dependent on relationships built between partnership administration and staff. As a result, administrative and staff changes require continuous professional development and oversight.

In the past year, the two career pathway partnerships have been working on implementing career pathway strategies for the transportation sector, specifically providing preparation and training for Class A Commercial Driver's Licensure to meet the demand for truck drivers in the region. Part of this development includes a recent meeting with the Department of Transportation who is interested in partnering as an employer of graduates of the program.

In general, the Region 5 career pathway approach includes:

- Alignment with the skill needs of industries and employers in region;
- Aligning the expertise and resources of employers, ABE, post-secondary education, community and workforce partners;
- Career counseling, career navigation and support services;
- Bridge programming that includes contextualized basic skills instruction, exposure to industry careers and an introduction to basic occupational skills;
- Enhanced academic instruction that integrates career and technical education with instructional support and reinforcement of skill concepts that results in stackable credits and credentials along a career pathway;

- Work-based learning opportunities including: clinicals, internships and apprenticeships;
- Working with post-secondary education to provide credit for prior learning;
- Placement and retention services; and
- Career laddering opportunities.

Region 5 received a DEED Career Pathway Equity Grant with implementation beginning in 2017. Through the grant, career pathways will be updated and mapped for health care, manufacturing and transportation.

Business representatives continue to be a critical and vital component of the sector partnerships in Region 5. Business representatives participate at various levels within the sector partnerships including: 1) Actively being engaged at the two WDB levels during development and approval of career pathway initiatives; 2) During the planning and implementation phase at the partnership team meetings; 3) Participating during trainings on employer panels; 4) At hiring phase of successful graduates from the CP trainings either through work-based learning opportunities or by direct hire of CP training graduates.

Roster of employers engaged in sector-based career pathways in Region 5 is included with documents submitted to DEED.

Region 5 is committed to participating in DEED technical assistance to increase employer engagement by utilizing the consulting services of Maher & Maher. We anticipate that following the consultations, Region 5 will identify, develop and implement additional strategies for increased business engagement. One outcome may be the establishment of training opportunities or development of resources for business that will result in increased hiring and retention of communities of color.

Throughout the process, Region 5 will identify best practices of regional businesses and utilize their expertise to advance increased hiring and retention of individuals from communities of color.

Region 5 will have their first consultation meeting with Maher & Maher representative on April 7, 2017.

Area 2 – Stakeholder Engagement

15. Describe the process for identifying the characteristics, size and scope of populations not fully benefiting from the economic recovery, experiencing factors such as high unemployment, lack of credentialed skills and other barriers to employment.

Our process for identifying the characteristics, size and scope of populations not fully benefiting from the economic recovery includes a three-pronged approach:

1. The first approach is a comprehensive review of available data including: labor market information, MN State Demographer information, U.S. Census data and available studies with regional data, for example *Kids Count*. Based on an initial review of data the following populations continue to experience

high unemployment rates:

Total Labor Force Population	Number	Unemployment Rate
Youth Ages 16-19	13,094	14.5%
Youth Ages 20-24	23,713	8.7%
Black or African American	2,232	21.2%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	870	9.7%
Asian/Pacific Islander	3,189	7.0%
Some Other Race	2,388	13.5%
Two or More Races	1,688	10.0%
Hispanic or Latino	9,755	12.2%
Veterans	11,719	6.9%
Individuals with any Disability	11,164	10.4%
High School Drop-outs	9,332	10.3%

2. The second approach is a broad engagement of stakeholders, including workforce center partners. In the current economy with jobs readily available, the individuals seeking services at workforce centers are often those facing barriers to employment. Workforce and community partners currently report, in addition to the populations above, offenders, older workers, and low income individuals with limited skills still struggle to find meaningful employment at family-sustaining wages.
3. The third approach will be through our asset mapping and gap analysis being conducted this year which may provide a greater understanding of the needs of youth populations that continue to experience declining labor force participation rates and populations experiencing employment disparities.

16. Describe who will be included in the broad stakeholder engagement to address a targeted number of socio-economic issues faced by diverse populations.

RWDA #5 will continue to expand our broad stakeholder engagement. Current stakeholder engagement includes:

- Employers representing key industry sectors
- Feedback from youth and adult customers
- Workforce partners
- Local school districts
- Alternative and charter schools
- Adult Basic Education
- Post-Secondary Institutions
- Service Cooperatives/Carl Perkins Career & Technical Education
- County Commissioners
- County Human Service Agencies
- County Corrections
- Labor organizations
- Local, county, regional and state economic development agencies
- Veteran organizations

- Chambers of Commerce
- Community based organizations
- Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Services for the Blind and private non-profits serving individuals with disabilities
- Organizations serving diverse populations (i.e. Diversity Council, MN Council of Churches, African Family Education Center, **Koran Organization of MN – Marshall Chapter**)

17. Describe how this engagement will impact the development and implementation of the selected sector strategies during the first two years of this plan.

The broad engagement of stakeholders greatly impacts the development and implementation of sector strategies including:

- Instrumental in the identification of selected sectors;
- Informs us on the skill needs of employers;
- Provides the basis for curriculum development (aligning with skill needs of employers)
- Provides career exploration opportunities;
- Provides work-based learning opportunities;
- Allows us to focus limited resources through the alignment of resources and expertise;
- Provides us a greater understanding of the unique needs of targeted populations;
- Provides us a greater understanding of the programs, services, and requirements of partners;
- Provides additional supports for addressing barriers of adult learners and job seekers;
- Avoids duplication of services and resources;
- Assists us in working towards a common mission and goals; and
- Benefits our dual customers of employers and job seekers by meeting their expectations and needs.

Goal – Identification of process for engaging communities and organizations serving individuals from disparately impacted populations.

- **Participation in Marnita's Table Events – February 2017;**
- **Asset Map process to identify leadership representatives from disparately impacted populations – May 2017 – June 2018;**
- **Targeted recruitment of community leaders/representatives and business owners from disparately impacted populations to serve on South Central and Southwest WDB's; Committees; and other leadership groups – April 2017 and on-going;**
- **Inclusion of targeted populations to serve on the Career Pathway Work Teams – May 2017 and on-going;**
- **Seek input & feedback from targeted populations and engage in development of strategies to address needs – July 2017 – June 2018;**
- **Targeted marketing to individuals experiencing employment disparities – June 2017 and on-going.**

Area 3 – Employment & Training Program Design

18. Based on the regional/local assessment of workforce development system services, describe how strategies will be created to pursue a more responsive alignment of employment and training services, based on career pathway thinking.

The region has already put a lot of focus and energy in aligning employment and training services with our career pathway approach. Progress to date includes:

- Building cross-agency partnerships; establishing shared mission and goals; defining roles and responsibilities; developing a work plan and Memorandum of Understanding for the partnership.
- Engaging employers; aligning with the skill needs of industry; developing career exploration and work-based learning opportunities.
- Developing a customer-centered design in which basic skills instruction is concurrent with career and technical training; our colleges are developing stackable credits and credentials within their programs of study allowing multiple entry and exit points; colleges are working on better approaches to provide credit for prior learning; opportunities for career laddering are in place; career navigators are in place to provide career counseling services, case management, supportive services, employment and retention services.
- Funding streams have been aligned; training programs are for credit which enables the use of financial aid as well as utilizing WIOA Title I and IV funding.
- We have begun work on aligning local programs and policies. Examples are aligning with WIOA programs and aligning policies for such things as cross-agency referrals and information sharing.
- We gather and track results as best we can to provide outcome information for our respective boards, however, with three data systems it is difficult. System changes have been made, but measuring them is more antidotal at this point.

During this two-year plan, RWDA #5 will utilize the U.S. Department of Labor Career Pathway Toolkit to continue to benchmark where we are at and to develop strategies for a more responsive alignment of employment and training services. Current strategies identified in our regional assessment include:

- Expanding partnerships to include more input and alignment of services for individuals experiencing employment disparities, and increasing connections with local school districts.
- Continue to increase employer engagement.
- Complete asset map and gap analysis of career/workforce development services.
- Development of better outreach strategies.

In addition, the region is willing to work in concert with MN DEED on Funding & Resource Needs, Policy and System Alignment, and System Management at the state level which would significantly impact our ability to address these areas at a regional level.

19. Describe how the entities responsible for participating in this process will be selected, including their expected roles and responsibilities.

The entities responsible for participating in this process will be the stakeholders of our sector-based career pathway partnerships. The stakeholders and their roles and responsibilities have been identified under Question 13. These stakeholders are knowledgeable and have been dedicated and committed to implementing a career pathway approach. As indicated earlier, our plan is to expand this partnership to increase employer and community engagement. Recommendations of the stakeholders that require policy, program and system change of the workforce system will be brought to our respective local workforce development boards for final approval and implementation.

20. Describe how the outcomes will be determined in terms of employment and training services modeling career pathway thinking by the end of the two year plan.

Once regional strategies have been identified and approved, an action plan will be developed that indicates the strategies, the steps to implement the strategies, the timeline and how we will measure progress, outcomes, and ultimately success. As the conveners of the career pathway partnerships, the local workforce development boards and staff will be responsible for general oversight and that the partnership is making progress on their goals.