MODIFICATION 2026-27
PUERTO RICO UNIFIED STATE PLAN WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT (WIOA)

CONEXIÓN LABORAL

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OVERVIEW

Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the Governor of each State must submit a Unified or Combined State Plan to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Labor that outlines a four-year strategy for the State's workforce development system. The publicly-funded workforce development system is a national network of Federal, State, regional, and local agencies and organizations that provide a range of employment, education, training, and related services and supports to help all job-seekers secure good jobs while providing businesses with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. States must have approved Unified or Combined State Plans in place to receive funding for core programs. WIOA reforms planning requirements, previously governed by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), to foster better alignment of Federal investments in job training, to integrate service delivery across programs and improve efficiency in service delivery, and to ensure that the workforce system is job-driven and matches employers with skilled individuals. One of WIOA's principal areas of reform is to require States to plan across core programs and include this planning process in the Unified or Combined State Plans. This reform promotes a shared understanding of the workforce needs within each State and fosters development of more comprehensive and integrated approaches, such as career pathways and sector strategies, for addressing the needs of businesses and workers. Successful implementation of many of these approaches called for within WIOA requires robust relationships across programs. WIOA requires States and local areas to enhance coordination and partnerships with local entities and supportive service agencies for strengthened service delivery, including through Unified or Combined State Plans.

OPTIONS FOR SUBMITTING A STATE PLAN

A State has two options for submitting a State Plan— a Unified State Plan or a Combined State Plan. At a minimum, a State must submit a Unified State Plan that meets the requirements described in this document and outlines a four-year strategy for the core programs. The six core programs are—

- the Adult program (Title I of WIOA),
- the Dislocated Worker program (Title I),
- the Youth program (Title I),
- the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act program (Title II), and

- the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program (authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by title III),
- the Vocational Rehabilitation program (authorized under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by Title IV).

Alternatively, a State may submit a Combined State Plan that meets the requirements described in this document and outlines a four-year strategy for WIOA's core programs plus one or more of the Combined State Plan partner programs. When a State includes a Combined State Plan partner program in its Combined State Plan, it need not submit a separate plan or application for that particular program. If included, Combined State Plan partner programs are subject to the "common planning elements" (Sections II-IV of this document) where specified, as well as the program-specific requirements for that program where such planning requirements exist separately for the program. The Combined State Plan partner programs are—

- Career and technical education programs authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, as amended by the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) (20 U.S.C. 2301 et seq.)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.)
- Employment and Training programs under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (programs authorized under section 6(d)(4) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2015(d)(4)))
- Work programs authorized under section 6(o) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2015(o))
- Trade Adjustment Assistance for Workers programs (Activities authorized under chapter 2 of title II of the Trade Act of 1974 (19 U.S.C. 2271 et seq.))
- Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program (programs authorized under 38, U.S.C. 4100 et. seq.)
- Unemployment Insurance programs (programs authorized under State unemployment compensation laws in accordance with applicable Federal law)
- Senior Community Service Employment program (programs authorized under title V of the Older Americans Act of 1965 (42 U.S.C. 3056 et seq.))

- Employment and training activities carried out by the Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Community Services Block Grant (Employment and training activities carried out under the Community Services Block Grant Act (42 U.S.C. 9901 et seq.)) [1]

[1] States that elect to include employment and training activities carried out under the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Act (42 U.S.C. 9901 et seq.) under a Combined State Plan would submit all other required elements of a complete CSBG State Plan directly to the Federal agency that administers the program. Similarly, States that elect to include employment and training activities carried out by the Department of Housing and Urban Development that are included would submit all other required elements of a complete State Plan for those programs directly to the Federal agency that administers the program.

HOW STATE PLAN REQUIREMENTS ARE ORGANIZED

The major content areas of the Unified or Combined State Plan include strategic and operational planning elements. WIOA separates the strategic and operational elements to facilitate cross-program strategic planning.

- The **Strategic Planning Elements** section includes analyses of the State's economic conditions, workforce characteristics, and workforce development activities. These analyses drive the required vision and goals for the State's workforce development system and alignment strategies for workforce development programs to support economic growth.
- The **Operational Planning Elements** section identifies the State's efforts to support the State's strategic vision and goals as identified in the Strategic Planning Elements section. This section ensures that the State has the necessary infrastructure, policies, and activities to meet its strategic goals, implement its alignment strategy, and support ongoing program development and coordination. Operational planning elements include:
    - State Strategy Implementation,
    - State Operating Systems and Policies,
    - Assurances,
    - Program-Specific Requirements for the Core Programs, and

- Program-Specific Requirements for the Combined State Plan partner programs. (These requirements are available in a separate supplemental document, Supplement to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Unified and Combined State Plan Requirements. The Departments are not seeking comments on these particular requirements).

When responding to Unified or Combined State Plan requirements, States must identify specific strategies for coordinating programs and services for State-identified populations. Use of links to external websites and documents is permitted within the State Plan narrative submission if such links remain active and adhere to Section 508 accessibility requirements.

Paperwork Reduction Act: The Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (PRA) provides that an agency may not conduct, and no person is required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. Public reporting burden for this information collection is estimated to be 86 hours per state; including time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Responding to this collection is required to obtain or retain the Federal grant benefit. In addition, responses to this information collection are public, and the agencies offer no assurances of confidentiality. Send comments regarding the burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Workforce Investment, and reference OMB control number 1205-0522. Note: Please do not return the completed plan to this address.

I. WIOA STATE PLAN TYPE AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. WIOA STATE PLAN TYPE

Unified or Combined State Plan. Select whether the State is submitting a Unified or Combined State Plan. At a minimum, a State must submit a Unified State Plan that covers the six core programs.

Unified State Plan. This plan includes the Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, Wagner-Peyser Act, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, and Vocational Rehabilitation programs.

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 one or more of the optional Combined State Plan partner programs identified below.

This is a unified plan

COMBINED PLAN PARTNER PROGRAM(S)

Indicate which Combined Plan partner program(s) the state is electing to include in the plan.

Career and technical education programs authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, as amended by the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) (20 U.S.C. 2301 et seq.)

No

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

No

Employment and Training programs under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (programs authorized under section 6(d)(4) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2015(d)(4)))

No

Work programs authorized under section 6(o) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2015(o))

No

Trade Adjustment Assistance for Workers programs (activities authorized under chapter 2 of title II of the Trade Act of 1974 (19 U.S.C. 2271 et seq.))

No

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

No

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

No

Senior Community Service Employment program (programs authorized under title V of the Older Americans Act of 1965 (42 U.S.C. 3056 et seq.))

No

Employment and training activities carried out by the Department of Housing and Urban Development

No

Community Services Block Grant (Employment and training activities carried out under the Community Services Block Grant Act (42 U.S.C. 9901 et seq.))

No

B. PLAN INTRODUCTION OR EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Unified or Combined State Plan may include an introduction or executive summary. This element is optional.

1. WIOA STATE PLAN TYPE & EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Governor of PR, Hon. Jennifer González-Colón is submitting its two-year modification of the **WIOA Unified State Plan** which provides a strategic roadmap designed to align Puerto Rico's human capital with its ambitious Reshoring goals.

This plan coordinates the following six core programs across three primary government agencies.

1. Adult Program (Title I)

- Administered by: Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DEDC).

2. Dislocated Worker Program (Title I)

- Administered by: Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DEDC).

3. Youth Program (Title I)

- Administered by: Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DEDC).

4. Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program (Title II)

- Administered by: Department of Education (PRDE).

5. Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service Program (Title III)

- Administered by: Department of Labor and Human Resources (DTRH).

6. Vocational Rehabilitation Program (Title IV)

- Administered by: Vocational Rehabilitation Administration (VRA/Department of Labor).

Executive Summary

The administration of Governor Jenniffer González-Colón, who took office in January 2025, has aligned Puerto Rico's economic and educational policies with "America's Talent Strategy: Building the Workforce for the Golden Age" framework. This federal strategy emphasizes high-growth industries and accountability and is built upon five strategic pillars designed to align the American workforce with the "America First" economic agenda.

The González-Colón administration, through the Puerto Rico Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DDEC) and the Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources (DOL HR) has localized these priorities to transform Puerto Rico into a competitive innovation hub.

These priorities align and compliment the five strategic pillars in the following ways:

1. Industry-Driven Strategies (Pillar I)

The federal strategy focuses on sector-specific training for industries like semiconductors, biopharma, and energy. The González-Colón administration has mirrored this by:

- Targeted Sector Growth: Directing Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds toward advanced manufacturing, life sciences, aerospace, and digital industries.
- Registered Apprenticeship: Puerto Rico's Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) has undergone a profound structural transformation between 2024 and 2026. Historically a small, traditional initiative, it has

been elevated by the González-Colón administration into the primary talent engine for the island's reshoring and reconstruction strategy.

- Energy Workforce Transition: Partnering with the U.S. Department of Energy to train workers for the island's transition to a resilient, decentralized power grid, aligning with federal goals for green energy infrastructure.
- Medical Technology: Leveraging Puerto Rico's existing biopharma base to create specialized training programs that support federal reshoring efforts.

2. Worker Mobility (Pillar II)

A core component of the "Golden Age" strategy is removing barriers for workers and ensuring work pays.

- Middle-Class Tax Reform: In early 2026, Governor González-Colón introduced a major tax reform aimed at reducing the burden on working families. By lowering income tax rates and doubling dependent deductions, the administration aims to incentivize workforce participation—a key goal of the national strategy.
- Infrastructure Investment: The administration secured over $100 million for port and pier modernization (e.g., Port of San Juan). These projects create high-paying maritime and logistics jobs, promoting upward mobility for the local workforce.

3. Integrated Systems (Pillar III)

The federal plan calls for streamlining duplicative programs. Governor González-Colón has made direct Federal engagement a hallmark of her term:

- PRFAA Leadership: Through the Puerto Rico Federal Affairs Administration (PRFAA), the administration has harmonized local labor initiatives with federal agencies (HHS, Energy, and Commerce) to ensure that federal grants for workforce development are deployed without the historic administrative delays.
- Healthcare Retention: The administration is aggressively lobbying for Medicare Advantage rate parity. This is a workforce issue: by securing fair reimbursement, the administration aims to stop the "brain drain" of healthcare professionals to the mainland, maintaining a robust local medical talent pool.

4. Accountability (Pillar IV)

The "Golden Age" strategy emphasizes credentials of value. The González-Colón administration has adopted this by:

- Vocational Alignment: Reforming local vocational and technical colleges to ensure curricula are co-developed with private-sector employers.
- Performance Measures: Implementing stricter reporting for programs funded by federal reconstruction dollars to ensure that training leads directly to long-term employment in the construction and engineering sectors.

***5*. Flexibility and Innovation (Pillar V)**

The administration has integrated Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a foundational pillar of its "innovation hub" vision for Puerto Rico.

The administration's strategy centers on the belief that a "Golden Age" workforce must be AI-literate to remain competitive and has implemented the following initiatives:

- AWS Technology Skills Partnership: In late 2025, Governor González-Colón signed a landmark agreement with Amazon Web Services (AWS) to provide free AI and cloud computing training to 50,000 residents. The program targets public school students, University of Puerto Rico (UPR) participants, and displaced workers to ensure a baseline of "AI literacy."
- AI Literacy Framework: Following the federal Department of Labor's 2026 AI Literacy Framework, the administration is integrating AI competencies into vocational training programs (WIOA-funded), shifting the focus from manual labor to AI-augmented technical roles in manufacturing and logistics.
- Reshoring Task Force: Through Executive Order 2025-012, the administration created a task force that uses AI data modeling to identify specific U.S. supply chain gaps. This allows the DDEC to proactively recruit biopharma and semiconductor firms by demonstrating exactly how Puerto Rico's infrastructure can support their AI-driven production lines.

The Workforce Pell Grant is a critical pillar of Puerto Rico's reshoring initiative. It will help transform how the Commonwealth develops the specialized talent needed to attract and retain high-tech manufacturing—particularly in the pharmaceutical, medical device, and aerospace sectors.

By funding the "missing middle" of education—the short-term technical certifications—Workforce Pell provides the human capital infrastructure necessary for Puerto Rico to compete as a global manufacturing hub.

II. STRATEGIC ELEMENTS

The Unified or Combined State Plan must include a Strategic Planning Elements section that analyzes the State's current economic environment and identifies the State's overall vision for its workforce development system. The required elements in this section allow the State to develop data-driven goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce and to identify successful strategies for aligning workforce development programs to support economic growth. Unless otherwise noted, all Strategic Planning Elements apply to Combined State Plan partner programs included in the plan as well as to core programs. Where requirements identify the term "populations", these must include individuals with barriers to employment as defined at WIOA Section 3. This includes displaced homemakers; low-income individuals; Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians; individuals with disabilities, including youth who are individuals with disabilities; older individuals; ex-offenders; homeless individuals, or homeless children and youths; youth who are in or have aged out of the foster care system; individuals who are English language learners, individuals who have low levels of literacy, and individuals facing substantial cultural barriers; farmworkers; individuals within 2 years of exhausting lifetime eligibility under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program; single parents (including single pregnant women); and long-term unemployed individuals. Additional populations include veterans, unemployed workers, and youth, and others that the State may identify.

A. ECONOMIC, WORKFORCE, AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES ANALYSIS

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

1. ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE ANALYSIS

A. ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

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

I. EXISTING DEMAND INDUSTRY SECTORS AND OCCUPATIONS

Provide an analysis of the industries and occupations for which there is existing demand.

II. EMERGING DEMAND INDUSTRY SECTORS AND OCCUPATIONS

Provide an analysis of the industries and occupations for which demand is emerging.

III. EMPLOYERS' EMPLOYMENT NEEDS

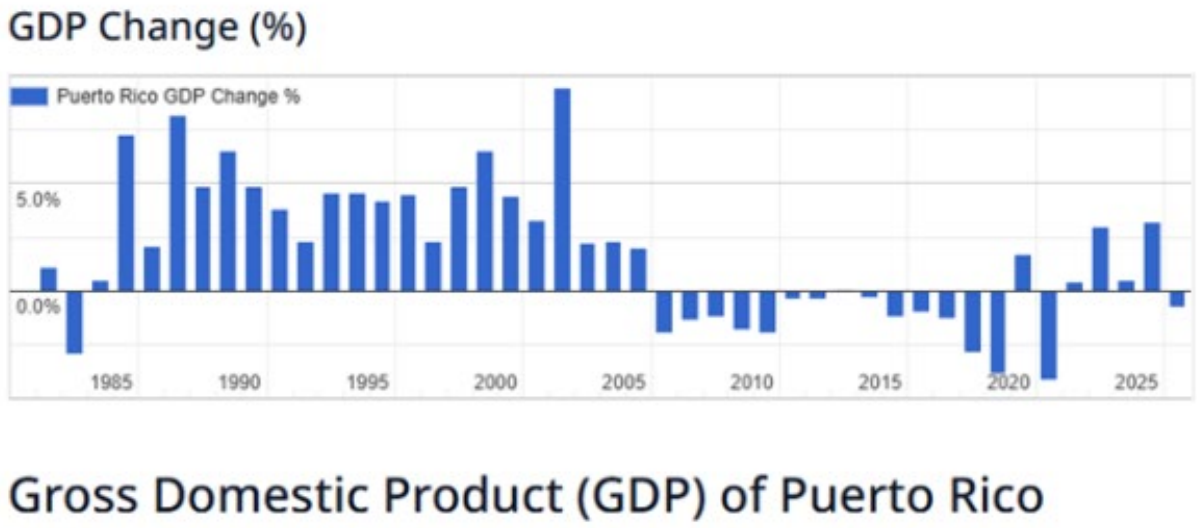
With regard to the industry sectors and occupations identified in (A)(i) and (ii), provide an assessment of the employment needs of employers, including a description of the knowledge, skills, and abilities required, including credentials and licenses.

Economic Analysis

The current landscape of Puerto Rico's labor market reveals an economy in a state of sophisticated recalibration. Moving beyond the "recovery" phase of the early 2020s, the island is now engineering a transition toward a knowledge-based, export-oriented ecosystem.

GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT (GDP)

Puerto Rico's economy entered 2026 having achieved a fragile yet historic equilibrium. After years of post-disaster volatility, the Real Gross National Product (GNP) grew by 2.1 percent in Fiscal Year 2024, but slowed to an estimated 0.4 percent in Fiscal Yar 2025.



Puerto Rico's economic data indicates a period of stabilization and moderate growth, following the volatile recovery cycles of the early 2020s. As of early 2026, the economy is transitioning into a "softer" growth phase as federal pandemic-era liquidity tapers off.

Key GDP and GNP Figures

Economists in Puerto Rico often distinguish between Gross Domestic Product (GDP)—the total value of goods and services produced on the island—and Gross National Product (GNP), which better reflects the income that actually stays in the local economy.

- Gross Domestic Product (GDP): In Fiscal Year 2025, GDP reached approximately $129.37 billion, reflecting a nominal increase of 2.6% over the previous year.
- Gross National Product (GNP): Real GNP (adjusted for inflation) grew by 2.1percent in FY 2024, but slowed to an estimated 0.4% in FY 2025.

In Puerto Rico, exports are the primary engine of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), fundamentally because the island operates as a high-intensity manufacturing hub within the U.S. customs system.

While most economies rely heavily on local consumption, Puerto Rico's GDP is uniquely "export-heavy," with total exports often representing over 50% of the island's total economic output.

The "Manufacturing Multiplier"

Manufacturing accounts for nearly 46–50 percent of Puerto Rico's GDP, and the vast majority of that production (approximately 74 percent) is destined for export.

- The Pharmaceutical Anchor: Pharmaceuticals alone contribute roughly 30% of the total GDP. In 2024 and 2025, pharmaceutical exports reached record levels, totaling over $48 billion.
- Value Addition: Because the island specializes in high-value-added goods (biotechnology, medical devices, and precision electronics), each dollar of export generates a significant ripple effect in specialized services, logistics, and high-wage technical employment.

The GDP vs. GNP Discrepancy

The impact of exports reveals a unique structural characteristic of the Puerto Rican economy: the gap between GDP and Gross National Product (GNP).

- Profit Outflows: Many of the largest exporters are multinational corporations. While the *production* (GDP) happens on the island, a significant portion of the *profits* is repatriated to parent companies off-island.
- The Result: This creates a situation where Puerto Rico's GDP ($129 billion) is nearly double its GNP ($70–85 billion). This gap is almost entirely driven by the net exports of the manufacturing sector.

Puerto Rico consistently maintains a positive trade surplus, which is a rare feat for an island economy. In 2025, exports climbed to $62.4 billion, creating a trade surplus of $7.4 billion (a 30 percent increase over 2024). When local consumption or government spending slows down, "Net Exports" (Exports minus Imports) often act as the primary stabilizer that prevents the economy from entering a recession. In 2024, for example, a robust improvement in foreign trade was a key factor in achieving the 2.1% real growth rate.

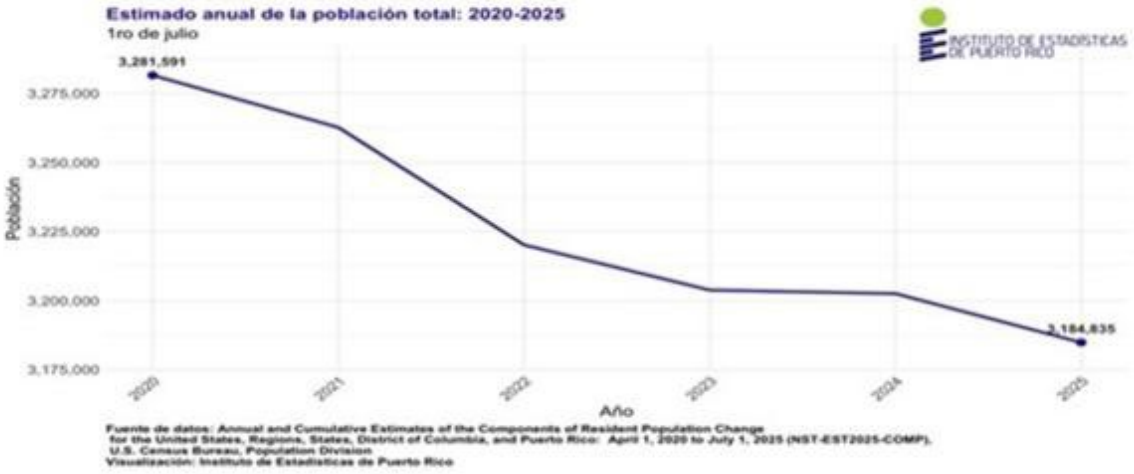
Strategic "Reshoring" Impact

Under the current economic vision of Governor Jenniffer González-Colón, exports are being used as a tool for economic diplomacy. By positioning the island as a "safe haven" for U.S. supply chains (Reshoring), the government aims to increase the volume of exports to the U.S. mainland. This strategy is intended to replace expiring federal aid with permanent, private-sector production, ensuring that GDP growth is fueled by global demand for "*Made in Puerto Rico*" goods rather than temporary stimulus.

POPULATION

The relationship between Puerto Rico's population and its economic growth in 2026 is defined by a "Demographic Squeeze"—a simultaneous decline in total residents and an acceleration in the aging of the remaining population.

As of the latest 2026 data, the island's population has slipped below 3.2 million, a threshold not seen since the 1980s. This shift creates structural challenges for the GDP that go beyond simple "headcount" and strike at the core of labor productivity and fiscal sustainability.



The population decrease is no longer just a result of migration; it is now driven by a "Natural Decrease" where deaths significantly outpace births. In 2025–2026, Puerto Rico recorded approximately 18,000 births against 33,000 deaths. This "natural change" creates a structural deficit of 15,000 people annually, regardless of migration.

After a brief period of "net positive" migration in 2024, the island returned to negative territory in 2025. Younger, working-age adults (ages 20–44) remain the most likely to leave, primarily seeking higher wages and more stable infrastructure in the mainland U.S.

The exodus of the youth leaves behind an older population, which shifts the economic focus from "production" to "consumption and care." The civilian labor force is currently estimated at 1.24 million. With a median age of 46, Puerto Rico has one of the oldest workforces in the Western Hemisphere. This leads to a "Skills Mismatch" where emerging high-tech sectors (like Aerospace and IT) struggle to find enough local, entry-level talent.

The ratio of non-workers (elderly and children) to active workers is rising. For every 100 working-age people, there are now approximately 50 dependents, increasing the tax and social burden on the active workforce. A shrinking population naturally reduces the demand for local services, housing, and retail. This is one reason why, despite high export growth, Real GNP growth is projected to be nearly flat (0.4 percent) in 2026.

To counteract a shrinking population, the current economic vision (including Governor González-Colón's plan) focuses on increasing output per worker by investing in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automated manufacturing to maintain high export volumes (Biopharma) with fewer total employees. The administration also plans on aggressively targeting the 55 percent of the

population currently outside the formal labor market to boost the Labor Force Participation Rate (approximately 44 percent). Finally, the administration hopes to pivot toward "Export Services" where a single high-skilled remote worker can generate significantly more GDP than a traditional service-sector employee.

Governor Jenniffer González-Colón's strategy to attract the Puerto Rican diaspora back to the island is built on the philosophy that "economic stability is the best repatriation policy." Rather than relying on a single "return home" program, her administration is implementing a multi-layered fiscal and industrial reform designed to make Puerto Rico a more viable long-term home for professionals and families currently living in the U.S. mainland.

The efforts can be categorized into three primary strategic pillars:

1. The "Middle-Class" Tax Reform (2025–2026)

The Governor's most direct effort to address population challenges and attract Puerto Ricans back to Puerto Rico her $550 million Tax Reform plan, introduced in early 2026. The goal is to lower the cost of living and increase the "net take-home pay" for working families, addressing the primary reason people leave. The reform plans includes the following:

- Income Tax Reductions: The plan specifically targets individuals earning between $25,000 and $90,000, significantly lowering their tax burden to compete with mainland U.S. states.
- Doubling Dependent Deductions: The deduction for minors and dependents was increased from $2,500 to $5,000, a move explicitly designed to support young families who might otherwise migrate for better financial support.
- Simplified Compliance: Under the reform, the administration is consolidating employment tax reporting, making it easier for small business owners and self-employed professionals to operate legally on the island.

2. The "Reshoring" Job Engine

The Governor is betting that high-quality, high-paying jobs are the only sustainable way to bring people back. Her "Industrial Reshoring" initiative aims to turn Puerto Rico into a global hub for sectors that diaspora Puerto Ricans often work in while abroad. This will be accomplished through:

- WIOA Alignment: She is strategically directing federal workforce funds toward Aerospace, Digital Industries, and Life Sciences. The vision is to

create a "tech corridor" where a Puerto Rican engineer in Florida or Texas can find an equivalent, high-paying role in Aguadilla or San Juan.

- Act 60 Modernization: By extending the Resident Investor and Export Services incentives (Act 60) through 2055, the administration is providing long-term certainty for service-based businesses (Consulting, Software, Legal), encouraging diaspora entrepreneurs to relocate their businesses to the island.
    - Clinical: Registered Nurses (RNs), Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs), Medical Technologists, and Physical Therapists.
    - Support: Home Health Aides, Nursing Assistants, and Medical Assistants.
    - Specialized: Pharmacy Technicians and Phlebotomists.
    - Skilled Trades: Master Electricians (*Peritos Electricistas*), Plumbers, Carpenters, and Masonry Workers.
    - Operational: Heavy Equipment Operators, Civil Engineers, and Project Managers.
    - Specialized: Solar Photovoltaic Installers and Safety Inspectors (OSHA-certified).
    - Information Technology: Cybersecurity Analysts, Software Developers (Java, Python), and Systems Architects.
    - Business Operations: Accountants, Auditors, and Compliance Officers.
    - Scientific**:** Quality Control Technicians and Lab Researchers (specifically for the Biopharma corridor).
    - Hospitality: Hotel Managers, Chefs/Head Cooks, and Multilingual Front Desk Agents.
    - Retail: Retail Supervisors, Logistics Coordinators, and Customer Service Representatives.
    - Areas: San Juan, Bayamón-Comerío, Guaynabo-Toa Baja, Carolina, and North-Central (Arecibo). This cluster is the services and logistics engine of the island, concentrating nearly 60 percent of all non-farm employment.

- Existing Demand Industry Sectors: Professional & Technical Services, Finance, and Retail Trade.
- Existing Occupational Demand: Accountants, Auditors, Customer Service Supervisors, and Retail Managers.
- Areas: Mayagüez-Las Marías and Aguadilla (Northwest). Known as the technical heart of Puerto Rico, this region leverages the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez (UPRM) to fuel high-tech industries.
- Existing Demand Industry Sectors: Aerospace Manufacturing, Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO), and Medical Device Manufacturing.
- Existing Occupational Demand: Aircraft Mechanics (A&P), Quality Control Technicians, and Industrial Engineers.
- Areas: Ponce and Caguas-Guayama. This region is heavily involved in the energy transition and physical infrastructure rebuilding, often serving as the logistics gateway for the south.
- Existing Demand Industry Sectors: Construction, Healthcare, and Heavy Logistics.
- Existing Occupational Demand: Registered Nurses, Project Managers, and Truck Drivers (CDL).
- Areas: Northeast (Fajardo), East-Central, and the Island Municipalities (Vieques/Culebra). This region is primarily focused on the Blue Economy and tourism-adjacent development.
- Existing Demand Industry Sectors: Hospitality, Marine Services, and Tourism.
- Existing Occupational Demand: Chefs, Hotel Front-of-House, and Boat Technicians.
- Cybersecurity Analysts: Critical for protecting intellectual property in the Biopharma and Finance sectors.
- Cloud Architects & Developers: Specifically, those skilled in AWS, Azure, and Python/Java.
- Data Scientists & Machine Learning Engineers: Needed to optimize automated manufacturing processes.

- Solar Photovoltaic (PV) Installers: Massive demand for residential and utility-scale solar.
- Energy Efficiency Auditors: Specialists who consult businesses on lowering high electricity overhead.
- Battery Storage Technicians: Experts in industrial-grade lithium and flow-battery systems.
- Aerospace Engineers: Designing systems for global aerospace firms.
- Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) Operators: Drone pilots for infrastructure inspection and agricultural monitoring.
- Avionics Technicians: Specialists in the electronic systems used on aircraft and satellites.
- Content Creators & Digital Strategists: Managing the global brands of local artists and firms.
- Eco-Tourism Guides: Specialists in biodiversity and sustainable maritime recreation.
- Film Production Technicians: Driven by the island's competitive tax credits for cinema and streaming productions.

3. Improving "Quality of Life" Infrastructure

The Governor has emphasized that "it is not enough to have a job if the lights don't stay on." Her administration is focusing on the structural push factors that drive migration. Through the "IDEA" initiative, she is working to fast-track energy grid repairs and deregulate the permitting process. The goal is to reduce the operational costs and frustrations that often deter returning residents from starting businesses.

Under Law 43-2026, the administration is promoting Puerto Rico as an inclusive and accessible destination. This is part of a broader "Welcome Home" narrative aimed at families with diverse needs, ensuring they feel the island can provide for their health and social wellbeing.

EXISTING DEMAND INDUSTRY SECTORS & OCCUPATIONS

In Puerto Rico, existing demand is defined by sectors that are currently experiencing high job vacancy rates, significant payroll growth, or are critical to the island's ongoing structural recovery. As of early 2026, the labor market

has reached a 16-year high in nonfarm employment, primarily driven by four "anchor" industries.

Mean Total Employment, Seasonally Adjusted and Percentage Change;

Fiscal Year 2019-2026

Year	Total Employment	Change%
2019	995	2.7
2020	994	-0.1
2021	1039	4.5
2022	1115	7.3
2023	1116	0.1
2024	1233.6	9.5
2025	1232.9	-0.06
2026	1233.8	0.07

The following details the sectors and specific occupations where demand is currently most acute.

1. Healthcare and Social Assistance

This is the most consistent driver of labor demand due to Puerto Rico's rapidly aging demographic and the expansion of federal healthcare funding. The increased need for geriatric care and a brain drain of medical professionals to the U.S. mainland serves a primary driver for existing demand,

High-Demand Occupations in Healthcare include:

2. Construction and Infrastructure

Fueled by billions in federal recovery funds (CDBG-DR and FEMA), the construction sector is facing a critical labor shortage that is expected to last through the next decade. Grid modernization (LUMA/Genera PR), bridge and road repair, and a surge in private-sector solar installations serve as a primary driver for this industry.

High-Demand Occupations in Construction and Infrastructure include:

3. Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services

This sector has seen a post-pandemic boom, particularly in services tailored for export under Act 60 incentives. Digital transformation of local businesses

and the growth of remote-service hubs for global firms serve as the primary drivers for this industry.

High-Demand Occupations in Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services include:

4. Leisure, Hospitality, and Retail

Despite being lower-wage sectors, they account for the largest volume of job openings and have shown the most resilient growth in 2025. Record-breaking visitor arrivals and the "Bad Bunny effect" (large-scale event tourism) seen in late 2025 is the primary driver for this growth.

High-Demand Occupations in Leisure, Hospitality, and Retail include:

While the island shares a macro-economic goal of "reshoring" and high-tech manufacturing, the specific industry and occupational demands vary significantly by the 15 local workforce development areas.

The following analysis breaks down the 15 local areas into four strategic clusters based on their dominant economic drivers.

1. The Metropolitan & North-Central Cluster

2. The Western "Aerospace & STEM" Corridor

3. The Southern & South-Central "Reconstruction" Hub

4. The Eastern & Island Municipalities

EMERGING DEMAND INDUSTRY SECTORS & OCCUPATIONS

As Puerto Rico moves through 2026, emerging demand is being shaped by a transition from traditional labor to a knowledge-driven, tech-enabled economy. While sectors like retail and government remain large, the *growth* is concentrated in industries that require specialized technical expertise, digital fluency, and high-value exports.

The following is an analysis of the industries and occupations currently ascending in the Puerto Rican labor market.

1. Technology and Digital Infrastructure

This is the most aggressive growth sector, fueled by the "21st Century Techforce" initiative and the island's role as a digital service hub for the U.S. mainland (Act 60). The "AI Revolution," cloud migration for local businesses, and a surge in cybersecurity requirements for the pharmaceutical supply chain serve as the primary drivers.

Emerging Occupations in Technology and Digital Infrastructure include:

2. Renewable Energy and "Green" Construction

The total transformation of the electrical grid (Act 17) has created a localized industrial boom that did not exist at this scale five years ago. Hurricane resilience mandates and the "LUMA/Genera PR" transition toward decentralized solar power serve as the primary drivers.

Emerging Occupations in Renewable Energy and "Green" Construction include:

3. Aerospace and Advanced Aviation

Centered largely in the West LWDA (Aguadilla-Mayagüez), this sector is moving beyond maintenance into high-level design and satellite technology. Federal defense contracts and Puerto Rico's strategic position as a low-cost, U.S.-regulated aerospace hub drive this demand.

Emerging Occupations in Aerospace and Advanced Aviation include:

4. Creative Industries and "Blue" Tourism

Moving beyond traditional "sun and sand," Puerto Rico is emerging as a hub for the "Orange Economy" (creative services) and sustainable maritime activities. Global demand for Puerto Rican cultural content (music/film) and a policy shift toward high-spending "Eco-tourism" has impacted the emergence of this industry.

Emerging Occupations in Creative Industries and "Blue" Tourism include:

Puerto Rico views emerging demand as a strategic shift toward a knowledge-based, multisectoral economy that is deeply integrated into global supply chains. Across the 15 Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDAs), this demand is no longer just about filling vacancies—it is about evolving the island's workforce to meet the technological and environmental requirements of 2026.

The 15 LWDAs translate these state goals into regional realities based on their local infrastructure and talent pipelines.

Regional Cluster	**Emerging Industry Focus**	**Key Emerging Occupations**
Northwestern Cluster (Aguadilla/Mayaguez)	Aerospace & BioTech Hub	Aerospace Engineers, Drone Pilots (FAA 107), Clinical Lab Researchers

Regional Cluster	Emerging Industry Focus	Key Emerging Occupations
Metro Hub (San Juan/Baymon,Carolina)	Knowledge Economy & Finance	Cybersecurity Analysts, Compliance Officers, AI Integration Specialists
Southern Hub (Ponce/Guayama)	Energy & Logistics Gateway	Solar PV Installers, Battery Storage Technicians, Smart-Grid Operators
Central/Rural (Caguas/Humacao)	Agro-Tech & Specialized Manufacturing	Hydroponic Technicians, CNC Operators, Food Safety Scientists

EMPLOYERS' EMPLOYMENT NEEDS

As Puerto Rico advances through 2026, the employment needs of local employers are characterized by a move toward technical specialization and soft skill resilience. As articulated in our 2024–2027 WIOA Unified State Plan, there is a significant skills mismatch where employers find that while candidates may have degrees, they often lack the specific industry-recognized credentials or behavioral competencies required for the modern workplace.

The following is an assessment of the core requirements across the island's economic landscape.

1. Universal "Foundation" Skills (Cross-Sector)

Regardless of the industry, Puerto Rican employers consistently rank the following three areas as their top "baseline" needs:

- Bilingual Proficiency: Mastery of both Spanish and English is no longer a "plus"—it is a mechanical requirement for any role involving global supply chains (Pharma/Aerospace), tech exports (Act 60), or high-end tourism.
- Digital Fluency: This includes the ability to navigate cloud-based project management tools (Teams, Slack), advanced data handling (Excel/Tableau), and an increasing expectation of AI Literacy (using generative AI to optimize routine tasks).
- The "Human Layer" (Soft Skills): Employers emphasize a critical shortage in Punctuality/Accountability, Critical Thinking, and the ability to work under high pressure without direct supervision.

2. Assessment by Sector: Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSA)s & Credentials

Sector	KSAs	Credentials/Licenses
Biopharma & Medical Devices	Deep understanding of GMP (Good Manufacturing Practices), FDA regulations, and Lean Six Sigma methodologies High-precision laboratory techniques, statistical process control, and cleanroom protocols.	Six Sigma Green/Black Belt certifications. CEIV Pharma (for logistics roles). Professional Engineer (PE) license for advanced manufacturing roles.
Aerospace & Aviation	Structural mechanics, avionics systems, and federal aviation regulations. Troubleshooting complex electronic systems and precision machining (CNC)	FAA Airframe & Powerplant (A&P) license (critical for MRO roles). FAA Part 107 (Drone Pilot License) for infrastructure and agricultural monitoring. AS9100 Quality Management standards.
Renewable Energy & Construction	National Electric Code (NEC), specifically Article 690 for solar, and smart-grid integration	NABCEP Certification (North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners)

Sector	KSAs	Credentials/Licenses
	Installation of Photovoltaic (PV) systems, battery storage management, and high-angle safety rescue	Master Electrician (*Perito*) license (State Board of Puerto Rico) OSHA 30 (Construction Safety and Health) (AWS Solutions Architect, Google Professional Cloud Architect).
Information Technology & Cybersecurity	Network security protocols, cloud architecture (AWS/Azure), and data privacy laws Programming in Python, R, or SQL; threat detection; and machine learning application	CompTIA Security+ or CISSP (Certified Information Systems Security Professional). Cloud Provider Certifications (AWS Solutions Architect, Google Professional Cloud Architect)
Sector	**KSAs**	**Credentials/Licenses**
Biopharma & Medical Devices	Deep understanding of GMP (Good Manufacturing Practices), FDA regulations, and Lean Six Sigma methodologies High-precision laboratory	Six Sigma Green/Black Belt certifications. CEIV Pharma (for logistics roles).

Sector	KSAs	Credentials/Licenses
	techniques, statistical process control, and cleanroom protocols.	Professional Engineer (PE) license for advanced manufacturing roles.
Aerospace & Aviation	Structural mechanics, avionics systems, and federal aviation regulations.	FAA Airframe & Powerplant (A&P) license (critical for MRO roles).
	Troubleshooting complex electronic systems and precision machining (CNC)	FAA Part 107 (Drone Pilot License) for infrastructure and agricultural monitoring.
		AS9100 Quality Management standards.
Renewable Energy & Construction	National Electric Code (NEC), specifically Article 690 for solar, and smart-grid integration	NABCEP Certification (North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners)
	Installation of Photovoltaic (PV) systems, battery storage management, and high-angle safety rescue	Master Electrician (*Perito*) license (State Board of Puerto Rico)
		OSHA 30 (Construction Safety and Health)

Sector	KSAs	Credentials/Licenses
		(AWS Solutions Architect, Google Professional Cloud Architect).
Information Technology & Cybersecurity	Network security protocols, cloud architecture (AWS/Azure), and data privacy laws	CompTIA Security+ or CISSP (Certified Information Systems Security Professional).
	Programming in Python, R, or SQL; threat detection; and machine learning application	Cloud Provider Certifications (AWS Solutions Architect, Google Professional Cloud Architect)

3. The Impact of Universal License Recognition (Law 102-2025)

A major shift in 2026 is the implementation of the Universal Recognition of Occupational and Professional Licenses Act.

- Mobility: Professionals from the U.S. mainland (diaspora) can now obtain equivalent licenses in Puerto Rico within 30 days, provided they have practiced for at least three consecutive years.
- Provisional Access: If a board fails to act within the 30-day window, a provisional license is automatically granted, allowing the worker to enter the labor force immediately while final review concludes.

B. WORKFORCE ANALYSIS

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

I. EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT

Provide an analysis of current employment and unemployment data, including labor force participation rates, and trends in the State.

II. LABOR MARKET TRENDS

Provide an analysis of key labor market trends, including across existing industries and occupations.

III. EDUCATION AND SKILL LEVELS OF THE WORKFORCE

Provide an analysis of the educational and skill levels of the workforce.

IV. COMPARISON OF ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE ANALYTICAL CONCLUSION. DESCRIBE AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY FOR MEETING HIRING, EDUCATION, AND SKILLS NEEDS IDENTIFIED IN THE ECONOMY COMPARED TO THE ASSETS AVAILABLE IN THE LABOR FORCE IN THE STATE.

Describe areas of opportunity for meeting hiring, education, and skills needs identified in the economy compared to the assets available in the labor force in the state.

The economic situation in Puerto Rico is a particularly prominent issue in the development and evolution of society. Therefore, it is relevant to identify, plan, implement, and evaluate economic development as part of the government's administrative efforts. This represents a challenge because there are exogenous situations that have caused the government to update or modify its strategies to achieve established objectives. The most relevant events that have affected economic development in Puerto Rico are as follows:

1. Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017; and
2. The COVID-19 pandemic.

These events affected Puerto Rico's economic activity, as reflected in the following macroeconomic indicators:

1. Since 2016, the GDP (approximately $ 107 billion) fell in 2017 to $ 102 billion (approximately). Subsequently, it continues to decline until 2020 (approximately $93 billion). In 2021, the economy showed a slight improvement of approximately .2%.
2. The EAI has decreased since 2006, and it showed a significant decrease in 2017. This index shows a slight improvement by 2022.
3. The population has declined continuously since 2000 but had a significant drop in 2017 and 2018. For 2021, there was a slight increase compared to 2020. In fact, 42.7% of the population is in poverty, with the population with the highest productivity (from 18 to 64 years old) representing 40.4% of the population by 2021.

The labor market is the main engine that complies with government strategies and allows for sustainable economic development. Thus, these economic indicators are of paramount importance in the design and planning of government strategies. In 2021, the DOL published the highest number of in-demand occupations. Some of these are as follows:

1. Retailers
2. Cashiers
3. Customer Service Representatives
4. Counters
5. Lawyers

Technological advances have affected many occupations. It projects that, for the next 10 years, the occupations with the highest demand will be as follows:

1. Information and security system
2. Computer System Communication
3. Robotics and engineering
4. Communications
5. Statistical
6. Medical
7. Nutritionists
8. Physical therapists
9. Laboratory technician

The labor force increased until 2006 to 1.4 million people and then decreased until 2018 with approximately 1.1 million people decreasing from 2006 to 2018 (21.4%). By 2022, there was a brief increase of 1,188 million people. Employed individuals are distributed across the following economic sectors:

1. Government
2. Communication, transportation, and utilities
3. Professional and commercial services
4. Educational services and health
5. Factory

Strategies designed by the government must address the following challenges:

1. Changes in technology
2. Changes in political vision
3. Changes in the environment
4. Ways and processes for doing business.
5. Stability in production costs

Therefore, this document presents the strategies and activities promoted by the government for the economic and sustainable development of Puerto Rico.

The labor market is one of the most relevant factors of production for economic development, not only in Puerto Rico, but worldwide. This factor of production is sensitive to its behavior because there are many elements that affect the welfare and standard of living for society. This represents many challenges and determinations that governments must face to maximize their resources and provide sustainable economic development.

Analyzing the behavior and trends of trades and occupations in our environment should be an important action in terms of fiscal policy. Therefore, communication channels and data collection from participants must be optimized. In addition, it is important to continuously review fiscal decisions and their effects on the labor market in both the short and long term.

One of the instruments or courses of action that allow the storage of data, communications, and review of labor trends according to the effects of globalization, among others, is the technology that allows support necessary for today's decision-making and its determination in the future. Therefore, it is important to consider the integrity of job opportunities with technology in terms of skill training, data analysis, and communication between relevant agencies.

The integration of technology into strategies in the labor field is imperative to analyze future trends and measure volatility in economic market behavior and job skills changes. Therefore, modernization in the world of work plays the role of economic transformation to promote the progress and well-being of the society in which we live. Their support in economic decisions allows us to measure and closely monitor the expected results of Puerto Rico's economic development.

Statistical Adjustment Model (SAM)

Puerto Rico must report state levels of the WIOA-program's performance outcome targets, as part of the negotiation process with the US DOL and similarly use the performance targets in the subsequent negotiations with the respective local areas. Implementing performance indicators allows the PR State agencies to monitor, make informed decisions and ensure continuous improvements plans to ensure execution across all programs.

To determine the expected performance levels of execution for the 2024 Puerto Rico Unified Plan, our jurisdiction implemented a new Statistical Models that aligns with the USDOL supported by the Statistical Adjustment Model Technical Assistance Center (SAMTAC) to ensure guidance and learnings from other jurisdictions.

The implementation of the Statistical Model (primarily for the Title1B) is based on the data collected in the Performance Indicators and Reporting Levels (PIRL) database thru PRIS's and its implementation however due to the impact of natural disasters that impacted the island like Hurricane Irma, Hurricane Irma and the Global COVID-19 pandemic, the Puerto Rico data required an extensive analysis and adjustment of the data to ensure reasonable results. Puerto Rico's expected performance targets are dependent on program participants characteristics and economic factors related to the labor conditions and market dynamics associated with the execution of the WIOA programs at the local areas.

The program participants and economic factors data considered into the models allows us to achieve unique ***state statistical models and unique statistical models for each local area*** with the required coefficients depicting how each variable and socioeconomic fits and adjusts performance goals for various kinds of served participants and market conditions. The models quantify how much those socio-economic variables can affect each of the program performance outcomes using an individual level of observation for each program participant as listed in the database. Program performance outcomes are long-term goals on primary program indicators set by Federal and state labor/education authorities. Based on the previous information, the work developed an objective statistical adjustment model with quality capable of accounting different socio-economic conditions controlling the assessment of the program performance goals.

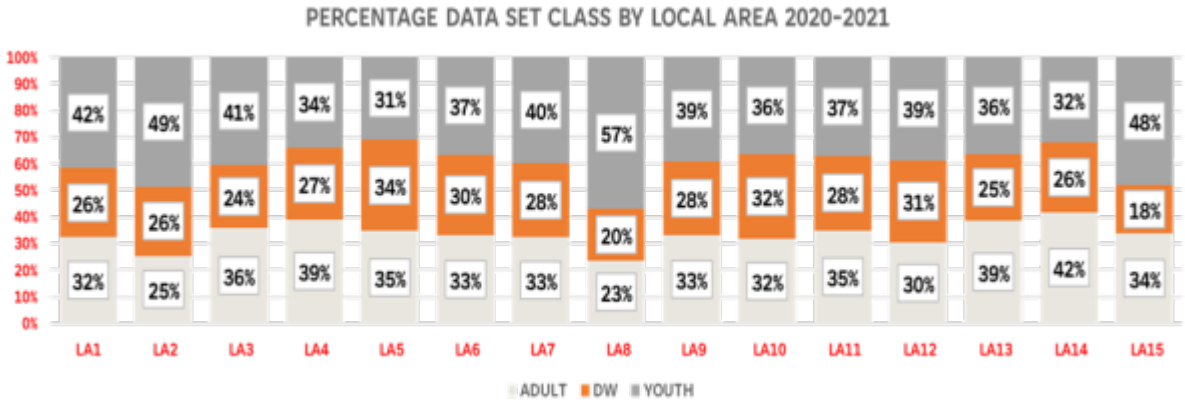
THE GOAL OF THE STATISTICAL MODELS IS CREATE AND ADJUSTMENT FACTOR FOR EACH (5) INDICATOR OF PERFORMANCE FOR EACH (15) LOCAL AREA WITHIN (3) ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH PROGRAMS."

For each program, five performance indicators were modeled: (i) Employed in the second quarter after exit, (ii) Employed in the fourth quarter after exit, (iii) Earnings in the third quarter after exit, (iv) Credential Attainment, and (v) Measurable Skills Gains.

Thru the implementation of the Statistical Adjustment Model for Puerto Rico each of the WIOA programs will obtain Adjustment Factors for each performance indicator that shall be used to analyze against the Actual Levels of Performance and determine realistic and reliable Levels of Performance for each of the indicators.

Puerto Rico is committed to comply with the Statistical Adjustment Model required by the USDOL therefore the implementation of the Statistical Adjustment Model shall be extended to all WIOA programs beyond Title 1B at the state level and to all the WIOA programs at the 15 local areas level.

The table below shows the levels of participation for each of the programs per local area considered.



2. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES ANALYSIS

The Unified or Combined State Plan must include an analysis of the workforce development activities, including education and training in the State, to address the education and skill needs of the workforce, as identified in (a)(1)(B)(iii) above, and the employment needs of employers, as identified in (a)(1)(A)(iii) above. This must include an analysis of—

A. THE STATE'S WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Provide an analysis of the State's workforce development activities, including education and training activities of the core programs, Combined State Plan

partner programs included in this plan, and required [6] and optional one-stop delivery system partners.[7]

[6] Required one-stop partners: In addition to the core programs, the following partner programs are required to provide access through the one-stops: Career and Technical Education (Perkins), Community Services Block Grant, Indian and Native American programs, HUD Employment and Training programs, Job Corps, Local Veterans' Employment Representatives and Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program, National Farmworker Jobs program, Senior Community Service Employment program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) (unless the Governor determines TANF will not be a required partner), Trade Adjustment Assistance programs, Unemployment Compensation programs, and YouthBuild.

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

B. THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

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

C. STATE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CAPACITY

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

A. The State's Workforce Development Activities

Provide an analysis of the State's workforce development activities, including education and training activities of the core programs, Combined State Plan partner programs included in this plan, and required [6] and optional one-stop delivery system partners.[7]

While the González-Colón administration continues to develop its mission, initiatives, and strategy, they are committed to transforming Puerto Rico's workforce development system from a collection of independent programs into a highly integrated "One-Stop" ecosystem. The analysis of the following proposed initiatives and activities reveals a strategic focus on interoperability, sector-based training, and rapid credentialing to meet the island's economic demand:

1. Core Program Education & Training Activities

The administration prioritizes training that leads directly to industry-recognized credentials, moving away from generalized education toward high-demand technical mastery.

- Title I: Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth (DEDC):
    - Activities: Heavy shift toward Registered Apprenticeships (RA) and Work-Based Learning (WBL). For 2026, the DEDC has launched "Pre-Apprenticeship" tracks in six new sectors, including Renewable Energy and Cybersecurity.
    - Focus: Utilizing "Individual Training Accounts" (ITAs) to fund short-term, stackable credentials (e.g., CNC Machining, Solar PV Installation) rather than traditional multi-year degrees.
- Title II: Adult Education and Family Literacy (PRDE):
    - Activities: Implementation of Integrated Education and Training (IET) models. This allows participants to learn foundational literacy and English *concurrently* with technical skills for a specific job (e.g., learning "Medical English" while training as a Pharmacy Tech).
    - Focus: Accelerating the transition to post-secondary education through "Career Pathways" aligned with the 15 Local Areas.
- Title III: Wagner-Peyser Employment Services (DTRH):
    - Activities: Transition to a "Virtual One-Stop" model using the Puerto Rico Integrated System (PRIS). This uses AI-driven matching to connect job seekers' existing skills with open positions in the Biopharma and Aerospace corridors.
- Title IV: Vocational Rehabilitation (VRA):
    - Activities: The Agency will continue to sponsor its consumers in pursuing technical and postsecondary occupational goals leading to recognized credentials and consistent with the consumers' strengths, resources, priorities, abilities, interests, functional capacities and informed choice.

Puerto Rico's economy must be adjusted and modified according to the environment that surrounds us. This refers to local as well as international situations. This makes the labor and productive sector adjust to market trends, where it can participate in economic and sustainable development. To

make some adjustments according to labor market trends, we can mention the following characteristics (Department of Labor, 2021):

1. Training and adaptability – It refer to qualities of the employee such as leadership, critical thinking, communication, and digital skills that allow adapting to the diverse types of jobs and the demands of each economic sector.
2. Permanent digital transformation – Companies will accelerate the digitization of their work processes and the automation of work. This will cause some jobs to disappear or to maintain themselves, new skills and ways of working will be required.
3. Temporary employment and outsourcing of services – Permanent employment will be less frequent and the search for new job opportunities will increase. Companies will gradually eliminate permanent positions and replace them with professional services.
4. Work flexibility – Teleworking, total or partial, and flexible schedules will allow employees to have a better quality of life for themselves, family, and work environment.

In the labor field, employers have their demands about the talent, knowledge, skills, abilities, and abilities that employees must have. These demands or requirements are harmonized with technical knowledge or with some level of education. Here are some requirements that employers demand when evaluating potential candidates:

1. Commitment to the company
2. Communication skills
3. Math skills
4. Thinking skills
5. Language skills (for example, Spanish and English)
6. Computer skills
7. Meet itineraries
8. Working under time pressure
9. Work without direct supervision
10. Handle employment-related emergencies
11. Working outside of your regular hours

In addition to this list, the basic skills sought by employers are identified, these are the following soft skills (Department of Labor, 2021):

1. Punctuality and accountability
2. Ability to follow instructions
3. Communication skills (oral and written)
4. Ability to work in a team
5. Ability to provide customer service
6. Ability to learn
7. Ability to identify and solve problems
8. Ability to anticipate and avoid problems
9. Self-motivation, self-initiative
10. Ability to work under pressure

Employers establish the academic or technical preparation that employees must have or be willing to take. Some jobs that have these characteristics are the following (Department of Labor, 2021):

1. Occupations with an Associate Degree or Postsecondary Degree without a degree are as follows
2. Heavy Truck and Cargo Drivers
3. Licensed Practical and Vocational Nurses
4. Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education
5. Hairdressers, Hair Stylists and Cosmetologists
6. Occupations with Baccalaureate Degree
7. Accountants and auditors
8. Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education
9. Market Research Analyst and Marketing Specialists
10. Management and Operations Managers
11. Medical and Clinical Laboratory Technologists
12. Occupations with Professional Degree, Doctorate or Master's Degree
13. Pharmacists

14. Lawyers
15. Medical Nurses
16. Postsecondary Health Specialty Teachers
17. Health Care Social Workers

These occupations are changing according to labor market trends and the opportunities and needs of employers, as well as the manner and types of jobs available.

For the year 2021, the educational level in Puerto Rico by age is distributed as follows:

Educational level in Puerto Rico by age as of 2021:

Item	***Total***	***Percent %***
Population	3,263,584	
Population 18 to 24 years	314,885	9.6%
High School graduate or higher	258,028	81.9%
Bachelor's degree or higher	30,938	9.8%
Population 25 to 34 years	419,212	12.8%
High School graduate or higher	386,366	92.2%
Bachelor's degree or higher	142,487	34.0%
Population 35 to 44 years	403,558	12.4%
High School graduate or higher	355,278	88.0%
Bachelor's degree or higher	133,685	33.1%
Population 45 to 64 years	872,417	26.7%
High School graduate or higher	722,040	82.8%
Bachelor's degree or higher	254,072	29.1%
Population 65 years and over	703,925	21.6%
High School graduate or higher	416,268	59.1%

Item	*Total*	*Percent %*
Bachelor's degree or higher	127,866	18.2%

Source: Educational Attainment: Census Bureau 2021: ACS 5 – Year Estimates Subject Tables

The percentages of the age groups in the table are related to the total population, while the percentage of the two components accelerated to the corresponding age group. Of the groups with the highest educational level in relation with the population is the group with the age of 45 to 64 years with a participation of 26.7% of the total population, and then follows the group of 65 years or more with 21.6% in relation to the population. This shows that the population with the highest level of education are people aged 45 and over. In addition, the components of "high school graduates" (which includes participants with university credits or associate degrees), and those of "bachelor's degrees or more" continue to be the most relevant for the groups of 45 years or more in consolidated terms. For the "Baccalaureate Degree or more" component, the 25 to 34 age group and the 35 to 44 age group were older than in the 65 and older age group.

The labor world in Puerto Rico is extremely competitive since a large part of the workforce contains university credits, baccalaureate, or higher degrees. The concentrations of university studies by age group are presented below:

Population by Postsecondary Education Level

Item	Total	Percent %
Population 25 to 39 years	208,630	
Science and Engineering	61,216	29.3%
Science and Engineering related fields	33,440	16.0%
Business	53,793	25.8%
Education	24,972	12.0%
Arts, Humanities and Others	35,209	16.9%
Population 40 to 64 years	321,614	
Science and Engineering	81,440	25.3%

Item	Total	Percent %
Science and Engineering related fields	36,193	11.3%
Business	107,455	33.4%
Education	55,526	17.3%
Arts, Humanities and Others	41,000	12.7%
Population 65 years and over	127,866	
Science and Engineering	31,570	24.7%
Science and Engineering related fields	10,557	8.3%
Business	30,969	24.2%
Education	39,081	30.6%
Arts, Humanities and Others	15,689	12.3%

Source: Field of bachelor's degree for First Major: Census Bureau 2021: ACS 5 – Year Estimates Subject Tables

According to the data presented, the group with the best academic preparation is the group of 40 to 64 years, being the concentration in business. This concentration is related to the increase in business creation or establishment.

Companies will look for the workers who best fit or adapt, through contracts for services, according to the need of the company. Some examples of these are as follows:

1. Temporary jobs – They are hired for a brief period, which can be of several types.
2. Freelance jobs – These types of contracts are used to develop or conduct specific projects.
3. "Crowdsourcing" – It consists of outsourcing tasks that were originally performed by employees to a group of qualified people.

Below is a list of jobs in high demand through 2031, as follows (Department of Labor, 2021):

B. Strengths and Weaknesses of Workforce Development Activities. Provide an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the workforce development activities identified in (A).

Strengths and Weaknesses of Workforce Development Activities

Strategic Strengths & System Capacity

The State Workforce Development Board is currently focused on the following

- Data Interoperability: A major achievement this the integration of management systems across Titles I, II, and IV. This allows for Co-Enrollment, where a single participant can receive literacy support (Title II), technical training (Title I), and disability accommodations (Title IV) simultaneously without redundant paperwork.
- Sector Partnerships: The State Board has established formal "Industry Sector Partnerships" where employers (not just educators) design the curriculum for the island's training providers.
- Performance Monitoring: Moving from "descriptive" data to predictive analytics, allowing LWDAs to anticipate labor shortages in specific municipalities up to six months in advance.

Puerto Rico reflects a workforce system in a state of high-velocity transition. The following analysis evaluates the structural strengths that power this new "Reshoring" economy and the persistent weaknesses that the administration is working to mitigate.

Strategic Strengths

A primary strength is the unprecedented alignment between economic policy (Act 60, Reshoring) and human capital development.

- Integrated Data Ecosystem (PRIS): A major technological victory is the full interoperability of the *Puerto Rico Integrated System*. By linking Titles I, II, III, and IV, the island has eliminated siloed data, allowing for Co-Enrollment. This means a single participant can be tracked across multiple programs—receiving English literacy, vocational training, and disability support simultaneously without redundant intake processes.
- STEM Pipeline Assets: Puerto Rico remains a global leader in STEM readiness, ranking 39th in the IMD World Talent Ranking. The ability to

produce 21,000 STEM graduates annually is a top-tier asset that provides the "anchor" for high-value exports in Biopharma and Aerospace.

- Sector-Based Agile Training: The shift toward Registered Apprenticeships (RA) and Work-Based Training allows the system to respond to market shifts faster than traditional universities. By involving employers directly in curriculum design, the LWDAs ensure that training leads to specific, high-demand licenses (FAA, NABCEP, OSHA) rather than general degrees.
- Universal License Recognition: Law 102-2025 has turned a former bureaucratic weakness into a strength by making it easier for the diaspora to return. This reciprocity provides an immediate influx of ready-to-work professionals in critical trades.
- The integration of workforce and economic development efforts mandated by WIOA has been made easier by Act 171-2014, which moved the Workforce Development Program from the PRDOLHR to the PRDEDC. Among the organizations that have benefited from these initiatives are the Youth Development Program, the Federal Contracting Center, and the Commerce and Exports Corporation's One-Stop Entrepreneur Support Network.
- An integrated statewide LEA oversees the public education system and tries to facilitate data integration, policy and program implementation, and result measurement easier.
- The amount of the population served and the effect that transfer payments have on the financial circumstances of people who are enrolled in large-scale federal assistance programs (SNAP, HUD, subsidiary programs, and other benefit systems, among others), which enable an important percentage of people to obtain more education, training, and work experience.
- The availability of numerous training and service providers, as well as trained staff, especially to provide services to target populations, including people with disabilities, supports core programs.
- In areas such as Applied Research, Incubators Startups, Accelerator Startups, Substitution of Imports of Goods and Services to Entrepreneurship Projects, and PYMES created that respond to market changes and economic development, PRDEDC offers Technical and Financial Assistance.

- The way structural reform is set up. Here are a few of them:
    - The Labor Transformation and Flexibility Act, Act 4-2017. improves labor market competitiveness, raises the workforce participation rate, and stops the flow of residents to other labor markets by amending labor laws.
    - Act 8-2017 – The Government Act for the Management and Reform of Human Resources. permits the moving of employees within the Government in order to reduce attrition and save $100 million.
    - Act 13-2017 – Act on Enterprise Puerto Rico. establishes a nonprofit organization with the goals of advancing Puerto Rico's economic growth, luring in foreign direct investment, and providing incentives for technology investments made in partnership with the private sector.
    - Act 18-2018 – Improves the quality and efficiency of processing requests for all licenses, permits, inspections, complaints, certifications, consultations, and other authorizations that impact a business's ability to operate in Puerto Rico, including those issued by municipalities. This is achieved by streamlining, reforming, and speeding up the permitting process.
    - Act No. 47-2021 - The Minimum Wage Act, Act No. 47-2021, was passed by Puerto Rico, raising the minimum wage on the island from $7.25 to $8.50 beginning of January 1, 2022. Unless a required decree changes that rise, more hikes to the minimum wage will be implemented on July 1, 2023, when it will be raised to $9.50, and possibly on July 1, 2024, when it would reach $10.50.
- DEDC has created the following public rules or processes for the distribution of funds under WIOA and other federal programs in order to protect the state fund's financial integrity:

Public Rules or Processes for the Distribution of Funds under WIOA and other Federal Programs

DDEC-WIOA-11-20	Close-out reports under Financial Reports
DDEC-WIOA-10-20	Policies and methods for payroll based on budget are outlined in the Payroll Cost Allocation Policy.

DDEC-WIOA-11-20	Close-out reports under Financial Reports
DDEC-WIOA-09-20	Allocation of costs and fund reimbursement
DDEC-WIOA-06-20	TAA Defines the region that can be relocated.
DDEC-WIOA-05-20	Guidelines for evaluating requests for Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) training funding.
DDEC-WIOA-RR-01-20	COVID-19 Layoff Aversion Fund Policy
Waiver Policy	Operational Protocol for Executing the Business Capitalization Waiver

- The following are some initiatives to strengthen fiscal integration:
    - Every year, a financial oversight of the operations funded by state reserve funds is conducted.
    - The State Board assesses transactions involving State Reserve money over $500,000 through its Executive and Planning Committee. Furthermore, regardless of the total amount of money spent, a report on all projects developed with Reserve monies is required.
    - The DEDC publishes Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for the hiring of any kind of professional service in order to set up competitive processes for the development of the state-mandated activities. Permanent members of the DEDC staff with experience in the service to be contracted staff the Auction Committee. When developing an RFP process, the DEDC complies to the state OGP's rules and regulations.
    - The DEDC also complies with state regulations for the disbursement of public monies. Additionally, the Office of the Puerto Rico Comptroller may examine any contract.

Structural Weaknesses

- Despite the technological and policy gains, several friction points continue to challenge the system's overall effectiveness.
- The "Hollow Middle" Skill Gap: While the island excels at producing engineers (high-skill) and retail workers (foundational-skill), it still faces a 4 percent deficit in middle-skill technicians. The existing labor force is often over-educated in theory but under-certified in the specific

technical applications required for modern smart-grids and advanced manufacturing.

- Chronic Low Participation: While the unemployment rate is at a historic low, the Labor Force Participation Rate remains one of the lowest globally. This reflects a persistent disconnect where a large segment of the population remains outside the formal economy due to the informal sector allure or high dependency ratios in an aging population.
- The Skills Mismatch in Soft Skills: Employers consistently report that while technical KSAs (Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities) are improving, there is a systemic weakness in workplace readiness. Issues with punctuality, critical thinking, and bilingual professional communication are frequently cited as the primary reasons for early-career turnover.
- Regional Inequality: There is a notable "metropolitan gravity" where resources and high-paying knowledge export jobs (Act 60) are concentrated in the San Juan area. Rural LWDAs struggle with Brain Drain, as their best-trained workers migrate to the Metro area or the U.S. mainland for higher wages and more stable infrastructure.
- The Federal Cliff: A primary concern is the gradual reduction of federal stimulus and disaster recovery funds, which have artificially buoyed the economy since 2018.
- Energy Costs: High electricity costs and grid instability remain the most significant tax on local businesses, leading to a decline in electricity generation as more industrial and residential users shift to off-grid solar.
- Inventory Shifts: While exports remain strong, a decrease in private inventory investment suggests businesses are becoming more cautious with their stockpiles as interest rates remain elevated.

OPPORTUNITY

There are several actions that the programs address to participants to continue improving or broaden the services provided to stimulate entry into the job market. These are:

Partnership with economic development entities: Government entities responsible for economic development operate under the Department of Economic Development and Commerce. As a result, education on Puerto Rican incentives that encourage creation of jobs is one of the tactics used to avert layoffs. Law 120-2014, Law 135-2014, and the Incentive for Micro-

entrepreneurs are a few of these instances. Consequently, a component of our approach is enabling businesses to reduce payroll costs by utilizing state incentives provided by the DEDC. These are state resources, but WIOA participants can still use them.

Incumbent Workers training: Employee training lowers the possibility of current employees being laid off. Companies need lifelong learning to be competitive in a dynamic, global environment.

Research and Development: Local areas are permitted to contract labor market research and consulting services under the Rapid Response program. Expert research and data-driven choices will be promoted by these initiatives.

Improving technology transfer: In order to provide a more accurate monitoring picture of WIOA participants, the DEDC is developing a case management program (employers and employees). This technology will be able to document business actions more effectively.

Customized Training: Customized training is intended to give local communities the adaptability they need to make sure that instruction fits the particular requirements of employers, job seekers, and employer organizations. Employers or a group of employers may use customized instruction to fulfill specific needs, and it should be carried out with the employer's promise to hire every graduate of the program.

On-the-Job Training: An essential tool, on-the-job training (OJT) is intended to give participants the experience and training they need to execute their jobs to the best of their abilities. "On-the-job training" refers to education provided by an employer to a compensated participant while they are engaged in productive work in a job that:

- Offers information or abilities necessary for the complete and effective execution of the work.
- Reimburses the employer for the unusual expenses incurred in giving the training and any follow-up supervision related to it, up to a certain percentage of the participant's pay rate.
- Is limited in duration as appropriate for the job for which the participant is receiving training, considering the program's content, the participant's previous work experience, and the participant's service strategy, as necessary.

THREATS

1. **LACK OF SKILLS**

Employers face a variety of situations and challenges today, including those related to technology advancements, the effects of globalization, business practices, climate change, interpersonal interactions, group work, etc. It is anticipated that these issues will persist into the future. Many of them have encountered the reality that a large number of applicants and workers lack the fundamental abilities needed to deal with changing circumstances. The following are some of the competencies or capabilities that the company faces and finds challenging to hire:

1. **Critical Thinking** – It's a logical procedure that encourages issue resolution and entails introspection. It necessitates information analysis, comparison, interpretation, and evaluation. There are three stages to it: Problem definition (A), research and planning (B), and result or finding evaluation (C).
2. **Creative Thinking** – It serves as the foundation for creativity. It entails having the capacity to apply learned information to produce novel solutions.
3. **Information Management** – Capabilities related to managing data include the following:
    a. Data access and search in a digital world
    b. Examine and choose data using reliability and validity criteria.
    c. Organize and classify information
    d. Combine data to create fresh concepts
4. **Communication** – It's critical to acquire the abilities necessary for exchange and collaboration in the digital world. It needs to have a defined goal and intended audience in order to be effective.
5. **Use of Technology** – Comprises using computer programs, hardware, online browsing, and peripherals to do out tasks. The ability consists of:
    a. The application of hardware and operating systems.
    b. Putting fundamental IT security guidelines into practice.
    c. Fixing problems with networking, hardware, and programming.
    d. Mastery of fundamental programs.

e. Understanding and utilizing online communication tools.

6. The ability of firms to adjust to ongoing shifts in the economy.
7. Data management to aid in making decisions.

Certain social indicators pose difficulties, and the government implements several ways to address these social problems, including poverty, unemployment, and veteran status. This is a synopsis of it.

1. **POVERTY**

Poverty can be defined as scarcity or lack of what is necessary to live. It limits people's participation in new job opportunities and, therefore, affects economic development and growth. According to data published in the 2021 Census, Puerto Rico's poverty level was as follows:

Puerto Rico's Poverty Levels as of 2021:

Item	***Total***	***Below Poverty Level***	***% Poverty Level***
Population	3,283,051	1,400,997	42.7%
Population 18 to 64 years	1,993,374	798,789	40.1%
Population 65 years and over	696,377	268,215	38.5%
Employment Status			
Labor Force 16 years and over	1,234,952	346,786	28.1%
Employed	1,055,058	230,365	21.8%
Unemployed	179,894	116,421	64.7%

Source: Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months: Census Bureau 2021: DTE 5 – Year Estimates Subject Tables

An examination of the population revealed that 42.7% of the general population fell below the poverty level. The age group of 18–64 years has the most significant impact, and this demographic's economic status influences a country's overall development. Within the labor force aged 16 and over, 28.1% fall below poverty level. Notably, the unemployed segment exhibits a higher poverty rate (64.7%) than other groups.

It is important to note that the necessary activities must be provided to minimize the impact of poverty. This will allow for better job opportunities and encourage the accumulation of wealth, which will result in improved decision-making for the well-being of all.

2. WORK INCAPACITY

Incapacity for work can be defined as the inability of a worker to perform the normal functions of his job. This labor barrier presents an ongoing challenge to incorporating participants into the labor market. The population by age for 2021 is as follows:

Population by Age for 2021:

Age	*Total*	*With Disability*	*Percent (%)*
Under 5 years	122,314	1,457	1.2%
5 to 17 years	474,265	48,089	10.1%
18 to 34 years	726,575	62,759	8.6%
35 to 64 years	1,266,285	269,407	21.3%
65 to 74 years	376,579	135,568	36.0%
75 years and over	319,798	196,089	61.3%

Source: Disability Characteristics: Census Bureau 2021: DTE 5 – Year Estimates Subject Tables

According to the data, the age group of 35–64 years has the highest number of people with disabilities, representing 21.3% of the total number of people in the group. This was followed by the group aged 75 years or older with 61% of the group, followed by the group aged 65 to 74 years with 36% disability. If we combine these groups, we obtain a representation of 601,064 people with disabilities.

Despite presenting disability in general terms, data are presented according to the type of disability or work barriers. These are:

Type of Disability or Work Barriers:

Disability Type	*Total*	*Percent (%)*
With a hearing difficulty	147,422	9.6%

Disability Type	*Total*	*Percent (%)*
With vision difficulty	218,097	14.2%
With a cognitive difficulty	303,088	19.7%
With an ambulatory difficulty	391,862	25.4%
With a self-care difficulty	170,510	11.1%
With an independent living difficulty	309,235	20.1%
Total	1,540,214	100%

Source: Disability Type by Detailed Age: Census Bureau 2021: DTE 5 – Year Estimates Subject Tables

If we analyze the information on the types of disability, ambulatory difficulty, difficulty in living independently, and cognitive difficulty were the ones with the greatest impact at 25.4%, 20.1%, and 19.7%, respectively. This combination represented 65.2% of the total number of people with disabilities.

3. VETERANS

Veterans are an important part of a country's economic development. Below is the information related to this important sector for economic development.

Veterans' Economic Development:

Item	*Total*	*Percent (%)*
Population	71,064	
Age		
18 to 34 years	3,418	4.8%
35 to 54 years	9,254	13.0%
55 to 64 years	12,544	17.7%
65 to 74 years	18,676	26.3%
75 years and over	27,172	38.2%
Disability Status		
18 years and over	70,461	

Item	*Total*	*Percent (%)*
With any disability	32,054	45.5%

Source: Veteran Status: Census Bureau 2021: DTE 5 – Year Estimates Subject Tables

The number of veterans increased as the age of the groups increased, with the largest being 75 years or older, with 38.2% of the total veterans participating in Puerto Rico (71,064). Veterans with disabilities comprised 45.5% of those aged 18 and older.

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

Economic development is a challenge in which governments plan, implement, and evaluate the activities associated with economic sustainability. This planning is ongoing as they must consider exogenous changes, specifically those that are not controllable. Some of the variables to be considered by the government in terms of the effect of the environment on economic development and sustainability are as follows:

1. Changes in technology.
2. International relations or conflicts.
3. Changes in the Vision of Public Policy.
4. Changes in the environment.
5. International economic treaties.
6. Ways or processes for doing business.
7. Availability and capacity of production factors.
8. Management of the inflation rate.
9. Management of migratory effects.
10. Stability in production costs.

Considering these situations, the government of the day analyzes the activities to be implemented to achieve development and economic sustainability, where the quality of life of society and accumulation of wealth improve. The government introduced several services, efforts, and activities aimed at enhancing and sustaining economic development. These include:

1. Guidance for establishing or expanding business:

a. Preparation and drafting of the business plan.

b. Guidance on financing options available at the state and federal levels.

c. Incentives for new businesses or existing businesses.

2. The Voluntary Chain Program is a group of independent businesses operating under a brand or name, which comes together with the purpose of realizing a common market and strengthening competitiveness, where each participant continues to own their own business. Among the benefits of this incentive are the following:

    a. This exempts the chain from paying municipal patents to the volume of sales generated through the program.

    b. It exempts the chain from paying tax on inventory or movable property, avoiding double taxation because it is paid only as an individual business.

    c. It provides the opportunity to make purchases to obtain better prices, better payment terms, minimization of inventory costs, and maximization of profits.

    d. Reduction of operational costs.

    e. It maintains a legal personality.

    f. It allows for the establishment of a common brand.

3. Certification is a local supplier for cruise ships, whose purpose is to promote the acquisition of provisions and services from Puerto Rican hands. Every local distributor or manufacturer must operate in Puerto Rico and register with the Department of Treasury.

4. Federal grant from the Economic Development Administration (EDA), whose main purpose is to assist Puerto Rico in economic recovery. The initiatives under this grant are intended to impact Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). The following are the initiatives covered by this grant:

    a. Entrepreneurship Centers where it allows the development and expansion of the business. This collaborative space integrates co-working spaces through training services, incentives, support programs, and collaborators in the same place. Some of the services offered in these centers are as follows:

        i. Creative lab with capacity for 12 people

ii. Internet service up to 50 mbps

iii. Use of photocopiers

iv. Conference room for up to 8 people

v. Multipurpose room with capacity for 50 people

vi. Audiovisual equipment for presentations

vii. Business Advisory Services

b. Business training, in which workshops are offered to SMEs, focuses on development, strengthening, and local and international expansion.

c. The Puerto Rico Innova Program, in partnership with the UPR Mayagüez Campus, seeks to empower local entrepreneurs to forge an entrepreneurial vision that allows them to generate innovative ideas that promote business projects with a high potential for expansion and development.

d. High-tech Business Accelerator seeks to boost twelve companies that are at an early stage to accelerate their growth and adequately prepare to target investors with a proven business idea.

5. The Puerto Rico Exports Program seeks to promote the export of products and services by local companies to become a continuous and permanent activity. This program consists of four phases:

    a. Diagnostics: Determines the level of a company's export capacity.

    b. Export plan development: essential tool for exporting products and services. In addition, it should be part of the company's business plan.

    c. Execution of the export plan: This offers several tools aimed at executing the export plan, including, among other training, trade missions (individual, sectoral, multisectoral, or reversed). They can be either face-to-face or virtual.

    d. Follow-up: Individualized advice on the next steps led by international trade specialists.

6. The Expo Partner Program is a mentoring program that provides access to trained human capital for international trade. The company will receive assistance in the following areas:
    a. Investigation of operational strengths and weaknesses.
    b. Preparation of an export plan.
    c. Implementation assistance
    d. Information on opportunities in foreign markets of interest.
7. Export incentives of up to 10,000 bring companies into the international markets. Services with this incentive, among others, are as follows.
    a. Expenses related to travel, business meetings, and/or participation in international events.
    b. Marketing campaign
    c. Business Intelligence Services
    d. Website translation
    e. Development of an "E-Commerce" Platform.
8. The Federal Contracting Center focused on assisting local businesses in selling their products and services to the federal government.
9. The Artisan Development Program aims to provide artisans with technical assistance for their operations and economic development. Some of these are:
    a. Assistance in the promotion, marketing, distribution, and sale of handicraft products.
    b. It organizes centers where artisans can produce, exhibit, and distribute their products.
    c. It encourages artistic work both inside and outside of Puerto Rico.

Its strategic goals are as follows:

1. Creation of a Digital Platform for Service for Artisans.
2. This stimulates the creation of self-managed jobs, micro-enterprise systems, and community enterprises in the artisanal field.
3. Development of a training program for artisanal promoters.

4. Creative Industries: These are the sectors of organized activity whose main objectives are production or reproduction, promotion, dissemination, and/or marketing of goods, services, and activities of cultural, artistic, and/or heritage content. The government encourages the creation, expansion, and development of such businesses. Some activities in this classification are advertising, architecture, arts, sculpture, design, audiovisual production, performing arts, research and development, and technological innovation. In Puerto Rico, the main industries are pharmaceuticals, consumer electronics, textiles, food, and tourism, among others. The average annual salaries of some creative occupations from 2016 to 2020 were as follows:

Average Annual Salaries of Some Creative Occupations from 2016 to 2020:

Occupation	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Computer Programmers	$46,750	$48,260	$46,280	$46,850	$47,400
Architects, except landscape architects	$53,090	$50,450	$50,070	$50,500	$52,990
Artists, painters, sculptors, illustrators	-	$32,720	$32,130	$32,610	$34,280
Graphic designers	$26,660	$24,560	$27,540	$30,300	$33,950
Editors	$42,680	$39,200	$40,900	$41,310	$46,110

Source: Puerto Rico Institute of Statistics (infogram.com/industrias-creativas-2020-1h7g6k0vro11o2o)

11. SMEs – This sector is the main driver of economic development and sustainability. The government of Puerto Rico considers this sector one of the most sensitive components in terms of its contribution and relevance to the economic sector. The incentives for this program are as follows:

    a. Innovative SMEs: This program offers the opportunity to obtain the capital they need up to a maximum of $100,000 to start or

scale their operations, with a view to commercialize and export their innovations.

b. Special Incentive for Foreign Transportation: Its purpose is to stimulate the growth of local companies' exports. It provides a refund of 20% of the cost of transporting products either by sea or by air abroad, up to approximately $ 2,000 per shipment. The maximum amount awarded to each company is 50,000. The incentive contract has a duration of one year and can be requested only on three occasions.

c. Special Incentive for Marketing Activities: Intended to stimulate the marketing of products and services of local businesses. This initiative offers reimbursement of up to 50% of the expenses incurred for these purposes. Up to a maximum of 50,000 overseas marketing strategies.

d. Program for the generation and retention of jobs: Establish a program of tax incentives to enable development and commercial expansion and the creation of new jobs. These incentives apply to newly created and expanding SMEs that incur net operating losses. The benefits received by SMEs are as follows:

    i. Extension of 50% of the payment of premiums from the State Insurance Fund with operational or expanding losses.

    ii. The contributions to preferential income over the three years are 5%, 10%, and 15%, respectively.

    iii. Extension of 50% in contribution to movable and/or immovable properties.

    iv. 50% of payments for municipal patents.

    v. Expedited process for evaluation and permission.

    vi. Payment of a staggered Christmas bonus.

e. Certification of SMEs to do business with the government: This certification provides the opportunity for the business to actively participate in the government procurement market.

The business world is dynamic, affecting the way we operate, both locally and internationally. Therefore, the government issues laws or resolutions to adjust atmospheric conditions in commercial terms to ensure the continuity of

Puerto Rico's economic development. Some measures signed by the government over time to address these situations and maintain economic development are as follows:

1. Law 166-1995, as amended, is known as the "Artisanal Development Program Law".
2. Law 117-2001, as amended, is known as the "Agricultural Loan and Loan Guarantee Act."
3. Law 16-2002, as amended, ordered banks to establish a Special Fund for emergency loans to small businesses in the tourism sector in Puerto Rico.
4. Act No. 152-2002, as amended, is known as the "Act to Create the Vieques-Culebra Special Economic Development Zone."
5. Law 194-2003, as amended, is known as the "Law for the Technological Development of Microentrepreneurs, Small and Medium Traders."
6. Law 389-2004, as amended, established the Financial Opportunities Program for Young Entrepreneurs attached to the bank.
7. Law 457-2004, as amended, creates the public fund in trust to be known as "Trust for the Financing of Companies in Special Communities," with independent legal personality, non-profit, irrevocable, and in perpetuity, attached to the bank.
8. Law 475-2004, as amended, is known as the "Law for the Development of Establishments for the Elderly in the Special Communities of Puerto Rico."
9. Law 73-2008, as amended, is known as the "Law of Economic Incentives for the Development of Puerto Rico."
10. Law 197-2009, which orders the bank to prioritize the consideration of loans requested by small and medium-sized enterprises for the manufacture, sale, and installation of solar equipment, windmills, and/or any other system used to generate electricity from renewable energy sources.
11. Law 27-2010, which provides special importance to loans requested by private companies to develop new products made with recyclable materials as raw materials for their manufacture.
12. Law 32-2010, as amended, is known as the "Law of the Agroeconomic Corridor of the Central Region of Puerto Rico."

13. Law 39-2010, as amended, is known as the "Law of the Corridor for the Socioeconomic Development of the Mountain."
14. Law 120-2014, as amended, is known as "Law of Incentives for the Generation and Retention of Jobs in SMEs."
15. Law 135-2014, as amended, is known as the "Law on Incentives and Financing for Young Entrepreneurs."

These laws, signed by the government, demonstrate the importance and relevance of this component in Puerto Rico's development and economic sustainability.

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS SERVICES

Puerto Rico's government promotes economic development through programs that impact many economic sectors and business activities.

Program Services offered by Puerto Rico's Government:

Agency:	Business Development Office (BDO) Workforce Development Program (WDP) Assistant Secretary of Permit Management (ASPM)
Program:	SMEs, Innovative SMEs
Population served:	Sectors such as advanced manufacturing, aerospace, bioeconomy (pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, and medical devices), environmental sciences, energy, and technology, whose businesses are aimed at serving as critical suppliers, replacing imports, or exporting goods or services.
Program Description:	Provides the opportunity to obtain the capital they need to start or scale their operations, with a view to commercializing and exporting their innovations internationally.
Authority:	Economic Incentives Fund of the Incentives Code Act 60-2019. (EIF-ICA 60-2019)

Agency:	DEDC
Program:	Air Cargo Logistics Community (ACLC)
Population served:	The new Air Cargo Community of Puerto Rico will include airlines, airports, medical and pharmaceutical device manufacturers, ground operators, and carriers.
Program Description:	Make Puerto Rico the most important air cargo operations center in the Americas. The community will have three main objectives: 1. Improve the overall quality of air transportation operations in Puerto Rico through the adoption of best practices and a standardized way of operating and representing the community to lawmakers and authorities, 2. Raise international awareness of Puerto Rico's air transportation capabilities, and 3. Leverage Puerto Rico's expertise in the life sciences field.

Agency:	DEDC
Program:	Club JOVEM (CJ YDP) (Young entrepreneurs) (Youth Development Program)
Population served:	Youth from public and private academic institutions.

Agency:	DEDC
Program Description:	Promote an entrepreneurial lifestyle and a sense of leadership in youth through educational workshops.
Authority:	DEDC

Agency:	DEDC, along with the Trade and Export Company and the Economic Development Bank for Puerto Rico,
Program:	Incentives and Financing for Young Entrepreneurs (Microentrepreneurs)
Population served:	Youth from 16 to 35 years old
Program Description:	Provides certain tax exemptions. Among the exemptions are the income tax exemption for youth from 16 to 35 years old on the first $40,000 of gross income generated from wages, services rendered, and/or self-employment, as well as the total exemption of income tax, municipal patent, and personal property tax on New Businesses established by youth from 16 to 35 years old on the first $500,000 of gross income generated during the first three years of operation.
Authority:	Law 135-2014 (now in Law 60 Incentives Code (L135-2014/L60-ICIFL-YE) Incentives and Financing Law for Young Entrepreneurs.

Agency:	DEDC
Program:	Industries
Population served:	Biotechnology, medical devices, pharmaceuticals, agroecology, aerospace, electronics, information technology, engineering, construction, and garment manufacturing industries. Promoting a diverse manufacturing economy.
Program Description:	Promote a diverse manufacturing economy by fostering innovation, supporting entrepreneurship, strengthening supply chains, fostering collaboration, and investing in workforce development
Authority:	Department of Economic Development and Commerce of Puerto Rico (DEDC)

Agency:	DEDC
Program:	Law to Incentivize the Relocation of Individual Investors to Puerto Rico
Population served:	Investors
Program Description:	The purpose of this measure is to encourage individuals who have not been residents of Puerto Rico for at least the last fifteen years before the approval of this Law, and who maintain investments in or outside of the US, to establish their residence and invest in Puerto Rico. This law fully exempts these individuals from paying taxes in Puerto Rico on passive income derived from their investments.

Agency:	DEDC
Authority:	Act 22 of the year 2012.

Agency:	DEDC
Program:	Puerto Rico Incentives Code (PRIC)
Population served:	Residents of the Island
Program Description:	Consolidate dozens of existing decrees, incentives, subsidies, refunds, or contributory or financial benefits. The incentives include laws for exports, manufacturing, agriculture, industries, entrepreneurship, and so on.
Authority:	Act 60 - 2019

Agency:	DEDC
Program:	Unique Service Center (CUS)
Population served:	Entrepreneurs and individuals interested in establishing a business.
Program Description:	It was created with the objective of promoting entrepreneurship and local economic activity. The CUS is a customer service area that offers individualized guidance on the services and incentives available within the DEDC to entrepreneurs and those interested in establishing a business.
Authority:	DEDC

Agency:	DEDC
Program:	Youth Development Program (PDJ)
Population served:	Youth between the ages of 13 to 29 years
Program Description:	Enrich knowledge, experiences, and foster an entrepreneurial mindset. The PDJ aims to boost socioeconomic development and the overall well-being of youth. The goal is to create new opportunities for young people, targeting the economic revitalization of Puerto Rico.
Authority:	DEDC

Agency:	DEDC
Program:	21st Century TechForce Puerto Rico
Population served:	Digital workers, university students.
Program Description:	The objective of this initiative is to bridge the gap between workforce capabilities, jobs, and opportunities in the technology industries such as cybersecurity, engineering, computer science, and other digital credentials. It also aims to provide a flexible and expedited way for individuals to enhance their skills with 21st-century tools, without the time commitment of obtaining a university degree. This initiative is focused on developing a world-class platform for short-term training courses in technology areas.

Agency:	DEDC
Authority:	DEDC

Agency:	DEDC
Program:	PRopósito
Population served:	Private enterprises, non-profit organizations, business associations, and government entities.
Program Description:	An integrated and collaborative project for our island that takes into consideration lessons learned from the past and is implemented in partnership with the private sector, non-profit organizations, business associations, and government entities. It is a Strategic Framework with a vision to become the Preferred Island in the world. The framework identifies five pillars to achieve this vision, including local and global integration, entrepreneurship, competitive citizens, advanced infrastructure, and social well-being.
Authority:	DEDC

Agency:	
Program:	Creative Industries
Population served:	Self-employed entities and individuals
Program Description:	Its purpose is to provide economic support. This incentive is focused on aiding those who are not eligible under other incentives provided by

Agency:	
	the Government of Puerto Rico or the U.S. CARES Act.
Authority:	Act 173-2014

Agency:	Roosevelt Roads Redevelopment Authority (RRRA)
Program:	Roosevelt Roads Redevelopment (RRR)
Population served:	People of Puerto Rico
Program Description:	The RRR Project aims to enhance economic and social growth in the eastern region of Puerto Rico. In 2013, the Local Redevelopment Authority for Roosevelt Roads acquired the title to 3,400 acres for the redevelopment of the former U.S. Navy base. The Master Plan was reorganized into 9 development zones under the Master Plan Development Zones 2014. The primary objective is to identify developers to create jobs and stimulate economic growth in Ceiba, Naguabo, and the eastern region of Puerto Rico.
Authority:	RRRA

Agency:	State Office of Energy Public Policy (SOEPP)
Program:	Energy Public Policy Law of Puerto Rico (EPPLPR)
Population served:	People of Puerto Rico
Program Description:	Create parameters that will guide a resilient, dependable, and robust

Agency:	State Office of Energy Public Policy (SOEPP)
	energy system, with fair and reasonable rates for all classes of consumers, enable the energy service user to produce and participate in energy generation, facilitate the interconnection of distributed generation and microgrids, and disaggregate and transform the electrical system into an open one.
Authority:	Law Number 17 of the year 2019.

Public/private partnerships allow the government, in collaboration with the private sector, to maximize its resources and offer numerous services to address situations related to economic development such as the labor market. Some of these are as follows:

Agency:	BDO
Program:	InvestPR
Population served:	Entrepreneurs, Investors, Shareholders
Program Description:	To bring new capital investments and businesses to Puerto Rico and transform it into a premier business destination.
Authority:	InvestPR is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting economic development and attracting investments to Puerto Rico.

Other programs:

Agency:	Department of Homeland Security (DHS) U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)
Program:	EB-5 Visa

Agency:	Department of Homeland Security (DHS) U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)
Population served:	Investors (and their spouses and unmarried children under 21 years old)
Program Description:	The EB-5 program promotes direct investment from foreign citizens. In exchange, it offers permanent residency to the investor, their spouse, and their unmarried children under 21 years old.
Authority:	US Congress

Agency:	U.S. Department of the Treasury and Internal Revenue Service (IRS)
Program:	Government of Puerto Rico
Population served:	Opportunity Zones (OZ)
Program Description:	These OZ were created to promote local, national, and international investment, create jobs, and generate economic development in disadvantaged communities.
Authority:	Federal Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. On July 1, 2019, Law 21 ("Law for the Development of Puerto Rico Economic Development Opportunity Zones") was enacted.

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

Technical Education (Perkins), Community Services Block Grant, Indian and Native American programs, HUD Employment and Training programs, Job Corps, Local Veterans' Employment Representatives and Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program, National Farmworker Jobs program, Senior Community

Service Employment program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) (unless the Governor determines TANF will not be a required partner), Trade Adjustment Assistance programs, Unemployment Compensation programs, and YouthBuild.

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

B. STATE STRATEGIC VISION AND GOALS

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

1. VISION

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

2. GOALS

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

(A) Goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce, including preparing youth and individuals with barriers to employment[8] and other populations.[9]

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

[8] Individuals with barriers to employment include displaced homemakers; low-income individuals; Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians; individuals with disabilities, including youth who are individuals with disabilities; older individuals; ex-offenders; homeless individuals, or homeless children and youths; youth who are in or have aged out of the foster care system; individuals who are English language learners, individuals who have low levels of literacy, and individuals facing substantial cultural barriers; eligible migrant and seasonal farmworkers (as defined at section 167(i) of WIOA and Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 35-14); individuals within 2 years of exhausting lifetime eligibility under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program; single parents (including single pregnant women); and long-term unemployed individuals.

[9] Veterans, unemployed workers, and youth and any other populations identified by the State.

3. PERFORMANCE GOALS

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

4. ASSESSMENT

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

1. **<u>Vision</u>. Describe the State's strategic vision of its workforce development system.**

State Strategic Vision & Goals

The economic and workforce vision of Governor Jenniffer González-Colón is a strategic pivot toward industrial self-sufficiency, fiscal modernization, and the aggressive "reshoring" of American manufacturing. Stepping into 2025 and moving through 2026, this administration has moved away from the reactive posture of the post-Maria era, replacing it with a proactive "Puerto Rico First" agenda that frames the island as a critical asset for U.S. national and economic security.

The Pillar of Industrial Reshoring

At the heart of the Governor's vision is the conviction that Puerto Rico should serve as the primary alternative to foreign manufacturing hubs. By leveraging the "*Made in Puerto Rico is Made in the USA*" initiative, this administration is actively courting pharmaceutical and medical device giants to repatriate operations from China and India. This is supported by a sweeping deregulation agenda—the "IDEA" initiative—designed to dismantle the bureaucratic bottlenecks in the permitting process that have historically stifled capital investment. The goal is to transform the island into a frictionless environment for high-tech production.

A Market-Driven Workforce Evolution

To fuel this industrial engine, the Governor's workforce policy has shifted from general education toward specialized, demand-driven training. Under her guidance, WIOA funds and state resources are being funneled into Reshoring Workforce Training Funds. This strategy prioritizes short-term, high-impact certifications in advanced manufacturing, aerospace, and cybersecurity over traditional four-year degrees.

Central to this human capital strategy is the elevation of bilingualism as a strategic competitive advantage. The administration views a dual-language workforce not just as a cultural trait, but as a professional prerequisite for Puerto Rico to dominate the global export services market (Act 60). Furthermore, her vision for "Educational Decentralization" aims to break the centralized Department of Education, giving local regions the autonomy to tailor their curricula to the specific industrial needs of their municipalities, such as AgTech in the south or Aerospace in the west.

Fiscal Relief and Labor Participation

Recognizing that a low Labor Force Participation Rate is the island's silent crisis, Governor González-Colón's vision includes a significant Fiscal Reform aimed at the middle class. By doubling dependent deductions and lowering individual income tax rates, the policy seeks to make formal employment more financially attractive than the informal economy. This is paired with "The Able Account" initiatives and enhanced childcare support, designed to remove the structural barriers that keep nearly 55 percent of the working-age population on the sidelines.

The Energy and Infrastructure Foundation

Finally, the Governor acknowledges that no workforce or industrial plan can succeed without a stable foundation. Her vision treats the energy grid as a national security priority. By maintaining an emergency declaration for the electrical system and fast-tracking baseload generation projects, she aims to lower the "cost of doing business" to competitive levels.

In summary, the González-Colón administration is attempting to engineer a virtuous cycle: lowering the cost of living through tax cuts and stable energy to retain talent, while simultaneously streamlining the business environment to attract the very industries that will employ that talent. It is a vision of Puerto Rico as a high-tech, bilingual, and fiscally lean jurisdiction that serves as the "Silicon Island" of the Caribbean.

Appendix 1: Performance Goals for the Core Programs

Each state submitting a Unified or Combined State Plan must identify the 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 an 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.

Include the state's expected levels of performance related to the performance accountability indicators based on the primary indicators of performance described in Section 116(b)(2)(A) of the WIOA.

Under section 116(b)(2)(A) of the WIOA, there are six primary performance indicators for its core programs. Performance measures were calculated using the following methodology:

- **Rate of Employment in the 2nd Quarter Post-Exit:** This metric assesses the proportion of individuals who secured non-subsidized jobs in the second quarter following their departure from the program. For young participants, this measure also included those engaged in educational or vocational training within the same time limit.
- **Rate of Employment in the 4th Quarter Post-Exit:** This indicator assesses the proportion of individuals who have found non-subsidized employment in the fourth quarter after leaving the program. The youth demographics include those involved in educational or vocational activities during that quarter.
- **Median Income in the 2nd Quarter Post-Exit:** This refers to the median income earned by individuals who have found non-subsidized employment in the second quarter after leaving the program.
- **Credential Achievement:** This metric indicates the proportion of participants who have either earned recognized tertiary education credentials or completed their high school education (or an equivalent) either while enrolled in the program or within a year of exiting it.
- **Documented Skill Advancements:** This measures the proportion of participants who, within a program year, are enrolled in educational or vocational training aimed at achieving recognized post-secondary credentials or employment, and have made verifiable gains in academic, technical, or occupational skills.

- **Employer Engagement Effectiveness:** This evaluates the efficacy of Puerto Rico's workforce system in meeting employer needs. It does so by examining metrics such as employee retention rates, the extent of employer engagement, and the rate of repeat business by employers.

The tables below provide the anticipated levels of performance for Title I, II, III, and IV programs.

Levels of Performance for Title I, II, III, and IV Programs:

Adult Program Performance Indicators				
Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	56.00%	59	56.50%	59.5
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	51.60%	62	52.10%	62.5
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$3,500.00	$3,900.00	$3,800.00	$4,000.00
Credential Attainment Rate	54.00%	64.5	54.50%	65
Measurable Skill Gains	55.50%	70.5	56.00%	71
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable 1	Not Applicable 1	Not Applicable 1	Not Applicable 1
Dislocated Program				

Adult Program Performance Indicators				
Performance Indicators				
Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	60.00%	60	60.50%	60.5
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	60.00%	62	60.50%	62.5
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$3,600.00	$3,900.00	$3,900.00	$4,000.00
Credential Attainment Rate	64.00%	70.5	66.00%	71
Measurable Skill Gains	46.00%	71	47.00%	71.5
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable 1	Not Applicable 1	Not Applicable 1	Not Applicable 1
Youth Program Performance Indicators				
Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level

Adult Program Performance Indicators				
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	52.00%	60	52.50%	60.5
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	52.20%	58	52.70%	58.5
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$2,500.00	$2,800.00	$2,600.00	$2,900.00
Credential Attainment Rate	35.50%	40	39.50%	40.5
Measurable Skill Gains	42.00%	70	44.00%	71.5
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable 1	Not Applicable 1	Not Applicable 1	Not Applicable 1
Adult Education and Literacy Program Performance Indicators				
Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second	35.70%	35.70%	35.80%	35.80%

Adult Program Performance Indicators				
Quarter After Exit)				
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	34.00%	40.00%	34.50%	40.30%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	3,625	3,625	3,630	3,626
Credential Attainment Rate	35.00%	42.00%	36.00%	42.30%
Measurable Skill Gains	45.80%	60.00%	46.90%	60.30%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable 1	Not Applicable 1	Not Applicable 1	Not Applicable 1
Wagner Peyser Program Performance Indicators				
Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	40.0		40.0	
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	40.0		40.0	

Adult Program Performance Indicators				
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	3,000		3,200	
Credential Attainment Rate	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Measurable Skill Gains	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable 1	Not Applicable 1	Not Applicable 1	Not Applicable 1

Vocational Rehabilitation Program Performance Indicators				
Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	30.0	43.0	30.5	43.5
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	35.0	43.3	35.5	45.0
Median Earnings (Second	4,500.00	4,825.00	4,500.50	4,850.00

Vocational Rehabilitation Program Performance Indicators				
Quarter After Exit)				
Credential Attainment Rate	25.0	33.1	25.5	35.1
Measurable Skill Gains	50.0	50.0	50.5	50.5
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable 1	Not Applicable 1	Not Applicable 1	Not Applicable 1

[1] For Title I Youth programs, employment, education, or training.

[2] For Title I Youth programs, employment, education, or training.

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

[2] Veterans, unemployed workers, and youth and any other populations identified by the State.

[3] For Title I Youth programs, employment, education, or training.

[4] For Title I Youth programs, employment, education, or training.

(4) Assessment.**4.** Describe how the State will assess the overall effectiveness of the workforce development system in the State in relation to the strategic

vision and goals stated above in sections (b)(1), (2), and (3) and how it will use the results of this assessment, which may include evaluation findings, and other feedback to make continuous or quality improvements.

- Puerto Rico's assessment of its workforce development system effectiveness will evolve from purely a compliance-based model to a data-driven, predictive framework. Assessment will be centered on how well the workforce system bridges the middle-skill gap while driving the Governor's Reshoring Strategy.
- The Commonwealth will continue to track six federal primary indicators of performance to track the return on investment for federal funding and measure success.
- Beyond federal performance metrics, Puerto Rico will consider reviewing the following supplemental data to track:
- Wage Growth Velocity: Measuring the rate of pay increases over the first 24 months, rather than just the median earnings at Quarter 2.
- Benefits Attainment Rate: Tracking the percentage of placements that include health insurance, retirement plans, and paid leave—critical for long-term economic independence.
- Stackable Credential Completion: Tracking how many individuals return to the system to "stack" a second or third certification (e.g., an electrician getting a solar PV certification), indicating a move toward higher-tier specialization.
- Informal-to-Formal Transition: Data tracking the number of workers who previously reported zero income but are now appearing in the PRIS (Puerto Rico Integrated System) with reported wages.
- Time-to-Fill for Priority Sectors**:** Measuring how many days it takes to fill a vacancy in Aerospace or Biopharma compared to the island-wide average.
- Co-Enrollment Intensity**:** The percentage of participants receiving services from more than one WIOA Title (e.g., Title I training + Title II English literacy). High co-enrollment suggests a truly "integrated" system.
- The "Participation Gap" by Region: Comparing the Labor Force Participation Rate of a specific LWDA against its neighbors to identify "hidden" pockets of disconnected workers.

- Return on Investment (ROI) by Provider: Analyzing the per-participant cost versus the long-term tax revenue generated by their subsequent employment.
- Puerto Rico will also consider assessing effectiveness by measuring how its activities impact the specific strengths and weaknesses identified in workforce system and summarized in the chart below.

Strategic Goal	Effectiveness Metric	Target Outcome
Close Middle-Skill Gap	Credential Attainment in Technical Trades	Move 4% of the labor force into certified technical roles.
Increase Labor Participation	Co-Enrollment Rate (Titles I-IV)	Increase participation from ~45% toward 48% by reducing barriers.
Reverse Brain Drain	Retention Rate of STEM Graduates	Measure the percentage of UPRM graduates placed in local Reshoring jobs.

C. STATE STRATEGY

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

1. DESCRIBE THE STRATEGIES THE STATE WILL IMPLEMENT, INCLUDING INDUSTRY OR SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS RELATED TO IN-DEMAND INDUSTRY SECTORS AND OCCUPATIONS AND CAREER PATHWAYS, AS REQUIRED BY WIOA SECTION 101(D)(3)(B), (D). "CAREER PATHWAY" IS DEFINED AT WIOA SECTION 3(7) AND INCLUDES REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP. "IN-DEMAND INDUSTRY SECTOR OR OCCUPATION" IS DEFINED AT WIOA SECTION 3(23)

2. DESCRIBE THE STRATEGIES THE STATE WILL USE TO ALIGN THE CORE PROGRAMS, ANY COMBINED STATE PLAN PARTNER PROGRAMS INCLUDED IN THIS PLAN, REQUIRED AND OPTIONAL ONE-STOP PARTNER PROGRAMS, AND ANY OTHER RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO THE STATE TO ACHIEVE FULLY INTEGRATED CUSTOMER SERVICES CONSISTENT WITH THE STRATEGIC VISION AND GOALS DESCRIBED ABOVE. ALSO DESCRIBE STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES IN REGARD TO WEAKNESSES IDENTIFIED IN SECTION II(A)(2)

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

State Strategy Implementation/Board Functions

Since the inauguration of Governor González-Colón in January 2025, Puerto Rico has entered a pivotal era of workforce revitalization. While the State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) completes its final confirmation phase, it has already moved aggressively to modernize the Island's labor pipeline. The Board's goal is positioning Puerto Rico as a premier destination for global investment and local talent cultivation.

Pillar I: Strategic Planning & System Integration

The Board is currently architecting the 4-Year State Unified Plan Modification, moving beyond administrative requirements to create a roadmap for total system integration.

- Operational Synergy: Through the implementation of WIOA and Wagner-Peyser (W-P) co-enrollment policies, the Board is eliminating silos.
- Institutional Governance: By refining the roles of One-Stop Operators and instituting rigorous Local Board re-certification, the Board is ensuring that every level of the workforce system is held to a standard of excellence that honors the needs of Puerto Rican job seekers and business.

Pillar II: Inclusion & Path-to-Credential Excellence

Recognizing that economic growth is only sustainable if it is inclusive, the Board is dismantling barriers to entry through high-impact partnerships.

- Strategic Alliances: Collaborations with the Polytechnic University and the Boys & Girls Club bridge the gap between academics and youth career readiness.

- Credential Integrity: The Board is mandating a shift toward "Career Pathways" that culminate in industry-recognized credentials, ensuring that training yields a high Return on Investment (ROI) for participants.
- Accessibility: A comprehensive review of the 16 American Job Centers (One-Stops) is underway to ensure they serve as modern, accessible hubs of opportunity for all citizens.

Pillar III: Sector-Driven Economic Growth

The Board has transitioned to a "Business-First" intelligence model, aligning federal WIOA investments with the industrial sectors most critical to Puerto Rico's future.

- Targeted Investment: Strategic funding is now prioritized for Advanced Manufacturing, Life Sciences (Med-Tech), Aerospace, and Energy, specifically designed to support the reshoring of vital industries.
- Apprenticeship Expansion: By scaling Registered Apprenticeships in high-growth areas like Clean Energy and IT, the Board is providing businesses with a "work-and-learn" model that accelerates the closing of the skills gap.

Pillar IV: Data Modernization & Digital Accountability

The hallmark of the new Board is a commitment to a "frictionless" user experience through technological innovation.

- The Common Intake Initiative: The Board is spearheading the development of a unified data environment. By creating a Common Intake form and aligning disparate computer systems, the Board is reducing administrative burden for participants, allowing them to spend less time on paperwork and more time on professional development.

2. Describe the strategies the State will use to align the core programs, any Combined State Plan partner programs included in this Plan, required and optional one-stop partner programs, and any other resources available to the State to achieve fully integrated customer services consistent with the strategic vision and goals described above.Also describe strategies to strengthen workforce development activities regarding weaknesses identified in section II(a)(2).

The State has identified areas in which the workforce needs to be trained strategically to meet current market trends. For this, four unified strategies are in place to describe how the State plans to strategically align goals with

specific tactics to be implemented by the stakeholders. These areas are (1) Technology, (2) Modernization, (3) Integration, and (4) Competencies/competitive.

In terms of Technology, the Department of Economic Development and Commerce is looking to finalize the implementation of co-enrollment and co-registration in all programs required using the Participant Record Information System known as PRIS. This system is already in use, but the state is working to expand its capability to help stakeholders in providing better services to the existing participants. Also, was identified the need to develop a Mobile App that could provide participants and businesses with a system in which services can be requested. To achieve this, the State is currently evaluating policies and professional development strategies focused on technology to provide adequate training that will result in having a well-trained workforce capable of effectively using the technology available in the market. Lastly, it is important to measure the benefits from these efforts; Therefore, a statistical method needs to be identified and implemented.

VRA is working towards improving the use of technology by having a case management platform in place. However, another aspect that is under review is having a platform for referrals that can facilitate the process of providing services to participants as well as having other stakeholder services available. Currently, efforts are being made to have PRIS help in this process.

The Puerto Rico Department of Education through WIOA Title II is working towards making sure that all Adult Learners are exposed to technology. Participants will be exposed to virtual learning experiences and professional development targeting emerging technologies. To achieve this, the PRDE must continue to improve the technological infrastructure available in the classrooms, improve the Internet service, and identify classrooms to turned into interactive classrooms across state.

The Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources has entered a MOU with DEDC/WPD in which 1.7M have been identified to improve PRIS. Components such as Wagner-Peyser, RESEA/WPRS, and other modules within PRIS needs to be developed and implemented to provide employment services as well as gathered statistical information to measure performance. On the other hand, PRDOLHR is working to finalize a service contract to automate WOTC program operations. This project should result in having in place an agile process in which certification process of businesses can be done online; currently, it is being done manually which causes a backlog of applications.

In terms of modernization, the DEDC is working to improve the PRIS system as previously mentioned. The focus of this is to make this system capable of having all related files accessible within the system and determine eligibility. Also, PRIS must include a module in which providers can be evaluated, approved, and generate performance reports. Another aspect that is under consideration is to establish a connection between local system and national systems such as talent pools, job search engines, and connect accountability systems to manage funds. Lastly, we must move towards going paperless and for this we must continue to digitize all efforts within stakeholders.

In this line of modernization, the Puerto Rico Department of Education has implemented a system to provide Online Professional Development to teachers in which technology is a focal point. However, it is being identified that a Distance Education Program needs to be developed. By having a Distance Education Program, other technological skills will be part of the experience. This could potentially result in having participants acquiring skills used in the current job market and not being used in traditional educational settings. In this sense, tablets and computers are being purchased and distributed. However, more equipment needs to be bought.

PRDOLHR contracted a service provider to evaluate through focal meetings with Employment Services Personnel the specific needs of Professional Development. The focus of this was to identify those specific areas in which the personnel need to acquire or improve their skills that will better the experience along with better structures to place participants in a job that match their skills.

Moving to the third area of integration, the Department of Economic Development and Commerce is working to improve PRIS by having all stakeholders connected to the same system and enables co-registration, cost allocation, and quality control of services provided. Also, the Register Apprenticeship Program has been identified as the principal strategy as is a priority identified by the USDOL.

The VRA continues to undertake efforts that promote the employment of individuals with disabilities. On October 31, 2025, held a meeting with the President and representatives of the Industrialists Association to discuss the draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and review the proposed terms prior to its signing. Other alliances are being considered to integrate and being competitive in today's job market which can be challenging for people with disabilities. Also, VRA has implemented pre-employment services known as Work Based Learning Experience (Aprendizaje Basado en Trabajo)

to coordinate placement not only within Public Agencies but the Private Sector as well.

The Puerto Rico Department of Education is also working to improve alliances with the public and private sector to have better learning opportunities as well as potential placement opportunities. For example, collaboration with core partners is currently in place to include services and support participants through the American Job Centers. This is focused on providing career pathways services, adult learning experiences, referrals, among other mechanisms that can be integrated to serve this population.

PRDOLHR has in place Talento Infinito, which is focused on people with disabilities and their specific needs. InPrende, provide businesses and other providers with professional development services to promote sustainable employment opportunities to participants.

The last area to be highlighted is the competitive market. For example, the Puerto Rico Department of Economic Development and Commerce is looking to expand Career Pathway Services, PRIS, and professional development opportunities to the personnel to improve their skills and competencies in their specific areas. For example, has been identified that the use of technology is one of the primary areas to be improved. The job market is moving faster than the Institution of Higher Education can adapt their offerings to what is needed. Therefore, efforts are being made to integrate experiences within Technology, Information Systems, Finance, Project Management among other specific areas into their services. Therefore, these are becoming areas in which more human capital is needed.

VRA is aware of how competitive the current Job Market is and for this is increasing their presence through Service Fairs. Some of the mandatory services provided are the following: Career Exploration Counseling, Counseling on Post Secondary Education Transition, Work Based Working Experience, Social Skills, and Independent Life Skills Experiences. This should result in better preparing potential candidates to be integrated into the Job Market.

PRDE for example, is working towards having pilot projects for Occupational Credentials to expand activities in which students can complete their school diploma and increase their proficiency in the English Language. Also, PRDE-OEA is looking to update and expand their Career Pathways opportunities and technical assistance to improve academic performance.

PRDOLHR continues to provide free counseling and consulting to businesses within the agriculture sector to access foreign human capital. This sector is being impacted by not having local human capital available to participate in this industry. Therefore, becomes challenging to meet the local product demand. For this, the use and integration of technology is needed to be competitive in this market. On the other hand, PRDOLHR continues to have presence in Conexión Laboral Centers to provide employment services and job placement to those participants looking for a job.

In the pursuit of a transformative shift in Puerto Rico's economic trajectory, the strategic partnership between DEDC/WDP and the Aboul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab North America (J-PAL) has surfaced critical insights into the challenges faced by American Job Centers (AJCs). These challenges encompass underutilization of the services provided, low employee salaries hampering recruitment and retention, and a need for enhanced leadership skills. J-PAL's rigorous findings advocate for a comprehensive strategy, emphasizing the pillars of competition, leadership, and improved compensation, designed to rejuvenate Puerto Rico's labor force.

The economic landscape presents formidable challenges, with the island's labor force participation rate ranking as the second lowest globally. A profound 24% decline in the labor force signals an urgency for targeted interventions. Alarmingly, 6 out of 10 working-age adults are neither employed nor actively seeking employment. To address this, J-PAL proposes a strategic reliance on external expertise, injecting fresh perspectives into management practices, recruitment strategies, and competitive compensation models.

Simultaneously, the Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DEDC) spearheads the 21st Workforce Project, a visionary initiative concentrating on 21st-century skills imperative for success in a swiftly evolving digital workforce. The World Economic Forum Future of Jobs Report 2020 identifies heightened demand for STEM skills, including roles such as Data Analysts, AI and Machine Learning Specialists, and Software Developers. With a demand exceeding 20,000 new workers in Technology and Engineering, Puerto Rico must align its education system with the dynamic needs of the industry.

Educational challenges loom large, with the K-12 system leaving students ill-equipped for technical roles, faculty shortages hindering post-secondary education, and barriers impeding student completion. The stark decline of 44% in K-12 enrollment between 2006 and 2019, coupled with widespread school closures, underscores the imperative for a robust education strategy.

The younger workforce, with distinct priorities and preferences for non-traditional working models, necessitates a recalibration of educational paradigms.

To confront these challenges head-on, Puerto Rico must invest in high-quality education programs aligned with industry needs, fortify faculty recruitment and retention, and cultivate robust partnerships between academia and employers. Addressing the pressing skills gap, especially in computer science roles, is pivotal for sustained economic growth.

In conclusion, Puerto Rico's commitment to revitalizing its economy hinges on a comprehensive strategy that encompasses improved workforce services, competitive compensation structures, and an education system attuned to global workforce trends. The collaborative efforts signify an initiative-taking stance in shaping a future where Puerto Rico's labor force is skilled, competitive, and poised for success in the rapidly evolving global job market. As a pivotal recommendation, J-PAL advocates for the integration of external providers for job-market and career navigators at AJCs, aiming to inject best practices and elevate the quality of services, aligning Puerto Rico's workforce with global job market trends. This strategic approach positions Puerto Rico for sustained economic growth and resilience in an increasingly dynamic global landscape.

As mentioned in section II (a) (2), Puerto Rico has faced many challenges during the last decades. This has resulted in population decline, a decrease in economic activity, an increase in financial debt, communication challenges between the government and the private sector, and outdated energy infrastructure, resulting in higher energy costs and increased costs of living, among others. Considering these challenges, the four main goals detailed in the previous pages were outlined to achieve a fully integrated experience for the participant. This consists of providing the human capital available at career centers with the professional development needed to provide a better experience to the participant and the appropriate transfer of knowledge. As identified in the economic outlook, Puerto Rico's businesses require human capital knowledgeable in technology and communication skills. These two elements are fundamental to creating new economic opportunities that align with the contemporary working ecosystems. Therefore, in the next section, we discuss operational planning elements that will strengthen workforce development activities.

III. OPERATIONAL PLANNING ELEMENTS

The Unified or Combined State Plan must include an Operational Planning Elements section that supports the State's strategy and the system-wide vision described in Section II(c) above. Unless otherwise noted, all Operational Planning Elements apply to Combined State Plan partner programs included in the plan as well as to core programs. This section must include—

A. STATE STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

The Unified or Combined State Plan must include–

1. STATE BOARD FUNCTIONS

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

The State Board, established pursuant to Act 171-2014 and Executive Order OE-2014-064, plays a pivotal role in coordinating and strategically planning employment and training initiatives throughout Puerto Rico. Led by the PRDEDC's Workforce Development Program, the Board oversees the implementation of Title I of WIOA and TAA. Its responsibilities encompass the orchestration of planning and coordination activities essential for leveraging federal assistance received under WIOA and related programs.

To ensure effective governance, the State Board collaborates with an inter-agency committee, integrating WIOA core programs into its comprehensive, operational agenda. The Board's authority and duties are delineated in WIOA, local statutes, and internal regulations. These regulations mandate the establishment of specialized subcommittees and working groups tasked with addressing specific technical aspects. These include the Strategic Planning and Budget Committee, Private Sector Liaison Committee, Evaluation, Monitoring, and Auditing Committee, Entrepreneurship Committee, Continued Improvement Committee, and the Executive Committee.

Functions

The State Board assumes additional responsibilities beyond its core functions to support the Governor and ensure effective implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). These responsibilities include:

1. Crafting and implementing a comprehensive State Unified Plan with clearly defined performance metrics.
2. Facilitating collaboration among key sectors and occupations to foster workforce development strategies.

3. Formulating and aligning policy directives to meet the evolving needs of Puerto Rico's workforce.
4. Modernizing and improving the accessibility of the one-stop delivery system for job seekers and employers.

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF STATE STRATEGY

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

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

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

Implementation of State Strategy

To serve the most vulnerable populations and to provide a career pathway for youth, DEDC has entered into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Department of Family, specifically with the Socioeconomic Family Development Administration (ADSEF), to serve recipients of the Nutrition Assistance Program (PAN) at the career centers for training and employment opportunities. Through this program, PAN recipients are referred to a career center through the Participant Record Information System (PRIS) case management system. What began as a pilot program at the Carolina Local Workforce Development Area, has expanded to all 15 local areas on the island.

DEDC has recently entered into a MOU with the Department of Education and the Restaurant Association in Puerto Rico (ASORE), to establish a pre-apprenticeship model for youth. This program will be piloted in Caguas.

DEDC has also engaged in a partnership with the Pharmaceutical Industry Association of Puerto Rico (PIA). The pharmaceutical and biopharmaceutical sectors are "Priority Sectors" for Puerto Rico. The State Workforce Development Board plans to collaborate with PIA to align training programs with the specific technical skills needed for med-tech and life sciences.

DEDC has partnered with Puerto Rico Industries for the Blind (Brightforce Industries) to establish an apprenticeship program to provide On-the-Job Learning (OJL) to 38 new workers and 12 incumbent workers in the occupation of sewing machine operator. The registered occupation is 1-year duration requiring a minimum of 144 hours of related instruction.

Partner Engagement with Educational Institutions (Workforce Pell)

The Governor's Office is facilitating a convening between DEDC and the Department of Education to capitalize on the new Workforce Pell landscape. By integrating these federal funding streams with existing WIOA strategies, the administration is securing a sustainable, credential-driven pathway for Puerto Rico's high-growth industries.

From DEDC's perspective, the authorization of Workforce Pell Grants under Public Law 119-21 is a pivotal development for Puerto Rico's economic strategy. By expanding federal financial aid to short-term, high-intensity programs (8–15 weeks), this legislation provides a new, scalable funding stream to accelerate the Commonwealth's Reshoring Initiative.

Historically, WIOA funds in Puerto Rico have carried the heavy lifting for short-term technical training. By opening up federal tuition support through the Department of Education, Workforce Pell unlocks a sustainable funding stream that makes high-quality technical training more accessible than ever before.

Utilizing Workforce Pell for tuition, DEDC can redirect WIOA Governor's Reserve and Formula funds toward "wraparound" services—such as childcare, transportation, and specialized equipment—that are often the biggest barriers to completion. With an estimated average grant of $2,200 per student, Puerto Rico can significantly increase the number of trainees in the pipeline for the Pharma and Aerospace sectors without increasing its local budget. Furthermore, Workforce Pell supports the Registered Apprenticeship model which now allows for a sophisticated braiding of federal funds where the Department of Education covers the classroom learning for the related technical instruction component of the Registered Apprenticeship program.

Public Law 119-21 requires that all Workforce Pell programs be approved by the Governor and State Board as high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand. This creates a quality assurance model for the Reshoring Initiative. Programs for Biologics Manufacturing and Medical Device Quality Control (which typically fit the 150–600 hour window) can now be scaled rapidly.

The law's focus on industry-recognized credentials ensures that trainees are earning certifications that global firms like Amgen, Lilly, and Honeywell require for their reshored operations.

Because Workforce Pell is available to individuals who already hold a Bachelor's degree, this creates an opportunity. This is vital for Puerto Rico's reshoring initiatives because it allows college graduates in declining industries to rapidly pivot into high-paying Artificial Intelligence or Advanced Manufacturing roles. Likewise, a job seeker can get a Workforce Pell for a CNC Machining certificate today and later apply those credits toward a full Engineering degree at the University of Puerto Rico.

Workforce Pell provides the critical capital needed to scale the DECC's workforce infrastructure, transforming targeted training initiatives into a massive, sustainable pipeline for the Island's priority sectors. In the wake of the Governor's executive convening, the State Board will establish a rigorous certification framework to validate university and community college programs, ensuring total alignment with the specialized requirements of Workforce Pell and the Commonwealth's Reshoring Initiative.

Improving Access to Post-Secondary Credentials (Registered Apprenticeship)

A cornerstone of Puerto Rico's workforce and business engagement strategy is the transformation of Registered Apprenticeship (RA) from a traditional training model into an engine for industrial growth. By leveraging WIOA funds, the DEDC is creating a labor pool tailored for the global "Reshoring" movement.

Strategic Investment & Scale

Under the leadership of Governor González-Colón, apprenticeships are being institutionalized as a standard workforce solution for the Puerto Rican business community.

- Capital Infusion: More than $11 million in WIOA 2025 Governor Reserve funds have been strategically deployed to scale RA frameworks across the Island.
- Rapid Expansion: As of early 2026, the DEDC oversees 140 Registered Apprenticeship Programs, with a record-breaking 51 programs established in 2025 alone.
- Current Talent Pipeline: Puerto Rico currently supports a robust ecosystem of over 2,200 active apprentices, with 324 graduates

recently attaining industry-recognized credentials that serve as a gold standard for technical proficiency.

Sector Alignment: From Legacy to Innovation

The administration is aggressively diversifying the apprenticeship portfolio to move beyond traditional trades into high-complexity, high-wage technical sectors.

Existing Sectors	Emerging Reshoring Sectors
Aerospace & Aviation	Biopharmaceuticals & Life Sciences
Mechanical Engineering	Artificial Intelligence (AI) & Machine Learning
Business Intelligence	Advanced Semiconductor Manufacturing
Specialized Construction (Carpentry)	Clean Energy & Grid Modernization

Career Pathway Pipeline

A key pillar of the new administration is the total alignment of education and industry. By embedding apprenticeship pathways into K-12 systems, community colleges, and universities, Puerto Rico is creating a seamless transition from the classroom to the production floor.

- Standardization: Apprenticeship is no longer an alternative path but a primary workforce strategy integrated into major economic development projects.
- Coordination: Enhanced partnerships with academic institutions ensure that curriculum development evolves at the speed of business, particularly in the Pharma and IT sectors central to the Reshoring Initiative.

By treating Registered Apprenticeship as an infrastructure investment rather than just a training program, Puerto Rico is ensuring that its workforce is not just "job-ready," but "future-ready"—providing the specialized talent necessary to anchor the world's most advanced industries in the Commonwealth.

B. ALIGNMENT WITH ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE THE PLAN

Describe how the activities identified in (A) will be aligned with programs and activities provided by required one-stop partners and other optional one-stop partners and activities provided under employment, training (including Registered Apprenticeships), education (including career and technical

education), human services and other programs not covered by the plan, as appropriate, assuring coordination of, and avoiding duplication among these activities.

American Job Centers in Puerto Rico have been strategically located in their respective local areas to ensure accessibility to programs and services. The strategic plan provides a framework for all workforce systems, including, but not limited to, WIOA core programs.

Job Corps

As with all required partners, the local boards are coordinating with the Job Corps Program for the delivery of its service through the development of MOUs entered between the Local Workforce Development Boards, the Chief Elected Officials, and Jobs Corps.

YouthBuild

Pathstone is the local operator of YouthBuild, and we are currently working on the process of completing MOUs with each local board. However, at the local level agreements are in place.

Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers Program

The MOU between the PRDOLHR and PathStone will facilitate the provision of educational services to MSFWs. PathStone provides education and information to agricultural workers on farms, camps, and other locations. Through the Outreach Program, PRDOLHR will leverage resources with PathStone to increase the number of MSFWs enrolled in educational services.

Activities authorized under title V of the Older Americans Act of 1965 (42 U.S.C. 3056 et seq.)

The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) is funded under Title V of the *Older Americans Act* Amendments of 2006, Public Law 109-365. The purposes of the SCSEP are to foster individual economic self-sufficiency and promote useful opportunities in community service activities, including community service employment for unemployed low-income persons aged 55 years or older, particularly those who have poor employment prospects, and to increase the number of persons who may enjoy the benefits of unsubsidized employment in both the public and private sectors. We are currently working to ensure that all Local Boards have their agreements with their corresponding SCSEP operator. In Puerto Rico, PRDOLHR, AARP, and Pathstone Inc. are SCSEP grantees.

Career and technical education programs at the post-secondary level authorized under the Act of 2006 (20 U.S.C. 2301 et seq.)

The Puerto Rico State Board of Career and Technical Education is responsible for implementing the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act. The Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE) is the state agency responsible for administering the program and oversees CTE in the public school system at both the secondary and post-secondary levels.

Consistent with the conditions set forth in an MOU, information regarding post-secondary course offerings and activities is available to individuals at all One-Stop career centers, and the Department collaborates with local boards throughout Puerto Rico to ensure a comprehensive workforce preparation system. A PRDE representative at the regional level sits on every local board and acts as the PRDE one-stop coordinator.

Under WIOA, the program seeks to support the system through partnerships with industry, updating of curriculum, development of career pathways to address workforce needs, articulation agreements with post-secondary education programs (Puerto Rico Technological Institute (ITPR) and the University of Puerto Rico (UPR), recruitment and training of qualified CTE teachers, teacher externships, and ongoing professional development opportunities. WIOA emphasizes greater coordination between workforce development and CTE through aligned definitions, the requirement that post-secondary CTE be a local infrastructure partner, the option to do a combined state plan that meets the planning requirements for WIOA's core programs and at least one other federal program, and other provisions.

The PRDE will continue to cooperate with the Technological Institute and other public and private post-secondary institutions, with the purpose of offering students the opportunity to complete college degrees by means of a sequential curriculum and avert any duplicity of courses. In addition, the PRDE will continue offering the dual credit program at the secondary level through which the participating students complete an associate degree in the ITPR and the UPR through a sequential curriculum, in addition to completing the high school diploma requirements.

Activities authorized under chapter 2 of title II of the Trade Act of 1974 (19 U.S.C. 2271 et seq.)

The main goal of the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program is to assist workers who have lost or may lose their jobs because of foreign trade. The TAA program offers a variety of benefits and services to eligible workers, including job training, income support, job search and relocation allowances,

and wage subsidies to workers aged 50 years and older. This program seeks to provide skills, credentials, resources, and support to displaced workers to encourage them to an early return to the labor force. The State Dislocated Worker Unit and TAA services will be effectively integrated into the AJCs and use the network as the main point of participant intake and delivery of TAA program benefits and services. PRDEDC has developed *State Policy Number 2020-001* to ensure that the correct process is implemented with the assistance of TAA clients.

Activities authorized under Chapter 41 of title 38, U.S Code

PRDOLHR, through the Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG), is committed to serving eligible transitioning service members, veterans, and eligible spouses by providing individualized career services and employment resources to those with qualifying employment barriers, in accordance with **Veterans' Program Letter (VPL) 05-24**. Through this commitment, JVSG helps veterans secure meaningful employment and maximize their career opportunities, honoring the nation's commitment to those who have served.

While continuing to serve existing veterans and other non-veteran job seekers, we recognized that changes in workforce programs' service delivery strategies to veterans were needed to respond to the forecasted increase in veterans, including people transitioning from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to the civilian labor force. Additionally, we are collaborating with workforce partners to ensure that changes are affected, so that workforce programs are aligned with the roles and functions established in their authorizing legislation.

Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program Specialist (DVOP)

The JVSG staff were refocused on their statutory duties to ensure that eligible veterans and spouses received the best combination of services according to their needs. To accomplish this refocusing, Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists serve only those veterans and eligible spouses most in need of individualized career services. Consequently, DVOP specialists will serve a narrower group of veterans and eligible spouses, enabling specialists to provide individualized career services to most of the people they serve. This, in turn, will impact the core programs, including WP and Title I. under 38 U.S.C. 4103A(a), a DVOP specialist provides individualized career services and facilitates placements to meet the employment needs of veterans, prioritizing services to special disabled veterans, other disabled veterans, and other categories of veterans in accordance with priorities determined by the USDOL. Policies and procedures are in place to

specifically prohibit DVOP specialists from performing non-veteran-related duties that detract from their ability to perform statutorily defined duties related to meeting the employment needs of eligible veterans. Additionally, regular audits are performed by DVET to ensure compliance with the limitations of the duties of the DVOP specialists.

DVOP specialists also place maximum emphasis on assisting economically or educationally disadvantaged veterans. To ensure that DVOP specialists can fulfill their statutory responsibilities to provide individualized career services to these categories of veterans, they are required to follow guidance developed by the USDOL and the Employment Service to identify the veterans prioritized and emphasized by the DVOP statute. An eligible veteran or eligible spouse who is identified as having a qualifying employment barriers is immediately referred to a DVOP specialist after being screened or, in instances where a DVOP specialist is not available, another provider of individualized career services within the AJC system. DVOP staff and other AJC staff provide veterans with SBEs and other eligible individuals with access to occupations in demand, training, and other services expected to be generated through the application of the priority of service through the provision of individualized career services with the goal of finding long-term sustainable employment.

Local Veterans' Employment Representative (LVER)

LVERs perform only the duties outlined in 38 U.S.C. 4104(b), which are related to outreach to the employer community and facilitation within the State's employment service delivery system. LVERs have assigned duties to promote employers, employer associations, and business groups the advantage of hiring veterans. LVERs, where implemented, are part of the One-Stop Career Centers "business services team" or as an entity, and as such, serve as an active member of that team. In addition, LVERs advocate for all veterans served by the network with business, industry, and other community-based organizations by participating in appropriate activities, such as:

- Planning and engaging in job and career fairs
- Conducting employer outreach
- In conjunction with employers, conducting job searches and workshops and establishing job search groups
- Coordinating with labor unions, apprenticeship programs, and businesses or business organizations to promote and secure employment and training programs for veterans

- Informing Federal contractors of the process of recruiting qualified veterans.
- Promoting credentialing and licensing opportunities for veterans; and
- Coordinating and participating in business outreach efforts.

Programs authorized under State unemployment compensation laws (in accordance with applicable Federal law)

PRDOLHR's UI programs include regular UI, UCX, UCFE, TRA, and PAB.

The main purpose of Unemployment Insurance is to pay benefits to claimants and help them return to the labor market before they exhaust their UI benefits. The Bureau of Employment Security, UI Division, will support WIOA through the RESEA personnel and by assigning one UI merit staff member to address any unemployment claimant's issue. PRDOLHR is committed to improving re-employment service delivery strategies. These strategies are included in the new RESEA program and the core program activities to be implemented in the State Unified Plan. RESEA staff will be ascribed to the program as a team for the provision of re-employment services to UI claimants selected to participate in the RESEA program. A UI merit staff member is available to work on program management. This UI staff member serves as a point of contact for technical assistance regarding UI issues, policies, and procedures.

This approach will ensure that claimants served through the RESEA program at the One-Stop Centers to meet the eligibility provisions of State laws and receive an appropriate level of service suited to each individual claimant and be exposed to re-employment services (RES), including guidance, evaluation, individual employment plans, labor market information focused on claimant needs, referrals to self-directed job search, additional services (job search workshops, assistance in finding employment, occupational counseling, and referrals to other services), and eligibility reviews to continue receiving unemployment benefits (UI). RESEA staff will provide traditional RESEA activities, such as UI eligibility review and referrals to adjudication. Responsibilities include registering UI claimants in Wagner-Peyser as required by State law, referral of UI claimants to career counselors as deemed necessary, case management, one-on-one personal interviews with the UI claimant, job search workshops, orientation of services available through the One-Stop Centers, referral to job offers, UI eligibility review, and providing of UI claimants with labor market information. These services will be managed

by the Re-employment Service staff and as appropriate, by a licensed career counselor where available (not all offices have a career counselor on-site).

As part of this commitment, the PRDOLHR will closely monitor these strategies to ensure their successful implementation to help UI claimants in the RESEA return to the labor market before exhausting their UI benefits. Through the RESEA initiative, ES will make efforts to implement strategies to improve UI connectivity with the public workforce system and improve re-employment service delivery strategies. PRDOLHR is committed to continuing to make progress, connecting UI claimants to job opportunities and/or services that will speed their return to employment.

Programs authorized under Part A of title IV of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.), subject to Subparagraph (C).

Coordination with TANF will be strengthened to identify and pursue braided funding opportunities to support common services and transition to procedures that facilitate serving customers under both TANF and core programs. In the short term, cross-program knowledge and understanding of TANF and core programs will be delivered to staff members, and a formalized referral process will be implemented to deliver career counseling and training coordination services and to provide access to job development and placement services for TANF customers. We are currently working to ensure that all Local Boards have their agreements.

Employment and training programs were administered by the Social Security Administration, including the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program established under Section 1148 of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1320b–19).

Through the issuance of local planning and certification guidance, the State Board will encourage local boards and operators to become engaged in the Ticket-to-Work program as qualified Employment Networks. Currently, two LWDBs are qualified as an Employment Network (Caguas-Guayama and Manatí-Dorado).

PRVRA continues to receive referrals from the Ticket to Work Program to provide vocational rehabilitation services. In addition, the PRVRA established an agreement with the Caribbean Center of Work Incentives Planning Assistance (CWIPA) to provide benefit-planning services to consumers of the PRVRA, who are beneficiaries of the Social Security Disability Insurance. This service is expected to help beneficiaries in decision-making regarding the benefits of reintegrating into the labor market.

As required under the WIOA, PRVRA will coordinate its services with the Employment Networks for common customers, including individuals receiving assistance from an Employment Network under the Ticket to Work program, detailing how the responsibility for service delivery will be divided between the network and the agency.

Employment and training programs conducted by the Small Business Administration (SBA)

Coordination with the local district office of the SBA will be enhanced to fully tap into the opportunities available under the program for entrepreneurial capacity-building and development. As previously discussed, although self-employment in Puerto Rico accounts for twice the national average, entrepreneurship development still lags significantly compared to other jurisdictions, thus representing a key opportunity for private employment creation.

Through planning guidance, local boards will be encouraged to engage the SBA and its network of Small Business Technology and Development Centers (SBTDCs) with locations in six local areas, and its specialized centers for international trade, technology, and innovation; and the program initiatives servicing students, women, veterans, national guard reserve personnel, young and emerging entrepreneurs, older persons, and homemakers. Local boards should also be encouraged to leverage the small business regional clustering organization initiative that serves the entire Island led by the SBA.

Under the lead of the PRDEDC, the Federal Contracting Center will approach the SBA program to devise ways to effectively market the HUBZone's opportunity to "Under the Flag" industries, helping to expand the employer's availability in 76 of the 78 municipalities identified and Labor Surplus Areas.

Programs authorized under Sections 6(d)(4) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2015(d)(4)) and work programs authorized under Section 6(o) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2015(o)).

The USDA's FNS oversees a U.S. block grant to Puerto Rico that funds the Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP), a separate food assistance program implemented since 1982 in lieu of SNAP. Section 4142 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 mandated the completion of a study to provide information to aid Congress in understanding the potential impact of re-establishing the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in Puerto Rico in lieu of block grant funding. The block grant remains. Adults are exempt from the work requirement.

MOU DEDC, PRDOLHR, and ADSEF

The departments of DEDC and PRDOLHR signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Administration of Socioeconomic Development of the Family (ADSEF) on June 28, 2022. The MOU facilitates the referral and registration of job seekers in the Wagner Peyser Employment Service and WIOA for NAP participants eligible for employment. As of 2019, NAP beneficiaries aged between eighteen (18) and fifty-nine (59) without dependents and who are physically able must engage in work training for a minimum of eighty (80) hours per month to maintain benefits. Participants in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) who are of working age, not disabled, and have no dependents (ABAWADs) will be required to enter the labor market.

PILOT PROJECT WITH ADSEF – SNAP

The Department of the Family, through the Administration of Socioeconomic Development of the Family (ADSEF), oversees programs such as the Nutrition Assistance Program (PAN) and the Temporary Assistance Program for Needy Families (TANF), mandated by Law 97-35 "Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act" of August 13, 1981. The Government of Puerto Rico is currently pursuing integration into the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). In collaboration, DEDC and ADSEF initiated a pilot project in the Carolina Local Area to establish procedures for delivering employment services to participants of nutritional assistance programs through the American Job Center (AJC). The project outcomes will inform the implementation of SNAP, delineating service flows, policies, and reporting protocols.

Furthermore, DEDC and ADSEF established an integrated information system via the "Participant Record Information System" (PRIS), enabling ADSEF to refer TANF and PAN participants to AJCs for employment, career, and training services. Both systems exchange participant data to enhance tracking accuracy. An IT consultant devised a pilot project integrating systems through an Enterprise Service Bus (ESB), connecting them via an API for seamless data distribution to respective databases.

The process is outlined as follows:

- ADSEF uploads the list of TANF and PAN recipients referred for WIOA services through the AJC into PRIS.
- AJC's partner programs receive referrals via Task Management.
- Activation of the PRIS Reportable Profile.

- AJC case managers contact individuals to ascertain their interest in continuing to receive WIOA services.
- AJC staff conduct interviews, provide services, and record them in PRIS.
- ADSEF staff access PRIS to review WIOA services provided at the AJC.
- PRIS transmits data to DSEF for generating programmatic reports.
- ADSEF submits the FSN-583 report.

The PRIS will provide the data of participants that receive WIOA services at the AJC to the ADSEF database, the data required for the preparation of the FSN-583 programmatic reports. The elements that will be used to complete the report are the following:

- Supervised Job Search (SJS)
- Job Search Training (JST)
- Self-Employment Training (SET)
- Basic/Foundational Skills instructions (includes High School Equivalency Programs) (EPB) ▪
- Career/Technical Education Programs or other Vocational Training (EPC)
- English Language Acquisition (EPEL)
- Work Readiness Training (EPWRT)
- Work Activity (WA) ▪ Internship (WBLI)
- Pre-Apprenticeship (WBLPA) ▪ Apprenticeship (WBLPA)
- On-the-Job-Training (WBLOJT)
- Work-based learning - Other (WBLO)
- NAP E&T program general measure Median Earnings
- NAP E&T program general measure Unsubsidized Employment

The results of the pilot project in Carolina, shows that ADSEF referred 800 beneficiaries of TANF and NAP; 359 beneficiaries were uploaded to PRIS, for a rate of 58%: WIOA services have been offered to 6 beneficiaries; with a balance of 465 pending services in the AJC.

Programs conducted under Section 112 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C.) 732)

The Client Assistance program remains under the Office of the Advocate of Persons with Disabilities. The system's components that provide services to persons with disabilities will be made aware of the obligations arising under Section 20 of the Rehabilitation Act. Providing information on means of seeking assistance under the Client Assistance program. PRVRA, as a state-designated agency for administering the core program under the Rehabilitation Act, will also continue enforcing compliance section 102, providing individuals with a description of services available from the client assistance program and information on how to contact the program as part of the eligibility determination process.

Registered Apprenticeship

Registered Apprenticeship (RA) is a key component to developing and advancing Puerto Rico's current and future workforce. The RA offers an industry-defined program that can assist employers and employees in developing their skills to be more competitive in the world marketplace.

Since 2018, the Puerto Rico Department of Economic Development and Commerce, through the Workforce Development Program, is serving as an Apprenticeship Office under USDOL-OA Region I oversight. Registered Apprenticeships are a top priority for WDP. As a proven training model to best meet the needs of businesses and provide long-term sustainable career opportunities for individuals, apprenticeships are the ideal workforce development tool to address the diverse challenges faced by the public workforce system. Consequently, WDP is investing significantly in the expansion and strengthening of Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs) throughout the state. WDP has assembled an Apprenticeship Team in the State office to assist employers, local boards, and partners across the state with establishing new RAPs. the State is investing in training, guidance, and technical assistance to the business services staff in each region to equip them to better assist with the creation of new RAPs and to better understand how to fully utilize WIOA funds to support the creation and sustainability of RAPs.

For eligible participants, local WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker funds may be used for not only Registered Apprenticeships, but for pre-apprenticeship training, such as remediation and/or basic job skills training, to prepare an individual for a Registered Apprenticeship program.

Registered Apprenticeships can be funded through several mechanisms. Given the unique nature of Registered Apprenticeships, there are several ways in which training services will be used in conjunction with these programs:

- Registered Apprenticeships generally involve both classroom and on-the-job training. An On-the-Job Training (OJT) contract may be developed with a Registered Apprenticeship program for training participants. The OJT contracts are made with the employer. The OJT contract may be made to support some or all the OJT portion of the Registered Apprenticeship Program;
- A combination of an Individual Training Account (ITA) to cover classroom instruction along with an OJT contract to cover some or all the work-based training portion of the Registered Apprenticeship is allowed; and
- Incumbent worker training may be used for upskilling apprentices who already have an established working/training relationship with the Registered Apprenticeship program.

Local areas may also include support services, in coordination with career and/or training services to participants in a Registered Apprenticeship program. The supportive services must be consistent with the WIOA Section 134(d)(2) and state and local policies.

The State Apprenticeship Expansion Formula (SAEF) Grant was awarded to the Puerto Rico Department of Economic Development and Commerce to continue developing, expanding, and modernizing the Registered Apprenticeship Program in Puerto Rico. By mid-January 2024, Puerto Rico has 50 Registered Apprenticeship Programs. The total number of active apprentices surpasses 1,000.

Since July 1, 2018, the Apprenticeship Program has been under the PRDEDC. The WDP oversees the implementation of the program in the workforce system. As part of the strategy for effective implementation, the WDP receives ongoing technical assistance and oversight from the National Apprenticeship Office and Region I in Boston, The WDP research opportunities and develops relationships with local businesses and partners, including registered apprenticeship programs and training providers, to make these training models available to participants. In accordance with standards described under Career Services, feedback mechanisms between Training Services and placement functions are in place to ensure that the training being provided meets the business's needs.

Registered Apprenticeship data is entered into a USDOL database called RAPIDS. In addition, we have an electronic Apprenticeship module that communicates with USDOL's WIPS system to report on program performance.

C. COORDINATION, ALIGNMENT AND PROVISION OF SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS

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

The DEDC, through its WDP, has the mission to implement a coordinated and integrated system for workforce development that provides access to employment and training services through its fifteen (15) Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDA's) and in joint efforts with core partners, educational institutions, and the private sector, to promote the economic development of Puerto Rico.

DEDC is the leading agency for the administration of the WIOA Core Programs. DEDC is also responsible for the TAA grants. The PRDE is responsible for Adult Education and Family Literacy under Title II. PRDOLHR is responsible for Wagner-Peyser, Veteran Services through the Jobs for Veterans State Grant, and the UI. Under PRDOLHR, the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration is present in the AJCs. Additionally, SCSEP is also within PRDOLHR, but partially because AARP and Pathstone, Inc. are also operators of the program. To improve the integration between programs, Puerto Rico implemented the following framework:

Inter-agency Efforts

The WDP ensures that the strategies and goals at the service delivery level are consistent with the State Board's vision and goals. The State Workforce Development Board (SWDB), consistent with the WIOA requirements, comprises business leaders from throughout the State, representatives of the education sector, representatives of organized labor, and state agency leaders. The mission of the board is to promote lifelong learning by collaborating with businesses, agencies, and organizations to bring the State's education, employment, and training programs together into a workforce

development system that provides the means for residents of Puerto Rico to gain sufficient skills, education, employment, and financial independence.

Data Communication

The focus on service integration enacted by the WIOA has motivated the DEDC to consider ways to link and allow tracing of participant data between partners, especially core programs, to improve communication and reduce duplication of services. The WIOA emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive system that provides integrated, uninterrupted services to all participants and effective strategies that meet employers' workforce needs. The State intends to have a comprehensive system of on-demand reports, utilizing data from its statewide shared database, which allows state and local staff to view outcome data at the State, regional, local, and case manager levels for Wagner-Peyser, WIOA Title I-B, TAA, and Veterans Employment and Training Services. In addition, the State seeks to have the necessary integration with Title II and Title IV programs.

Regional and local plans, MOUs, and cost-sharing agreements will facilitate integration across the various data systems of all the required partners that participate in the workforce system over the next four years. The DEDC supports data-sharing and alignment at the state level by convening a data-sharing group across state agency partners and at the local level. The DEDC supports education and training on specific systems and will advocate for policy changes, as needed, to establish data-sharing agreements.

Coordination of Services through One-Stop Centers

The American Job Centers in Puerto Rico are engines that lead the efforts and coordination of the workforce's service delivery on the Island. The AJCs ensure that job seekers receive comprehensive, coordinated, and high-quality services from all partners. The AJCs in Puerto Rico have the same services; however, each geographic area on the Island has individual characteristics, so each AJC adjusts to these needs to promote optimal and adapted services. It should be noted that these centers operate under applicable federal and state regulations. The functions of each partner are described in the Memoranda of Understanding, as required by the WIOA. Each AJC has an Executive Director responsible for coordinating Services through One-Stop Centers. The director must also ensure the availability of services offered by partners within the AJCs, including Title II and Title IV. The One-Stop centers host these programs' representatives, including representatives from the PRDE (for Title II) and the VRA (for Title IV). Providing direct access to representatives from these agencies and programs improves

the delivery of services, strengthens networks, and supports the effective implementation of protocols existing between the PRDE and VRA, including the coordination of Individualized Educational Programs. To ensure that they provide a high quality of service to individuals, AJC staff receives ongoing training, has the necessary tools to perform their duties, and has the resources to provide optimal service to meet everyone's needs. System partners collaborate through referrals, individualized attention, and other services. The State Plan provides cross-training as a part of statewide initiatives. The main objective of this initiative is for AJC staff to have up-to-date knowledge of the services offered by the WIOA members in Puerto Rico. This training will allow for more streamlined service delivery within AJCs.

Coordination among Programs

The core and required partner delivery of services revolves around a customer-centered integration and continuous improvement approach, supported by appropriate guidance to align programs, local boards, operators, and providers; staff cross-training on program requirements and referral procedures; and a process focusing on the provision of services along with functional areas. Service integration in One-Stop Centers will be led by a One-Stop Operator with core programs, required programs, and additional programs authorized to join the system that will remain accessible as required by the rule.

AJC operators coordinate the individual services between partners to deliver services according to their needs. The service flow follows the general service flow to serve job seekers at One-Stop Centers:

- The greeting and identification of new customers or participants are completed at a common intake, where the operator's staff records control data and validates it through the case management system (if the customer is new or is receiving services under a program).
- Claimants of Unemployment Compensation Insurance scheduled to receive re-employment services are referred directly to UI services.
- The One-Stop Operator provides orientation to customers and helps them obtain a general understanding of the services offered through the One-Stop network.
- If the customer opts to assist him/herself during job search, resume writing, telephone, and resource use, he/she will be guided to the One-Stop resource center, delivery of labor exchange services through self-service, self-service technology tools, and staff-assisted services.

- If deemed ready for employment, the customer will be led to receive labor exchange services, including job referrals and job placement follow-up.
- Job seekers seeking employment first receive services from Wagner Peyser's Employment Service. If the job seeker is a new customer, their demographic and registration data will be gathered and sent to assisted services to be counted as a reportable individual.
- If an individual needs additional services to enter employment or continue an educational career, or requires improvement of their employment skills, it is determined that they need assisted services and is hereinafter considered a participant under WIOA.
- The Case manager or Career Planner completes an assessment to determine participants' needs, goals, job skills, and readiness. A common assessment tool is being developed to account for the information requirements of all cores and partners, thus facilitating the joint service of the customer.
- Participants can enter the system through any of the core partner programs according to their specific service needs. The AJC Operator coordinates the assistance of AJC partners in accordance with the requirements determined by the objective assessment. Currently, services are coordinated through a referral process. With the development of the RFP DEDC-PDL-2020-06, to expand the scope of the PRIS database, the State seeks to improve the technological integration of core partner databases through the PRIS.
- The referral structure is critical to the system's effectiveness and is enabled by the MOUs among the programs. The One-Stop Center staff must have a thorough understanding of program requirements and services to effectively assess the participant's eligibility under the various programs, avoid "wrong–doors" and duplication regarding the delivery of services, and ensure the efficient use of program resources and outcome achievement.

Title II Services

- The One-Stop Center's network will be complemented by Title II activities administered by the Adult Education and Literacy Program offered at PRDE schools. As a core service, Title II will support the One-Stop service delivery system to help participants attain a secondary school diploma; transition to post-secondary education and training

using career pathways, integrated education, and training; and receive workforce preparation activities and services needed to succeed in the labor market.

- Program resources will be prioritized and coordinated with partnering programs to shore up services that reflect the needs of the workforce.
- The main service under the program addresses the needs of Adult Basic Education, especially among disadvantaged, low-income adults, and criminal offenders. The program assesses the participants' skills and provides them with the literacy and math skills necessary to become literate at the levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family, and in society.
- The program will continue to coordinate with the PRDCR to address the needs of eligible adult literacy participants in juvenile detention centers and correctional facilities through collaborative services including vocational training, adult literacy courses, personal and workforce preparation counseling, and teacher cross-training. The Special Education staff is also integrated into the planning function because a substantial number of inmates are also adults with disabilities.
- Another Title II service is English language instruction. The PRDE prioritized playing an active role in facilitating the participants' goal of becoming bilingual.
- English classes and Conversational English will continue to be provided as part of the Adult Education Program offered in schools and Adult Education program centers. The objectives of conversational ESL and academic English programs are to provide adults with the knowledge and skills necessary to make correct use of the English language in academic as well as in work settings; develop adults' listening, reading, writing, and oral skills; and measure their performance using the English program standards and performance measures established for English as a Second Language.
- Other service delivery program services focus on adults in need of workplace literacy. The objective is to develop the required skills and knowledge to enable participants to obtain, retain, or upgrade their employment once they complete specialized training or vocational education. Targeted populations are disadvantaged adults, adults with disabilities, single parents, and displaced homemakers. The goal of these services is to address and improve the specific needs of workforce workers' productivity. These activities are delivered at the

workplace and/or at employment development centers. The content is tailored to the needs of the workforce and remains accessible to participants, including continuous learning using technology and in coordination with groups and resources in the community to supplement services.

- The third order of priority for delivering services targets individuals facing barriers to employment, particularly disadvantaged and homeless adults, single parents, adults with disabilities, and displaced homemakers. These will be served through an Adult Basic Education program that aims to improve basic skills in language and mathematics.
- These programs provide adults with academic, employability, and self–improvement skills to assist them in attaining a secondary school diploma and in the transition to post-secondary education and training.
- The fourth priority targets immigrant and disadvantaged adults, homeless adults, single parents, and displaced homemakers through Family Literacy programs. The next order of priority in delivering services will be afforded to Adult Secondary Education services for disadvantaged adults, individuals with disabilities, the homeless, incarcerated adults, adults with disabilities, single parents, and displaced homemakers at level three or above who need to attain a high school diploma or high school equivalency and transition to post-secondary education.
- Title I partners will offer basic and individualized service careers or any other allowable service required by the participant to obtain or retain employment. Once the participant is ready for employment, the program might pursue any job placement activity allowed by the program or refer the participant back to the Employment Service.
- PRDE's AEP will work collaboratively with other core programs and partner agencies to expand access to education, training, and employment opportunities for adult learners. The AEP will provide resources and services through American Job Centers (One-Stop Centers), including orientation about program opportunities, career pathways, transition resources, referral processes, and other joint mechanisms developed through agency partnerships. The Adult Education Program has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the 16 American Job Centers (AJC) for collaboration and

contributes to infrastructure costs for the operations of the AJC. The AEP maintains a regular employee staff member at each of the 16 One-Stop Centers one day a week to evaluate adult education potential participants and make referrals to the adult education service providers approved by the AEP for services. These AEP employees make cross-referrals between One-Stop centers and AEP service providers.

Youth

- According to Sec. 129(c)(2) of the WIOA, local areas must make up each of the required fourteen youth elements required for youth participants. Local youth programs must be designed to provide an objective assessment of each youth participant that meets the requirements of WIOA Section 129(c)(1)(A) and include a review of the academic and occupational skill levels, as well as the service needs, of each youth to identify appropriate services and career pathways for participants and inform the individual service strategy.
- When designing youth employment and training programming, State and local areas should consider the following design elements: promotion and increase of meaningful work experience opportunities as set forth in Section 129(c)(2)(c) of WIOA, particularly for out-of-school youth; increase of service delivery for youth with disabilities; need to address the issues impacting service delivery for out-of-school youth; need to ensure quality case management through the monitoring process; and provision of effective follow-up services.
- In efforts to engage out–of–school youth (OSY), both the Adult Education and Literacy Program and the AJC Title II partner strengthen coordination with school districts. Local boards will also be encouraged to coordinate with other programs servicing youth, such as Foster Care and TANF programs, residential programs, and community–based initiatives.

Adults and Dislocated Workers

- The main goal of the Adults and Dislocated Workers Program is employment. Coordination with Wagner Peyser's Employment Service is crucial for participants to achieve the goals set out in their Individual Employment Plan (IEP). Capacity-building efforts under Title I will focus on work–based training. The main source of participants in both programs is the Employment Service. Common intake and case management are key tools for the AJC operator to coordinate services

among three programs: adults, displaced workers, and employment services. The new PRIS database platform contains integration elements using the same database: case management, intake, and reporting.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

- PRVRA provides a wide range of services to people with disabilities to integrate them into the workforce, including training in personal/occupational settings, pre-employment services, counseling, and job readiness services (resumes, interviews, identification of candidates ready for employment, and referrals to job offers), among others. PRVRA will continue to serve people with disabilities to integrate them into the workforce. In addition to supporting full access to services through One-Stop Centers, the VRA continues to serve youth and students with disabilities, with an emphasis on those with significant disabilities and in need of Pre-Employment Transition services. To this end, the Administration will maintain its collaboration with the PRDE's Special Education program to accelerate the implementation of students' individualized plans, continue offering guidance in schools to students, parents, and school staff, and participate in PPT meetings.

State Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) One Stop Partners

The coordination and alignment of services among AJC partners are initially established at the state level through the signing of a MOU among the grantee agencies of Title I core programs. The Secretaries of the Department of Economic Development and Commerce, the Department of Education, the DOL and Human Resources, and the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration; grantees of WIOA core programs; and the Presidents and the fifteen (15) Local Boards that are part of the Puerto Rico Workforce Development System signed a state agreement to ensure the operations of the One-Stop Center-American Job Centers, to lay the groundwork for the provision of services to participants in the AJC and the negotiation of local MOUS.

The objectives of the state MOU are as follows:

- to establish the parameters of negotiation at the local level,
- define the framework of reference that should govern each agreement between the Local Board and the partners,
- clearly define the parameters of the respective human resources commitments for each grantee,

- Provide foundation elements for representatives of state agencies (grantees) and Local Boards to negotiate their respective memoranda of understanding.

The content of the MOU encompasses the following agreements between the grantees of the programs:

- Description of the PR One Stop System,
- Roles and Responsibilities of core and required partners,
- Availability of Career Services,
- Services to Population with Multiple Barriers to Employment,
- Resources and Costs,
- Continuous Improvement and Duration of the MOU,
- Local Terms and Economic Conditions,
- Local Memorandum of Understanding,
- Review, Amendments, Dispute Resolution, and Impasse process,
- Sexual and Labor Harassment, Alcohol and Drug Free Environment,
- MOU Dispute Resolution Process, and
- Discrimination Policy.

MOU Summary

The next section presents a summary of the state MOU's content, which sets the rules for coordinating services between partners to provide services to participants and employers; Description of One Stop Center System:

1. A system with fifteen (15) Local Areas offers training and employment services through its 16 One-Stop Centers (AJC) throughout Puerto Rico. The AJC design of the AJC must have a continuous presence of services represented by the core and required partners,
    a.
        i. Programs authorized under title I of WIOA include the following:
            1. Adults,
            2. Dislocated workers,
            3. Youth,

4. Job Corps,
5. YouthBuild,
6. Native American programs, and
7. Migrant and seasonal farmworker programs.

2. The required partners are the entities responsible for administering the following programs and activities in the local area:

1. The Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act (29 U.S.C. 49 et seq.), as amended by the WIOA title III.
2. The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) program authorized under title II of WIOA;
3. The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program authorized under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 720 et seq.), as amended by WIOA title IV:
4. The Senior Community Service Employment Program authorized under title V of the Older Americans Act of 1965 (42 U.S.C. 3056 et seq.);
5. Career and technical education programs at the post-secondary level authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (20 U.S.C. 2301 et seq.);
6. Trade Adjustment Assistance activities authorized under chapter 2 of title II of the Trade Act of 1974 (19 U.S.C. 2271 et seq.);
7. Jobs for Veterans State Grant programs authorized under Chapter 41 of title 38, U.S.C.;
8. Employment and training activities conducted under the Community Services Block Grant (42 U.S.C. 9901 et seq.);
9. Employment and training activities conducted by HUD.
10. Programs authorized under State unemployment compensation laws (in accordance with applicable Federal law)
11. Programs authorized under sec. 212 of the Second Chance Act of 2007 (42 U.S.C. 17532); and
12. TANF authorized under Part A of title IV of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.), unless exempted by the Governor under §678.405(b).

Roles and Responsibilities

Section 121 lists the minimum responsibilities of partners in the AJC:

1. Promote AJC system integration and have available basic career services consistently and coordinately through the OSC-AJC operator.
2. Develop a flowchart for delivering efficient services to employers, participants, and clients.
3. Provide access to services to meet the needs of workers, job seekers, youth, and people with barriers to employment, including people with disabilities.
4. Establish a method to subsidize the costs of services and operation of the system.
5. Determine the standards of service and branding for co-located partners.
6. Commitment to providing training and professional development opportunities to the AJC staff.
7. Facilitate communication channels between partners and other components of the AJC in coordination with the AJC operator.
8. Development and design of public policies, standards, and processes.
9. Provide additional services to the WIOA to meet the needs of the participants.

Delivery of Basic Career Service

1. Basic Career Services will be universally available for the entire AJC population.
2. Each partner is responsible for delivering services corresponding to their program.
3. Partners must avoid the duplication of services.

Service to people with barriers to employment.

Partners must ensure that services are available to people with barriers to employment The term ‘‘individual with a barrier to employment’’ means a member of one or more of the following populations:

1. Displaced homemakers.
2. Low-income individuals.

3. Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians are defined in Section 166.
4. Individuals with disabilities, including youths with disabilities.
5. Older individuals.
6. f. Ex-offenders.
7. g. Homeless individuals (as defined in Section 41403(6) of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (42 U.S.C. 14043e–2(6))), or homeless children and youths (as described in Section 725(2) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11434a (2))).
8. Youths who are in or have aged out of the foster care system.
9. Individuals who are English language learners, individuals who have low levels of literacy, and individuals facing substantial cultural barriers.
10. Eligible migrant and seasonal farm workers, as defined in Section 167(i).
11. Individuals within two years of exhausting lifetime eligibility under Part A of Title IV of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.).
12. Single parents (including pregnant women).
13. Long-term unemployed individuals.
14. Other groups such as the Governor determine.
15. Employer services fall into two categories:

1. Participation and Commitment- Educate and provide general information to employers on how the services in the AJC can represent solutions to their challenges or needs in terms of the employment of qualified personnel.
2. Business Services- Develop customized strategies based on their profile to determine the needs of employers in a way that addresses the challenges related to Recruitment, Employment, Training, Closures, and Layoff.

Resources and Cost Sharing

- The provision of direct services to participants and employers is a priority in AJC.
- Each partner is responsible for subsidizing the direct services related to their program without losing the perspective that the provision of services for each partner must be transparent to the participant.

- All partners share equitable and proportionate responsibilities for the operating expense costs of the AJC.

Continuous Improvement and MOU Validity

- All partners must participate in the process of programmatic review, continuous improvement, integration of original ideas, innovation, and efficient approach.
- Partners seek feedback from participants regarding their satisfaction with the services provided in the AJC.

Local Memorandum of Understandings

- The roles and responsibilities of the partners in the state MOU must be integrated as part of the local MOU.
- Local MOUS shall specify these roles and responsibilities, as well as WIOA provisions, final rules, guides, and policies issued by the state.
- Local MOUs are an integral part of the state memorandum.

Terms and Economic Conditions

Partners must develop a financial plan, including the terms and conditions for subsidizing the services and operating costs of the one-stop center. The goal of having an operational budget is to develop a subsidy mechanism as follows.

1. Set and maintain the local workforce development system at a level that meets the needs of job seekers and the business conditions of the Local Board
2. Reduce duplication and maximize the use of resources and technologies
3. Expenses are appropriately shared by determining the center's proportional use and benefits received, and all funds are used only for permissible activities under the WIOA.
4. The budget includes the following cost categories required by WIOA and its regulations:

1. Infrastructure Costs
2. Career Services
3. Operator Costs
4. Shared Services

5. All costs shall be included in the Infrastructure Funding Agreements (IFA), distributed according to the proportional use and relative benefits received by the partner, quarterly reconciled against current expenses, and adjusted to the budget accordingly.
6. The operating budget of the UGC-AJC must be transparent, and all partners must negotiate in good faith and pursue reasonable and fair outcomes.

Cost Allocation Plan (CAP)

1. The Cost Allocation Plan (CAP) is a method for identifying direct and indirect costs and supports the distribution of costs among partners.
2. Costs in the CAP will be classified as Direct and Indirect Costs.
3. Cost pool must be determined and then distributed by partners.
4. Costs considered in the CAP include Infrastructure Costs, Human Resources-Related Costs, Non-Personnel Costs, Additional Costs, Services, Operating Costs, and Shared Services.
5. In CAP, costs must be assignable, permissible, and reasonable.
6. CAP should indicate the basis for calculating the costs to be allocated to each partner.

AJC Financing

Accepted financing mechanisms are the Local Financing Mechanism and the State Funding Mechanism, as established by TEGL 17-16, Infrastructure Funding of the One-Stop Delivery System.

Miscellaneous Clauses

1. The state MOU also includes the conditions for Revision, Amendments, Dispute Resolution, and Impasses
2. The state MOU must be reviewed and renewed within a period of not less than three (3) years, to ensure adequate cost subsidies and delivery of services.
3. The current MOU revision began in PY 2021.

Public Policy on Sexual and Labor Harassment, Alcohol-Free and Drug-Free Environment

The AJC partners will seek and train their resources in the AJC, to comply and ensure that the policies related to Sexual and Labor Harassment are meet, as well as public policies on Alcohol and Drug-Free Zones

Non-Discrimination Policy

MOU partners and staff representing them in the AJC shall not discriminate against applicants, complainants, participants, and staff of the programs in the AJC AJC based on race, color, gender, age, religion, birth, origin or ethnic identification, political ideology, physical or mental disability, socioeconomic status, having been victims of domestic violence, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender or marital identity of the parties, genetics, immigration status as an immigrant legally admitted and authorized to work in the US or to participate in any subsidizing program or activity under WIOA Title I, and will take affirmative action to prevent such discrimination.

MOU Dispute Resolution Process

Include a process to resolve disputes among the partners.

Complaints Process between Partners

Include a process to resolve complaints among the partners.

D. COORDINATION, ALIGNMENT AND PROVISION OF SERVICES TO EMPLOYERS

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

The Employer Engagement Committee of the State Board and the Workforce Development Program of the DEDC are leading the process to develop policies to guide the LWDBs and the AJC to collaborate with businesses.

These policies will provide a broad framework to guide the local areas to create skilled business service teams that will be able to build credible relationships and provide worthy services that will benefit businesses. Wagner-Peyser staff will be an integral part of this effort.

These strategies are aimed at business service teams to develop relationships with employers in their local areas, use the networks of the private sector employers on their local boards to expand their contacts and to provide

information on industry trends, identify potential red flags, develop other sources of early information on potential issues within their local areas, and develop responses to address identified issues.

Every Local WDBs has its own Employer Engagement committee, composed of business representatives. These Committees will help develop teams, provide guidance and recommendations, ensure professional development, establish specific goals for teams, and track progress.

DEDC enlisted the expertise of a consultant to assess the AJC brand's effectiveness among employers. Through qualitative and quantitative analyses, the consultant evaluated employer awareness, perception, and utilization of AJCs. Based on the findings, recommendations will be formulated to improve services, raise awareness of available resources, ensure brand consistency, and support the implementation of a new plan, complemented by the formulation of an outreach strategy. Consequently, a new branding initiative, Conexión Laboral, has been introduced.

The goal of the Employer Engagement Committee and the DEDC is to increase employer participation rates, including repeat customers, and to increase the retention rates of employees placed into employment by AJCs. This rate would help raise employers' confidence in the workforce and lead to increased employer engagement.

Apart from the strategies mentioned to improve and increase trends on participation of AJCs services, the AJC network can assist employers with recruitment, interviews, and hiring services.

Services to employers include the following:

- Interviews and screening of job candidates to select skilled and trained personnel who will fulfill their labor force needs,
- Labor market information,
- Membership in the State, local boards, working groups, sector partnerships, employers' committees, among other entities, to intervene in policymaking for education, training, and employment in the local, regional, and statewide levels,
- Use of the One Stop Center network and systems to disseminate job offers; and
- Incentives, subsidies, follow-up, and supportive services to employees, including initial services to obtain Health and Drug Testing, criminal records, and required certifications for prospective employees.

Employment Service staff:

- Issue employer certifications, denials, or notices of invalidation for tax credit on a timely basis,
- Maintain a system and procedures to regularly monitor the activities initiate appropriate corrective actions,
- Manage agreements with TANF and NAP in Puerto Rico serving the majority of WOTC applications, which are from participants of the TANF or NAP programs and train staff from these programs,
- Maintain the current cooperative efforts with employment and training organizations already working with the private sector, such as Veterans organizations, Job Service Employer Committees, and local boards, to inform employers about requirements for the use of the federal tax incentive known as Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC),
- Train, as appropriate, State, and participating agency staff and provide monitoring and technical assistance to these agencies, and
- Engage in outreach efforts to obtain more qualifying employers to use the tax credit program and increase the number of certifications.

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

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

The State's strategies for Partner Engagement with Educational Institutions and other Education and Training Providers will be robust and comprehensive. The State Board, in collaboration with key stakeholders such as the PRDE's State Board for Career and Technical Education and the PRDOLHR, will ensure effective delivery of occupational education tailored to high-demand, mid- and high-skilled, and technologically advanced occupations. Leveraging its convening authority under WIOA, the State Board will coordinate with the Education Council, the PRDE, institutions of higher education (IHEs), and Career and Technical Education (CTE)

institutions to establish a unified framework supporting career pathways and aligning educational and workforce systems. Educational institutions will serve as providers of essential educational and training services, pivotal for the successful implementation of the Registered Apprenticeship program. Furthermore, the system will equip AJC staff with training programs on structured work-based learning, fostering collaboration on pre-apprenticeship programs designed to meet industry demands.

Regarding services for students with disabilities, coordination mandated by Act 51-1996 will ensure a seamless transition from special education programs to post-secondary education. The PRVRA will facilitate this transition, intervening before eligible students graduate to ensure their placement in training programs and post-secondary educational institutions. The PRVRA will sponsor training in accredited educational institutions, equipping individuals with disabilities with the necessary skills for the workplace.

In addressing individuals with barriers to employment, the PRDE's CTE program, along with basic adult education, will play a pivotal role in meeting the workforce development needs of the correctional population. For further details on coordination with the Carl D. Perkins program, please refer to Sections III(A), (2), and (B) for comprehensive information.

F. IMPROVING ACCESS TO POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIALS

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

The State's compliance with WIOA mandates includes maintaining a publicly accessible list of eligible training providers and programs, featuring pertinent performance and cost data. The State Board has established protocols for the initial determination and subsequent certification of training providers. Local boards, in issuing determinations, must:

-
    -
        - Conduct analyses of economic, geographic, and demographic factors affecting applicant populations, considering accessibility challenges.
        - Identify occupations in demand within their geographic regions.

- Maintain an ongoing process for initial eligibility determination.
- Define eligibility criteria, additional information requirements, and minimum performance standards for training providers, tailored to specific local areas.
- Ensure compliance with FERPA regulations to protect the confidentiality of education records.
- Regularly invite public and private educational institutions and community-based organizations to apply for eligibility determination based on demand for training.
- Facilitate the automatic inclusion of apprenticeship program providers in the State List upon request, as per the Registered Apprenticeship Act and State provisions.

Registered Apprenticeship and One-Stop Centers' operators must assess provider performance against established criteria to determine eligibility, ensuring the selection of qualified training service providers.

Improving Access to Post-secondary Credentials

Puerto Rico's strategic approach to improving access to post-secondary credentials, including Registered Apprenticeship certificates, is a crucial component of its workforce development plan. This strategy, as mandated by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), involves maintaining an accessible list of eligible training providers that is publicly available and includes pertinent performance and cost information. The State Board has established a set of procedures for the eligibility determination and certification of these training providers, ensuring that the training services offered are aligned with the demands of the local labor market.

Local boards are instrumental in this process, tasked with analyzing a range of factors, such as economic, geographic, and demographic characteristics, and identifying the specific occupational training services in demand within their respective regions. They also ensure that the process of determining the initial eligibility for training providers remains open and inclusive throughout the year. Additionally, local boards are responsible for safeguarding the confidentiality of education records in compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

This strategy also emphasizes the promotion of apprenticeship programs, with registered providers being automatically included in the State's list upon request, thereby facilitating access to a diverse range of training opportunities. The goal is to ensure that individuals across Puerto Rico have access to training programs that lead to recognized post-secondary credentials, which are vital for enhancing employability and meeting the evolving needs of the local and global job markets.

Coordination, Alignment, and Provision of Services to Employers

In Puerto Rico's workforce development plan, the coordination and alignment of services to employers are essential for meeting current and projected workforce needs and achieving industry or sector goals. This coordination is primarily facilitated by the Employer Engagement Committee of the State Board and the Workforce Development Program of the DEDC.

The approach involves developing the Business Service Unit at the state level, aimed at building skilled business service teams capable of establishing credible relationships with businesses. These teams are guided by the Statewide Business Services Framework Plan, which provides a comprehensive approach to collaborating with businesses effectively. This plan is crucial in guiding local areas to create teams that can deliver valuable services to the business community. Strategies for layoff aversion are a significant focus, aiming to equip business service teams with the skills to build strong relationships with local employers. These strategies include leveraging private sector networks to expand contacts, provide industry trend information, identify early warning signs of potential local issues, and develop tailored responses to address these challenges.

Each Local Workforce Development Board (WDB) has an Employer Engagement committee composed of business representatives. These committees play a pivotal role in team development, setting goals, and tracking progress, ensuring that the teams are well-equipped to meet the needs of the employer community.

The DEDC's initiative to evaluate the AJC brand among employers further enhances this approach. This evaluation involves qualitative and quantitative assessments to understand employer awareness, perception, and utilization of AJC services, followed by recommendations to improve services and increase brand awareness.

Through these concerted efforts, Puerto Rico aims to increase employer participation rates, enhance employee retention rates, and foster greater

employer confidence in the workforce, leading to more robust employer engagement in the workforce development system.

Partner Engagement with Educational Institutions and Other Education and Training Providers

The engagement of educational institutions and training providers is a crucial element in Puerto Rico's workforce development strategy. This engagement is centered around the creation of a job-driven education and training system, where the State's strategies are intricately linked with community colleges, adult education providers, career and technical education schools, and other eligible training providers.

Under the coordination of the State Board, there's a concerted effort to align the resources and support of various educational bodies, including the PRDE's State Board for Career and Technical Education, local institutions of higher education (IHEs), and Career and Technical Education (CTE) institutions. This alignment is intended to foster the implementation of career pathways and enhance the overall educational and workforce systems. One key aspect of this strategy is leveraging these institutions as providers of educational and training services. This approach is vital for the successful execution of Registered Apprenticeship programs, wherein the system develops and deploys training programs for AJC staff on working with structured work-based learning programs. Moreover, the design of this framework contributes to collaboration on pre-apprenticeship programs developed in response to industry demands. The coordination also focuses on services for students with disabilities, ensuring a seamless transition of these young individuals into post-secondary education and the workforce. This involves collaboration between the PRDE's Special Education Program and the PRVRA.

Overall, the strategy aims to leverage federal, state, and local investments to enhance access to workforce development programs at these educational institutions, ensuring that the workforce development system in Puerto Rico is comprehensive, inclusive, and effectively meets the needs of its diverse population.

Coordination and Alignment of Services

The Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DEDC) in Puerto Rico plays a pivotal role in integrating workforce development systems across the region. Key areas of focus include:

1. **Inter-agency Efforts**: DEDC ensures alignment of strategies and goals across various agencies, promoting a unified approach to workforce development.
2. **Data Communication**: Prioritizing the sharing and integration of participant data among partners, especially core programs, to enhance communication and reduce duplication of services.
3. **One-Stop Centers**: These centers are critical in delivering coordinated services, adapted to meet the unique needs of each geographic area in Puerto Rico.

The economic transformation of Puerto Rico, guided by PRopósito and WIOA, is designed to establish a competitive, knowledge-based economy. This strategy is centered on improving digital literacy, technological proficiency, and infrastructure. PRopósito's initiatives complement WIOA's aims to develop a skilled workforce by focusing on workforce development. Critical components of this strategy include expanding high-speed internet access, aligning training programs with local economic requirements, and providing quality services through American Job Centers. Collaborating with educational institutions and concentrating on post-secondary qualifications are essential. The Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DEDC) guarantees seamless service delivery to both individuals and employers, preparing a workforce that is ready to meet current and future market demands. This comprehensive approach promises inclusive economic growth and positions Puerto Rico as a significant participant in the global digital economy.

Improve the Case Management process and Empower Participants Selection

Through the J-PAL grant, the WDP will be evaluating the case management process at the local level, targeting offer technical assistance to improve service and increase enrollment. Increasing access to postsecondary education and credentials is related to the design of the Individual Service Strategy and the Individual Employment Plan. It will seek to integrate the following into the case management design:

1. Identify areas that need to be improved in case management development, discuss with case manager at local areas and develop public policies and procedures required to standardize the process across the AJC.

2. Improve technical assistance on LMI resources targeting more informed participants decision making and empower their strategies choice….
3. to place more emphasis on career development and job placement, and help more adults get on and stay on a path toward earning postsecondary degrees
4. Leverage external partners for recruitment and program design, like community-based organizations serving most in need adults and youth, as key partners for local board in recruiting and enrolling students in post-secondary education, like Boys and Girl Clubs, Sor Isolina Ferre Centers, Politécnico Amigo, among others.
5. Community-based organizations can become a strong referral base for local areas recruitment, by referring their clients of disadvantages youth, foster homes youth, single parents, among others.
6. Case management can identify student needs in a methodical way, structuring as an on-going process.
7. Improve youth and adult empowerment to visualize their goals and see their progress.
8. Case management involve community resources, including members of the family, in the strategies design and follow-up process.
9. Increase support services to postsecondary participants to stay in training, achieve their educational and occupational goals, until job placement.
10. Technical assistance to Local Board to improve approval processes for new credentials linked to employer demand.
11. Support services and programs of study would be structured and delivered to meet the needs of part-time students who are balancing work and family obligations while attending school.

Case Management Certification

To improve case management at AJCs, WDP is implementing a Case Management Certification for case managers from the 15 LWDAs, in a contract with Workforce180, a training provider to workforce professionals from more than 500 organizations in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, US Virgin Islands and Guam. This credential will help case managers have a standardized view of the case management process for AJC participants and clients, with

a specialized focus on WIOA. The training curriculum includes themes like the process of case management; effective assessment; service partnership; managing the caseload; follow-up; attitudes and behaviors; strategies for problem solving; and crisis case management, among others. Complete detail of de credential will be found in the Workforce180 electronic profile at Case Management Certification – Workforce180.

Key Initiatives:

The PR Department of Economic Development (DEDC) has implemented several key initiatives under the PRopósito program to stimulate economic growth in Puerto Rico. These initiatives focus on various strategic areas to enhance the island's competitiveness and quality of life.

- **Research and Development:** This aspect aims at developing knowledge for wealth generation and commercialization, positioning Puerto Rico among the top jurisdictions for ease of doing business globally. The focus areas include access to capital, permit agility, and energy resilience.
- **21st Century TechForce Puerto Rico:** This initiative is designed to address the rapid changes in the job market, especially the increasing demand for digital skills. The goal is to make Puerto Rico one of the top states/territories for 21st-century talent development, aiming to produce around 50,000 additional skilled workers in the next decade. This includes:
    - **Credential Accumulation:** Scholarships are provided to selected universities to redesign curriculums and develop short, stackable credentials in computer science and related fields.
    - **Short-term Credentials:** To increase the skilled workforce in technology areas, grants are given to tech and programming academies to expand and retain top faculty talent.
    - **Educational Digital Innovation Program (PIDE):** Grants are awarded to selected middle and high schools to finance innovative solutions connecting students with 21st-century jobs.
- **Quick Start:** This program aims to create a one-stop service center for employers to address 21st-century talent needs by designing and adapting curriculums focused on industry-specific requirements.
- **Centro de Investigación en Ciencias Moleculares (CICIM):** This public corporation affiliated with the University of Puerto Rico focuses on

advanced research in molecular sciences. The DEDC has signed a collaboration agreement with CICIM to boost its infrastructure and programmatic projects.

- **Carga Aérea:** The DEDC collaborates with the Puerto Rico Air Cargo Community to support initiatives that optimize this competitive element, aiding the industrial and commercial sector on the island.
- **Energy Policy Public Program (PPPE):** This program focuses on sustainable energy development, including initiatives like the "Bipartisan Infrastructure Law" for Puerto Rico's Weatherization Assistance Program and certifications for Energy Service Companies (ESCO).

These initiatives represent a comprehensive approach to enhancing Puerto Rico's economic landscape, focusing on education, infrastructure, technology, and energy sustainability.

The economic transformation of Puerto Rico, guided by PRopósito and WIOA, is designed to establish a competitive, knowledge-based economy. This strategy is centered on improving digital literacy, technological proficiency, and infrastructure. PRopósito's initiatives complement WIOA's aims to develop a skilled workforce by focusing on workforce development. Critical components of this strategy include expanding high-speed internet access, aligning training programs with local economic requirements, and providing quality services through American Job Centers. Collaborating with educational institutions and concentrating on post-secondary qualifications are essential. The Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DEDC) guarantees seamless service delivery to both individuals and employers, preparing a workforce that is ready to meet current and future market demands. This comprehensive approach promises inclusive economic growth and positions Puerto Rico as a significant participant in the global digital economy.

G. COORDINATING WITH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

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

Main Components of Economic Development

Puerto Rico's economic landscape is poised for transformation through the strategic integration of PRopósito's initiatives with the WIOA State Plan. This collaboration marks a pivotal shift toward developing a globally competitive

knowledge-based economy, focusing on enhancing digital literacy, technological skills, and infrastructure.

The connection between PRopósito's plans and the WIOA State Plan is crucial in transforming Puerto Rico's economy into a competitive, knowledge-based one. PRopósito's focus on digital literacy and infrastructure development works well with WIOA's goals for workforce development, aiming to provide the workforce with the necessary digital and technological skills. This alignment is important in adjusting to the fast-paced changes and requirements of the global market.

PRopósito's strategy focuses on enhancing high-speed internet access across Puerto Rico, which is integral to fostering digital literacy and bridging the digital divide. This initiative is in harmony with WIOA's objective of integrating technology into educational and workforce training programs. By improving internet access, the state ensures that a larger segment of the population can acquire digital skills, making them more employable in technology-driven industries. PRopósito aims to transform Puerto Rico's infrastructure to support digital commerce, aligning with WIOA's initiatives to improve logistical capabilities and technological infrastructure. This transformation is essential for creating a workforce adept at digital technologies and e-commerce, which are increasingly vital for economic growth. By investing in infrastructure, Puerto Rico has positioned itself as a competitive player in the global digital economy.

This strategy also extends to developing talent that is aligned with global trends. This approach is reflected in WIOA's focus on skill enhancement, ensuring that the workforce is prepared for high-value, knowledge-based jobs. Programs under WIOA, such as expanding apprenticeships and professional development for educators, align with PRopósito's goals by providing training in emerging fields and ensuring that the workforce is adaptable to future industry developments. Furthermore, PRopósito's objectives in promoting entrepreneurship and fostering a multisectoral economy resonate with WIOA's emphasis on diverse career pathways. This involves creating training programs that cater to the current market needs and anticipating future economic shifts. It is about preparing the workforce not just for today's jobs, but for tomorrow's opportunities as well.

PRopósito's social well-being goalis mirrored in WIOA's strategies to ensure inclusivity and equal access to opportunities. This includes specialized programs for various demographic groups to ensure that economic growth is equitable and benefits all sections of society.

Local Economic Integration and Workforce Development

Local economic integration is a key aspect in aligning workforce development with Puerto Rico's economic strategies. This integration involves tailoring training and development programs to the specific economic activities of local areas, ensuring that the workforce is not only skilled, but also relevant to local market demands. By fostering robust partnerships with programs such as Job Corps, YouthBuild, and the Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers Program, the approach is inclusive of various community needs.

This localized focus ensures that training programs are closely linked to burgeoning sectors, such as technology, agriculture, and service industries, making the workforce more adaptable and responsive to local economic needs. Such an approach is vital for creating a workforce that is aligned with the unique economic landscape of different regions within Puerto Rico. This strategy encompasses understanding the specific needs of each local area and developing training programs that are directly relevant to these needs.

Furthermore, this integration is crucial for addressing the challenges of under-employment and unemployment in various regions by creating a workforce that is equipped with skills that are in demand locally. This results in a more effective and efficient workforce development system that not only meets the current needs of the local economy, but also prepares for future economic challenges and opportunities.

Accessibility and Quality of Services through Job Centers

American Job Centers (AJCs) in Puerto Rico play a pivotal role in delivering accessible and high-quality services aligned with the state's workforce development strategies. These centers are hubs where job seekers can access a comprehensive range of services tailored to the diverse needs of the workforce. While operating under federal and state regulations, each AJC is uniquely adjusted to cater to the specific characteristics and requirements of its geographic area.

This localized approach ensures that the services offered are not only standardized in quality, but also relevant to the unique economic and employment landscape of each region. AJCs facilitate a crucial connection between job seekers and the labor market, offering resources, training, and support tailored to local industry demands. Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) guides the collaboration and roles of partners within AJCs, ensuring a cohesive approach to service delivery.

The effectiveness of AJCs is significantly enhanced through ongoing staff training and resource allocation, ensuring that the workforce is provided optimal services to meet their needs. By hosting representatives from various programs and agencies, including those for adult education and vocational rehabilitation, AJCs create a one-stop shop for workforce services. This comprehensive approach helps to streamline the job-seeking process, making it more efficient and effective for individuals seeking employment.

Enhancing Collaboration with Educational Institutions

Enhancing collaboration with educational institutions is central to Puerto Rico's workforce development, aligning educational and training services with state economic needs. This collaboration involves a concerted effort with community colleges, technical schools, and other educational providers, ensuring that the education and training system is job-driven and responsive to market demands. The State Board coordinates with entities such as the PRDE's State Board for Career and Technical Education, ensuring the alignment of occupational education with high-demand sectors. This partnership is the key to implementing career pathways and aligning educational offerings with workforce needs. Additionally, initiatives such as the Registered Apprenticeship program highlight the role of educational institutions in providing practical hands-on training that is directly relevant to the industry. This collaboration also emphasizes the importance of services for students with disabilities, ensuring their smooth transition into post-secondary education and workforce. Overall, engagement with educational institutions underpins the goal of creating a skilled, adaptable, job-ready workforce in Puerto Rico.

Improving Access to Post-secondary Credentials

Improving access to post-secondary credentials in Puerto Rico is a crucial component of the State's workforce development strategy. This effort focuses on facilitating pathways to industry-recognized certificates, licenses, and certifications that are both portable and stackable, catering to the evolving needs of the modern labor market. The State's approach involves maintaining a publicly accessible list of eligible training providers, accompanied by performance and cost information, ensuring transparency and informed decision-making for potential participants. Local boards play a key role in this process by evaluating the impact of various factors such as economic trends and demographic characteristics on the accessibility of training services. They are tasked with identifying in-demand occupations within their geographic regions, thus aligning training opportunities with the local labor market needs. This strategy emphasizes continuous openness in

the eligibility determination process, ensuring that a wide range of training providers can participate in and contribute to a diverse educational landscape. Additionally, the State's strategy includes safeguarding the confidentiality of educational records in compliance with FERPA, further ensuring the integrity of the system. Overall, the focus on post-secondary credentials is more than just on training; it is about creating a seamless bridge between education, training, and employment, ensuring that the workforce is equipped with the qualifications and skills required for successful and sustainable employment in Puerto Rico's dynamic economy.

Coordination, Alignment, and Provision of Services to Individuals

In Puerto Rico, the coordination, alignment, and provision of services to individuals is a multifaceted process that underpins the effectiveness of WIOA programs. The Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DEDC) has led this effort, working to implement a system that integrates services across 15 Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDAs) and aligns them with the needs of individuals and employers. This system relies on inter-agency collaboration, ensuring that strategies and goals at the service delivery level resonate with the overarching vision of the State Workforce Development Board (SWDB).

A crucial aspect of this coordination is data communication, where the DEDC leverages technology to track participant data, enhance communication, and reduce the duplication of services. This approach emphasizes the need for a comprehensive system that delivers uninterrupted, integrated services that effectively address both individual and employer needs. American Job Centers (AJCs) play a central role in this structure, ensuring the delivery of high-quality, coordinated services to job seekers. These centers are designed to adapt to the specific needs of their geographic areas, offering a range of services from various partners, including adult education and vocational rehabilitation.

Effective coordination of these services across different programs and providers is key to addressing the diverse needs of individuals in Puerto Rico. This process is facilitated through MOUs and cost-sharing agreements, ensuring a streamlined and efficient service delivery model that meets the needs of Puerto Rico's dynamic workforce.

Coordination, Alignment, and Provision of Services to Employers

In Puerto Rico, the coordination and alignment of services with employers are crucial aspects of the workforce development strategy. This process was spearheaded by the Employer Engagement Committee of the State Board

and Workforce Development Program of the Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DEDC). Their primary objective is to develop a Business Service Unit at the state level, leading to the creation of a Statewide Business Services Framework Plan. This plan guides Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs) and American Job Centers (AJCs) in collaboration with businesses.

The DEDC, through its partnership with consulting firms, focuses on developing and implementing strategies for layoff aversion and improving the overall quality of services to employers. These strategies aim to build skilled business service teams capable of establishing strong relationships with employers, providing valuable services that cater to their unique needs, and responding proactively to industry trends and potential market shifts.

Moreover, the Employer Engagement Committees at each local WDB play a pivotal role in this ecosystem. Comprising business representatives, these committees provide guidance, set specific goals, and track the progress of business service teams, thus ensuring their alignment with the state's economic development objectives. This comprehensive approach aims to increase employer participation rates, bolster confidence in the workforce, and foster robust employer engagement, ultimately contributing to Puerto Rico's economic prosperity and labor market stability.

Partner Engagement with Educational Institutions and Other Education and Training Providers

Puerto Rico's strategy of engaging with educational institutions and other education and training providers is a cornerstone of creating a workforce development system that is both dynamic and job-driven. The State Board plays a critical role in this endeavor by coordinating with the Puerto Rico Department of Education's State Board for Career and Technical Education, higher education institutions, and various training providers. This collaboration aims to establish a unified framework that supports the implementation of career pathways and aligns educational offerings with labor market needs.

The key to this strategy is the integration of educational institutions as active partners into the workforce development system. These institutions, including community colleges and technical schools, are crucial in providing educational and training services that meet the industry requirements for high-, mid-, and technologically advanced occupations. The approach also encompasses services for students with disabilities, ensuring their seamless transition to post-secondary education and the workforce, in accordance with Act 51-1996.

Moreover, the strategy emphasizes leveraging Federal, State, and local investments to enhance access to the workforce development programs at these institutions. This involves not only fostering alignment between educational programs and workforce needs, but also ensuring that these programs are accessible and meet the diverse needs of the population. The concerted effort of the State Board and its educational partners is pivotal in building a job-driven education and training system that effectively bridges the gap between education and employment in Puerto Rico.

Jobs for the Future Inc (JFF)

Platform for Social Impact (PSI), in collaboration with Jobs for the Future, Inc. (JFF), presents an innovative workforce development model tailored to address Puerto Rico's urgent economic recovery needs. Our unsolicited proposal aims to harness catalytic capital to build, evaluate, and scale workforce programs, aligning with the government's comprehensive objectives. With a skilled team and a focus on timely execution, we aim to impact 10,000 families by enhancing education, economic opportunities, and health services. Our strategy prioritizes wage growth, job placement, talent development, increased labor force participation, and retention of Puerto Rican talent, fostering collaboration between public and private sectors. Through this initiative, PSI and JFF seek to catalyze economic growth, leveraging both public and private resources to bolster infrastructure and human capital. The project envisions a phased approach, engaging stakeholders to refine and expand a community-based development model. PSI's recent $41M fundraise and the launch of OASIS, a multipurpose center in San Juan, signify our commitment to piloting and scaling transformative education and workforce solutions across Puerto Rico. Initial phases will focus on landscape analysis, policy development, participatory research, and solution testing, culminating in a scalable model for regional implementation.

B. STATE OPERATING SYSTEMS AND POLICIES

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

1. THE STATE OPERATING SYSTEMS THAT WILL SUPPORT COORDINATED IMPLEMENTATION OF STATE STRATEGIES (E.G., LABOR MARKET INFORMATION SYSTEMS, DATA SYSTEMS, COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS, CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS, JOB BANKS, ETC.).

State Operating Systems & Policies

To promote efficiency, an integrated service delivery model, and continuous improvement, DEDC has updated/drafted the following policies:

- Co-enrollment policy (WIOA & Wagner-Policy) with customer flow chart
- One-Stop Certification Policy
- One-Stop Operator Procurement
- Local Board Recertification Policy
- Local Area Performance Policy
- Adult Priority of Service Policy

Workforce and labor market information systems

The workforce and labor market information system (WLMI) established under Section 49l-2 of the Wagner-Peyser Act is administered by the PRDOLHR. The Department also maintains a Bureau of Labor Statistics and a Research Division on Occupational Skills and administers the Occupational Employment and Wages Survey, the Nonfarm Employment Survey, and special surveys, studies, and research. The products are readily available at http://www.mercadolaboral.pr.gov/.

The PRDOLHR maintains a WLMI that is fully accessible for a range of customer groups, including job seekers, employers, and policymakers. State and local industry and occupational employment projections are maintained for the long-term (10 years) and short-term (2 years), as well as for statewide and sub-state levels. The State uses the Local Employment and Wages Information System (LEWIS) to derive staffing patterns for sub-state projections.

As required by the USDOL, the PRDOLHR also produces a statewide annual economic analysis report, which is an essential tool for strategic planning for WIOA and other workforce programs. The report provides information and analyses that can support workforce planning and the process of making policy decisions for workforce development, education, economic development and business engagement in sector strategies and career pathway initiatives.

The plan proposes to continue coordination with federal data producers to ensure Puerto Rico is included in reports, series, surveys, and statistical products that are available for other state jurisdictions and are accessible through USDOL websites. Among other, these include the following products:

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- Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD). LEHD links employees' and employers' records from an array of data sources (administrative records, demographic surveys, and censuses). LEHD's principal product is its Quarterly Workforce Indicators (QWI), which include employment, job creation, monthly earnings, and worker turnover data by locale, as well as by the industry, gender, and age of workers. Although all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. The Virgin Islands have joined the LED Partnership, and the LEHD program has not yet produced public-use statistics for Puerto Rico.
- Business Dynamics Statistics (BDS). Provides annual measures of business dynamics (such as job creation and destruction, establishment births and deaths, and firm startups and shutdowns) for the economy, aggregated by establishment and firm characteristics.
- County Employment and Wages (QCEW). BLS produces this series from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) program. Wages represent total compensation paid during the calendar quarter, regardless of when the individual worked during that quarter.
- USDOE's State Assessment of Adult Literacy and State and County Estimates of Low Literacy. The SAAL is conducted in conjunction with the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL). Puerto Rico is not included in this report.

The Department of Education uses the Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) for K- 12 levels throughout its jurisdiction with a clear component of the WLMI system that provides increased visibility of data in the systems of primary and secondary education. The objective of the SLDS is to contribute to improving education policy and operational decisions using data related to students' achievements over time. It also aims to establish the mechanisms of organization, policies, procedures, systems, and human resources necessary to perpetuate their use by those interested in education at all levels. An immediate result was to help improve the ability to identify young people outside school who need services from the workforce system.

The system integrates data from the Student Information System of the PRDE (SIE, for its acronym in Spanish), which collects information on all students enrolled in the public education system, the Financial Information System

(SIFDE, for its acronym in Spanish), data from the Special Education Program, and data on students who are Spanish learners, among other data.

The Adult Education Program is integrated into the Data Management Committee, which coordinates the integration of the data collected in the Adult Information System (AIS) in the access portal of the longitudinal system. This has facilitated access to the data of the program and to improve the capacities for the presentation and analysis of the data necessary to support the decision-making process.

The Education Council collects, analyzes, and disseminates detailed data on K-12 educational institutions, vocational and technical institutions and IHEs. Data available at:

https://agencias.pr.gov/agencias/cepr/inicio/estadisticas_e_investigacion/Pages/default.aspx.

DATA, COMMUNICATION AND CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Participant Record Information System (PRIS)

The Puerto Rico database system is the Participant Record Information System (PRIS), became available on March 9, 2020. Technology solutions include common registration and case management across Title I and Title III programs. The software solution for WIOA workflows follows the Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 05-16, and WIOA Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL).

In compliance with Section 116(d)(1) of WIOA and related federal guidelines, the system consists of multiuser web-based software based on the PIRL, including the validation rules established by DOLETA and reports related to the PIRL database. Its main function is to comply with the three sets of validation rules (duplicate rules, valid values rules, and logical rules) reflected in the generation of 100% error-free comma delimited text files (csv files) based on the PIRL schemas for all programs. The software was developed according to the PIRL Schemas CSV files and will be used by the 16 programs included in the PIRL.

Title I–B programs and W-P programs were fully integrated. The Workforce Development Program continued its process for integrating Titles I, II, III, and IV and other required partners.

The implementation of the new software for data collection and information management expected results are:

- Improved Service Delivery and Employment Outcomes for Dislocated Workers;
- More Effective Connections to All Available Services through Integrated Case Management;
- Preventing Long-Term Unemployment;
- Increased Early Intervention and Layoff Aversion;
- Increased Accessibility to Services through Automation and Self-Service; and
- Enhanced Identification of Service Delivery Needs.

The PRIS collects and reports on performance measures for Title I and Title III programs. Currently, ETA 9169 for PY 2019 and PY 2020 were submitted and certified by WIPS.

The PRIS is reviewed periodically for potential updates, the database and reporting phase have already been completed, and the vendor is working to expand the capacity of the PRIS with the following additional modules:

- Case Management – The case management module is a supplemental tool to facilitate the collection of data from case managers in the AJC, currently in the process of implementation in PRIS. Its design was made through the input of a sample of case managers, WP and WDP staff. The module is in the stage of performing QA and user tests to upload it to the platform.
- Eligible Training Providers Module – This module electronically integrates the entire process for eligible training service providers to: submit documentation to the Local Boards of trainings eligible for WIOA funds; allow the Local Board process for evaluating and approving recommended training in accordance with occupational demand; as well as the evaluation at state level and the creation of the ETPL. The module collects the ETPL performance data elements required in ETA 9171.
- Registered Apprenticeship Module – In addition to the required elements of the PIRL, contain additional data fields to collect information relevant to case management and will be aligned with the RAPIDS database.

- Youth Module – This module collects information from service providers of the 14 elements of the youth program from the local areas and state level.
- Rapid Response Module – Collects information from dislocated workers receiving rapid response services.

AJC Partners Integration

One of the main goals of the workforce development system is the integration of all core and required partners in the AJC for common intake, common case management, supportive services, and avoiding duplication of services.

The WDP and partners have already initiated the process of integrating services, including databases, which is in the stage of initiating the evaluation of the partners' IT infrastructure. Therefore, this is an ongoing process that is still in development. This work will support the objectives of integrating and reporting the results of the entire workforce system.

The WDP and State Board began to bring together all required and non-required WIOA partners. The inclusion of partners on this platform will allow for a more effective system. DEDC must establish data-sharing agreements with each partner willing to be integrated in the system, either by sharing the data or by achieving an interface to share customer participation information. This will improve both client services and reporting with respect to data analysis and client activities. The intent of this process is to gather comprehensive and consistent information so that appropriate workforce development services will be provided. Common intake and case management will help coordinate and align services provided through the workforce development system and will ensure that those needing services through the workforce system receive appropriate services.

State Wage Interchange System (SWIS). Puerto Rico signed the SWIS Agreement with DOLETA, which incorporated all six WIOA core programs to exchange interstate quarterly wage records. Since January 1, 2020, all Queries for Wage Data for all applicable programs have been processed through the SWIS Clearinghouse. The SWIS Agreement replaces the Wage Record Interchange System (WRIS and WRIS2) Data Sharing Agreements previously executed by most States. States signing the Agreement will be able to exchange interstate quarterly wage records with any other State signing the Agreement to satisfy performance reporting requirements in section 116 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

The PR Department of Labor & Human Resource is the SUIA agency. "SUIA" is the state agency that holds wage data, whether such agency also administers the state's unemployment insurance program. On the other hand, PACIA" is the Performance Accountability and Customer Information Agency designated by the governor to be responsible for coordinating the state's program for assessing state and local program performance and evaluating training provider performance. The PACIA are PR Department of Economic Development & Commerce – Access PACIA; PR Department of Education – Access PACIA; PR Department of the Family – Access PACIA; and the PR Vocational Rehabilitation Administration – Access.

MIP. The Accounting Information System (MIP) is used by the WDP to keep accounting data on WIOA federal funds allocated to local areas, as well as disbursements to participants and providers and administrative and operational concepts of expenditure. All local boards (15) provide the data required by the system regardless of the use of internal financial information systems.

Claimants' Services Web Portal. The system allows an unemployment insurance claim to be filed online. Users can file an initial claim for unemployment benefits if they have worked in Puerto Rico for at least two-quarters within the last 18 months and become unemployed for reasons beyond their control. Any application submitted after 5pm, from Monday to Friday, will be processed on the next working day. Time required to complete the application should not exceed 30 minutes. Also, claims are accepted by phone at (787) 945-7900, a service available during regular working hours.

National Reporting System (NRS) - The Puerto Rico Adult Education data collection reporting system uses the NRS designed to help providers collect, analyze, and use data to identify and implement strategies to achieve expected levels of performance. Current efforts are focused on PRIS integration, which will strengthen compliance with NRS requirements.

Case Management Information System (CMIS). PRVRA's case management system keeps data, required for federal and state reporting, on services provided to applicants, consumers and potentially eligible students with disabilities. CMIS is not currently integrated with PRDOLHR or the One-Stop systems.

Job Banks. PR.JOBS is the official Job Bank of the PRDOLHR. This resource, available to employers and job seekers in general, is provided free of cost by Direct Employers as part of an agreement with the NASWA to provide a valuable tool to State Workforce Agencies. Direct Employers Job Central is a

web clearinghouse operated by Direct Employers, where employers can post available jobs and recruit eligible job candidates; job seekers may also search for job openings and apply for employment.

Job Central uses the O*NET Auto coder to assign occupational codes. Direct Employers uses a version that has been upgraded extensively since the original and will not record jobs uploaded from a state workforce agency site unless they have a valid SOC/O*NET code assigned.

Upon registration in PR.JOBS, a job seeker will have access to a vast network of employers and can publish their resume online and gain access to skills transferability tools such as MyNextMove and MySkillsMyFuture. A registered employer will find a network of jobseekers in search of employment and can search their resumes online to match their job opportunities and allow them to extend an invitation for an interview that is transparent to the job seeker.

RAPIDS. Registered Apprenticeship data are entered into a USDOL database called the Registered Apprenticeship Partners Information Data System (RAPIDS). In addition, we have an electronic Apprenticeship module that communicates with the USDOL's WIPS system to report on program performance. We are working with the ETA Regional Office to achieve the interface between the two systems.

The PRIS is in the process of upgrading, the database and reporting phase are already completed, and the vendor is working to expand the capacity of the PRIS with the following additional modules, as described in the previous section:

- Case Management
- Eligible Training Providers
- Registered Apprenticeship Module
- Youth Module
- Rapid Response Module
- ETPL Module

The WDP hired an IT vendor to develop the integration of the databases of the core and required partners of the system, seeking that the PRIS can be used by the required partners as their database platform and share relevant information from other partners to avoid duplication of services and track clients through their participation. The WDP and partners have already begun the process of outlining the process of integrating services, including

databases, which is in the stage of initiating the evaluation of the partners' IT infrastructure. This work will support the objectives of integrating and reporting the results of the entire workforce system.

The expected results are as follows:

- Improved Service Delivery and Employment Outcomes for Dislocated Workers;
- More Effective Connections to All Available Services through Integrated Case Management;
- Preventing long-term unemployment
- Increased Early Intervention and Layoff Aversion;
- Increased Accessibility to Services through Automation and Self-Service; and
- Enhanced Identification of Service Delivery Needs.

NRS. The Adult Information System complies with the regulations and requirements of the Adult Educational System and manages the required federal reporting for the NRS. Title II is expected to join the PRIS as an additional module through an agreement.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services. The PRVRA system collects data for the RSA-911 and other federal and local reports. Whereas WIOA sets new performance indicators for the program, CRIS will be undergoing adjustments in programming, so that data can be recorded as needed to measure compliance. Currently, the CRIS is not integrated into the system of other core programs or the One-Stop center network.

Description of the Adult Information system at PRDE-ADP (PEA)

The PRDE-AEP reporting process is as follows:

- The AEP implemented an Adult Information System (AIS) with the purpose of maintaining accurate participant data and continuous improvement in data quality. Training in the platform use is offered to service providers' center directors through workshops focused on key issues such as how to gather and save data, data quality validation, data usefulness to demonstrate service effectiveness, performance level standards negotiated with NRS and follow-up to performance indicators.

- Additional technical assistance is provided through phone calls and e-mails. Issues are also addressed through the Adult Information System (AIS) call center. This effort is implemented at central AEP offices to guide local providers in the daily operations of data collection for adult education activities.
- The Adult Information System (AIS) is also used to continue reviewing local activity data gathering on educational functioning level gains and the number of participants post-tested. This review process allows the program staff to thoroughly assess program operations.
- The AIS is also used to analyze the reported performance data. To perform this analysis, the process conducted at the State and local levels is based on the data collected by the service providers and uploaded to the Adult Information System (AIS) at the AEP central level. A detailed data review and validation of each data indicator is performed by the central office. The specific identified anomalies are checked for corrections. The errors, when identified, are resolved by telephone calls and discussion of the raw data indicators with the education centers directors, teachers, and counselors at each center.

Database integration among core partners commenced in PY 2021. Analysis of the information infrastructure (IT) poses as the most time-consuming task within the work plan established with the vendor, mainly due to the diverse technological architectures of each core program. The objective isn't to share the entire database, given the presence of confidential and sensitive participant information. Instead, the aim is to share pertinent information on service delivery to facilitate co-enrollment, enhance service delivery, and prevent redundancy. It's noteworthy that while Wagner-Peyser (WP) and Title I are already integrated, the integration process with Title II and VRA is ongoing.

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

The State Board will review its policies to comply with the requirements of WIOA. To bring all practices into compliance with WIOA and other federal regulations, the PRDEDC and the State Board have the following policies or guidance:

State Policies and Procedures

1	DDEC-WIOA-07-2023	Compliance Guidance of Expenditures of Fund in in Government Public Outreach in an Election Year
2	WIOA-PP-05-2021-enmienda December 12, 2023	Guidelines to Programmatic Data Validation for Title I Programs under WIOA
3	WIOA-PP-03-2020-enmienda 1, December 12, 2023	Selection of Eligible Youth Service Providers
4	WIOA-PP-02-2021-enmienda 1,December 12, 2023	Procedure and Requirements for the Subsequent Designation and Redesignation of Local Workforce Development Areas under WIOA
5	WIOA-PP-08-2023	Travel expenses and representation expenses (per diem) for attendance at Local Workforce Development Board meetings
6	WIOA-PP-07-2023	Transfer of funds between the Adult and Dislocated Workers Programs
7	WIOA-06-2023	Plan for the Operations of AJC after Emergencies
8	WIOA-PP-05-2023	Transitional Jobs for Adults and Dislocated Workers

1	DDEC-WIOA-07-2023	Compliance Guidance of Expenditures of Fund in in Government Public Outreach in an Election Year
9	WIOA-PP-04-2023	Work Experience under the Adult, Dislocated Workers, and Youth Programs
10	WIOA-PP-03-2023	Support services and "Needs Related Payments (NRPs)"
11	WIOA-PP-02-2023	Priority of Services in Title I Adult Program
12	DDEC-WIOA-PP-01-2023	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA)
13	DDEC-WIOA-05-2023	21ST Century Techforce Puerto Rico
14	DDEC-WIOA-04-2023	Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDA) faculty to provide a summer bonus as part of fringe benefits to their employees
15	DDEC-WIOA-03-2023	Instruction for Use the PRIS Participant Module (PRIS 2.0)
16	DDEC-WIOA-02-2023	New Workforce Brand "Conexión Laboral"
17	DDEC-WIOA-01-2023	Guide to Procurement of Legal Services in the WDLA
18	WIOA-PP-04-22 – Amendment 1	Work-Based Training (WBT) activities under WIOA

1	DDEC-WIOA-07-2023	Compliance Guidance of Expenditures of Fund in in Government Public Outreach in an Election Year
19	DDEC-WIOA-08-2022	Launch of the new brand "Conexión Laboral". This policy establishes the creation of a unified brand and image to promote and maximize the participation and services offered by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act ("WIOA").
20	DDEC-WIOA-07-2022	Participation of LWDA Employees in Emergency Relief in Municipalities Affected by Hurricane Fiona
21	DDEC-WIOA-06-2022	Appointing Authority for Executive Directors of Local Workforce Development Areas
22	DDEC-WIOA-05-2022	Applicability of Law No. 47 of 2021, on Minimum Wage to Municipal Consortia and Program Participants under the WIOA Act
23	DDEC-WIOA-004-2022	Applicability of 29CFR38 and 29USC3248 (WIOA) to the provision of services in One-Stop or One-Stop Partners, statutes, and prohibition of discrimination on the

1	DDEC-WIOA-07-2023	Compliance Guidance of Expenditures of Fund in in Government Public Outreach in an Election Year
		basis of race, color, national origin, religion, age, disability, gender, place of residence, political affiliation, or belief, in the provision of services.
24	DDEC-WIOA-03-2022	Guide to Allowable and Non-Permissible Costs with WIOA Funds
25	DDEC-WIOA-02-2022	Policy related to allowable expenses to travels paid with WIOA Funds
26	DDEC-WIOA-01-2022	Visits and Face-to-Face Services to the T&Cs/AJC
27	DDEC-WIOA-05-2021	Guide to Programmatic Data Validation under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Program
28	Carta Circular DDEC-WIOA-04-2021	Faculty of local areas to pay a summer bonus as part of fringe benefits to their employees
29	DDEC-WIOA-03-2021	Prohibition of total closure of the AJC during the administrative closures decreed by the municipalities

1	DDEC-WIOA-07-2023	Compliance Guidance of Expenditures of Fund in in Government Public Outreach in an Election Year
30	DDEC-WIOA-02-2021	Procedure for subsequent designation and re-designation of local areas - To provide guidance and process for the designation and subsequent designation of Workforce Development Areas.
31	DDEC- WIOA- 01- 2021	Policy to comply with the Sunshine Provision for Local Board activities under the Workforce Opportunity and Innovation Act WIOA
32	RESOLUCION NUM 01-2021	State Board Resolution No. 01-2020 to Temporary Jobs
33	DDEC WIOA-RR-02-20	Public Policy to allocation of funds for COVID Prevention
34	DDEC-WIOA-11-20	Financial Reports - Close-Out Reports
35	DDEC-WIOA-10-20	Payroll Cost Allocation Policy - Guidelines and procedures for payroll base on budget
36	DDEC-WIOA-09-20	Cost allocation and fund reimbursement
37	DDEC-WIOA-08-20	Case Management and Record-Keeping Policy

1	DDEC-WIOA-07-2023	Compliance Guidance of Expenditures of Fund in in Government Public Outreach in an Election Year
38	DDEC-WIOA-07-20	Procedure for the follow-up service required by WIOA for participants of the Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Programs
39	DDEC-WIOA-06-20	TAA Definition of eligible displacement area
40	DDEC-WIOA-05-20	TAA Training - Requirements when approving Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Training funds request.
41	DDEC-WIOA-04-20	Guidelines to the process of certification, recertification, and decertification of Local Boards
42	WIOA-03-20	WIOA-03-20 - Policy for the Competitive Selection of Eligible Youth Service Providers
43	DDEC-WIOA-02-20	DDEC-WIOA-02-20 - Technical Assistance Guidelines to 14 elements of youth program - Guide to define concepts, eligibility, and other aspects related to the youth program

1	DDEC-WIOA-07-2023	Compliance Guidance of Expenditures of Fund in in Government Public Outreach in an Election Year
44	DDEC-WIOA-RR-01-20	Policy for COVID-19 Layoff Aversion Fund
45	WIOA 03-2017	Circular Letter on Public Policy and Requirements for Publicity, Transparency, Openness and Disclosure of Local Board Affairs
46	WIOA 2-2017	Guideline to the Competitive Selection of One Stop Center Operators - American Job Center
47	WIOA 01-2017	Policy to the development of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and IFA with AJC partners
48	State Board Rule	Internal Rule of the State Board
49	State Boad Sanctions	Policy to establish the procedure for the determination of WIOA rules violations and the imposition of state board sanctions

MOU and IFA policy

The WDP developed the public policy **WIOA- 01-2017**, **a Process to Develop the Memorandums of Understanding**, issued on April 24, 2017, distributed to

the presidents of the Local Boards, CEO, and Partners of the AJC. It establishes the legal basis and process for Local Boards and partners to negotiate memorandums of understanding. The policy entitled **Guide to the Preparation of the Infrastructure Financing Agreement (IFA) and Resource Allocation** was prepared using as reference TEGL *17-16, Infrastructure Funding of the One-Stop Delivery System*. The WIOA-01-2017 policy sets the parameters for negotiation and the content that the agreement should have. The development of local memorandums is based on the state agreement signed by the grantees of the partner programs of the system.

The policy includes legal reference, definitions, purpose, MOUS content, stages of the negotiation process, roles and responsibilities, and guidelines for the development of an infrastructure costs agreement. The next section summarizes the most relevant information regarding this policy.

The purpose of the MOU is to provide information on the relationship between the Local Board, the AJC Operator, and the One-Stop System's partners. The Local Board and the partner negotiated the MOU to ensure that the following WIOA principles are implemented:

1. Universal Access: All clients, including those with barriers to employment, will have access to job search, training, and occupational services in all AJCs and will also be provided with information leading to decision-making targeting career development and the employment market.
2. Service in the One-Stop System: All clients can explore career development and job preparation services and access information on employment opportunities.
3. Individual Choice: Customers will be able to choose from a variety of careers, skills, employment, and training information to obtain the services and skills they need to increase their employability opportunities based on individual needs, which will be nurtured by the advice and escape of AJC staff.
4. Regional Development: Create a labor development system that promotes the regional labor market's skills and improves the economic development of the Region and Local Area. Services such as commas, tax credits, incentives, and labor market information must be accessible within the AJC.

5. Cost-efficiency: All customers must have access to a system that minimizes costs and promotes the participation of employers and job seekers who use the system so that services do not double.
6. WIOA emphasizes full and active collaboration, good-faith negotiation, and the best agreement between the parties regarding services, costs, resources, and other provisions related to the best and most efficient Single Gestion System, which is required by law and other applicable regulations.

MOU must contain at least the following information:

1. Description of the services to be provided through the AJC, including how those services will be coordinated and provided.
2. A fiscal plan on how the costs of services and system operation will be subsidized, including infrastructure, operational, and hared costs.
3. Methods for referral of individuals between the operator/ is of the UGC-AJC and partners for the service and activity concerned.
4. Methods to ensure that the needs of workers, youth, and individuals with barriers to employment, including individuals with disabilities, are addressed through the provision of appropriate services, including access to technology and materials available in the UGC-AJC.
5. Description of the reports that each partner must produce under the program/agency regulation it represents concerning the services it provides in the UGC-AJC, who and how he will be responsible for collecting and submitting the required information.
6. Description of the services to be provided through the AJC UGC, including how those services will be coordinated and provided.
7. Duration of MOU and procedures for amending and/or reviewing it.
8. Guarantees that each MOU will be reviewed, at least every three (3) years so that appropriate funds are allocated, and the provision of services is ensured.
9. MOU must be updated in a period of no more than three (3) years to reflect any changes in signers and cost sharing.
10. If a partner using the process described in section 678.750 of the WIOA Final Rule appeals to the determination of the assigned infrastructure cost, resulting in a change in the WIOA's contribution to infrastructure costs, the MOU must be updated to show such a determination.

11. The determination of the format that the MOU will have been of the Local Board, also complying with the requirements set out in section 678.500 of the WIOA Interpretative Regulations and with any other provisions by the State.

12. The MOU may contain any other provision agreed upon by the parties, which must be consistent with WIOA Title I and its Regulations, Laws and regulations related to programs administered by partners and other applicable legal regulations. Such additional provisions may not contravene the provisions of this Circular Charter.

Availability of Career Services and Employer Services

1. Basic career services will be universally available to the entire population.
2. Each partner is responsible for providing services that correspond to the program or agency they represent.
3. Career services are detailed in section 678.430 of the Final Rule. Section 678.435 describes the services available to employers in the AJC.
4. Employers' services fall into two main categories:
    a. Participation and Commitment- Educate and provide general information to employers on how the services in the AJC can represent solutions to their challenges or needs in terms of the employment of qualified personnel.
    b. Business Services- develop customized strategies based on their profile to determine the needs of employers in a way that addresses the challenges related to Recruitment, Employment, Training, Closures, and Layoffs.
5. Multi-barrier Employment Population Services - Partners must ensure that services are available to individuals with barriers to employment.
6. Continuous Improvement and Duplication of Service
    a. All partners will participate in the process of programmatic review and continuous improvement to offer the best services, avoid duplication, and consider an innovative approach to the delivery of services.
    b. Partners will participate in the day-to-day development and improvement of the system's procedures, policies, operational administration, and the Single Management Center.

c. To ensure that services are responsive to community needs, partners will interview customers for feedback related to satisfaction with the services and care provided at the AJC. Tools will be developed to measure continuous improvement and avoid service duplication.

- Evaluation Sheet–to be administered to all AJC staff, including partners, every three months. This Evaluation Sheet shall consider, among others, the delivery of services and referral processes.
- Customer Service Survey - which will be administered every three (3) months by the AJC Operator to participants. To do this, the operator will choose a statistical sample corresponding to 35% of the total daily average participants.
- The results of these tools will be used to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of AJC processes and services.
- Performance Measure - All partners will work together to achieve and exceed the Performance Measures negotiated with DOLETA.
- The AJC operator will report on the progress of these measures, and all partners will discuss alternatives to mutually achieve performance, negotiate rates, and share responsibility.
- Common Operating System - All partners will integrate into the common operating system for the acquisition of information, evaluation, referral, and monitoring of participants in the UGC-AJC.
- Priority of Service: All employment and training programs or partners, subsidized with federal funds, and administered by AJC partners, will observe a preferred system for people with disabilities, veterans, pregnant women, people over 65, and other priority population. Employment and training opportunities must be provided to such a population and/or other eligible persons, as established by federal and State laws and federal policies applicable to the grants.

Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA) and Resource Allocation Guidelines

Infrastructure Funding of the One-Stop Delivery System (AFI) and Resource Allocation Agreement Guidelines were prepared using TEGL 17-16, Infrastructure Funding of the One-Stop Delivery System. The WIOA-01-2017 policy sets the parameters for the negotiations of the one-stop center cost allocation. The allocation and distribution among AJC core programs and infrastructure costs are governed by WIOA Section 121(h), its Final

Regulations, and the Federal Cost Principles contained in the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Principal Costs, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards of 2 CFR Part 200 (Uniform Guidance).

1. All programs must contribute to infrastructure costs and certain additional costs, comma required by 20 CFR 678.700 and 678.760, 34 CFR 361.700 and 361.760, and 34 CFR 463.700 and 463.760, respectively. Under federal cost principles, a member's contribution must be reasonable, necessary, and assignable to the program.
2. The Guide describes the governor's responsibilities, the State and State board, the Local Board, CEOs, and partners to determine infrastructure costs and their roles in the development of Local Financing Mechanisms (LFMs) and State Financing Mechanisms (MFS).
3. All costs incurred in the operation of the AJC must be allocated in compliance with federal cost principles and by using an accepted cost allocation methodology. These methodologies should be described in an Infrastructure Financing Agreement (IFA), in which each Local Board must submit to the State along with the Memorandum of Understanding and the Local Plan.
4. The IFA must be certified and approved by the AJC Operator and each required and optional partner.
5. Consistent with 20 CFR 678.755, 34 CFR 361.755 and 34 CFR 463.755, IFA must include the following elements:
    a. the validity of the IFA (which may differ from that of the MOU);
    b. identification of the infrastructure cost budget, which is a component of AJC's operational budget;
    c. identification of all AJC partners, the CEO(s) and the Local Board participating in the IFA;
    d. a description of the process for periodic review and modification to ensure equitable benefits between partners in the agreement;
    e. information on the Local Board's measures, the CEO(s), and the core partners to reach consensus or ensure that the Local Area followed the state financing process (SFM);
    f. a description of the process to be used among partners to resolve infrastructure financing issues during the MOU's duration, in cases where no consensus is reached.

Infrastructure Financing Mechanisms

Infrastructure costs can be financed through two methods: the Local Financing Method (LFM) and State Financing Method (SFM). The LFM method allows flexibility for the Local Board and partner programs to establish the design and allocation of funds through consensus. The intention of the LFM is to make a good-faith effort to reach agreement in the development of an AFI. On the other hand, SFM is thinking about it as an alternative when the required consensus between the Local Boards and partner programs is not achieved.

AJC Operational Costs

The AJC budget should contain a base budget that is based on the individual budgets distributed in two types of costs specifically described in the Rule: (1.) the Infrastructure Costs, defined in WIOA's 121(h)(4); and (2.) the Additional Costs, which consist of operating costs and cost of shared services that are related to the operation of the AJC (but do not constitute the infrastructure costs), are described in Section 121(i) of WIOA. Specific references on infrastructure costs can be found in sections 20 CFR 678.755, 34 CFR 361.755, and 34 CFR 463.755

1. **Infrastructure Costs** -Infrastructure costs are defined as the overall operating costs of the AJC, not related to the payment of human resources (salaries, or marginal benefits, among others), and may include the rental of physical facilities, utilities and maintenance, equipment (including products related to evaluation and technological assistance for persons with disabilities) and technology to facilitate access to the JJ (including planning activities and candidate search (outreach)) and may include the costs associated with establishing the identifier American Job Center (AJC) and related materials, as defined in Uniform Guidance 2 CFR 200.94, necessary for the operation of the center. Include:
2. **Non-personnel costs** - Non-personnel costs are all costs that are not compensation for personal services
3. **Personnel costs** -. In contrast to non-personnel costs for the one-stop system, personnel costs include salaries, wages, and fringe benefits of the employees of partner programs or their sub-recipients, as described in 2 CFR 200.430 (Compensation – personal services) and 2 CFR 200.431 (Compensation – fringe benefits) of the Uniform Guidance.

4. **Additional Costs**- One-stop partners must share in additional costs, which must include applicable career services, and may include shared operating costs and shared services necessary for the general operation of the one-stop center.
5. **Career Services** - One-stop partners must ensure that at least some career services, described in WIOA sec. 134(c)(2), are provided at the one-stop center.
6. **Shared Operating Costs and Shared Services** - One-stop partners may also share other costs that support the operations of the one-stop centers and the costs of shared services. The costs of shared services may include initial intake, assessment of needs, appraisal of basic skills, identification of appropriate services to meet such needs, referrals to other one-stop partners, and business services (WIOA sec. 121(i)(2), 20 CFR 678.760, 34 CFR 361.760, and 34 CFR 463.760, respectively).

Funding Types and Sources.

Funding for infrastructure and additional costs, such as shared costs and services, may be in the form of: (1) cash, non-cash, and third-party in-kind contributions; (2) funding from philanthropic organizations or other private entities; or (3) other alternative financing options, as described in WIOA Sec. 121(c)(2)(A)(ii) and 20 CFR 678.715, 34 CFR 361.715, and 34 CFR 463.715. Infrastructure funding may be from funds classified as administrative, program, or both, depending on the requirements of the partner program.

Uniform Guidance – Federal Cost Principles

Any cost paid with federal grant funds must comply with Subpart E, Federal Cost Principles of the Uniform Guidance at 2 CFR Part 200. The Federal Cost Principles, applicable to one-stop partners that are federally funded, provide general guidance for developing cost allocation methodologies and determining if contributions towards infrastructure costs and additional costs are necessary, reasonable, and allocable to their program based on the relative benefits received. Additionally

Proportionate Use

Proportionate use refers to a partner program contributing its fair share of the costs proportionate to: (1) the use of the one-stop center by customers that may include reportable individuals and participants in its program at the one-stop center; (2) the amount of square footage occupied by the partner program in the one-stop center; or (3) another allocation base consistent with the Uniform Guidance.

Relative Benefit

The process of measuring the benefits of a program must use reasonable methods and is related to the benefits received by the partner at the center.

Partner Programs with Multiple Grant Recipients

In this situation, each contracted grant recipient must contribute to infrastructure.

Cost Allocation

Cost allocation is based on the premise that federal programs must have an equitable proportion of cost-sharing based on the benefit received by each program.

1. **Definition of Allocation of 2 CFR 200.4**

It is the process of assigning a cost or a cost group, to one or more cost objectives, in reasonable proportion with the expected benefit or other equitable relationship. The process can involve assigning a cost directly to a final cost goal, or through one or more intermediate cost goals.

2. **Assignable Cost**

32 CFR 200.405 details the criteria for determining assignable costs under a federal program.

3. **Allocation Methodologies**.

In the development of the methodology, the partners: (1) determine the infrastructure costs budget and the budget(s) for additional costs, which must include career services and may include shared services and shared operating costs for a particular comprehensive one-stop center; (2) determine which methodologies are reasonable and acceptable; and (3) from the acceptable methodologies, select the methodology (or methodologies) that will be applied to the different cost categories. Partners should focus on identifying methodologies that most effectively allocate costs based on proportionate use and relative benefits received by the partners.

4. **Allocation Bases**

When costs cannot be directly assigned to a final cost objective, they are placed in a pool that will be allocated later to the benefiting partner programs.

5. **Inputs**

The inputs are the most used allocation bases for the resources used in a process, activity, or service. Using inputs, the cost is allocated at the same time it is incurred and usage must be documented. Examples of input bases include: (1) staff time allocated based on timesheets and time distribution records; (2) facilities allocated based on square footage; (3) accounting services allocated based on transactions; and (4) equipment or supplies allocated based on usage.

6. **Outputs**

Departments consider output to be the result of an activity or service. Examples of output allocation bases include: (1) participants and reportable individuals under a specific program; (2) number of customers who are obtaining employment after self-directed job search; and (3) number of customers receiving a specific career service.

Basic Cost Allocation Principles

1. **Allowable Costs**

To be allowed, a cost is necessary and reasonable for the proper and efficient administration of the program. To reduce the risk of expense accumulation and be responsible for unintended costs, the planned program expenses, terms, and conditions of the delegation of funds, and applicable regulations should be carefully reviewed before incurring any cost of a program.

2. **Reasonable Costs**

For a reasonable cost, it must not exceed the costs incurred by a prudent person under the same circumstances. To determine the reasonableness of a given cost, consideration should be given to:

1. Whether the cost is of a type recognized as normal and necessary for the operation of the organization or the management of the assignment.
2. The requirements or restrictions imposed by factors such as generally accepted business practices, state and federal laws, regulations and terms and conditions of the allocation.
3. If the individuals and/or parties concerned act prudently within the circumstances, considering their responsibilities to the organization, its members, employees, customers, the public and public interest.

4. Important deviations from established organizational practices can unreasonably increase operating costs.

5. **Assignable Costs**

For a cost to be assigned to a given cost objective, other costs incurred for the same purpose must be treated as being constantly treated in similar circumstances. Any cost assignable to a particular fund, grant, assignment, or other cost objective, under these principles, may not be changed to other federal grants or allocations to cover funding deficiencies, to avoid restrictions imposed by law or assignment contracts, or for other reasons.

However, this prohibition is not a limitation on cost changes that are allowed under two or more allocations under existing agreements within the programs.

4. **Benefits**

Benefit measurement is a critical requirement and a central task to be performed under a cost distribution. Costs are assignable to a particular cost target considering the expected benefits from that cost goal.

When direct benefit measurement cannot be performed efficiently and effectively, it is appropriate to group this type of cost into a cost pool and subsequently make a distribution. The allocation basis should be the mechanism used to allocate combined costs (pool) to final cost targets. Partners must be careful that the selected base does not distort the expected results.

Cost Allocation Plan (CAP) - Method for Documenting Cost Allocation

CAP is the method by which an organization identifies, groups, and distributes the direct and indirect costs allowed in grants and contracts. Accounting records are the evidence required to justify all expenses included in a cost-sharing plan. The CAP must include at least the following elements:

1. An organizational chart that identifies all partners, type of services and staff functions.
2. A description of the types of services and programs delivered at the center.
3. A copy of the official budget that includes all the costs to operate the AJC.
4. A description of the methods used in allocating expenses for each cost objective that includes the following:

a. A narrative description of the methodology for the allocation of expenses for each cost objective.

b. An overview of direct costs and cost types.

c. A list of indirect costs, pool costs, basis for the allocation of each pool cost type, and supporting documentation for each allocation base.

d. A summary of the allocation of the costs of the core services allocated for the operation of the AJC.

e. A certification from the AJC operator that the cost allocation methodology has been prepared in accordance with the guidelines and instructions given by the State. If the AJC wishes to certify your PAC, you can use a certification statement developed by the Local Board.

Factors to Develop a PAC

1. **Simple** - use the most straightforward and least expensive method possible, based on a measure to calculate the relative benefit are expected to receive, which can produce an equitable allocation of costs between programs.
2. **Replicable** - the process that unfolds must be replicable at any time.
3. **Consider Available Resources** - it is essential to consider the structure and capabilities of the accounting system in the design of a cost allocation process.
4. **Make changes wisely** - Making changes to the CAP that result in a retroactive redistribution of costs to the cost objective would be permissible only when the change results in a more equitable distribution of costs. Such changes in the allocation methodology must be received by the necessary, justified, and documented prior approvals.

Example of a Cost Allocation Process

The Guide includes a practical example showing cost estimates based on square feet, pool cost objective of physical facilities, number of expected participant's equipment costs, and wages.

Certification of the AJC Infrastructure Financing Agreement

1. It is a matter of certifying that in the CAP, the included expenses are correctly allocated in accordance with the rules and regulations established for the use of WIOA funds.
2. Costs presented in the CAP have been duly negotiated and reviewed for AJC's partners, and they are fair and reasonable, considering the contribution of each partner to the operation of the center and the provision of services.
3. It includes the signature of the people responsible for negotiating the CAP and the date of certification of the agreements.

AJC Partners Integration

One of the main goals of the workforce development system is the integration of all core and required partners in the AJC for common intake, common case management, supportive services, and avoiding duplication of services. The WDP hired an IT vendor to develop the integration of the databases of the core and required partners of the system. The main challenge is assessing each partner's IT architecture, some of which has their own database platforms and confidentiality requirements. This initiative seeks that the PRIS can be used by the required partners as their database platform and share relevant information from other partners to avoid duplication of services and to track clients through their participation.

The WDP and partners have already begun the process of outlining the process of integrating services, including databases, which is in the stage of initiating the evaluation of the partners' IT infrastructure. This work will support the objectives of integrating and reporting the results of the entire workforce system.

The WDP and State Board began to bring together all required and non-required WIOA partners. The inclusion of partners on this platform will allow for a more effective system. DEDC must establish data-sharing agreements with each partner willing to be integrated in the system, either by sharing the data or by achieving an interface to share customer participation information. This will improve both client services and reporting with respect to data analysis and client activities. The intent of this process is to gather comprehensive and consistent information so that appropriate workforce development services will be provided. Common intake and case management will help coordinate and align services provided through the workforce development system and will ensure that those needing services through the workforce system receive appropriate services.

The PRIS is in the process of upgrading, the database and reporting phase have already been completed, and the vendor is working to expand the capacity of the PRIS with the following additional modules:

- Case Management
- Eligible Training Providers Module
- Registered Apprenticeship Module
- Youth Module
- Rapid Response Module

Policy DEDC-WIOA-PP-01-2023 - Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility

It set the public policy on DEIA under Executive Order 14035 promulgated by the White House on June 25, 2022, entitled "Executive Order on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce. The mission of the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) is to "foster, promote, and develop the well-being of America's salaried workers, job seekers, and retirees, improving their working conditions, enhancing sustainable employment opportunities and ensuring job security, benefits and rights.

USDOL revised the employment equity regulations contained in 29 CFR 30 for apprenticeship programs to emphasize the policy of equal opportunity for all populations. They also emphasize the prohibition of harassment and discrimination in learning programs. In the review, they clarified terms such as gender identity (includes more than sexual preferences, it includes how the person feels and projects themselves), age discrimination (over 40) and sex (discrimination based on pregnancy, gender identity and sexual orientation).

Public policy requires DEDC and local areas to take affirmative action to prevent inequality, discrimination, and harassment in apprenticeship programs and services. DEDC as a recipient and administrator of WIOA federal funds affirms and pursues to ensure that the precepts of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility are respected among visitors, applicants, recipients of WIOA Program benefits, as well as within its own WDP employees and Local Area employees. Going forward, WDP staff, as well as all LWDA staff, should work to identify strategies to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, and to eliminate, where applicable, barriers to equity when doing work related to programs funded in whole or in part by WIOA in such a way that all individuals, regardless of their social or economic conditions, their gender identity, their sexual orientation, their race, their religious ideology, their participation or identification with ethnic groups

Minority members may, if eligible, participate in the programs and services offered on an equal basis with other people. Likewise, and in harmony with the principle of merit, they must ensure that the procedures related to recruitment, hiring of employees, background investigations, promotions, retention, performance evaluations and recognitions; professional development or training programs, mentoring programs, sponsorship initiatives, sponsorships, internships, scholarships, pre-apprenticeship programs, employee resource groups and affinity group programs; temporary employee details and assignments, pay and compensation policies, benefits, including health benefits, retirement and employee services benefits, and work-life programs, if any; disciplinary action or adverse actions to the employee; reasonable accommodations of employees and applicants for employment with disabilities; anti-discrimination policies in employment to prevent gender-based violence (including domestic violence, stalking, and sexual violence); reasonable accommodations for employees who are members of religious minorities; and training, apprenticeship, and onboarding programs comply with public policy in favor of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

Similarly, sponsors of DEDC's Registered Apprenticeship Program, as well as any other program subsidized with WIOA funds, have a responsibility to ensure and promote that their learning programs are equitably accessible to all persons interested in enrolling in them, taking into consideration this public policy on diversity. equity, inclusion, and accessibility, as defined above.

It is the public policy of the DEDC that, to the extent possible, appropriately qualified individuals or individuals from backgrounds of advanced diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility issues in the workplace are considered for employment, as permitted by law.

As part of this policy, DEDC will promote a data-driven approach that promotes diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in the workplace while protecting employee privacy by safeguarding all personally identifiable employee information, as well as all health-related information that is protected by law. DEDC, through the WDP, may participate in Collaborative Agreements to expand participation in WIOA-funded programs and initiatives to members of underserved communities in accordance with the provisions of Executive Order 14035. Sponsors of registered apprenticeship programs must ensure that their apprenticeship programs are accessible to all individuals seeking to enroll under the principles contained in this DEIA public policy. Equal access and treatment shall be guaranteed to all applicants or participants in any WIOA-funded program.

DEDC's Office of Human Resources identified Miss. Janice Rodríguez, as the Diversity Officer or a Diversity and Inclusion Officer that operates independently of the Equal Employment Opportunity Officer and that can address any claims of violations of the provisions of this public policy and the Executive Order cited above in those WIOA-funded WDP programs.

LWDA Navigators

J-PAL North America State Innovation Initiative Grant

WDP won the 2021 J-PAL North America State and Local Innovation Competition and will receive a $50,000 grant from the non-profit Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab, North America office (J-PAL NA). J-PAL was founded in 2003 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) by professors Abhijit Banerjee, Esther Duflo and Sendhil Mullainathan. To transform the global vision, we must effectively combat global poverty. J-PAL NA will provide technical assistance and $50,000 in funding to develop a robust case management system to provide better services focused on Puerto Rico's workforce development.

One of the recommendations presented by J-PAL to improve service delivery and performance in LWDAs is the need for a Career and Job Market Navigators (Navigators) in each LWDA. The primary objective is to have a specialized career and job market navigation to actively reach out and offer comprehensive employment support services to WIOA clients, to secure a reliable, timely and strategic service provider who will further the WDP's mission in delivering exceptional customer service. Navigator service must include the following components:

1. an initial skill diagnosis.
2. offering support in developing individual action plans and motivating and encouraging their implementation.
3. connecting clients with job opportunities, both in the local area and beyond.
4. providing information on high-demand occupations, including earnings, and skill requirements to broaden search horizons.
5. delivering instruction on using job search engines effectively.
6. assisting clients in crafting resumes, preparing for interviews, signaling their skills, and exploring opportunities for career advancement, among other activities that facilitate the matching between clients and

suitable employment opportunities. Once employment is secured, clients will continue to benefit from an array of services:

7. receiving ongoing guidance to address challenges associated with job retention and accessing the necessary assistance to further their careers, with support provided for a period of six months post-employment.

The intervention is centered on conducting active outreach and providing intensive employment support services by Navigators. These services will encompass a range of offerings, such as conducting initial assessments for clients, offering support in creating individual actions plans and motivating their execution, connecting clients with job opportunities locally and beyond, providing information about in-demand occupations, including their earnings and skill prerequisites to expand search horizons, delivering guidance on utilizing job search engines, aiding in resume writing, interview preparation, showcasing skills, and presenting opportunities for career advancement, among other activities that facilitate the matching between clients and employment opportunities.

The Workforce Development Program (WDP) has established guidelines and parameters for the recruitment and utilization of Career Navigators. Currently, an RFP (Request for Proposals) is being formulated to adhere to these guidelines and fulfill the requirement for employing Career Navigators within the program. This strategic initiative aims to enhance workforce development efforts and streamline career guidance services for program participants.

3. STATE PROGRAM AND STATE BOARD OVERVIEW

A. STATE AGENCY ORGANIZATION

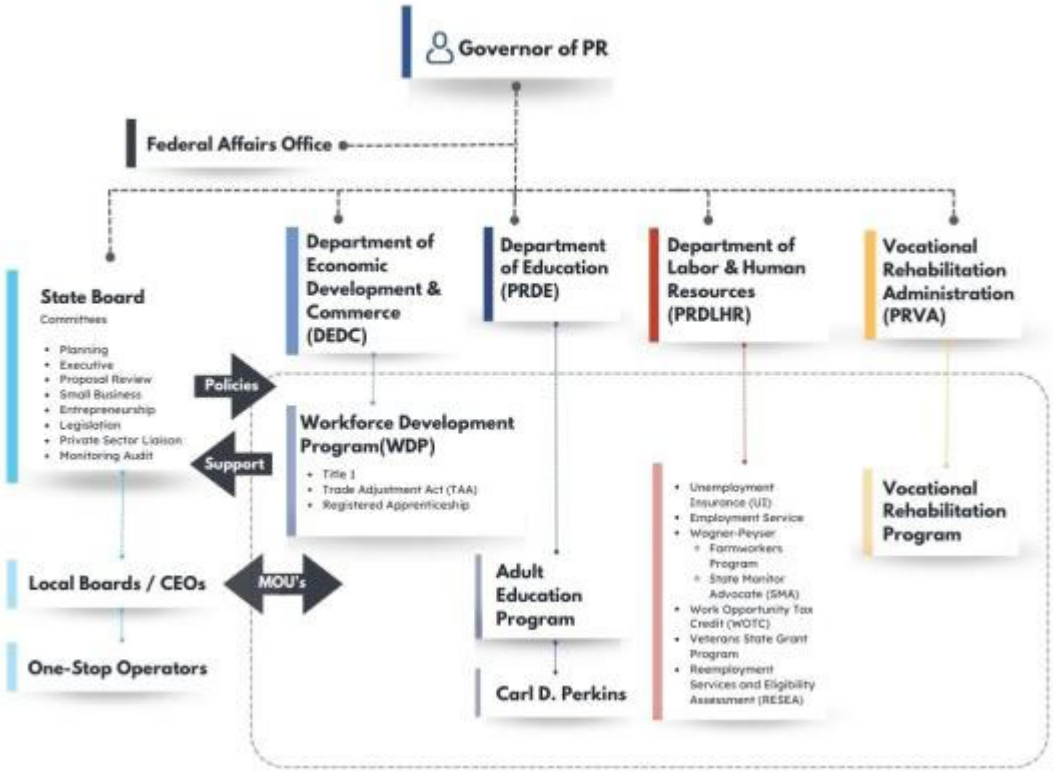
Describe the organization and delivery systems at the State and local levels for the programs covered in the plan, including the organizational structure. Include an organizational chart.

The core programs fall under the purview of three departments within the Government of Puerto Rico: the Department of Economic Development and Commerce, the Department of Education, and the Department of Labor and Human Resources. The organizational charts provided offer an overview of the workforce development system's overall design and the specific configurations of the four departments, along with their corresponding programs.

The initial organizational chart illustrates the amalgamation of the four core programs overseen by the Governor of Puerto Rico, who serves as the

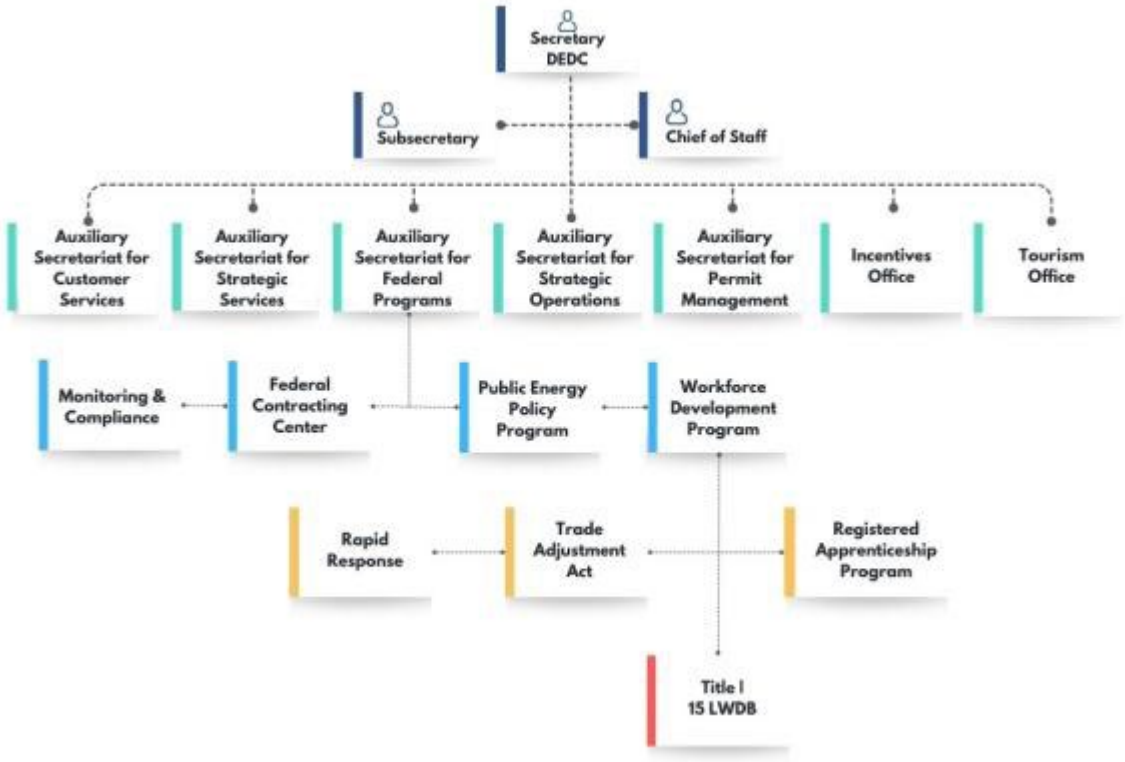
grantee for Title I, Title II, Title IV, and RAV. It delineates the involvement of the State Board in policy development, the operation of one-stop centers, and their interconnectedness with the programs. Additionally, it outlines the role of the Workforce Development Program (WDP) as a programmatic entity under the State Board, highlighting the interaction processes facilitated by Memorandums of Understanding among the programs. Subsequent diagrams showcase the organizational structures of each state department, showcasing their units in relation to the broader workforce development system.

Figure 1. Analysis of Workforce Development:



Analysis of Workforce Development, Education, and Training Activities, features a more comprehensive breakdown of core programs and their corresponding units, titled "State Administered Workforce Programs by WIOA Type." The provided chart is presented in a clear and official format, including the complete program names, to enhance readability for the audience.

Figure 2. DEDC Organization Chart



Panel Consensus (Compliance): The Plan must describe the organization and delivery system for either workforce (DEDC) or education (PRDE).

The DDEC is a public agency and instrumentality of the GOVERNMENT OF PUERTO RICO, duly organized and existing pursuant to Reorganization Plan No. 4 of June 22, 1994, as amended and is responsible for implementing and supervising the execution of Puerto Rico's public policy on economic development in the various entrepreneurial sectors of manufacture, commerce, tourism, and services. Also, it is the entity designated by Law No. 171-2014, as the state-administering agency for the federal funds received under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

The DDEC, through its Labor Development Program (LDP) has the mission to implement an integrated system for workforce development that provides access to employment and training services through its Local Labor Development Areas (LLDA's) and in joint efforts with educational institutions in conjunction with the private sector in order to promote the economic development of Puerto Rico. Also, provide assistance to dislocated workers with the Rapid Response service in coordination with Unemployment Insurance, Employment Service of Wagner Peyser Program. With this joint effort, the DDEC will be able to provide the necessary opportunities for each citizen or specific group of employers to achieve and maintain adequate

levels of productivity and acquisition power, with the primary emphasis in the public policy for employment and training which establishes the development of strategies to maximize the public and private resources.

Figure 3. PRDE Organization Chart

The Title II delivery system will be through local educational services providers including all categories specified in the regulations. The DE-AEP include a central office and several regional units to deliver services using local qualified educational services providers. Using the considerations specified in section 231(e) of WIOA, the AEP will fund each eligible provider to establish or operate programs that provide any of the following adult education and literacy activities identified in section 203 of WIOA, including programs that provide such activities concurrently: Adult education, Literacy; Workplace adult education and literacy activities, Family literacy activities, English language acquisition activities, Integrated English literacy and civics education, Workforce preparation activities, and integrated education and training that provides adult education and literacy activities, concurrently and contextually with both workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster, and that is for the purpose of educational and career advancement. The service providers delivery system covers all the education regions. As of May 2024, the DE-AEP has onboard over 90 qualified education services providers island wide.

Figure 4. PRDOL Organization Chart

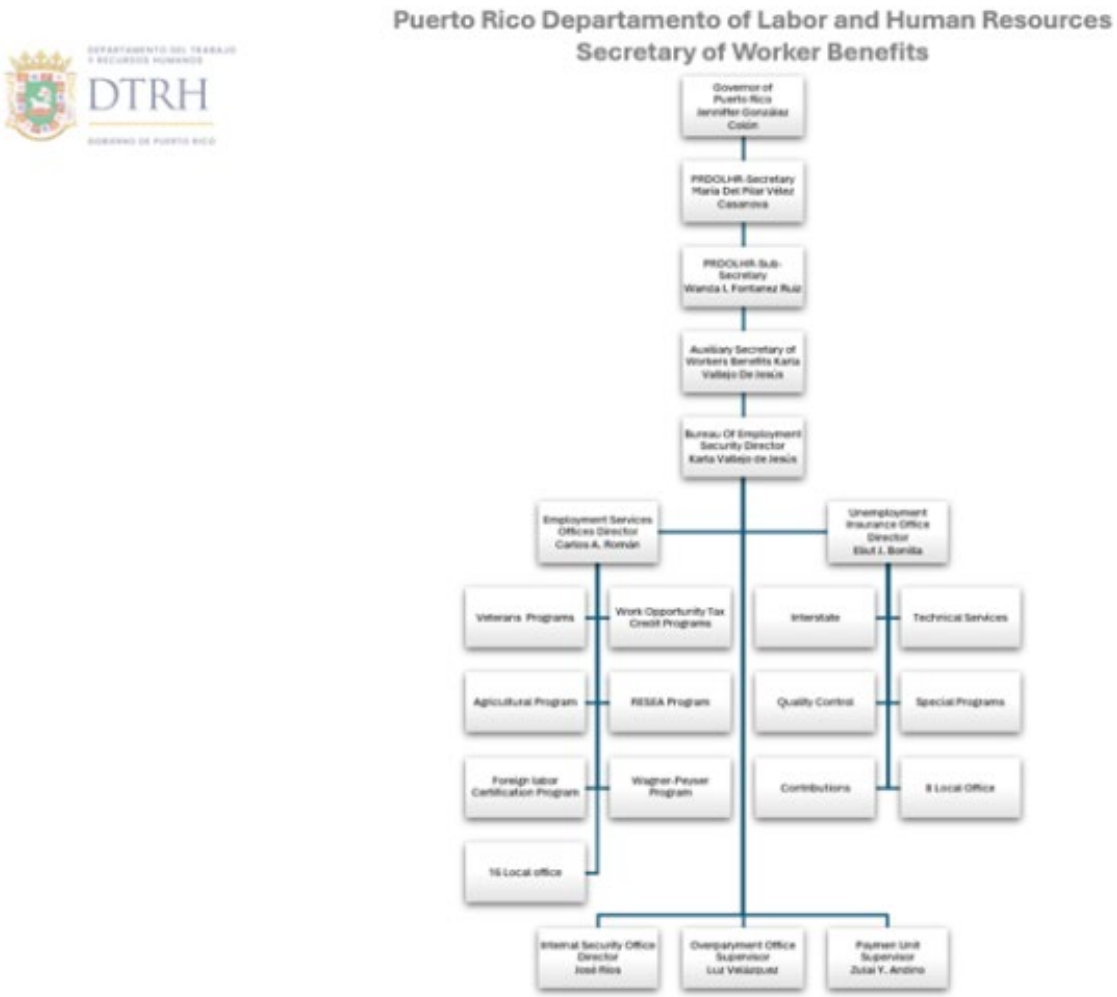
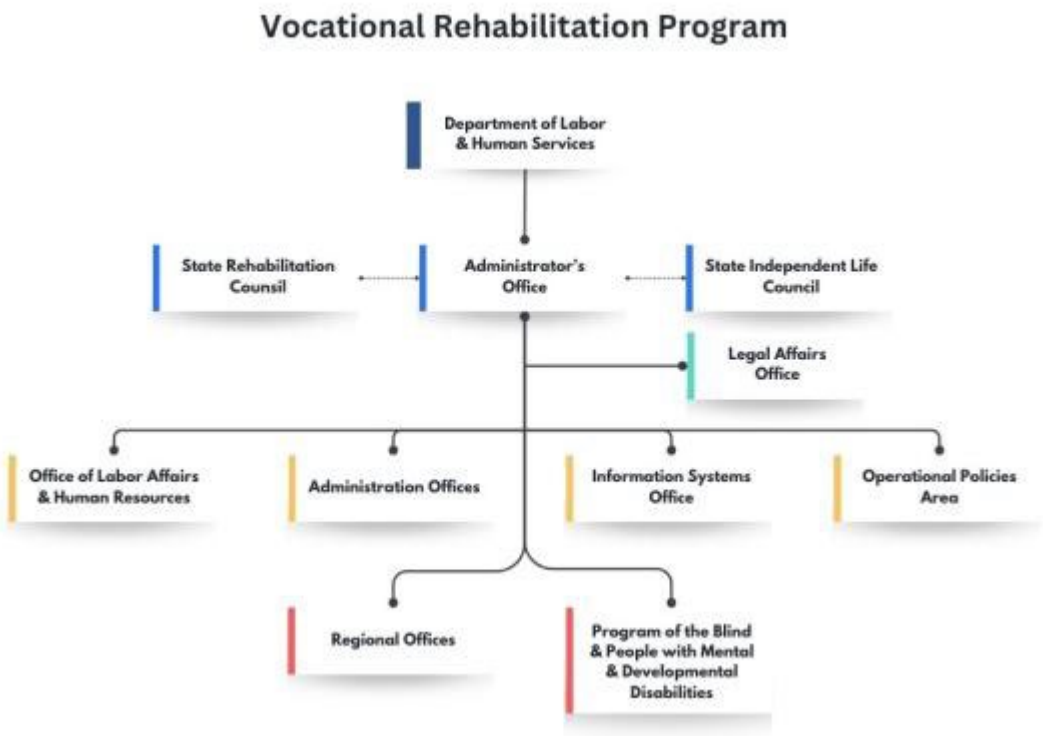


Figure 5. VRA Organization Chart



VRA is made up of an Operational Policies Area and an Administrative Area

The Vocational Rehabilitation Administration (VRA) consists of two main areas: the Operational Policies Area and the Administrative Area.

Operational Policies Area: This segment is responsible for crafting policies applicable to officials providing direct services and acts as the liaison for these units at the Central Level. The units under its purview include the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Services (OVRCS), the Office of Assessment and Adjustment (OAA), the Office of Employment Support and Modalities (OESM), the Office of Quality Control and Program Management (OQCPM), and the Office of Pre-Employment Transition Services (OPTS).

Administration Area: This area oversees the development, review, guidance, and enforcement of administrative regulations in accordance with relevant laws. It facilitates the creation of decentralized administrative procedures, fostering efficient and prompt services. Additionally, it formulates, coordinates, and supervises the implementation of public policies mandated and authorized by the Administrator. This includes establishing operational and administrative processes within the Budget, Finance, Purchasing, Documents, and General Services Divisions.

B. STATE BOARD

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

Attached, you will find the updated table of the composition of the State Board. We are in compliance with the required labor representation. Additionally, the Governor's Office is making efforts to nominate the only vacancy from the private sector. We have made numerous efforts with the office of the President of the Senate of Puerto Rico for the designation of their representative. However, we have not received a response. Therefore, the Governor's Office will be contacting the office of the President of the Senate to assist in filling the vacancy.

The Secretary of Education has delegated her representation to Dr. Yarilis Santiago, Director of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Program (Title II). Thus, Title II has unique representation on the State Board.

PR State Workforce Board Members

The State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) in Puerto Rico, in compliance with WIOA sec. 101 and 20 CFR § 679.110, was established through a new executive order (OE-2022-034). The Governor convened with the board for the first time in November of 2022, marking a significant milestone in workforce development efforts. Notably, this executive order underscores a heightened focus on Apprenticeship Program representation, requiring three representatives from this sector.

The composition of the SWDB is detailed below, featuring representatives from various sectors:

State Workforce Development Board (WIOA)

NAME	COMPANY/ORGANIZATION	AFFILIATION
Jennifer González Colón (Frances G. Ortiz Molina) (Representative)	Commonwealth of PR	Governor
Angel Peña Ramírez	State Representative	House of Representatives
Iveliz Morales Correa	State Senator	Senate Representative
Juan A. Alvarado Zayas	Alvarado Tax & Business Advisors	Business

NAME	COMPANY/ORGANIZATION	AFFILIATION
Administrator & Co-Founder		
Johanne Pagán Mercado Head of Human Resources	Advantage Insurance	Business
Sonia E. Navarro González, President	Fina Consulting Group	Business
Carl R. Levya Ramos, Principal Associate	Carl Leyva & Associates, Corp.	Business
Umberto J. Donato Solis, President	DDD Group	Business
Elizabeth Alonso Quiñones. Vice President	Hidroponistas de Puerto Rico	Business
Luis Alvarado Cintrón, President	EIS Consulting Group	Business
Teresita Santiago Lebrón, Chief Executive Officer	El Morro Technologies, LLC	Business
Bettina Mercado, President	Bettina Cosmetics	Business
Astrid Méndez Leon, Human Resources Manager	Boston Scientific	Business
Humberto Zacapa, Senior Executive	SNC Technical Services, LLC	Business
Joscan Feliciano García, CEO	Puerto Rico Industries for the Blind	Business
Melissa Rivera Roena, General Manager	Manpower Group	Business
Irba M. Batista Cruz, President	Bonafide Retirees Chapter of the Central Federation of Workers	Labor

NAME	COMPANY/ORGANIZATION	AFFILIATION
Bryon Silva, Training Director /Apprenticeship Coordinator	LIUNA-PR District Council	Labor
Alma Frontera Colon, President	Boys & Girls Club of PR	Labor
Osvaldo Ubinas Nieves, Director	Ramey Job Corps	Labor
Sebastián Negrón-Reichard Secretary	PR Department of Economic Development & Commerce	Government
María Del Pilar Vélez, Secretary	PR Department of Labor & Human Resources	Government
Eliezer Ramos Pares, Secretary	Department of Education	Government
Dr. Rosa Lugo Cabán Administrator (Viviana Torres Dávila) Representative	Vocational Rehabilitation Administration	Government
Vacant		Chief Elected Official
Vacant		Chief Elected Official

Note: Board vacancies are pending Governor's appointments.

Board Activities

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

The State Board engages in a comprehensive range of activities aimed at effectively fulfilling its functions. Collaborating with an interagency committee comprising core and required partners, the State Board executes the development of the plan through a year-round working agenda. The delineation of the State Board's role and responsibilities is guided by WIOA, local statutes, and internal regulations. The latter includes the establishment of subcommittees and working groups dedicated to addressing technical and specific issues. Noteworthy among these are the Strategic Planning and

Budget Committee, Private Sector Liaising Committee, Evaluation, Monitoring, and Auditing Committee, Entrepreneurship Committee, Continuous Improvement Committee, and the Executive Committee.

In addition to its internal initiatives, the State Board is entrusted with assisting the Governor in additional functions outlined by WIOA. These responsibilities encompass:

• Developing and implementing the State Unified Plan and performance measures.

• Formulating and expanding strategies for partnerships in in-demand sectors/occupations.

• Crafting and aligning policies to meet workforce development goals.

• Overseeing the development and continuous improvement of the one-stop delivery system.

• Formulating policies and guidance pertaining to the role and resource contribution of one-stop partners.

The Puerto Rico State Workforce Development Board (PRSWDB) convenes a minimum of four times annually, utilizing either in-person sessions or videoconferencing. These meetings serve as platforms for addressing state network issues, formulating strategic policies, acquiring performance updates, and supervising funding initiatives. Decisions are democratically made through a majority vote of serving PRSWDB members, following Robert's Rules of Order. The decision-making process prioritizes inclusivity and collaboration among stakeholders to fortify the workforce system. Educational and informational segments of the meetings adhere to the Chair's preference. The executive committee, meeting separately, assists and expedites the state board's work, evaluating reports from the Workforce Development Program (WDP) and making fund allocation recommendations.

The executive committee's responsibilities encompass overseeing the strategic plan implementation, monitoring workgroup plans and progress, aligning workgroups, advocating for efficiency and cooperation, overseeing strategies for education and business outreach, and providing recommendations to the Governor on geographic designations for workforce development areas.

A key priority of the PRSWDB is enhancing information technology functions, focusing on technological integration with Labor Development System

partners, online availability, and responsive career information. Emphasis is also placed on performance functions, concentrating on continuous improvement and contributions to achieving the PR State Unified Plan goals. The performance system evaluates process and outcome measures related to WIOA performance common measures and other relevant areas.

The executive committee, meeting monthly, collaborates with staff on WIOA State Plan preparation, annual report submission, and oversight functions. It holds interim meetings for emergency or time-sensitive decisions and communicates actions promptly to the full PRSWDB. The Planning Committee, another standing committee, reviews and recommends necessary reports and information and collaborates closely with state agency staff during the development of the WIOA State Plan.

Additionally, the Innovation and Trends Committee is tasked with developing strategies to support career pathways for individuals with disabilities. PRSWDB staff, administratively attached to the DEDC, may seek assistance from other state government units as needed to fulfill their duties and responsibilities.

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

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

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

Puerto Rico is currently pursuing a dual-track evaluation strategy designed to connect economic development with high-performance service delivery. The Evaluation proposals includes the following:

- The Reshoring Workforce Initiative: Data-Driven Industry Alignment

In direct response to Executive Order OE-2025-012, the Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DDEC) launched the Reshoring Puerto Rico Workforce Fund RFP in September 2025. This initiative represents a paradigm shift in how the Island prepares its labor pool for global competition. A cornerstone of this initiative is a comprehensive analysis of the

current "training ecosystem." This mechanism will identify "real-time" skill gaps, allowing the State Board to pivot training investments as rapidly as the market evolves.

- The One-Stop Excellence & Risk Mitigation Assessment

Beyond industry alignment, the Board is conducting a sophisticated Service Delivery Audit across the American Job Center (One-Stop) network. This dual-purpose evaluation and risk assessment targets the "customer journey" to ensure efficiency and compliance.

- Human-Centric Service Delivery: The assessment analyzes front-line staff interactions to ensure that customer service and participant assessments are standardized, empathetic, and effective.
- Integrated Service Logic: The evaluation scrutinizes the depth of Co-Enrollment and Service Integration, ensuring that participants can seamlessly access multiple programs (such as WIOA Title I and Wagner-Peyser) without administrative friction.
- Market-Facing Operations: The audit extends to Business Outreach and job placement efficacy, measuring how successfully staff bridge the gap between training programs and high-demand job opportunities.
- Risk Management: By identifying operational bottlenecks and compliance vulnerabilities, this assessment serves as a safeguard against performance failures, ensuring the system remains resilient and audit-ready.

Title I-B

The State will continue to assess the program based on the results of fiscal and programmatic monitoring, customer satisfaction surveys, and the analysis performance and accountability measures. PR has already completed the development of the Statistical Adjustment Model (SAM). SAM is the primary tool that will be used by the state board and governor to evaluate the performance and delivery of services at the AJCs. It will help to assess the Title I programs each year based on State performance accountability measures described in section 116(b) of WIOA. SAM outcomes will provide the state board and governor quality data to assess the effectiveness and improvement of programs by local area.

Adult Education

Section 212 of WIOA requires a description of how the eligible agency will evaluate annually the effectiveness of adult education and literacy activities

based on the performance measures described in section 116. The evaluation will address the extent to which local providers have implemented each of the thirteen required activities specified in Section 231 and will focus in two key features: a formative evaluation is conducted to assure quality of program management by tracking the effectiveness of program development and implementation; followed by a summative evaluation that documents the educational impact on learners, and determines the extent to which populations specified in the State Plan are served.

The project staff, together with the evaluator, design and formalize the evaluation plan. The evaluation tasks are divided into the following tasks:

- Documenting the project's implementation process;
- Periodically aligning program elements with program goals;
- Monitoring outcomes and impact;
- Following up on studies of former participants;
- Measuring the effectiveness of teacher training; and
- Assessing the extent to which adult education goals and objectives of individuals with barriers to employment and ensuring their access, and other special populations have been met.

The evaluation plan will yield both quantitative and qualitative data, needed to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the program's functions and services. The program evaluator will utilize a combination of strategies, which include but are not limited to Pre and post inquiries; Surveys; Interviews; Standardized tests; Placement tests; Attendance records; Observations; and Questionnaires.

The product of the evaluation will include:

- Applicable information about the effectiveness of the Section 231 grant program
- Characteristics of the adult learners
- Improvements in literacy levels and educational gains of learners
- Analysis of learner goal attainment
- Outcomes of performance standards
- Services provided

The outcome reports will include the new requirements of the National Reporting System (NRS).

Pursuant to Section 116 of the Adult Education and Literacy Act, each local provider must report student progress measures obtained from all students who have attended at least twelve (12) hours of instruction in programs receiving Section 231 federal supplemental funds. The evaluation activities will require local providers to:

- Collect and analyze student performance and program improvement data;
- Determine performance levels on standard and core indicators;
- Identify needs and support services; and
- Implement continuous improvement initiatives to meet performance levels for standards and core indicators.

Documented progress of student performance measures must include at a minimum:

- Literacy skill level improvements in reading, writing, and speaking the English Language, English language acquisition, problem solving, numeric, and other literacy skills;
- Placement in, retention in, or completion of post-secondary education, training, or unsubsidized employment or career advancement;
- A secondary school diploma or its equivalent; and
- Attainment of student learning goals.

All participating local providers will be required to maintain individual student records for all students who have attended 12 hours of instruction. Each record must contain:

- Student identification and Intake information;
- Demographic data;
- Attendance data;
- Assessment data;
- Attainment data; and
- Other relevant information as specified by the data management system.

Performance Measures

Title II, negotiated performance indicators, actually under OCTAE final approval and Federal Review panel acceptance are as follows.

Adult Program Performance Indicators		
Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	5900.0%	5950.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	6200.0%	6250.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$3,900.00	$4,000.00
Credential Attainment Rate	64.5	65
Measurable Skill Gains	70.5	71
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable 1	Not Applicable 1

Monitoring of providers

The Puerto Rico Department of Education Adult Education Services continues to promote its comprehensive accountability system to determine program effectiveness and measure the progress of local providers towards continuous improvement. The agency reviews program delivery strategies, processes, and evaluation data to support and improve the literacy services provided and to optimize the return of the investment of federal funds in adult education literacy activities.

Monitoring processes include risk monitoring to determine that the allocated funds are used efficiently; monitor files to validate that local programs meet the eligibility criteria of the participants; and programmatic and fiscal monitoring. Said monitoring activities will be conducted each school year, to demonstrate compliance with the applicable program regulations. The monitoring effort will continue throughout the Plan and will include:

- **Mid-year Reports -** The Puerto Rico Adult Education Program requires all local providers to submit quarterly reports that reflect participation levels for the first three months.

- **Annual Program Evaluation -** The Program conducts continuous comprehensive program evaluation. This evaluation includes all participating local providers and uses surveys of all local providers, on-site observations, and interviews. It provides recommendations for state level planning and development activities for the following year. It will also identify the best practices and emerging needs in conjunction with the training and technical assistance needed for local providers to establish high quality, effective instructional programs to the targeted populations specified in the State Plan.
- **Student Follow-up** - The Adult Information System's report submitted to the USDOE will reflect the grantee's progress in achieving the objectives in the application of the program and the effect of the program on participants served.

Vocational Rehabilitation

The agency will assess its performance accountability measures, described in section 116(b) of WIOA, through:

- Reports on WIOA indicators based on data gathered through the case management system;
- Satisfaction surveys to customers, employers, and Community Rehabilitation Programs;
- Compliance with strategies established in the VR Portion of the Plan; and
- Internal programmatic monitoring.

To collect data for the WIOA performance indicators, PRVRA staff will follow-up on customers and request data on employment and wages records from other agencies.

The VRA has developed the following strategies to assist other WIOA components in helping people with disabilities:

1. Coordinate the participation of VRA staff in the American Job Centers [AJC] to properly channel the needs of those with disabilities who request information and service in such centers.
2. Identify possible referrals to the services of the VRA.
3. Provide the AJC staff with guidance on several topics of interest that are requested related to people with disabilities.

4. Actively participate in job fairs coordinated by the AJC.
5. Exchange of employment networks/employers.

The PRIS collects and reports on performance measures for Title I and Title III programs. Currently, ETA 9169 was submitted and certified by WIPS.

The WDP and State Board began to bring together all required and non-required WIOA partners. The inclusion of partners on this platform will allow for a more effective system. DEDC must establish data-sharing agreements with each partner willing to be integrated in the system, either by sharing the data or by achieving an interface to share customer participation information. This will improve both client services and reporting with respect to data analysis and client activities. The intent of this process is to gather comprehensive and consistent information so that appropriate workforce development services will be provided. Common intake and case management will help coordinate and align services provided through the workforce development system and will ensure that those needing services through the workforce system receive appropriate services.

B. PREVIOUS ASSESSMENT RESULTS

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

Title I Programs Assessments

The Monitoring and Compliance Division of DEDC assesses the Operational, Administrative, and Fiscal Systems using the DEDC Monitoring Rule and the Resolution of Audit Reports of WIOA grants and other funds allocated by USDOL. The DEDC rule defines monitoring as a continuous process of structured assessment of the operations of local areas and sub-recipients to identify at an early stage those inappropriate practices that may result in non-compliance with the purposes of the act and the 20 CFR.

Some of the objectives established in the State Monitoring System, as instituted in the current rule, are:

- Conduct annual on-site monitoring reviews of local areas' compliance with 2 CFR part 200, as required by sec. 184(a)(3) of WIOA.

- Verify expenditures have been made against the proper cost categories and within the cost limitations specified in WIOA and the regulations.
- Determine the compliance with WIOA regulations and other applicable laws
- Verify that services to participants qualify for Title I programs and as specified in the Local Plan and annual funding allocation plan.
- Evaluate the internal control structure concerning these objectives to determine the risk of illegal acts or violations of the Allocation Contract, Applicable Laws, or Regulations.
- Expand the analysis conducted by DEC units regarding financial reports, identify any deviation or unexpected result reflected in the reports, and corrective actions implemented at the local level.

The Monitoring and Compliance Division complied with the provisions of 20 CFR 683.410 (b)(2)(1) and conducted monitoring remotely and on-site.

WDP Evaluations

DEDC provides tools to local areas that enable them to track their performance measures as the year progresses and to track the impact on the performance of each of their participants. In addition to federally mandated reports, the WDP has developed a variety of locally requested reports that allow staff to track caseloads, correct data entry errors, and analyze performance at the state, local, and desk levels. A quarterly report on the execution, level of expenditures and participants is sent to the CEOs, LWDBs and LWDA staff.

Through the monitoring reviews, the State Board identified technical assistance needs to attend to the primary monitoring and oversight findings such as:

1. MOU's and IFA's compliance with requirements established in the policy WIOA – 01– 2017: *Memorandums of Understanding and Infrastructure Agreements* and on the statutory requirements of WIOA and its implementing regulations.
2. Some LWDBs do not meet all the requirements of the Sunshine Provision in compliance with the related Public Policy *DDEC-WIOA-01-2021: Guidance on the responsibility of Local Boards to comply with transparency and disclosure requirements*.

3. Some LWDBs did not demonstrate that they conducted a monitoring review of the Youth Program.
4. Lack of documentation in the files of participants in the adult and dislocated worker programs related to skills assessment, support service needs, and incomplete or generalized Individual Employment Plan (IEP) goals, among others.
5. For the Youth Program, we found files with generalized Individual Service Strategy (ISS), a lack of documents evidencing eligibility, and a lack of follow-up to participants.
6. The contracts lack the required minimum clauses and correct references to WIOA law. DEDC will be issuing a policy related to this issue.
7. There is a need for technical assistance in determining the eligibility of participants in the youth, adult, and particularly dislocated worker programs.
8. Lack of controls to meet the 20% spending requirement in the work experience element of the Youth Program. Quarterly reports are already being worked on with DEDC Finance to track the level of LWDB spending.
9. Lack of several public policies such as priority of service, needs additional assistance, among others.
10. Lack of complaints and grievance procedures
11. Some local boards didn't demonstrate that they have taken steps before the competition of its One-Stop operators, such as market research, requests for information, and collection of a cost price analysis, among others. WDP staff will provide technical assistance to ensure compliance with policy WIOA-02-2017.
12. Lack of documentation demonstrates the competitive selection of professional and career service providers, etc.
13. Lack of internal controls related to property management and others with state legislation.
14. There is a need to improve technological access to people with disabilities in the AJCs.
15. The self-service and career resource area in the AJCs does not have all the required information.

Title IV - Vocational Rehabilitation Assessments

The PRVRA conducted a Comprehensive Statewide Assessment of Rehabilitation Services' Needs (CSNA) during 2023 whose results are presented under section B of the Vocational Rehabilitation portion of this State Plan. The CSNA includes aspects of the quality, effectiveness, and needs for improvement, which are considered by the PRVRA to develop its Goals and Strategies. Also, Section D of the VR portion of this plan includes the results on how the VR program goals were achieved during PY 2024.

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program had negotiated levels of performance for the following indicators:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit); and
- Credential Attainment Rate
- Measurable Skills Gains

Achievements are also shown in the table:

Performance Indicators for VR PY 2025 and 2026:

Vocational Rehabilitation Program Performance Indicators				
Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	30.0	43.0	30.5	43.5
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	35.0	43.3	35.5	45.0
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	4,500.00	4,825.00	4,500.50	4,850.00

Vocational Rehabilitation Program Performance Indicators				
Credential Attainment Rate	25.0	33.1	25.5	35.1
Measurable Skill Gains	50.0	50.0	50.5	50.5
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable 1	Not Applicable 1	Not Applicable 1	Not Applicable 1

During PY 2024, the VRA was unable to meet the negotiated levels in four of the five indicators, attributed mostly to fact that between October and December 2023, the VRA closed a significant number of inactive cases that would be included in the performance calculations for PY 2024. Because these cases were closed due to the inability to establish contact, there was an inherent risk of not being able to obtain credentials and post-exit employment information, which ultimately occurred. Most of these individuals also did not appear in employment records (UI wage files), resulting in a performance percentage that were significantly lower than in previous years and below the negotiated target.

Based on the evaluations and other the CSNA, RSA Data Dashboards, local reports and programmatic monitoring conducted by the central office of the PRVRA, the agency adjusts its goals and strategies.

Title II - AEP Assessment

The Adult Education Program (AEP) of the Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE), WIOA Title II delegate agency, conducts continuous annual evaluations of local service providers of activities under Title II. The evaluation is conducted as part of the requirements of the proposals that the service providers present to the Adult Education Program. Each year the effectiveness of service providers in providing educational services to adult program participants is evaluated. The methods used are as follows:

Effectiveness evaluation

The Puerto Rico Department of Education uses valid and reliable evaluation methods to evaluate the execution of the Educational Functioning Levels (EFL). The EFL is a measure of what students should know at each level of functioning. The performance of the functioning levels is evaluated by

making comparisons of two years or more of the percentages that the service providers obtain when offering the educational services to the participants. To have a good execution, the results of the evaluations of the service centers must respond to the performance levels that are negotiated with the Federal Government and if they do not comply with this criterion, they must show that their percentages have improved compared to the previous year. The performance levels are negotiated with the Federal Government, and this is the metric used to demonstrate the effectiveness of the service providers. This data are collected through the National Reporting System (NRS) from adult program participants.

The use of standardized tests

To assess the quality of educational services under title II, the DEPR-AEP uses standardized tests to require controls to measure the quality of teaching and provide the opportunity for participants to go beyond the classroom. Test administration provides accurate information and ensures placement of adult learners at appropriate instructional levels. In addition, it allows to obtain in a reliable way the educational gain and with it the promotion of the participants to a more advanced level.

PRDE uses the following guidelines to document achievements:

1. Selection and use of appropriate evaluation instruments
2. Manage the pre-test for diagnostic purposes and guide the teaching process.
3. Placement to place the student in the appropriate program and level of instruction.
4. Use post-test results to validate educational gain and promotion to the next level.
5. Establishment of valid performance standards
6. Report valid and reliable evaluation results and related information.

Annual AEP assessment of individual service providers

To meet the annual assessment requirement, AEP Adult Information System (AIS) staff maintains an ongoing assessment program that provides technical assistance and verifies compliance by all local services providers. The evaluation program includes quarterly technical assistance seminars for all educational service providers to discuss progress in data collection and data quality.

Annually, at the end of the current program year, staff prepare a summary evaluation report, which is used by a team of three staff serving as academic and operations facilitators to visit local providers and discuss performance results and the areas of improvement.

As part of the annual assessment, the AEP assesses the past effectiveness of local providers (WIOA Criterion 3) in improving the literacy of eligible individuals, to meet State-adjusted performance levels for primary indicators of performance standards outlined in WIOA section 116, especially with respect to eligible individuals who have low literacy levels.

In addition, annually, the AEP verifies that each service provider meets the performance levels negotiated by PRDE with the OCTAE - NRS and, in case of non-compliance, whether there has been an improvement compared to the previous program year. If there has been an improvement, the AEP views this as a performance gain and provides an extension to the service provider for compliance.

C. EVALUATION

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

There are several aspects of WIOA which need to be evaluated since WIOA implementation and development initiatives to transform the provision of services, increase the use of funds and improve performance. We will follow the recommendation to use DOLETA resources and tools to design the evaluation of the areas or issues identified by the State Board and the core and required partners of the AJC:

- WorkforceGPS Evaluation and Research Hub
- Evaluation Toolkit: Key Elements for State Workforce Agencies September 2020
- Peer Learning Cohort on Evaluation (EvalPLC)

The Evaluation and Monitoring Committee of the State Board will be activated to manage the evaluation process. PR has already completed

the development of the Statistical Adjustment Model (SAM). SAM is the primary tool that will be used by the state board and governor to evaluate the performance and delivery of services at the AJCs. It will help to assess the Title I programs each year based on State performance accountability measures described in section 116(b) of WIOA. SAM outcomes will provide the state board and governor quality data to assess the effectiveness and improvement of programs by local area. It is recommended to perform the following activities:

1. Surveying the cores and required partners to identify common evaluation areas
2. Identify the areas that can be assessed with the internal staff of the partners:
    a. Selection of One-Stop Operator
    b. Competitive selection of youth service providers
    c. Common intake and co-enrollment process
3. Survey the state board to identify areas of concern
4. Develop RFPs to hire evaluators for items that require expertise or be evaluated by external resources objectively
5. Some of the evaluation topics identified are:

- Number of Local Areas needed
- Local Areas Organization Designs
- Comprehensive AJC
- Policy development process and standardization
- Delivery of services in the youth program
- Employer engagement and services in AJC
- AJC flow of services among partners
- Dissemination and Outreach approaches
- Remote Workforce Services and Online Learning

Risk Analysis at Local Boards

Risk analysis is the process of identifying, assessing, and evaluating potential risks to understand their likelihood of occurrence and potential impact. Conducting a risk analysis can help organizations determine whether they

should undertake a project or approve a financial application, and what actions they may need to take to protect their interests. There are two types of risk analysis: quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative risk analysis uses mathematical models and simulations to assign numerical values to risk, while qualitative risk analysis relies on a person's subjective judgment to build a theoretical model of risk for a given scenario.

The DEDC applied a risk analysis in the 15 local areas, to analyze five management areas of the local areas, Human Resources, Administration, Budget, Contract/Legal and Information Systems Management. The results of the risk analysis show that human resource management and MIS are the operational areas that require the most attention, with results of less than 70% in a few local areas. In the human resources item, they are related to the lack of standardized processes, regulations, classification plans, among others. MIS is associated with the use of the new PRIS platform, which continues to be developed to add new tools required for participant case management. The state level will provide follow-up and technical assistance on the results of this analysis.

Evaluation program vs. monitoring program: Description of AEP Monitoring program

The AEP does not have a formal evaluation program but a monitoring program. To validate compliance with the rules and regulations that apply to the AEP, monitoring is conducted with the primary objective of evidencing the day-to-day services.

In the monitoring application process, the staff assigned to the AEP must collaborate with the Regional Educational Office (ORE) staff and local provider's education centers to be monitored. The monitors will be duly identified and authorized to have broad access to all the documentation related to the administration and implementation of the activities of the Adult Education Program. They will maintain the level of confidentiality established by law. In addition, they will have access to all the facilities where projects subsidized with federal funds are implemented. The monitors, if requested, can assist in the investigation of any activity at the request of the AEP management.

It is the responsibility of the education center's management to comply with the recommended corrective action plans. The staff assigned to the PEA will monitor their compliance.

The officer conducting the monitoring will make a checkmark under Yes, No, or N/A in each criterion to be evaluated. At the end of each evaluation

area, will add the evaluated criteria and the criteria marked as YES and write the subtotal reached for each evaluation area; will add the subtotals of each area to determine the score obtained and then divide the score obtained by the total criteria evaluated to calculate the result of the monitoring according to the percentage of the evaluation scale.

The service provider will present all the evidence required for the application of this guide, including but not limited to agendas, attendance lists, minutes, files, reports from the Adult Information System (SIA), calendars, work plans, improvement plans, among others. At the end of the monitoring administration process, it will be discussed, and technical assistance will be offered in the areas that merit it. Educational service providers scoring 69% or less may have their contracts terminated and will not be considered for contracting in future competitive proposals.

The process of administration, follow-up, and compliance with the Programmatic and Fiscal Monitoring Guide will be conducted according to the provisions of the Monitoring Unit Procedure Guide, which constitutes a support system in the effective implementation of the Program to promote its continuous improvement.

5. DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS FOR CORE PROGRAMS

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

A. FOR TITLE I PROGRAMS

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

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

The Governor allocates WIOA formula funds according to services to youth, adults, and dislocated workers in accordance with WIOA sections 128(b) and 133(b). The Governor's reserve funds from each of these sources for state-wide workforce investment activities. In making these reservations, the Governor reserves up to 15 percent from each of these sources. Reserved funds are combined and spent on statewide employment and training activities for adults and dislocated workers, and statewide youth activities, without regard to the funding source of the reserved funds. In addition, the Governor reserves a portion of the dislocated worker funds for statewide

rapid-response activities, as described in WIOA. In making this reservation, the Governor reserves up to 25 percent of the dislocated worker funds.

Allocation Formula

The Governor elects to distribute funds in accordance with the allocation formula in section 128(b), as follows:

- 33$^{1/3}$ percent on the basis of the relative number of unemployed individuals in areas of substantial unemployment in each workforce investment area, compared to the total number of unemployed individuals in all areas of substantial unemployment in the State;
- 33$^{1/3}$ percent on the basis of the relative excess number of unemployed individuals in each workforce investment area, compared to the total excess number of unemployed individuals in the State; and
- 33$^{1/3}$ percent on the basis of the relative number of disadvantaged youths in each workforce investment area, compared to the total number of disadvantaged youths in the State. (WIOA sec. 128(b)).

Minimum Funding Provisions

According with section 683.125 (a) in case of fund reduction related to previous program year, for funding authorized by secs. 128(b)(2), 133(b)(2)(A), and 133(b)(2)(B) of WIOA, which are youth, adult, and dislocated worker funds, a local area must 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.

Ratable Reduction

According with section 683.125 (e), if the amounts of WIOA funds appropriated in a fiscal year are not sufficient to provide the amount specified in paragraph (a) of this section to all local areas (*less than 90 percent of the average allocation percentage of the local area for the 2 preceding fiscal years*), the amounts allocated to each local area must be ratably reduced.

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

Allocation Formula

The Governor elects to distribute funds in accordance with the allocation formula in 133(b), as follows:

- 33$^{1/3}$ percent on the basis of the relative number of unemployed individuals in areas of substantial unemployment in each workforce investment area, compared to the total number of unemployed individuals in areas of substantial unemployment in the State;
- 33$^{1/3}$ percent on the basis of the relative excess number of unemployed individuals in each workforce investment area, compared to the total excess number of unemployed individuals in the State; and
- 33$^{1/3}$ percent on the basis of the relative number of disadvantaged adults in each workforce investment area, compared to the total number of disadvantaged adults in the State. (WIOA sec. 133(b))

Minimum Funding Provisions

According with section 683.125 (a) in case of fund reduction related to previous program year, for funding authorized by secs. 128(b)(2), 133(b)(2)(A), and 133(b)(2)(B) of WIOA, which are youth, adult, and dislocated worker funds, a local area must 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.

Ratable Reduction

According with section 683.125 (e), if the amounts of WIOA funds appropriated in a fiscal year are not sufficient to provide the amount specified in paragraph (a) of this section to all local areas (*less than 90 percent of the average allocation percentage of the local area for the 2 preceding fiscal years*), the amounts allocated to each local area must be ratably reduced.

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

Formula Allocation

The Governor elects to distribute funds by the allocation formula considering the following:

1. **Total Allocation (100%)**
2. State (Administrative, Reserve, and Rapid Response) – 40%
3. **Allocation Under WIOA (for Local Areas) -** 60**%**

Relative Distribution

- **WIOA Sec. 133(b)(2)(B)(ii) - Number of individuals who receive unemployment insurance**

Relative Number -20% of the allocation

- **WIOA Sec. 133(b)(2)(B)(ii) - Number of unemployed individuals**

Relative Number -20% of the allocation

- **WIA Sec. 133(b)(2)(B)(ii) - Number of layoff individuals**

Relative Number - 20% of the allocation

- **WIA Sec. 133(b)(2)(B)(ii) -Number of Declining Industries**

Relative Number - 15% of the allocation

- **WIA Sec. 133(b)(2)(B)(ii) - Number of Dislocated Farmer/Ranchers**

Relative Number - 5% of the allocation

- **WIA Sec. 133(b)(2)(B)(ii) -Number of long-term unemployed individuals**

Relative Number -20% of the allocation

Minimum Funding Provisions

According with section 683.125 (a) in case of fund reduction related to previous program year, for funding authorized by secs. 128(b)(2), 133(b)(2)(A), and 133(b)(2)(B) of WIOA, which are youth, adult, and dislocated worker funds, a local area must 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.

Ratable Reduction

According with section 683.125 (e), if the amounts of WIOA funds appropriated in a fiscal year are not sufficient to provide the amount specified in paragraph (a) of this section to all local areas (*less than 90 percent of the average allocation percentage of the local area for the 2 preceding fiscal years*), the amounts allocated to each local area must be ratably reduced.

B. FOR TITLE II

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

The Department of Education of Puerto Rico (DEPR) is the eligible agency for adult education, literacy programs, and implementation activities under Title II of WIOA. The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), the Assistant Secretary for Alternative Education-Adult Education Program (AEP) and the State Director for Adult Education, are the implementation unit for these programs.

The implementation of the curriculum in all Adult Education program centers requires continuous faculty development efforts to ensure that teachers are thoroughly familiar with the requirements of academic content standards. Hired curriculum facilitators will provide technical assistance in the implementation of the curriculum in all Adult Education program centers and activities. The directors and key staff of the AEP Program will provide technical assistance to program teachers in curriculum implementation. Adult Education program teachers will receive specialized training on the standards, indicators, assessment activities of the curriculum, and activities related to the development of 21st Century skills relevant to competitiveness in the global labor market, STEM, employability, workforce preparation skills, and career pathways.

The AEP emphasizes the importance of the lives of people who have not completed high school, the need for English language learning and civic participation, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens. This aligns with the purpose of AEFLA to assist immigrants and other individuals who are English language learners to improve their reading, writing, and comprehension skills in English and mathematics as well as to understand the American system of Government, individual freedom, and the responsibilities of citizenship. The commitment of the AEP is focused on providing a structured, innovative, flexible, and contextualized curriculum, in addition to being dynamic and adaptable to changes in social and educational systems in a contextualized environment.

The AEP will update the workforce preparation curriculum according to labor trends with opportunities and allow the expansion of the career pathway model. These activities on career pathways and soft skills in the new curriculum will provide the transferable skills needed by individuals to make them "employable" to an employer, including problem-solving, oral communication, adaptability, collaboration, resource management,

organizational skills, written communications, and technology use. In addition, this training allows participants to develop their own businesses.

The Service Providers of each center will receive technical assistance related to all requirements of the AEP training activities to achieve better academic performance and greater preparation so that adult participants can compete in post-secondary levels and/or in the areas of need required.

Panel Consensus (Compliance): Puerto Rico must describe the methods and factors of how AEFLA funds will be distributed. The narrative must be revised and describe the methods and factors for distributing Title II funds.

The PRDE's Adult Education Program uses the following parameters to distribute funds to approved applicants:

1. No less than 82.5 percent of the grant funds will be used to award grants and contracts under Section 231 and to conduct Section 225, of which no more than 20 percent of such amount shall be available to conduct Section 225.
2. Shall not use more than 12.5 percent of the grants to conduct State Leadership activities under Section 223.
3. Shall not use more than 5 percent of the grant funds, or $85,000, whichever is greater, for the administrative expenses of the eligible agency.
4. Every effort is made to select at least one eligible provider for each local area of the workforce system in Puerto Rico.

Providers' grants will be distributed based on the ability to meet the following AEFLA purposes outlined in WIOA:

1. Assist adults in becoming literate and obtaining the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and economic self-sufficiency.
2. Assist adults who are parents or family members to become full partners in the academic development of their children.
3. Promote the transition from adult education to post-secondary education and training through career pathways.
4. Assist adults in completing high school and holding a diploma or equivalent certificate.
5. Assist immigrants and English language learners to improve reading, writing, math, and comprehension of the English language and

acquire an understanding of the American government, individual freedom, and responsibilities of citizenship.

II. DESCRIBE HOW THE ELIGIBLE AGENCY WILL ENSURE DIRECT AND EQUITABLE ACCESS TO ALL ELIGIBLE PROVIDERS TO APPLY AND COMPETE FOR FUNDS AND HOW THE ELIGIBLE AGENCY WILL ENSURE THAT IT IS USING THE SAME GRANT OR CONTRACT ANNOUNCEMENT AND APPLICATION PROCEDURE FOR ALL ELIGIBLE PROVIDERS [(WIOA TITLE II SECTION 231(C)(1)-(2)].

The program will ensure that service providers deliver services to eligible individuals who have attained at least 16 years of age, are not enrolled, need to be enrolled in a secondary school under Puerto Rico law, lack basic skills, do not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, or are English language learners.

The following organizations will be eligible to apply for funding, provided they have demonstrated effectiveness and comply with the following considerations:

1. Local education agency
2. Community-based or faith-based organizations.
3. Volunteer literacy organization
4. Public or private non-profit agency
5. a public housing authority
6. a library
7. a consortium or coalition of the agencies, organizations, institutions, or libraries
8. a partnership between an employer and an entity
9. an institution of higher education
10. A non-profit institution that can provide adult education and literacy activities to eligible individuals.

An eligible provider must establish that it has demonstrated effectiveness through performance data on its record of improving the skills of eligible individuals, particularly those with low levels of literacy in reading, writing, mathematics, English language acquisition, and other subject areas relevant to the service provided in the state's application for funds. In addition, the provider must provide information regarding its outcomes for participants related to employment, attainment of secondary school diploma or its

recognized equivalent, and transition to post-secondary education and training.

The providers could demonstrate past effectiveness in basic skill-deficient eligible individuals in all the following areas: reading, writing, mathematics, and English language acquisition. The outcomes used to determine the demonstrated effectiveness are as follows:

1) The number of eligible individuals with basic skills deficient in reading, writing, math, and English language skills.

2) Attainment of secondary diploma/equivalent

3) Transition to post-secondary education and training

1. Providers' grant distribution criteria.

The PRDE's Adult Education Program uses the following parameters to distribute funds to approved applicants:

1. No less than 82.5 percent of the grant funds will be used to award grants and contracts under Section 231 and to conduct Section 225, of which no more than 20 percent of such amount shall be available to conduct Section 225.
2. Shall not use more than 12.5 percent of the grants to conduct State Leadership activities under Section 223.
3. Shall not use more than 5 percent of the grant funds or $85,000, whichever is greater, for the administrative expenses of the eligible agency.
4. Every effort is made to select at least one eligible provider for each local area of the workforce system in Puerto Rico.
5. The provider's grants will be distributed based on the ability to meet the following AEFLA purposes outlined in WIOA:
    a. Assist adults in becoming literate and obtaining the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and economic self-sufficiency.
    b. Assisting parents and family members in becoming fully engaged partners in their children's educational growth.
    c. Promote the transition from adult education to post-secondary education and training through career pathways.

d. Assist adults in completing high school and holding a diploma or equivalent certificate.

e. Assist immigrants and English language learners improve reading, writing, math, and comprehension of the English language and acquire an understanding of the American government, individual freedom, and responsibilities of citizenship.

The PRDE's AEP will fund each eligible provider to establish or operate programs that provide adult education and literacy activities, including programs that provide such activities concurrently. The eligible provider is responsive to:

1. Regional needs as identified in the local plan under WIOA; and
2. Serving individuals in the community who were identified in such a plan as most in need of adult education and literacy activities, including individuals who:
    a. Have low levels of literacy skill; or
    b. Are English language learners.
3. The ability of the eligible provider to serve eligible individuals with disabilities, including those with learning disabilities.
4. The providers' activities, including reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, and English language acquisition, are based on the best practices derived from the most rigorous and appropriate research available, including scientifically valid research and effective educational practice.
5. Provide learning in context, including through integrated education and training, where participants acquire the skills needed to transition to and complete post-secondary education and training programs, obtain and advance employment leading to economic self-sufficiency, and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
6. The provider's activities are delivered by well-trained instructors, counselors, and administrators, who meet any minimum qualifications established by the State.
7. The provider maintains a high-quality information management system that can report measurable participant outcomes and monitor program performance.

Panel Consensus (Compliance): The Plan must describe how the State agency will ensure that there is direct and equitable access to all eligible providers to apply and compete for AEFLA funds. That information is missing from the narrative.

The Title II - AEP conducted a multiyear full and open competition for grant activities. The grant application addressed the 13 considerations and requirements established in Title II. Multiyear competition is open to all eligible providers. All eligible providers were required to submit evidence of the demonstrated effectiveness. To demonstrate effectiveness, applicants who have received Title II AEFLA funds in the program years immediately preceding the multiyear competition are evaluated based on their performance against the state's negotiated targets during those years. Applicants that did not receive funds through the AEP will be required to provide data that shows their past ability to achieve success on comparable measures. For both groups, these measures were effective in helping the students develop their academic skills.

The multiyear competition process includes the wide circulation of the RFP among all WIOA local area geographical service providers to ensure the provision of services in areas of difficult access to services and underrepresented services.

The AEP will conduct a new phase of multiyear competition to expand geographical areas and offerings in adult education. The AEP is dire to expand the number of service providers to make educational services more accessible. Applicants that do not receive funds through the AEP will be required to provide data that show their past ability to achieve success in comparable measures.

C. VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

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

Rehabilitation Act 93-112 provides the necessary services to eligible certified persons with disabilities. Services are offered so that people with disabilities can prepare, enter, advance, obtain, or retain employment consistent with their strengths, priorities, resources, interests, concerns, unique skills, and

informed selections. The population that can be referred to this program must comply with the following criteria:

1. A qualified professional determines that the applicant has a physical or mental impairment.
2. The physical/mental condition of a person constitutes or results in substantial impediment to employment.
3. The applicant requires vocational rehabilitation services to prepare for, secure, obtain, retain, or advance employment that is consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, abilities, interests, functional residual abilities, and informed selection.
4. Presumption that the person can benefit from vocational rehabilitation services to obtain a job.

6. PROGRAM DATA

A. DATA ALIGNMENT AND INTEGRATION

Describe the plans of the lead State agencies with responsibility for the administration of the core programs, along with the State Board, to align and integrate available workforce and education data systems for the core programs, unemployment insurance programs, and education through postsecondary education, and to the extent possible, the Combined State Plan partner programs included in this plan. The description of the State's plan for integrating data systems should include the State's goals for achieving integration and any progress to date.

Describe data-collection and reporting processes used for all programs and activities, including the State's process to collect and report data on co-enrollment, and for those present in the one-stop centers.

I. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S PLANS TO MAKE THE MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS FOR THE CORE PROGRAMS INTEROPERABLE TO MAXIMIZE THE EFFICIENT EXCHANGE OF COMMON DATA ELEMENTS TO SUPPORT ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

Program Data

To better support data integrity and data integration, DEDC issued an RFP for an updated version of the PRIS case management system. The contract was awarded to the software company Softek Inc. Currently, PRIS integrates WIOA and Wagner-Peyser participant data. In addition, the Department of Family utilizes the system to refer PAN participants to the career

centers. DEDC hopes to implement a Common Intake form to integrate the services for all partner programs.

Regarding the management information systems of Puerto Rico and the plans to make them interoperable, there are:

1. **PRIS Implementation and Expansion**: The Participant Record Information System (PRIS) serves as the backbone for data management in Puerto Rico's labor development system. Initiated in March 2020, it is designed to record participant information and generate comprehensive reports for Title I-B and Title III programs under WIOA. The expansion plan includes integrating modules for Title II (Adult Education and Literacy) and Title IV (Vocational Rehabilitation Act) to enhance collaboration and data integration across these programs. This initiative reflects a commitment to creating a more cohesive and efficient data management system that spans the entire spectrum of workforce development programs.
2. **Data Sharing and Co-Enrollment Strategy**: The State's strategy focuses on bridging the gap between various workforce development programs. While there is existing co-enrollment between Title I and Title III, the plan aims to extend this framework to other titles. By leveraging PRIS, the system will facilitate identifying participants enrolled in multiple programs, using shared data elements like social security numbers. This integrated approach is crucial for delivering coordinated services and understanding the cumulative impact of multiple workforce development initiatives on an individual participant.
3. **Technological Upgrades and Vendor Collaboration**: Recognizing the dynamic nature of federal labor regulations and the evolving needs of workforce development, the State is actively working with IT vendors to upgrade the PRIS system. These upgrades are not just about expanding the system's capacity but also about ensuring its responsiveness to legislative changes and the growing demand for more sophisticated data analysis and reporting capabilities.
4. **Streamlining Intake and Service Delivery**: The integration of participant management systems across WIOA Titles I, II, and IV is a significant step towards streamlining the service delivery process. By developing a common intake and case management framework, the State aims to eliminate redundancies, reduce administrative burdens, and ensure that individuals seeking services through the workforce development system receive appropriate and coordinated support.

5. **Collaboration with the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration (VRA)**: The VRA's involvement is pivotal in collecting common data among WIOA partners. Their strategies focus on sharing statistical information, formulating intervention plans, and updating case management systems to enhance post-program follow-ups. These initiatives are integral to ensuring that the State's workforce development programs align with evaluation standards and performance indicators, particularly for individuals with disabilities.
6. **Focus on Performance Indicators and Evaluation Standards**: Moving beyond basic descriptive statistics to more advanced predictive and prescriptive analysis marks a significant shift in how the State evaluates its workforce development programs. This analytical approach involves a deeper examination of the factors influencing program performance, foreseeing future trends, and identifying targeted actions to improve client services. It represents a more data-driven and proactive approach to workforce development.
7. **Technological and Administrative Strengthening**: Implementing technology projects for case management and document sharing is part of a broader strategy to improve the efficiency and accuracy of data management in workforce development programs. This technological enhancement goes hand in hand with regular performance evaluations and updates to administrative procedures, ensuring continuous improvement and adherence to performance standards.

These detailed strategies collectively form a robust plan for developing an interoperable management information system across core programs, aiming to facilitate efficient data exchange and enhance the overall effectiveness of the State's workforce development system.

II. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S PLANS TO INTEGRATE DATA SYSTEMS TO FACILITATE STREAMLINED INTAKE AND SERVICE DELIVERY TO TRACK PARTICIPATION ACROSS ALL PROGRAMS INCLUDED IN THIS PLAN

The WDP has established plans with the aim of integrating data systems to streamline admission and service delivery, while facilitating the tracking of participation across all programs included in this plan. The primary objective is to enable the required partners to use the Participant Registration Information System (PRIS) as their central database platform, simultaneously facilitating the exchange of relevant information among different partners.

This is done to prevent service duplication and to allow for more efficient client tracking as they engage with the program.

Currently, Title I and Title III use the PRIS system as their registration platform. By contrast, Titles II and IV employ their own systems. This disparity in the registration systems has been identified as a challenge. The phase of development regarding the interoperable integration of Title II and Title IV programs is currently in the analytical stage. This suggests that careful evaluation of how to achieve integration before proceeding to full implementation is underway.

In a recent meeting among key partners, the need for technological integration was emphasized. The PRIS system is prepared to integrate with partners who do not use the same system through the "Enterprise Service Bus," which acts as an integration hub. In the short term, ongoing efforts are being made to establish communication between systems, enabling electronic referrals, tracking, and the retrieval of results. Regarding the targeted completion date for integration of the database among partners, December 2024 was set as the objective. This period signifies a long-term commitment to achieving desired technological integration.

III. EXPLAIN HOW THE STATE BOARD WILL ASSIST THE GOVERNOR IN ALIGNING TECHNOLOGY AND DATA SYSTEMS ACROSS REQUIRED ONE-STOP PARTNER PROGRAMS (INCLUDING DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMON INTAKE, DATA COLLECTION, ETC.) AND HOW SUCH ALIGNMENT WILL IMPROVE SERVICE DELIVERY TO INDIVIDUALS, INCLUDING UNEMPLOYED INDIVIDUALS

WIOA's lead agencies in Puerto Rico are committed to the governor's vision for workforce development and recognize its relevance to the island's economic and social progress. The progress of participants is monitored through the PRIS system, allowing the identification, evaluation, and reporting of participants' performance in terms of obtaining educational credentials or securing jobs that contribute to economic development. The Puerto Rico Workforce Development Program recognizes the importance of evaluating the success of the WIOA program on the island. The State Board plays a critical role in collaborating with the Governor to align technology and data across all comprehensive partner programs, including One-Stop Partner Programs. This alignment aims to improve the delivery of services to people, including the unemployed.

Under WIOA, core partners are expected to collaborate within a Single Management Center system to provide comprehensive services to job seekers and employers. The State Board evaluates the execution of each

core partner in coordination with the core partners to ensure that they meet the objectives and expectations established in their respective parts of the plan.

Specific evaluation processes and criteria may vary from one AJC to another and may be defined in the local Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between lead partners. The evaluation includes assessing each lead partner's contribution to the AJC's overall performance, such as its effectiveness in serving jobseekers and employers, achieving program objectives, and meeting program objectives. WIOA requirements.

These evaluations are conducted periodically, and performance assessments help identify areas for improvement, effectively allocate resources, and ensure that the AJC system continues to provide high-quality services to its clients. It also helps maintain accountability and transparency among key partners in the AJC system. To ensure that the system is operating in the shortest time possible, the WDP and State Board hold follow-up meetings on the status of system development and improvements.

As established in the WIOA Act, the Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DEDC) must provide the Governor of Puerto Rico with program execution indicators. These reports are based on those submitted through the Program Planning Information System (Workforce Integrated Performance System (WIPS)). After reporting on the WIPS, a report will be produced on Puerto Rico's execution of Title I. The State Board coordinates the compilation of these execution reports and presents them as a unified report published on the State Board's website, which is on the DEDC website.

IV. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S DATA SYSTEMS AND PROCEDURES TO PRODUCE THE REPORTS REQUIRED UNDER SECTION 116, PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM. (WIOA SECTION 116(D)(2)).

The State's enhanced plan to develop and produce reports under Section 116, performance accountability system (WIOA section 116(d)(2)), based on the prior and current data, includes:

1. Advanced Utilization of PRIS: Continuing to use the Participant Record Information System as the central platform, ensuring comprehensive data management and report generation in line with the PIRL guidelines and DOLETA validation rules.
2. Integration Across Titles: Focusing on integrating data from WIOA Titles I, II, III, and IV, with particular emphasis on finalizing the integration of

Titles II and IV into the PRIS system. This integration will enhance the scope and accuracy of reporting.

3. Continuous Improvement and Error Rectification: Building on past challenges, the plan involves rigorous error-checking processes and rectifying issues related to data migration and the incorporation of new WIOA data elements.
4. Timely Submission and Certification of Reports: Ensuring the timely submission and certification of crucial reports, such as ETA 9169, as well as ETA 9173 reports, through enhanced collaboration among WIOA partners and stringent internal review processes.
5. Collaborative Efforts for Data Accuracy: Strengthening collaboration with partners, especially Title III, for review and correction of data before report generation, thereby ensuring the accuracy and WIOA compliance of the submitted reports.

This comprehensive plan aims to build upon past experiences and leverage technological advancements to ensure effective, accurate, and timely reporting in accordance with WIOA section 116(d)(2) requirements.

Panel Consensus (Compliance): The Plan did not include the data systems and procedures used to report on Title II and Title IV programs.

The PRDE-AEP – Title II uses a custom developed data collection and reporting system to report to the National Reporting system.

The process the PRDE-AEP uses to report the performance data is based on the data collection done by the service providers and uploaded to the Adult Information System (AIS) at AEP central level. A detailed data review and validation for each data indicator is performed by the central office. The specific anomalies identified are checked for corrections. The errors, when identified, are resolved by telephone calls and discussion of the raw data indicators with the education center's directors, teachers, and counselors at each center. The AEP Program accountability is measured using the following outcome measures:

1. Measurable skill gains (MSG) are reported during regularly established survey schedules as required by the National Reporting System. This is based on the lowest functioning level in which the participant earned at least one eligible literacy completion point, earned a diploma in secondary education, or exited and enrolled in a post-secondary career and technical education by the end of the reporting year.

2. Credential Attainment Rate measures student attainment of a secondary school diploma, recognized equivalent, or enrolled in post-secondary education or career training within one year of exit.
3. Employment Rate (second quarter after exit) measures the number of participants that exit during the reporting period who are employed during the second quarter after exit divided by the number of those that exited during the reporting period.
4. Median Earnings (second quarter after exit) for all exiting in a core program, the report of the wage that is at the midpoint between the highest and lowest wages earned in the second quarter after exit.
5. Employment Rate (fourth quarter) for the number of participants exiting during the reporting period who are employed during the fourth quarter after exit divided by the number of those exiting during the reporting period.

Each fiscal year, the Adult Education program negotiates the proposed target percentages for each of the core indicators of performance with the USDOE, Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE). Each local program is responsible for meeting or exceeding negotiated performance targets.

B. ASSESSMENT OF PARTICIPANTS' POST-PROGRAM SUCCESS

Describe how lead State agencies will use the workforce development system to assess the progress of participants who are exiting from core programs in entering, persisting in, and completing postsecondary education, or entering or remaining in employment. States may choose to set additional indicators of performance.

WIOA's lead agencies are committed to the governor's vision of Puerto Rico's workforce development and its importance to economic and social development. The participants' progress is monitored using the PRIS system. WDP has been identifying effective measures for evaluating current and historical data to move from simple descriptive statistics to predictive statistics, and more importantly, to formulate prescriptive analyses.

Several factors that influence the outcomes achieved and future planning must be considered to assess and improve the execution of programs under WIOA. These factors include collecting and analyzing accurate data on the progress and outcomes of the program, such as employment placement, income growth, and the completion of training programs. Additionally, it is crucial to understand the changing demands of the labor market by

identifying growing sectors or industries, in-demand skills, and emerging opportunities. Stakeholder engagement, involving employers, educators, community organizations, and clients, provides essential feedback on a program's effectiveness. Furthermore, establishing a continuous evaluation process that allows real-time corrective actions and continuous feedback from stakeholders is essential.

The methodology used to evaluate these factors involved collecting data from participants, including demographic information, services received, educational achievements, and employment outcomes. Local areas and the state have access to a dashboard that allows them to visualize data and monitor program execution. Moreover, data analysis and extraction techniques can be employed to identify trends, patterns, and areas that require improvement. Surveys should also be conducted among program participants, employers, and educational institutions to gather valuable insights into program effectiveness.

Regarding performance indicators for programs under the WIOA, core partners assess key indicators, such as employment in the second quarter after exit, employment in the fourth quarter after exit, median income in the second quarter after exit, credential attainment rate, and measurable skill gains.

For the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service program, similar indicators are assessed, including employment in the second quarter after exit, employment in the fourth quarter after exit, and median income in the second quarter after exit. It is important to note that the credential attainment rate and measurable skill gain indicators do not apply to the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service program. Finally, the Employer Service Effectiveness (ESE) indicator is measured as a shared outcome among the six core programs within each state to ensure a comprehensive approach to serving employers. Due to the lack of historical data, states are not required to submit the expected levels of performance for the ESE indicator in 2022 and 2023. Each core program must submit expected performance levels for all other applicable indicators.

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

Explain how the State will meet the requirements to utilize quarterly UI wage records for performance accountability, evaluations, and as a source for workforce and labor market information, consistent with Federal and State law. (This Operational Planning element applies to core programs.)

The wage record information is used to determine employment, retention, and average earnings. Puerto Rico's Unemployment Insurance (UI) wage records are the primary data source. The signing of the SWIS (State Wage Interchange System) Agreement between Puerto Rico and the United States Department of Labor (DOLETA) is a crucial step for collaboration in the collection of interstate quarterly wage records. This agreement allows the exchange of salary data between Puerto Rico and the federal government, specifically with DOLETA, to use this information for purposes related to workforce programs and law enforcement. The SWIS Agreement replaces the Wage Record Interchange System (WRIS and WRIS2) Data Sharing Agreements previously executed by most States. States signing the Agreement will be able to exchange interstate quarterly wage records with any other State signing the Agreement to satisfy performance reporting requirements in Section 116 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

The PR Department of Labor and Human Resources is the SUIA agency. "SUIA" is the state agency that holds wage data, whether such agency also administers the state's unemployment insurance program. On the other hand, PACIA" is the Performance Accountability and Customer Information Agency designated by the governor to be responsible for coordinating the state's program for assessing state and local program performance and evaluating training provider performance. The PACIA is the PR Department of Economic Development & Commerce – Access PACIA, PR Department of Education – Access PACIA, PR Department of the Family – Access PACIA, and PR Vocational Rehabilitation Administration – Access.

Puerto Rico has met the requirements for utilizing quarterly Unemployment Insurance (UI) wage records for accountability, evaluations, and as a source of information on the workforce and labor market in accordance with federal and state laws. This achievement is facilitated by the State Wage Interchange System (SWIS).

All inquiries for wage data related to applicable programs are processed through the SWIS Clearinghouse. The Department of Labor and Human Resources (DTRH) in Puerto Rico generates a list detailing the employment status of each participant, including the employers they are working for and their salaries. This list, known as the "State Wage Record File," is loaded into the "Participant Record Information System" (PRIS) to record the wages corresponding to each participant in the WIOA program. This enables the identification of employed participants, their employment industry, and their salary information.

In addition, to enhance wage data collection and ensure data accuracy, the SWIS file was implemented. The integration of data from this file into the PRIS allows us to obtain more precise and validated information about participants who have received services under the WIOA program and have obtained exit dates.

While Title II and Title IV programs do not enroll their participants in the PRIS, they have signed the SWIS agreement, granting them access to the information. These programs have their own protocols for requesting salary information from the DTRH. In summary, Puerto Rico established an effective system for using quarterly UI wage records as a source of information to meet accountability and evaluation requirements for programs under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. This ensures data accuracy and transparency during the execution of the programs.

D. PRIVACY SAFEGUARDS

Describe the privacy safeguards incorporated in the State's workforce development system, including safeguards required by section 444 of the General Education Provisions Act (20 U.S.C. 1232g) and other applicable Federal laws.

The State adheres to Section 444 of the General Education Provision Act, Section 2(c)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 49l-2(a)(2) of the Wagner Peyser Act, 2 CFR 200.303, OMB Uniform Guidance, and all other applicable provisions. Additionally, it complies with all relevant local provisions, such as those outlined by the Puerto Rico Institute of Statistics, regarding the access, dissemination, and confidentiality of government information.

The PRIS Management Information System, being a crucial component, employs a role-based access control to protect confidential data, ensuring that only authorized personnel with specific privileges can access sensitive information. This system is consistently monitored to maintain security and compliance. Additionally, the State's commitment to technological integration, data sharing, and efficient service delivery, as outlined in the program data, reinforces the importance of safeguarding participant information while improving overall program effectiveness. The strategic approach to managing data across various workforce development programs, including the integration of Titles II and IV into PRIS and the use of SWIS for wage record data, exemplifies a robust and coordinated effort in data management and privacy protection.

7. PRIORITY OF SERVICE FOR VETERANS.

A. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL IMPLEMENT THE PRIORITY OF SERVICE PROVISIONS FOR COVERED PERSONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE JOBS FOR VETERANS ACT, CODIFIED AT SECTION 4215 OF 38 U.S.C., WHICH APPLIES TO ALL EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAMS FUNDED IN WHOLE OR IN PART BY THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR.

B. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL MONITOR PRIORITY OF SERVICE PROVISIONS FOR VETERANS.

C. DESCRIBE THE TRIAGE AND REFERRAL PROCESS FOR ELIGIBLE VETERANS AND OTHER POPULATIONS DETERMINED ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE SERVICES FROM THE JOBS FOR VETERANS STATE GRANTS (JVSG) PROGRAM'S DISABLED VETERANS' OUTREACH PROGRAM (DVOP) SPECIALIST/CONSOLIDATED POSITION.

1. **Describe how the State will implement the priority of service provisions for covered persons in accordance with the requirements of the Jobs for Veterans Act, codified in section 4215 of 38 U.S.C., which applies to all employment and training programs funded in whole or in part by the DOL.**

In compliance with the Jobs for Veterans Act, codified in section 4215 of 38 U.S.C., and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Puerto Rico is committed to prioritizing service provisions for covered persons. The State has a multi-layered approach to ensure that these individuals are prioritized in all employment and training programs funded, either fully or partially, by the Department of Labor (DOL). The D.O.L has meticulously aligned its State Unified Plan with this federal legislation, ensuring that all policies, procedures, and guidelines are in full compliance with section 4215 of 38 U.S.C.

1. **Identifying Covered Persons**

- Definition: A "covered person" includes the veterans and spouses of certain veterans. This definition is in line with the Jobs for Veterans Act of 2002 and PRDOLHR's commitment to identifying veterans, veterans with disabilities, and eligible persons.
- Scope: The priority of service provisions is applicable to all employment and training programs funded in whole or in part by the DOL, including but not limited to programs under WIOA, the Wagner-Peyser Act, and other specialized programs.
- Data Collection: Application forms should include specific questions to identify veterans and eligible spouses, as outlined in the Strategic Plan implemented by Wagner-Peyser.

- Verification: The PRIS will be used to verify the status of veterans and eligible spouses, aligning with the PRDOLHR's strategy to confirm the priority of service.
- Specialized Staff: The Veteran Program Coordinator (JVSGC) and Wagner-Peyser merit staff are responsible for overseeing the identification process, ensuring that the priority of service is granted to the correct individuals.
- Data Security: Given that personal information will be collected and verified, it is crucial to outline the measures that will be taken to secure sensitive data.

2. **Priority of Service**

- Legal Mandate: The law mandates that covered persons must be given priority over non-veterans for employment, training, and placement services. This is reinforced by the PRDOLHR's commitment to establishing relationships with various agencies to ensure service priority.
- Resource Allocation: Priority will be provided by the Wagner-Peyser merit staff, and the Veteran Program Coordinator (JVSGC) will oversee compliance.
- Service Tiers: Different tiers of service could be established to prioritize veterans with significant barriers to employment, such as homelessness or disability, as defined in the 2020 WIOA State Unified Plan.
- Customization: Services are customized based on the individual needs of the covered persons, ensuring that they receive the most relevant and effective support.
- Ensure that the advanced analytics tools used for real-time monitoring comply with data privacy laws and are accessible to all users.
- Appeals Process: An appeals process should be in place for individuals who believe they have been wrongly denied the priority of service.

3. **Implementation by State and Local Workforce Investment Boards**

- Guidance: The Office of Workforce Investment provides specific guidelines that are further detailed in the PRDOLHR's Strategic Plan.
- Local Implementation: Local Workforce Investment Boards are responsible for on-the-ground implementation, including training staff

members and periodic reception and Labor Exchange Staff reinforcement, as outlined in the 2020 WIOA State Unified Plan.

- Performance Metrics: While you mentioned key performance indicators, specific metrics for success could be further elaborated to ensure methodological monitoring.
- Inter-agency Collaboration: The PRDOLHR is committed to establishing relationships with a wide range of organizations, including municipalities, colleges, and faith-based organizations, to ensure a comprehensive approach to service priorities.
- Partnerships: Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) will be established with these entities to formalize roles, responsibilities, and resource sharing.
- Stakeholder Input: Consider obtaining feedback from veterans' organizations and other stakeholders to ensure that the program meets the needs of the community it serves.

4. **Monitoring Compliance**

- DOL Oversight: The U.S. The Department of Labor has the authority to monitor and enforce compliance. This is further supervised by the JVSGC in Puerto Rico.
- Audits: Regular internal and external audits should be conducted, aligned with PRDOLHR's commitment to data and report validation.
- Real-time Monitoring: Advanced analytics tools can be employed to provide real-time monitoring of service provision, ensuring immediate corrective action if discrepancies are found.
- Data-driven decision-making: These analytics will also inform future policy decisions, ensuring that the program evolves based on empirical data rather than theoretical models.
- PACT Act: The PACT Act has an open enrollment period for post-9/11 combat veterans who meet specific criteria. This is particularly relevant for Puerto Rico given its high veteran population.
- Healthcare Benefits: The VA in Puerto Rico focuses on comprehensive healthcare coverage, which could be a selling point for attracting veterans to DOL-funded programs.

- Technology: VA's commitment to providing accessible technology can be leveraged to make DOL-funded programs more accessible and efficient.
- Skill Matching: Advanced AI algorithms could be used to match veterans with the most suitable employment opportunities based on their skills and preferences.
- Legal Review: Given the legal implications, it would be prudent to have this document reviewed by legal experts familiar with federal and state employment laws.
- Performance Metrics: While you mentioned key performance indicators, specific metrics for success could be further elaborated to ensure methodological monitoring.
- Whistleblower Protection: Procedures should be in place to protect employees who report non-compliance from retaliation.

By adhering to these guidelines and continually monitoring the effectiveness of the priority service provisions, Puerto Rico can ensure compliance with the Jobs for Veterans Act. Given the specific needs and resources of Puerto Rico, the implementation strategy may vary; however, the core principles remain the same. This detailed approach ensures a robust, compliant, and effective implementation of the priority of service provisions for covered persons in strict accordance with the Jobs for Veterans Act and other relevant legislation.

2. **Describe how the State will monitor priority of service provisions for veterans.**

This section elaborates on the oversight mechanisms in place to monitor compliance with the priority of service provisions. This includes data collection methods, audit procedures, and staff training programs aimed at ensuring effective implementation.

1. **Data Collection and Reporting**

The Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources (PRDOLHR) will utilize PRIS and its robust data collection and reporting system to monitor compliance with the priority of service provisions. This system tracks key performance indicators, such as the number of veterans served, types of services provided, and outcomes achieved.

2. **Third-party Audits:** Third-party audits should be used for unbiased assessment of compliance.

3. **Audits and Inspections**

Regular audits and inspections will be conducted by the U.S. The Department of Labor (DOL) and the Veteran Program Coordinator (JVSGC) ensure that all workforce development programs comply with the Jobs for Veterans Act of 2002. These audits will include a review of the collected data and may involve site visits to local American Job Centers (AJCs).

4. **Staff Training and Reinforcement**

Staff members will undergo periodic training to ensure that they are well-versed in the priority of service provisions. Wagner-Peyser staff will continue to announce and provide priority of service to veterans according to Federal law and applicable regulations.

5. **Public Awareness**

The workforce system network in Puerto Rico keeps the public informed about the Priority of Service entitlement to veterans, covered persons, and eligible spouses through announcements posted on bulletin boards and near the entry service delivery point.

3. ***Describe the screening and referral process for eligible veterans and other populations determined eligible to receive services from the Jobs for Veterans*** State Grants (JVSG) Program's Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist/consolidated position.

This section describes the screening and referral processes in place to direct eligible veterans and other specified populations to appropriate services. It details the roles of Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists and other key personnel in this process.

DVOP Specialists

DVOP specialists focus on providing individualized career services to meet the employment needs of veterans, particularly those who are economically or educationally disadvantaged, including homeless veterans, veterans with disabilities, and veterans who face other significant barriers to employment.

Roles and Responsibilities of DVOP Specialists:

1. Case Management: DVOP specialists provide individualized career services, including comprehensive assessments, the development of individual employment plans, and career counseling.

2. Skill Identification: They help veterans identify their skills, including transferable skills from their military service, and match them with suitable employment or training opportunities.
3. Resource Navigation: DVOP specialists guide veterans through various federal, state, and local resources for job training, employment placement, and other support services.
4. Special Populations: DVOP specialists are trained to work with special populations of veterans, such as those with disabilities, to ensure that they receive appropriate accommodation in the workplace.
5. Follow-Up Services: They provide follow-up services to ensure that veterans remain employed and address any issues that may arise post-placement.
6. Reporting and Compliance: DVOP specialists are responsible for maintaining accurate records of their activities and outcomes, which are used for program evaluation and compliance with federal regulations.
7. Training and Development: They often engage in continuous professional development to stay updated on best practices in veterans' employment services.

Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG)–U.S. Department of Labor

Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP)–U.S. Department of Labor

By providing these specialized services, DVOP specialists play a crucial role in helping veterans transition successfully from military to civilian life, particularly those facing significant barriers to employment.

1. **Initial Identification and Verification**

Upon entering AJCs, veterans and eligible spouses are notified of their priority right of service under the Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Wagner-Peyser merit staff identify eligible veterans for priority of service and refer those who meet the criteria for individualized career services to Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists, as appropriate.Verification through the required paperwork will be conducted, especially if eligibility is determined.

2. **Screening Process**

Veterans and eligible spouses are screened based on their specific needs and barriers to employment. Those meeting the definition of a Veteran with Significant Barriers to Employment will be referred to as one of the JVSG DVOP Specialists for the provision of services. This includes services such as re-employment orientation, individualized career assessment, and job search assistance.

Training and Development for DVOP Specialists: DVOP specialists should engage in continuous professional development to stay updated on best practices in veterans' employment services.

Emergency Response: Procedures for immediate responses to urgent cases, such as veterans with acute mental health issues, should be outlined.

3. **Referral to DVOP Specialists**

Veterans meeting specific criteria, such as being a special disabled or disabled veteran, homeless, recently separated, etc., will be referred to DVOP specialists for intensive services. These services are designed to address the unique challenges faced by these populations, and may include focused case management services, re-employment orientation, individualized career assessment, and job search assistance.

By incorporating these detailed strategies and mechanisms, Puerto Rico aims to comply fully with the Jobs for Veterans Act, ensuring that veterans and their eligible spouses receive priority of service to which they are entitled. This comprehensive approach involves multiple stakeholders, including federal and state agencies, local workforce development boards, and community organizations, all working in concert to serve this important population effectively.

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

Describe how the one-stop delivery system (including one-stop center operators and the one-stop delivery system partners), will comply with section 188 of WIOA (if applicable) and applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.) regarding the physical and programmatic accessibility of facilities, programs, services, technology, and materials for individuals with disabilities. This also must include a description of compliance through providing staff training and support for addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities. Describe the

State's one-stop center certification policy, particularly the accessibility criteria.

Section 188 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) prohibits discrimination against individuals who apply to, participate in, work for, or contact programs and activities that receive financial assistance from the Department of Labor (DOL). This includes discrimination based on disability. Section 188 also mandates that reasonable accommodations be provided to qualified individuals with disabilities. The DOL has issued regulations implementing Section 188 non-discrimination requirements that apply to programs or activities offered through the American Job Center (AJC) system, also known as the one-stop delivery system.

Puerto Rico's workforce system must be prepared to serve jobseekers from diverse backgrounds facing different barriers. Positive outreach encompasses both the physical accessibility of all facilities, as well as programmatic accessibility, particularly with customers' access needs. This will allow for better integration of service delivery and coordination among workforce system partners. Advances in personal computing and telecommunications technology have enabled the provision of services tailored to each participant's needs to be delivered with ease directly to their homes.

The success of this program depends on the values and actions that local Workforce Development Boards and their partners use to guide their planning and operations, which they must consider as follows:

1. Integrated: Think and function as an integrated system of partners that share common goals with services delivered by various organizations with the best capabilities for a seamless customer experience.
2. Accountable: Committed to high-quality customer services with regular program performance review based on shared data and actions that enhance outcomes.
3. Affirmative Outreach: Meets the needs of customers by ensuring affirmative outreach to programs, services, and activities for all eligible individuals.
4. Continuous Improvement: Create a delivery system that utilizes feedback from employers and current and future jobseekers to challenge the status quo and innovate to drive measurable improvements.
5. Partnership: Address to align goals, resources, and initiatives with economic development, business, labor, and education partners.

6. Regional Strategy: Work with counterparts to address broader workforce needs of the regional economy and leverage resources to provide a higher quality and level of services.

WIOA requires that there be at least one physical one-stop career center in each local area. To achieve the goal of increased access, Puerto Rico must consider three process levels:

1. Comprehensive
    a. Accessible to the public during regular business days as well as physical and programmatic access to individuals with disabilities.
    b. Portal sites for electronic access.
    c. Provider of basic and individualized career services, educational services, and training services.
    d. Provider of business services.
    e. Representation of partners.
    f. Additional related employment and training resources.
2. Affiliated
    a. Access to the public is physically and programmatically accessible to individuals with disabilities.
    b. Portal sites for electronic access.
    c. Providers of Basic Career Services.
    d. Representation of one or more mandated partners.
    e. Additional related employment, education, and training resources.
    f. Established working relationships as part of an integrated system of WorkSource sites.
3. Connection
    a. Accessible to the public with barriers outlined in WIOA, which include physical and programmatic access to individuals with disabilities.
    b. Portal sites for electronic access.
    c. Providers of Basic Career Services.

d. Additional related employment and training resources.

e. Established working relationships as part of an integrated system of WorkSource sites.

To maximize the efforts of all participants with access to services, each one-stop site must:

1. Describe how their site works cooperatively with WIOA's core partners to provide quality services to all customers. Describe their outreach to populations with barriers in the community and their relationships with core programs and community partners to effectively serve them.
2. Provide evidence that basic ADA requirements are met.
3. Describe initiatives or strategies in developing positive outreach, provide tangible evidence of implementation or solution-driven plan development, and address the following four specific areas of access:

    a. Physical: Architectural or building

    b. Information: All the official documents printed, and materials posted.

    c. Digital: Software, web-based programs, and print alternatives.

    d. Communication: Verbal and non-verbal access to services, phones, and others.

4. Describe the wireless Internet infrastructure.
5. Address how the needs of populations with barriers are met through staff assistance and other means.
6. List any best practices to highlight and share for continuous improvement.

In Puerto Rico, Title I and the PRVRA will lead the efforts to adapt the USDOL Office of Disability Employment Policy's (ODEP) recommendations contained in its "Promising Practices in Achieving Universal Access and Equal Opportunity: A Section 188 Disability Reference Guide". The resulting guidance will be adopted by the State Board and mandated to all local areas as part of the local area certification and operator competitive selection processes.

Assessment of Accessibility to Individuals with Disability

At least once every three years, local boards must assess the effectiveness, physical and programmatic accessibility, and continuous improvement of one-stop centers and delivery systems. Considering this point, local boards determine appropriate actions to address the necessary policies and procedural modifications. This assessment also provides feedback to the local board, which supports the development of local planning goals.

WDP has utilized two mechanisms to conduct assessments of the workforce system, and these are the following:

1. One-Stop Certification Process: The State Board Certification Criteria provides a certification tool and outlines the certification process. At least once every three years, local boards must access the effectiveness, physical and programmatic accessibility, and continuous improvement of one-stop centers and delivery systems.
2. One-Stop System Monitoring: The monitoring of compliance with accessibility for individuals contains the following evaluation elements:

    a. Designation of Equal Opportunity Official: An Equal Opportunity Officer (EOO) has been appointed (29 CFR 38.23)

    b. Equal Opportunity and Non-Discrimination Policy Dissemination: Procedures or methods are in place to ensure communication with persons with disabilities. The Monitoring and Compliance Office conducts an annual inspection of auxiliary aids and services to ensure communication with disabled individuals.

    c. Review Of Commitment, Plans, Contracts and Procedures: The entity ensures that each applicant for funds and training providers interested in being eligible for receipt of funds under Title 1 of WIOA includes, in their application, the commitment to comply with the laws and regulations prohibiting discrimination outlined in 29 CFR 38.20(a).

    d. Universal Access: This includes the following:

        i. The subrecipient has made efforts to broaden the composition of groups considered for participation or employment to include members of both sexes, racial and ethnic groups, individuals of various ages, and individuals

with disabilities, including the following efforts (29 CFR 37.42):

1. The subrecipient has a method to make reasonable accommodations and modifications available to individuals with disabilities section 29 CFR 38.8.

ii. The subrecipient physical facilities provide structural access to persons with disabilities, such as 29 CFR 38.4(2) and 38.9(e):

1. The subrecipient provides auxiliary aids and services when necessary to afford individuals with disabilities the opportunity to participate and enjoy the benefits of Title I of WIOA. The primary consideration for providing such aid and services is the requests of individuals with disabilities section 29 CFR 38.9(b).

2. If the subrecipient communicates via telephone with beneficiaries, registered individuals, eligible applicants, participants, job seekers, and/or employees, the same utilizes telecommunication mechanisms for individuals with hearing impairments (TDD/TTY). or equally effective communication systems section 29 CFR 87.9 (c).

3. The subrecipient has signs at the main entrance of those facilities with no access, directing the public to a location where they can obtain information about accessible facilities. These signs meet the requirements prescribed by the General Service Administration in 41 CFR 102-76/Regulation section 29 CFR 38.9 (e) (1).

4. The eligibility criteria used for the participation of individuals in programs or activities under Title I of WIOA provide individuals with disabilities equal opportunity and access to the benefits, aids, training, programs, or activities provided to other individuals, section 29 CFR 38.7 (i), (j) and (l).

e. Data and Information Collection and Record-Keeping

i. The Entity has designed procedures for data and information collection and record keeping.

ii. The VRA also collaborates with the American Job Center, allowing them to use our accessibility study to access the compliance of their facilities with legislation:

1. Expansion of the availability of information resources or training for new recruitment staff through the agency's internal page (Intranet).
2. It continues with the use of remote interpretation video technology for the deaf.

Staff Training and Support for Compliance

- Reasonable Accommodations: The document states that training and support services must be provided to qualified individuals with disabilities unless doing so would cause undue hardship. This is in line with 29 CFR 37.8 and 29 CFR 32.13. (Page 54)
- Reasonable Modifications: It is necessary to provide reasonable modifications to policies, practices, and procedures for the registration and provision of career, training, and support services to individuals with disabilities. Unless such modifications fundamentally alter the nature of the service, program, or activity. (Page 54)
- Integrated Setting: Programs and activities must be administered in the most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of qualified individuals with disabilities. (Page 54)
- AJC Staff Responsibilities: American Job Center (AJC) staff are instructed not to automatically refer jobseekers with disabilities to State vocational rehabilitation programs. Referrals are made based on whether the individual would benefit from such services, in addition to other programs and services available in the AJC. (Page 35)
- Universal Access and Equal Opportunity: The document outlines various sections dedicated to ensuring equal opportunities, including providing reasonable accommodations and modifications, effective communication, and program accessibility. (Page 3)
- Prohibitions and Modifications: The document mentions that compliance involves adhering to prohibitions and providing reasonable accommodations and modifications. It also involves administering programs in the most integrated setting to ensure effective communication. (Page 9)

- Monitoring and Continuous Improvement: There should be ongoing monitoring for compliance and continuous improvement.

Source Document: "Promising Practices in Achieving Universal and Equal Opportunity: A Section 188 Disability Reference Guide" by the US Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment, Pages 3, 9, 35, 54, 56, 57.

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

Describe how the one-stop delivery system (including one-stop center operators and the one-stop delivery system partners) will ensure that each one-stop center is able to meet the needs of English language learners, such as through established procedures, staff training, resources, and other materials. Describe how English language learners will be made aware of the opportunity to enroll and/or co-enroll in all the core programs for which they are eligible.

The WIOA Act establishes, among other things, that accessibility is guaranteed to participants regardless of the language in which they communicate. This law is enacted in the existing multilingualism in the 50 states of the United States, where the variety of languages is very diverse. In the case of Puerto Rico, although there is a need to provide services in different languages, established public policy requires that the official languages in which agencies and instrumentalities must offer services and access to information are Spanish and English.

In order to comply with both, the Public Policy established in the document entitled, Transparency and Disclosure Requirement (Sunshine Provision) of the activities of local boards under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (DDEC-WIOA-01 -2021), effective April 8, 2021, by the Government of Puerto Rico, as well as the regulations established in the WIOA law and the Executive Order on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce, we develop below the actions to follow to achieve such an important objective:

• Evaluation: It is essential to carry out a comprehensive needs assessment to identify the specific challenges and opportunities that exist in the population to receive this service. This assessment should include demographics, language proficiency levels, and challenges accessing services and data collected by the United States Census Bureau.

• Development: Develop and implement comprehensive language access plans for each local area. These plans should describe strategies for providing

language assistance services to participants, such as interpretation and translation services.

• Training: Train staff who provide services in the local area, including front-line employees, case managers, in language development and understanding of other cultures.

• Recruitment: Recruiting bilingual or multilingual staff who can communicate with participants in their languages of speech is essential. Staff highly trained in multilingual communication will significantly improve accessibility to the service.

• Tool Identification: Identify free or low-cost translation software that performs text-to-text, text-to-speech, and speech-to-text translations to provide support and service to potential multicultural clients visiting local areas.

• Document Repository: Developing a repository of documents translated into the various languages spoken by participants is essential. This repository should include outreach materials, application forms, program brochures, and other resources needed to access services.

• Video Resources Repository: Develop short training videos where you explain in other languages how you can serve a person seeking services in the Local Area.

• Collaborative Alliances with Third Sector: Establish collaborative alliances with the Consular Corps of Puerto Rico (CCPR) for interpretation services in other languages. The CCPR is a non-political, secular, and non-profit institution established under the laws of Puerto Rico. It has consuls from 31 countries, accredited in the US and officially represented in Puerto Rico and serves its resident citizens. This agreement would frame interpretation services in other languages which can be performed in local areas or virtually. These can collaborate in the translation of brochures, service documentation such as: eligibility criteria. Likewise, they can collaborate in the review of non-discrimination policies. In addition, they can collaborate in the dissemination of the services offered by the local area and serve as a bridge for participants.

•Collaborative Alliances with Government Resources- The Immigrant Counselling and Services Office is created in 2020 by through Law No. 254 of October 28, 2000, by the Department of State of Puerto Rico. Dedicated to attend to the affairs of immigrants who are Puerto Rico residents.

Collaborates in coordinating services among foreign residents to facilitate the prompt handling and monitoring of their cases with the Local Areas.

• Outreach Campaigns: Guaranteeing equal opportunity in the receipt of services, launch an outreach campaign in the main media, social networks and in service offices where the offering of multilingual services in local areas is made known. In the AJC there is availability of documents in the respective translations in the main languages of older speakers. If an individual of some kind who does not have the translation of documents requests services, the translation service will be requested through one of the organizations with prior agreements.

By implementing these initiatives in Local Areas, they can better adapt to the needs of participants in the language of their preference and ensure equitable access to essential employment and training services.

IV. COORDINATION WITH STATE PLAN PROGRAMS

Describe the methods used for joint planning and coordination among the core programs, and with the required one-stop partner programs and other programs and activities included in the Unified or Combined State Plan.

The Puerto Rico State Plan Advisory Committee and Joint Policy Workgroup have played a pivotal role in the development and coordination of the Unified State Plan of Puerto Rico 2024. The collaborative effort involves representatives from key programs, with the Department of Economic Development and Commerce serving as the lead executor. This review focuses on the planning process, collaborative efforts, and key responsibilities undertaken by both state and local entities in aligning workforce policies and services with regional needs.

Unified State Plan Development:

The establishment of a WIOA Unified State Plan Review Task Force in PR is led by the Title I-B; it signifies a concerted effort to create an integrated, aligned, and viable WIOA Unified State Plan. The advisory team, comprising representatives from major programs, such as Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Wagner-Peyser, and Vocational Rehabilitation Program, has been instrumental in the review of the Unified State Plan for 2024.

Strategic Planning Process:

The planning process commenced with comprehensive meetings with representatives of major programs to assess the implementation of strategies outlined in the Unified and Conditionally Approved Plan 2022. The goal was

to identify achievements and areas for improvement, incorporating new strategies to enhance services. Collaboration with programs such as Adult Education, Employment Services for Older Workers, and Vocational Rehabilitation has been integral to this process.

Local Workforce Development Boards and Chief Elected Officials:

At the local level, the involvement of Local Workforce Development Boards (LDBs) and Chief Elected Officials (CEOs) in the design and governance of the system is essential. Their responsibilities include conducting workforce studies, collaborating with system partners to develop local plans, and establishing public policies in line with state directives. Additionally, efforts are directed towards engaging employers, implementing career pathways, utilizing technology, and ensuring accessibility in accordance with WIOA and the ADA Act.

Certification of One Stop Centers:

A crucial aspect of the local board's responsibilities involves the annual evaluation of the physical and programmatic accessibility of One Stop Centers, aligning with WIOA and ADA Act provisions. Certification of these centers, in accordance with 20 CFR Sec. 678.800, mandates that the Local Board cannot operate the Single Management Center.

Emerging Themes and Priorities:

The advisory team has highlighted three emerging themes in the WIOA State Plan: Maximizing access to employment, reviewing implemented strategies, and modernizing the workforce system. While addressing customer needs remains a priority, the cohesive vision for the workforce system emphasizes interagency collaboration strategies and multisectoral alignment.

Governor's State Workforce Development Board Approval:

Upon completion, the reviewed and refined Unified State Plan is presented for review and approval by the Governor's State Workforce Development Board of the State of Puerto Rico, ensuring alignment with state policies and objectives.

The collaborative efforts of the Puerto Rico State Plan Advisory Committee and Joint Policy Workgroup, in conjunction with state and local entities, reflect a commitment to enhancing workforce development strategies. The comprehensive review process underscores the dedication to achieving a cohesive vision for the workforce system in Puerto Rico.

V. Common Assurances (For All Core Programs)

The Unified or Combined State Plan must include assurances that:

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The State has established a policy identifying circumstances that may present a conflict of interest for a State Board or local board member, or the entity or class of officials that the member represents, and procedures to resolve such conflicts;	Yes
2. The State has established a policy to provide to the public (including individuals with disabilities) access to meetings of State Boards and local boards, and information regarding activities of State Boards and local boards, such as data on board membership and minutes;	Yes
3. The lead State agencies with optimal policy-making authority and responsibility for the administration of core programs reviewed and commented on the appropriate operational planning elements of the Unified or Combined State Plan, and approved the elements as serving the needs of the populations served by such programs;	Yes
4. (a) The State obtained input into the 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; (b) The State provided an opportunity for review and comment on the plan by the State Board, including State agency official(s) for the Unemployment Insurance Agency if such official(s) is a member of the State Board;	Yes
5. The State has established, in accordance with WIOA section 116(i), fiscal control and fund accounting procedures	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
that may be necessary to ensure the proper disbursement of, and accounting for, funds paid to the State through allotments made for the core programs to carry out workforce development activities;	
6. The State has taken appropriate action to secure compliance with uniform administrative requirements in this Act, including that the State will annually monitor local areas to ensure compliance and otherwise take appropriate action to secure compliance with the uniform administrative requirements under WIOA section 184(a)(3);	Yes
7. The State has taken the appropriate action to be in compliance with WIOA section 188, Nondiscrimination, as applicable;	Yes
8. The Federal funds received to carry out a core program will not be expended for any purpose other than for activities authorized with respect to such funds under that core program;	Yes
9. The State will pay an appropriate share (as defined by the State board) of the costs of carrying out section 116, from funds made available through each of the core programs;	Yes
10. The State has a one-stop certification policy that ensures the physical and programmatic accessibility of all one-stop centers with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA);	Yes
11. Service providers have a referral process in place for directing Veterans with Significant Barriers to Employment (SBE) to DVOP services, when appropriate; and	Yes
12. Priority of service for veterans and eligible spouses is provided in accordance with 38 USC 4215 in all workforce preparation, development or delivery of programs or services funded directly, in whole or in part, by the Department of Labor.	Yes

VI. PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR CORE PROGRAMS

The State must address all program-specific requirements in this section for the WIOA core programs regardless of whether the State submits either a Unified or Combined State Plan.

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES UNDER TITLE I-B

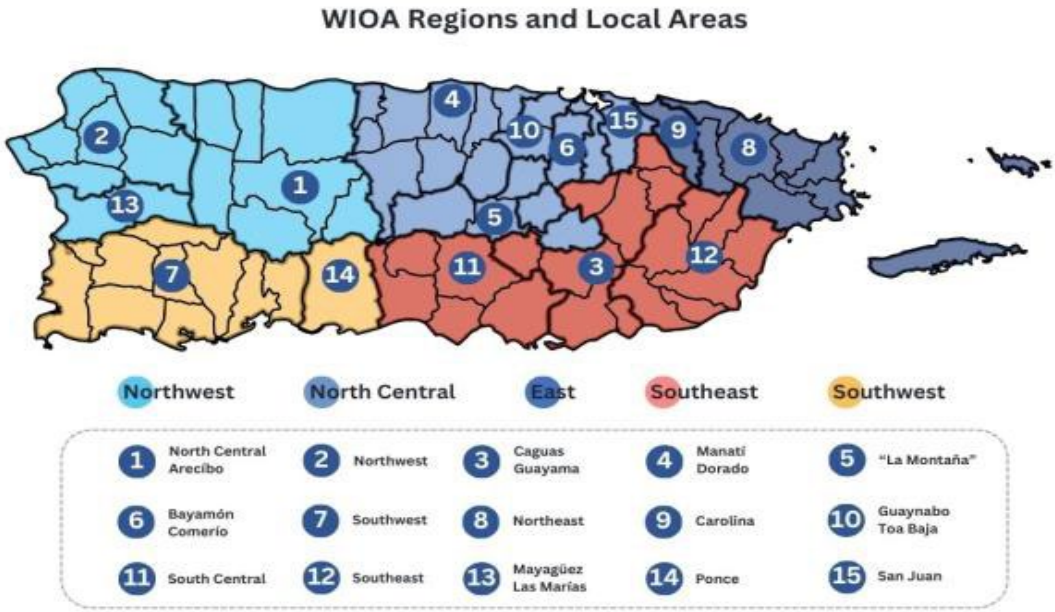
The Unified or Combined State Plan must include the following with respect to activities carried out under subtitle B—

A. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

1. REGIONS AND LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AREAS

A. IDENTIFY THE REGIONS AND THE LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AREAS DESIGNATED IN THE STATE

In 2016, the governor identified five regions of economic development in the Island, according to the predominant economic activities at that time. However, although these five regions remain in place, the current government is evaluating the effectiveness of these regions under the new economic reality of Puerto Rico. A reorganization of the regions is being considered in order to adapt to the new trends of the labor market, the needs of the participants and to respond to an efficient system.



The main characteristics of the regions are:

- Northwest. The region is characterized by an industrial clustering in computer and information devices, aerospace, and agriculture.
- Southwest. The region is characterized by the concentration of industries in the sectors of agriculture, eco-tourism, hospitality, and logistics technology.
- North Central. The region is characterized by an industrial clustering in pharmaceutical manufacturing, biotechnology, logistics technology, health services, research and development and medical tourism.
- Eastern. The region is characterized by the concentration of industries in tourism, and logistics technology.
- Southeast. The region is characterized by the concentration of industries in pharmaceutical manufacturing, agricultural biotechnology including crop research and development.

The Governor and the State Board shall update the public policy and guidelines to enable local areas to develop regional plans. The guidelines will consider the following topics, consistent with the objectives established in WIOA regulations:

- Technical assistance to local areas for carrying out the regional planning and service delivery efforts required under section 106(c);
- Alignment with regional economic development strategies adopted by the State;
- Integration of the economic development initiatives of local government consortia;
- Integration of industry cluster organizations, and the advancement of sector strategies and initiatives;
- Development of projects and activities for existing and emerging industries generating jobs opportunities;
- Collaboration with business and industry associations available in the region
- Agreement structure (MOUs) with consortia, clusters, business associations, academia, providers and other stakeholders in the workforce development systems;

- Conditions for strategic planning including evaluation of strength, weaknesses, and opportunities in the region, terms for the revision of the plan, among other parameters;
- Governance of the regional plan, in collaboration with the boards of mayors and participating local boards; and
- Integration of the local boards in the service-delivery model mandated by WIOA, including common intake, common outreach strategies and initiatives, universal service across the region, common performance measures (optional), identification of additional grants and fund opportunities, cost allocation plan, and MOU structure with required and optional partners, among other factors.

Puerto Rico have 15 Local Areas with 17 American Jobs Center (AJC). The next map shows the 15 Local Areas. The composition of each region and local area is described in the next section.

B. DESCRIBE THE PROCESS AND POLICY USED FOR DESIGNATING LOCAL AREAS, INCLUDING PROCEDURES FOR DETERMINING WHETHER THE LOCAL AREA MET THE CRITERIA FOR "PERFORMED SUCCESSFULLY" AND "SUSTAINED FISCAL INTEGRITY" IN ACCORDANCE WITH 106(B)(2) AND (3) OF WIOA. DESCRIBE THE PROCESS USED FOR IDENTIFYING REGIONS AND PLANNING REGIONS UNDER SECTION 106(A) OF WIOA. THIS MUST INCLUDE A DESCRIPTION OF HOW THE STATE CONSULTED WITH THE LOCAL BOARDS AND CHIEF ELECTED OFFICIALS IN IDENTIFYING THE REGIONS

The State Board's policy DDEC-WIOA-02-2021, ***Public Policy and Requirements for the Initial and Subsequent designation of local areas under WIOA***, establishes the process for considering the request of the initial designation of local areas for the administration of the funds allocated under WIOA. Additionally, the guidance establishes the directives that will govern the process of evaluation of an application for the subsequent designation as local area. Finally, it also establishes the circumstances and criteria under which the State Board may consider an application for re-designation of local areas that belong to a region of economic development or that seek designation as a single local area.

Under WIOA, the State Board has the power to recommend the designation of an entity as a local area. The State Board advises the Governor in matters relating to the workforce investment system, including those related to section 106 of WIOA, as well as sections 20 CFR 679.200 to 679.290 of the proposed rule.

WIOA conceives a system centered on the customer, comprising both job seekers and employers, capable of anticipating and responding to the needs of regional economies. This requires that local boards and the Chief Elected Officials design and manage a regional system by aligning their services and policies with regional needs and devising support strategies for the provision of services adapted to the demands of the economy.

The Governor, in consultation with the State Board, the Chief Elected Officials and the Local Boards will designate local areas as a condition for receiving the funds allocated to the Government of Puerto Rico under Title I of WIOA. In accordance with OE-2014-64, the PRDEDC is WIOA's Title 1 designated grantee, as well as the designated unit to provide administrative and operational support to the State Board.

The state regulations are being issued in compliance with sections 3 and 106 of WIOA, Act 171-2014, which transferred the WDP to the PRDEDC, and the Governor's EO-2014-64 that designated the PRDEDC as grantee, administrator

and monitor of WIOA funds allocated to the State and established the State Board.

The State Board Administrative Letter WIOA-02-2021, also enacts public policy to guide the local area re-designation process. In summary, the transition process from a local area designated previously, to be initially designated as a local area under WIOA can occur using one of two methods:

- Automatic Designation. Under section 106(b)(2) of WIOA, the Governor must approve an application from the previously designated area for the initial designation under WIOA, provided there has not been a change in the composition of the local area; and for the 2 program years prior the local area "performed successfully", and complied with the criteria pertaining "sustained fiscal integrity".
- Discretionary Designation. After recommendation of the State Board, in accordance with section 106(b)(4) of WIOA, the Governor might approve an application of any unit of general local government, including a combination of those units, for its designation as local area under WIOA, if the State Board recommends and determines that the unit or units share a common labor market; share a same area of economic development; and have federal and non-federal resources, including education and training institutions appropriated for delivery service for the labor force.

At any time, the Governor might review the performance and outcomes of a local area to assess if it meets the requirements for its subsequent designation.

Puerto Rico currently has five regions and fifteen local labor development areas.

The Bureau of the Census uses, among other data, Place of Workflows to support delineation of Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas for OMB. Metro and Micro areas, commonly used geographical areas used by the Bureau, are made up of a county with a large population nucleus and adjacent counties that have a high degree of integration with that nucleus.

Similarly, the Puerto Rico WIOA State Office has used Place of Workflows to propose to define geographical labor markets, by determining the integration of places of residence with the main areas of work in a region. Municipalities were grouped based on the municipal interrelationship between the place of work and place of residence of workers. Municipality-to-municipality home-to-work flows area was based on 5- year ACS. The

resulting regions may be considered labor market areas. Implicitly home-to-work flows consider the size and diversity of a center of economic activity, driving distances, and psychological and geographic barriers. The proposed regions conform quite well with traditional areas of economic activity consisting of a central place -sometimes more than one- of economic activity and smaller adjoining municipalities. As such, they provide a rational basis to conduct regional planning. All local areas are within a specific region. Adjustments were made to account for the supra-regional pull of the certain municipalities of the San Juan Metropolitan Area, mainly the municipalities of San Juan, Bayamon, Carolina, and Guaynabo avoid defining an excessively large labor market area. The current regions and the local areas are listed in the table below:

Local and Regional Areas

Region	**Municipality**	**Workforce Area**
East	Carolina	Carolina
East	Canóvanas	Northeast
East	Ceiba	Northeast
East	Culebra	Northeast
East	Fajardo	Northeast
East	Loíza	Northeast
East	Luquillo	Northeast
East	Naguabo	Northeast
East	Río Grande	Northeast
East	Vieques	Northeast
North-Central	Bayamón	Bayamón-Comerío
North-Central	Comerío	Bayamón-Comerío
North-Central	Cataño	Guaynabo-Toa Baja
North-Central	Guaynabo	Guaynabo-Toa Baja
North-Central	Toa Alta	Guaynabo-Toa Baja

Region	Municipality	Workforce Area
North-Central	Toa Baja	Guaynabo-Toa Baja
North-Central	Barranquitas	La Montaña
North-Central	Cidra	La Montaña
North-Central	Naranjito	La Montaña
North-Central	Orocovis	La Montaña
North-Central	Barceloneta	Manatí-Dorado
North-Central	Ciales	Manatí-Dorado
North-Central	Corozal	Manatí-Dorado
North-Central	Dorado	Manatí-Dorado
North-Central	Florida	Manatí-Dorado
North-Central	Manatí	Manatí-Dorado
North-Central	Morovis	Manatí-Dorado
North-Central	Vega Alta	Manatí-Dorado
North-Central	Vega Baja	Manatí-Dorado
North-Central	San Juan	San Juan
Northwest	Las Marías	Mayagüez-Las Marías
Northwest	Mayagüez	Mayagüez-Las Marías
Northwest	Moca	Noroeste
Northwest	Rincón	Noroeste
Northwest	San Sebastián	Noroeste
Northwest	Jayuya	Norte-Central Arecibo
Northwest	Lares	Norte-Central Arecibo
Northwest	Adjuntas	North-Central Arecibo
Northwest	Arecibo	North-Central Arecibo

Region	Municipality	Workforce Area
Northwest	Camuy	North-Central Arecibo
Northwest	Hatillo	North-Central Arecibo
Northwest	Quebradillas	North-Central Arecibo
Northwest	Utuado	North-Central Arecibo
Northwest	Aguada	Northwest
Northwest	Aguadilla	Northwest
Northwest	Añasco	Northwest
Northwest	Isabela	Northwest
Southeast	Aguas Buenas	Caguas-Guayama
Southeast	Aibonito	Caguas-Guayama
Southeast	Arroyo	Caguas-Guayama
Southeast	Caguas	Caguas-Guayama
Southeast	Cayey	Caguas-Guayama
Southeast	Guayama	Caguas-Guayama
Southeast	Gurabo	Caguas-Guayama
Southeast	Trujillo Alto	Caguas-Guayama
Southeast	Coamo	South Central
Southeast	Juana Díaz	South Central
Southeast	Santa Isabel	South Central
Southeast	Villalba	South Central
Southeast	Humacao	Southeast
Southeast	Juncos	Southeast
Southeast	Las Piedras	Southeast
Southeast	Maunabo	Southeast

Region	Municipality	Workforce Area
Southeast	Patillas	Southeast
Southeast	San Lorenzo	Southeast
Southeast	Salinas	Sur Central
Southeast	Yabucoa	Sureste
Southwest	Ponce	Ponce
Southwest	Cabo Rojo	Southwest
Southwest	Guánica	Southwest
Southwest	Guayanilla	Southwest
Southwest	Hormigueros	Southwest
Southwest	Lajas	Southwest
Southwest	Maricao	Southwest
Southwest	Peñuelas	Southwest
Southwest	Sabana Grande	Suroeste
Southwest	San Germán	Suroeste
Southwest	Yauco	Suroeste

C. PROVIDE THE APPEALS PROCESS AND POLICY REFERRED TO IN SECTION 106(B)(5) OF WIOA RELATING TO DESIGNATION OF LOCAL AREAS

The state policy DDEC-WIOA-02-2021, Procedure for subsequent designation and re-designation of local areas, seeks to establish the process for considering the request of the initial designation of local areas for the administration of the funds delegated under WIOA, including the appeal procedures in case on an adverse determination regarding the application for a local area designation. Accordingly, a local area that understands that an adverse determination made with respect to its application of automatic or subsequent designation warrants revision, might submit to the state a reconsideration statement addressed to the State Board within a term of 15 calendar days after the date of receipt of the notification. The State Board shall issue a final determination within 15 calendar days after receipt of the

review request. If a denial determination is issued, the PEE might file an appeal to the USDOL within 30 calendar days from the date of receipt of the notice of the determination of the State Board.

Appeals process relating to the designation of local areas

The State Policy contains information regarding this full process. The content of this policy is as follows:

A unit of general local government or grant recipient that requests but is not granted designation of an area as a local area under either the initial or subsequent designation clause may submit an appeal to the Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DEDC).

1. An appeal must be in writing and filed with the DEDC within fourteen (14) days after the notification of the decision. The appeal is to be submitted to the Secretary of DEDC and the President of the State Workforce Development Board.
2. The appeal must contain a specific statement of the grounds upon which the appeal is sought.
3. The State Board will have 60 days to review the appeal and make recommendations to the Governor. The review will consider the information of the original request and supplemental information provided in the appeal to determine if the criteria set forth in this policy have been met.
4. The final decision rests in the Governor.
5. If the appeal is connected to a request for initial designation under this policy and if the appeal does not result in designation, the entity may be requesting review by the Secretary of Labor to determine if procedure rights were granted of if the minimum criteria of WIOA Section 106(b)(2) of Section 106 (b)(3) were met. This second level of appeal must be sent within fourteen (14) days to:

Assistant Secretary of Employment and Training
United States Department of Labor
200 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20210

A copy of the appeal must be simultaneously provided to the:

ETA Regional Administrator
United States Department of Labor
John F. Kennedy Federal Building
Room E-350
Boston, Mass 02203

D. PROVIDE THE APPEALS PROCESS AND POLICY REFERRED TO IN SECTION 121(H)(2)(E) OF WIOA RELATING TO DETERMINATIONS FOR INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

WIOA-01-2017MOUs and IFAs State Policy

The Workforce Development Program approved on May 5, 2017, the Policy to the development of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and IFA with AJC partners. In accordance with WIOA, One-Stop partners may appeal the determination on the portion of funds to be provided for One-Stop infrastructure cost and request a hearing. A written appeal and request for a hearing must be mailed to the State Board within 21 calendar days from the Local Board infrastructure cost determination.

One-Stop partner may appeal to the Governor's determination regarding their portion of funds to be provided for infrastructure costs. This policy will apply to all entities and individuals who would like to appeal a decision at the local or the state levels.

The appeals process relating to determinations for infrastructure funding are as follows:

1. The Governor, through the assistance of the SWDB, will make the final determination of each required partner's proportionate share of statewide infrastructure costs under the State funding mechanism.
2. Any required partner may appeal the Governor's determination on the basis of a claim that:

- The Governor's determination is inconsistent with the proportionate share requirements of 20 CFR 678.735(a), or
- The Governor's determination is inconsistent with the cost contribution caps described in 20 CFR 678.736 and 20 CFR 678.738.

3. The process will ensure resolution of the appeal to ensure the funds are distributed in a timely manner, consistent with the requirements of 20 CFR 683.630.

4. An appeal must be made within twenty-one (21) days of the Governor's determination and must be submitted formally, in writing, by registered mail no later than the fifteen (15) day from the date of receipt of the notice of denial or revocation.

2. STATEWIDE ACTIVITIES

A. PROVIDE STATE POLICIES OR GUIDANCE FOR THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM AND FOR USE OF STATE FUNDS FOR WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES

The Planning Guidelines is the official document that sets the public policy and requirements for allocating local area funding for the Youth, Adult and Dislocated Workers programs. In compliance with WIOA regulations, priorities and goals the State planning will meet the needs of services of specific populations and minorities, as well as those of job seekers and employers. The annual Planning Guidelines compile the State and Federal public policies pertaining to the management of WIOA funds. This Guide is designed to ensure compliance with ETA policies and goals, as stated in Training and Employment Guidance Letters (TEGL), Training and Employment Notices (TEN), WIOA Final Rules, as well as the State Board policies. Please, for more details about State Policies and Procedures, refer to the **Table 29 - *State Policies and Procedures.***

The Workforce Development Program approved on 5 May 2017 the policy: **WIOA-01-2017 -**Policy to the development of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and IFA with AJC partners. In accordance with WIOA, One-Stop partners may appeal to the Governor's determination on the portion of funds to be provided for One-Stop infrastructure cost and request a hearing. A written appeal and request for a hearing must be mailed to the State Board within 21 calendar days from the Governor's infrastructure cost determination.

The appeal must be in writing and state the grounds for the appeal. The appellant must describe how the Governor's infrastructure cost determination is inconsistent with proportionate share requirements, cost contribution limitations, and/or the cost contribution caps, in accordance with WIOA Notice of Proposed Rulemaking Section 678.750(b).

The appellant will be contacted within 10 calendar days of the receipt of the appeal and a hearing date will be scheduled. To ensure a prompt resolution of the appeal and distribution of funds in a timely manner, the appellant will receive a written decision no later than 15 calendar days after the hearing.

B. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE INTENDS TO USE GOVERNOR'S SET ASIDE FUNDING FOR MANDATORY AND DISCRETIONARY ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING HOW THE STATE WILL CONDUCT EVALUATIONS OF TITLE I ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES.

Policy for the Allocation of State Reserve Funds to Local Board

This policy provides instructions to local areas to apply for additional funding from the WIOA State Reserve as set forth in Section 134 of WIOA. The regulation establishes a reserve of state funds that provides flexibility for state governments to address specific needs at the local level.

Funds reserved by the Governor for statewide workforce investment activities may be combined and used for any of the activities authorized in WIOA sec. 129(b), 134(a)(2)(B), or 134(a)(3)(A) (which are described in §§ 682.200 and 682.210), regardless of whether the funds were allotted through the youth, adult, or dislocated worker funding streams.

Criteria include, but are not limited to:

1. Additional funding from the reserve shall be subject to the availability of funds from the State Reserve.
2. The allocation of supplementary funds from the reserve shall be based on the need demonstrated by the local boards.
3. The local area must have an obligation and expense ratio of 80% or more for all current formula allocation.
4. The local area must comply with all required rules for formula funds (i.e., obligations/expenditures, monitoring)
5. Additional funds must be fully exhausted before additional funding can be granted.
6. Supplementary funding must be spent on the direct costs of participants and does not include administrative costs.

The policy lays out the responsibilities of the WDP, the local board, and the board of mayors (CEOs) in submitting the application and oversees the state reserve funds. It also identifies priority activities for the delegation of funds.

Governor set-aside funds

Statewide activities funds are being used and prioritized to carry out the following required activities:

- **Operating a fiscal management and accountability system:** The DEDC has established, in accordance with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Section 116(i), fiscal control and fund accounting procedures that are necessary to ensure the proper disbursement of, and accounting for, funds paid to the State through allotments made for adult, dislocated worker, and youth programs to carry out workforce investment activities.
- **Dissemination of the State's list of Eligible Training Providers:** The WIOA Section 122(c) specifies that states must establish an application procedure for training providers and programs to maintain their eligibility and the eligibility of their programs. States in partnership with the local boards, the One-Stop system, and its partners play a leadership role in ensuring the success of the eligible training provider system. The module of the Eligible Training Providers List (ETPL), that is part of the PRIS, serves as an important tool for participants seeking training to identify appropriate providers and relevant information such as cost and program outcomes. Using the PRIS, career planners can assist participants in identifying training providers offering programs in high-demand industries that result in positive outcomes and recognized credentials. This system will provide up-to-date information about in-demand occupations, training programs that address the skill needs of employers, and information about available jobs and occupations.
- **Technical Assistance to local areas**: The State will publish and disseminate performance outcomes on a quarterly basis for all local areas. These reports allow the State and local areas to monitor performance outcomes to establish trends and identify measures requiring corrective action. The WIOA program staff will monitor performance, identify issues, and provide technical assistance, as needed.

Program Assessment

PR has already completed the development of the **Statistical Adjustment Model** (SAM). SAM consider two main variables to a assess the performance outcomes, the (1) DOL's program participants characteristics and (2) economic factors related to the labor conditions and market dynamics. Based on the previous performance, the model is working to develop and evaluate an objective statistical adjustment model capable of

accounting different socio-economic conditions controlling the assessment of the program performance goals.

SAM is the primary tool that will be used by the state board and governor to evaluate the performance and delivery of services at the AJCs. It will help to assess the Title I programs each year based on State performance accountability measures described in section 116(b) of WIOA. SAM outcomes will provide the state board and governor quality data to assess the effectiveness and improvement of programs by local area.

Programmatic reviews ensure that the workforce development system achieves quality program outcomes that meet the requirements and objectives of the WIOA and federal and state regulations. Puerto Rico will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of local programs by conducting comprehensive programmatic reviews and oversight activities for the entire workforce development system. The WIOA programmatic reviews will provide guidance and direction to local programs to assist in providing quality workforce development services to our customers and provide a framework for continuous improvement efforts under the WIOA. Program reviews also offer the opportunity for disseminating information about effective program practices to the entire workforce development system. State staff will continue to conduct programmatic reviews to ensure effective grant monitoring and oversight utilizing a comprehensive set of monitoring and oversight activities, including on-site monitoring, quarterly desk reviews, and ongoing technical assistance and training.

Use of the DEDC Monitoring Guides by WIOA State Coordinators is required. In addition, Monitoring Guides are living documents that are updated regularly to reflect changes in law, regulation, and/or policy, as well as to include any improvements which will make the guides easier and more effective to use.

In addition to funding the above-referenced WIOA activities, statewide activities funds are being used for those activities deemed most essential to the basic functions of the workforce investment system, including oversight of the local workforce investment boards and the WIOA programs. Statewide funds are being used to carry out the following allowable activities:

- **State Level Administration** includes the following functions:
    - Staff costs for program oversight and monitoring.
    - Participant Record Information System (PRIS)and related staff costs: The state uses a single integrated data collection system,

known as the Participant Record Information System. This ensures that all local providers collect, report, and maintain the same data elements. In the next months, DEDC is going to start a second phase aimed to achieve the integration and/or interface of some required partner's data systems.

- **Special Projects Funding**: Funds have been set aside for yet-to-be-determined special projects generated by DEDC. Special projects could include, but are not limited to, workforce and economic information and data needs, support for statewide planning activities around the WIOA, support for regional and local activities, surveys, evaluations. Funds may also be utilized to provide additional support for local boards operations, commensurate with the level of any remaining set aside funds.
- **Capacity Building and Professional Development Funds to our workforce development system**: To most efficiently and effectively utilize these funds to benefit the entire Puerto Rico workforce development system, funds are going to be allocated to support activities in addressing the goals of local strategic plans and the needs of local employers for a skilled workforce. Funds may be utilized for, but not limited to, supporting state and local partnerships to build equitable pathways to high-wage careers, enhancing system capacity to provide opportunities for individuals with barriers to employment to enter in-demand industry sectors or occupations and nontraditional occupations, and developing and improving local program performance and goals through assisting ongoing system development and proficiency, including professional development and technical assistance.

These procedures were submitted and approved by the State Board. For some of these procedures, a private consulting firm conducted interviews with DEDC financial staff and together developed procedures for proper allocation of program costs. In addition, the following procedures are performed to ensure the fiscal integrity of the program:

- A single audit of the use of the funds is carried out once a year.
- Financial monitoring of the activities carried out with funds from the state reserve is carried out once a year.
- Contracts that exceed $10,000 must be referred to the Governor's office. If they exceed $50,000, they must also be sent to the OGP.

- The State Board is in the process of establishing public policy for the evaluation and approval of any delegation of funds from the state reserve.
- The State Board, through its Executive and Planning Committee, evaluates transactions of State Reserve funds that exceed $500,000. In addition, it requires a report of all projects developed with Reserve funds regardless of the amount of funds used.
- The WDP has a Planning Guide that is reviewed each program year to bring it in line with the public policies issued by DOLETA. It contains all instructions on the use of funds. This guide is also used for permitted state reserve activities.
- For the development of the activities required by the state, the DEDC develops competitive processes by publishing RFPs for the hiring of any professional service. There is a permanent Auction Committee, which is staffed by additional DEDC personnel who specialize in the service to be contracted. The DEDC follows the protocols and policies of the state OGP to develop any RFP process.
- All contracts are regulated by the 2 CFR ensuring that obligations and funds are not used for: food and beverage, branding, and marketing projects, including website development, indirect administrative costs, politically related activities, entertainment, fines and penalties, donations, fundraising activities, individual memberships, and subscriptions.
- For incumbent workers training, the employers must sign certifications and warranties and complete the contract process. Funds will be reimbursed as expenses are incurred. So the State Board, through the Fiscal Agent, will ensure that companies submit performance reports and expense receipts before issuing reimbursements. The performance reports will include the amount of work savings, the estimated amount of annual wage savings, and the specific project measures and results. Employers benefiting from the fund must retain receipts for at least three years beyond the end of the grant period.
- The WDP will agree with employers receiving the fund that they may be subject to local, state, or federal monitoring.
- The DEDC also adheres to state laws regarding the use of public funds. And all contracts are subject to review by the Puerto Rico Comptroller's Office.

Fund Allocation Policies

To ensure the fiscal integrity of the Statewide fund, the DEDC currently have developed the following public policies or procedure targeting the cost allocation under WIOA and other federal programs:

DDEC-WIOA-11-20	Financial Reports - Close-Out Reports
DDEC-WIOA-10-20	Payroll Cost Allocation Policy - Guidelines and procedures for payroll base on budget
DDEC-WIOA-09-20	Cost allocation and fund reimbursement
DDEC-WIOA-06-20	TAA Definition of eligible displacement area
DDEC-WIOA-05-20	TAA Training - Requirements when approving Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Training funds request.
DDEC-WIOA-RR-01-20	Policy for COVID-19 Layoff Aversion Fund
Waiver Policy	Operational Procedure for Implementing the Waiver for Business Capitalization
State Board Santions	Policy to establish the procedure for the determination of WIOA rules violations and the imposition of state board sanctions
DDEC-WIOA-04-2021	Faculty of local areas to pay a summer bonus as part of fringe benefits to their employees
WIOA-03-2021	Prohibition of the total closure of the One Stop Centers (OSC) during the administrative closures decreed by the municipalities
DDEC-WIOA-02-2022	Policy related to allowable expenses to travels paid with WIOA Funds

DDEC-WIOA-11-20	Financial Reports - Close-Out Reports
DDEC-WIOA-01-2023	Guide to Procurement of Legal Services with WIOA Funds
DDEC-WIOA-07-2023	Guidance for the Expenditures Government Public Outreach in an Election Year
DDEC-WIOA-03-2022	Guidelines to Permissible and Non-Permissible Costs with WIOA Funds
WIOA-PP-03-2023	Support services and "Needs Related Payments (NRPs)"

Panel Consensus (Compliance): No evidence of any evaluation research though that is a required statewide activity as per 20CFR 682.220. TA recommended to include provision of information on the regulation and information on the nature of evaluation, as per online technical resources available in the EvalHub.

As required by § 682.200(d), PR must use funds reserved by the Governor for statewide activities to conduct evaluations of activities under the WIOA title I core programs to promote continuous improvement, research and test innovative services and strategies, and achieve high levels of performance and outcomes.

The DDEC has not complied with this regulatory requirement due to the lack of resources and tools to carry out research and statistical analysis. Although previous plans had made commitments to carry out evaluations, they never materialized. The WDP will establish as a programmatic objective for PY 2024, to conduct a first research and assessment of the outcomes of the PY 2022 and PY2023 performance measures outcomes, under the direction of the state board. Title I has a newly developed SAM, which will allow us, for the first time since WIOA, to analyze the results of the implementation of the 18 negotiated performance measures.

A resource will be identified for each of the core partners to create an Evaluation Committee to design and implement an assessment process. This committee shall present a Work Plan to the State Board, with the milestones for the fulfillment of this programmatic objective.

The work plan and methodology to be developed must comply with 20 CF 682.220, State Assessments, and WIOA sec. 116(e). The evaluation process must be carried out in compliance with at least the following elements:

1. Designed in conjunction with State and Local WDBs and core programs;

2. Design survey and analysis of customer feedback, including participants, employers, eligible training providers and youth service providers.

3. Use state outcomes and process measures developed for the performance reporting;

4. Use analytical and statistical methods that are reasonably feasible, such as the use of control groups;

5. Delivery results to the State WDB and Local WDBs

6. Make available to the public (including by electronic means) reports containing the results

7. Conduct evaluations that jointly examine title I core program activities and activities under other core programs in WIOA titles II–IV.

8. Use funds from any WIOA title I– IV core program to conduct evaluations, in coordination with State and Local WDBs and with State agencies responsible for the administration of all core programs.

The state agrees to cooperate with any evaluations and related research projects conducted by the Secretaries of Labor and Education and to use state reserve funds responsibly and in accordance with the competency required by federal regulations. Before the end of the first quarter of PY 2004, the WDP will submit to the FPO of Region I the composition of the evaluation committee to be appointed and the work plan to be prepared by the committee.

C. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL UTILIZE RAPID RESPONSE FUNDS TO RESPOND TO LAYOFFS AND PLANT CLOSINGS AND COORDINATE SERVICES TO QUICKLY AID COMPANIES AND THEIR AFFECTED WORKERS. STATES ALSO SHOULD DESCRIBE ANY LAYOFF AVERSION STRATEGIES THEY HAVE IMPLEMENTED TO ADDRESS AT RISK COMPANIES AND WORKERS.

State Unit for Dislocated Workers and Employers – Rapid Response Services

The Department of Economic Development and Commerce facilitates the statewide Rapid Response services and serves as the recipient of plant closings/mass layoff notices required under the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act.

Rapid Response is a key component to Puerto Rico's strategy to create a unified local approach while working with and providing a comprehensive array of services to employers. As a business service, Rapid Response will

promote a full range of services available to help companies in all stages of the economic cycle. Early intervention facilitates a relatively quick and unencumbered transition to employment or training, following either a permanent closure or mass layoff, or a natural (or other) disaster resulting in mass job dislocation.

The State Unit for Dislocated Workers and Employers of the Workforce Development Program of DEDC is in charge of carrying out Rapid Response services and coordinates the Trade Adjustment Assistance Program (TAA). The State Unit has Rapid Response and TAA coordinators who have the responsibility to coordinate services to dislocated workers affected by mass layoff and plant closings. The Rapid Response process involves a unification of state agencies and local service providers, together with the private sector and organized labor. The goal of all concerned parties is to provide dislocated workers with an array of support, resources, and technical assistance to effectively assist in the transition to reemployment. The RR and TAA State Coordinators participate in cross training of crucial re-employment and assistance programs and services most relevant to each local area or region. Subsequently, the RR and TAA State Coordinators acts as the link between the Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs), Wagner Peyser and Unemployment Insurance of the PRDOLHR, and applicable federal, state, and private resources to ensure all re-employment and supportive service information is readily available to assist employers and workers experiencing a mass layoff or plant closing.

The state has been developing a comprehensive rapid response and TAA procedures, that will be continuously reviewed for improvement, to serve impacted employers and workers using the Rapid Response, and TAA Programs. To provide thorough and complete delivery, the procedures will provide a special emphasis to business engagement and layoff aversion services.

The Rapid Response team begins the process by interacting with companies that have, or plan to, lay off workers. Information regarding the WIOA Dislocated Worker and TAA Programs are provided to the company, and if applicable, union officials at this early stage. Worker meetings are planned at this point to discuss the available workforce programs in more detail.

In addition to acting as a facilitator and resource of re-employment resources, the TAA and RR State Coordinators thoroughly documents dislocation events, allowing for trend analysis and proactive strategy development, organizes necessary communications and aligns relevant services to support affected workers. The strategies are all part of a demand-

driven system and a key component of a comprehensive layoff aversion strategy.

To prevent risk for companies and employees, state strategies for layoff aversion are oriented in four dimensions:

- **Partnership with economic development entities**: The Department of Economic Development and Commerce is the umbrella for government economic development agencies. Therefore, part of the strategies for the prevention of layoffs is the orientation on incentives in Puerto Rico that promote job creation. Some of these examples are Law 120-2014, Law 135-2014, Incentive for Micro-entrepreneurs, among others. Therefore, part of our strategy is that companies can have savings in their payrolls through state incentives under the DEDC. These are state resources but apply to WIOA participants.
- **Incumbent Workers training**: Employee training reduces the risk of dislocation of the incumbent workers. Lifelong education is the basis for companies to be competitive in a global and changing economy.
- **Research and Development**: Permissible activities under Rapid Response allow local areas to contract consulting services and labor market research. These actions will encourage data-based decision making and expert research.
- **Improving technology transfer**: The DEDC is developing a case management program that will allow for a better monitoring picture of WIOA participants (employees and employers). This system will be able to keep a better record of the activities that occur in companies.

D. DESCRIBE THE STATE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES TO PROVIDE RAPID RESPONSES IN CASES OF NATURAL DISASTERS INCLUDING COORDINATION WITH FEMA AND OTHER ENTITIES.

The statewide RR coordinator and team respond to natural disasters in the same manner as other dislocations, while adapting to the unique characteristics of the event. The coordinator will organize and develop a coordinated response with the appropriate federal, state, and local agencies to ensure impacted individuals receive the services they need.

When the Governor declares an emergency and formally requests a federal emergency declaration, the Puerto Rico Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DEDC)will work with the local board(s) to determine if the disaster could result in a potentially large loss of employment and evaluate whether sufficient resources are available to adequately

provide workforce services. If a funding shortfall is anticipated, the DEDC will seek Emergency Dislocated Worker Grant funding pending federal designation. If FEMA declares a natural disaster and establishes a designated disaster area, the DEDC will formally apply for assistance and work with the local area(s) on implementation.

PR recently has been affected by different types of disasters; hurricanes, earthquakes, and the latest COVID-19 pandemic The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, through the Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DEDC), the WIOA Title I-B grantee, seeks a waiver allowance of WIOA section 134(a)(2)(A), (2)(B) and (3) to allow flexibility in the use of the funds reserved by the Governor for use to provide statewide rapid response activities (i.e. WIOA section 134(a)(2)(A)), and for use to provide statewide employment and training activities (i.e. WIOA section 134(a)(2)(B) and (3)) to provide disaster recovery assistance to affected areas as describe in WIOA 170(d) and 20 CFR 687.100(b), for program years 2024 and 2025, in case then PR face any disaster qualifying event by FEMA.. The waiver to WIOA section 134(a)(2)(A), (2)(B) and (3) was approved to PR on October 6, 2022, and is valid until June 30, 2024. This waiver is submitted in this plan for ETA extension for PY 2024 and 2025.

Under this waiver allowance, permitted WIOA statewide fund use includes, but is not limited to:

- Expeditious allocation of funds to a local workforce development board, or local board, so they may respond quickly to a disaster, emergency, or other qualifying event as described at 20 CFR 687.l00(b). Only those events, and cascading events caused by a qualifying event, that have been declared as an emergency or disaster by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), by the chief official of a Federal Agency with jurisdiction over the Federal response to a disaster with potential significant loss of employment, or the Governor of Puerto Rico as a qualifying event, qualify for the use of WIOA statewide funds.
- To alleviate the effects that a qualifying event causes within affected local area(s), and/or planning regions, WIOA statewide funds will allow comprehensive disaster relief employment and employment and training activities, and the provision of needed humanitarian resources and services, including other services or resources deemed necessary as described at 20 CFR 687.180(b)(1).

- An individual's disaster relief employment is limited to 12 months or 2080 hours for work related to recovery from a single emergency or disaster. The Workforce Development Program (WDP) of the DEDC may extend an individual's disaster relief employment for up to an additional 12 months or 2080 hours if requested and sufficiently justified by the local board.
- Employment and training activities as described in WIOA section 134(c) and (d) are supported for WIOA eligible participants.
- Supportive services may be provided to enable individuals to participate in disaster relief employment, including such costs as transportation, childcare, and personal safety equipment and clothing consistent with local policies.
- Individuals shall be eligible to be offered disaster relief employment and employment and training services if such individual is a dislocated worker; is a long-term unemployed individual as defined by the State; is temporarily or permanently laid off as a consequence of the emergency or disaster; or in the case of an individual who is self-employed, becomes unemployed or significantly underemployed as a result of the emergency or disaster as well as appropriate adults and youth ages 18 and over.

E. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE PROVIDES EARLY INTERVENTION (E.G., RAPID RESPONSE) AND ENSURES THE PROVISION OF APPROPRIATE CAREER SERVICES TO WORKER GROUPS ON WHOSE BEHALF A TRADE ADJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE (TAA) PETITION HAS BEEN FILED. (SECTION 134(A)(2)(A) AND TAA SECTION 221(A)(2)(A) .) THIS DESCRIPTION MUST INCLUDE HOW THE STATE DISSEMINATES BENEFIT INFORMATION TO PROVIDE WORKERS IN THE GROUPS IDENTIFIED IN THE TAA PETITIONS WITH AN ACCURATE UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROVISION OF TAA BENEFITS AND SERVICES IN SUCH A WAY THAT THEY ARE TRANSPARENT TO THE DISLOCATED WORKER APPLYING FOR THEM (TRADE ACT SEC. 221(A)(2)(A) AND SEC. 225; GOVERNOR-SECRETARY AGREEMENT). DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE FUNDS THAT HAVE BEEN RESERVED FOR RAPID RESPONSE TO PROVIDE SERVICES FOR EVERY WORKER GROUP THAT FILES A TAA PETITION AND HOW THE STATE WILL ENSURE THE PROVISION OF APPROPRIATE CAREER SERVICE TO WORKERS IN THE GROUPS IDENTIFIED IN THE PETITION (TAA SEC. 221(A)(2)(A)).NOTE: UNTIL THE TAA PROGRAM IS REAUTHORIZED, THE REQUIREMENTS TO PROVIDE RAPID RESPONSE AND APPROPRIATE CAREER SERVICES TO WORKER GROUPS ON WHOSE BEHALF A PETITION HAS BEEN FILED IS NOT APPLICABLE.

Both TAA and Rapid Response activities are shared by the State Unit for Dislocated Workers and Employers within the Workforce Development Program of DDEC to ensure the provision of an all-inclusive approach. The Rapid Response section is comprised of Rapid Response (RR) and TAA State Coordinators who are assigned to serve layoffs/closings across the state.

The RR Coordinators begin the process by interacting with companies that have, or plan to, lay off workers. As soon as company closure or layoff information is known, this information is investigated by the assigned Coordinator. Investigation and fact-finding of potential trade impact is immediately conducted for consideration of a TAA Petition. If found that a TAA petition filing is warranted, the TAA State Coordinator discusses with the employer, and if applicable, the Union Officials, the next steps for petition filing as well as potential benefits if approved. If the impacted employer or Union prefers to file the TAA Petition with the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL), the TAA State Coordinator is available for assistance.

Depending upon the employer preference, a Rapid Response and/or Worker Orientation meeting is arranged to discuss the re-employment, state, federal, and local resources, as well information presented by the W-P and UI staff. If TAA certified, the TAA Worker Benefit Orientation (WBO) meetings are arranged in coordination with all applicable partners, including LWDBs.

The TAA WBO meetings expand upon the Rapid Response worker orientation and provide detailed information on all TAA benefits and services, according with instruction set in policy **DDEC-WIOA-05-20 – Training Service under Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Programs**. The integration of the State's Rapid Response and TAA Program ensures workers will receive prompt and accurate information to make informed career and employment decisions.

The LWDBs are highly encouraged to co-enroll TAA participants into the WIOA Dislocated Worker programs as applicable. The TAA Comprehensive Manual states "In accordance with federal regulations, each LWDV shall provide a full range of reemployment services, including mandated services, to eligible workers. These services include case management, training, job search/relocation allowances and other dislocated worker programs administered by the LWDB to maximize program efficiency and prevent duplication of services".

Qualified participants for this program can receive the following services:

- Skills assessments, individual employment plans, career counseling, supportive services, and information on training labor markets;

- Classroom training, on the-job training, customized training designed to meet the needs of a specific employer or group of employers, apprenticeship programs, and more;
- Income support available in the form of weekly cash payments to workers who are enrolled in a full-time training course and have exhausted their unemployment insurance;
- Reimbursement for costs of seeking employment outside of the worker's commuting area;
- Reimbursement for relocation costs for employment outside of the worker's commuting area; and
- A wage subsidy for up to two years that is available to re-employed older workers and covers a portion of the difference between a worker's new wage and their old wage (up to specified maximum amount).

B. ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKERS PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

1. WORK-BASED TRAINING MODELS

If the State is utilizing work-based training models (e.g. on-the-job training, incumbent worker training, transitional jobs, and customized training) as part of its training strategy and these strategies are not already discussed in other sections of the plan, describe the State's strategies for how these models ensure high quality training for both the participant and the employer.

POLICY WIOA-PP-04-22-Work-Based Training (WBT)

The state board approved policy WIOA-PP-04-22-Work-Based Training (WBT) activities under WIOA (update by Amendment 1), to provide guidelines regarding the Work-based Training, including On the Job Training, Customized Training, Incumbent Workers Training, and Registered Apprenticeship, which is pending for board review and approval.

Work-based training is employer-driven with the goal of unsubsidized employment after participation. Generally, work-based training involves a commitment by an employer or employers to fully employ successful participants after they have completed the program. Work-based training can be an effective training strategy that can provide additional opportunities for participants and employers in both finding high-quality work and in developing a high-quality workforce. Customized training, On-the-Job Training (OJT), incumbent worker training, and Registered Apprenticeships are all identified as work-based training services. Each of these work-based

training models can be effectively used to target different job seekers and employer needs.

The WIOA State Workforce Development Board is in the process of approving a Work-based Training Policy at state level. Nevertheless, the LWDBs are required to have a local policy in place that includes a strategy for providing work-based training services. Local training policies and contracts are reviewed during the WIOA programmatic reviews.

Customized Training: Customized training is designed to provide local areas with the flexibility to ensure that training meets the unique needs of job seekers and employers or groups of employers. Customized training is to be used to meet the special requirements of an employer or group of employers and conducted with a commitment by the employer to employ all individuals upon successful completion of training.

Employers pay a significant portion of the training costs, as determined by the local board, taking into account the size of the employer and other factors that may include the number of employees participating in training; the wage and benefit levels of the employees (at present and anticipated upon completion of the training); the relation of the training to the competitiveness of the participant; and other employer-provided training and advancement opportunities.

The training must incorporate new technologies, processes, or procedures, skills upgrades, workplace literacy, or other appropriate purposes as identified by the local board.

The LWDBSs are required to have a local customized training policy for the execution of customized training contracts. Since "significant portion of the training costs" is not identified under the WIOA, the LWDBs will be allowed to locally define "significant portion" as part of their local customized training policy.

On-the-Job Training: The OJT is primarily designed to first hire the participant and provide the participant with the knowledge and skills necessary for the full performance of the job. The OJT is a critical tool that can help job seekers enter successful employment. The term ''on-the-job training'' means training by an employer that is provided to a paid participant while engaged in productive work in a job that:

- Provides knowledge or skills essential to the full and adequate performance of the job.

- Provides reimbursement to the employer of up to a percentage of the wage rate of the participant for the extraordinary costs of providing the training and additional supervision related to the training.
- Is limited in duration as appropriate to the occupation for which the participant is being trained, taking into account the content of the training, the prior work experience of the participant, and the service strategy of the participant, as appropriate.

The LWDBs are required to have a local OJT policy for the execution of OJT contracts. Local OJT policies and contracts will continue to be reviewed during the WIOA Programmatic Reviews.

Prior to approving an OJT, the local area must assess the potential participant to ensure suitability for the training. The assessment, at a minimum, shall include the relevant occupation's specific skill requirements, the participant's academic and occupational skill level, prior work experience and the Individual Employment Plan (IEP) or Individual Service Strategy (ISS). The IEP must reference the lack of skills and the need for OJT. The results of the assessment will be used, in part, to determine the appropriateness of and suitability for the OJT, along with determining the duration of the training.

Prior to entering into an OJT agreement with an employer, the local LWDBs shall conduct a pre-screening to ensure that the employer meets the minimum standards and can provide both training and long-term employment to an OJT participant.

Local areas should target priority industries identified by Local Workforce Development Boards consistent with a demand-driven workforce system. Occupations targeted for OJT should be defined in the local OJT policy and should align and support State Workforce Development Board. Targeted outreach should then occur within those industries.

Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) Programs: The IWT is designed to ensure that employees of a company can acquire the skills necessary to retain employment and advance within the company or to provide the skills necessary to avert a layoff and must increase both the participant's and a company's competitiveness. An ideal IWT is one where a participant acquires new skills allowing the participant to move into a higher skilled and higher paid job within the company, thus allowing the company to hire a job seeker to backfill the incumbent worker's position. The training should, whenever possible, allow the participant to gain industry-recognized training experience and ultimately, should lead to an increase in wages.

The IWT is designed to meet the special requirements of an employer (including a group of employers in partnership with other entities) to retain a skilled workforce, or to avert the need to lay off employees by assisting the workers in obtaining the skills necessary to retain employment. The IWT is conducted with a commitment by the employer to retain or avert the layoffs of the incumbent workers being trained.

Local areas may use up to 20 percent of their local Adult and Dislocated Worker funds for IWT. The employer, or group of employers, must pay for a portion of the cost of providing the training to incumbent workers. The portion of the training cost is the non-federal share of the cost of providing the training.

The LWDBs utilizing IWT are required to have a local IWT policy in place. The local policy must include a description of local and/or regional layoff aversion strategy being utilized.

Employers are required to contribute their share (the non-federal share) of the training costs, using a sliding scale approved by the LWDB.

Local policies and contracts for IWT will be reviewed during the WIOA Programmatic Reviews.

2. REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP

Describe how the State will incorporate Registered Apprenticeship into its strategy for service design and delivery (e.g., outreach to sponsors and prospective sponsors, identifying potential participants and connecting them to apprenticeship opportunities).

Registered Apprenticeship (RA) is a key component to developing and advancing Puerto Rico's current and future workforce. The RA offers an industry-defined program that can assist employers and employees in developing their skills to be more competitive in the world marketplace.

Since 2018, the Puerto Rico Department of Economic Development and Commerce, through the Workforce Development Program, is serving as an Apprenticeship Office under USDOL-OA Region I oversight. Registered Apprenticeships are a top priority for WDP. As a proven training model to best meet the needs of businesses and provide long-term sustainable career opportunities for individuals, apprenticeships are the ideal workforce development tool to address the diverse challenges faced by the public workforce system. Consequently, WDP is investing significantly in the expansion and strengthening of Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs) throughout the state. WDP has assembled an Apprenticeship Team in the

State office to assist employers, local boards, and partners across the state with establishing new RAPs. the State is investing in training, guidance, and technical assistance to the business services staff in each region to equip them to better assist with the creation of new RAPs and to better understand how to fully utilize WIOA funds to support the creation and sustainability of RAPs.

For eligible participants, local WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker funds may be used for not only Registered Apprenticeships, but for pre-apprenticeship training, such as remediation and/or basic job skills training, to prepare an individual for a Registered Apprenticeship program.

Registered Apprenticeships can be funded through several mechanisms. Given the unique nature of Registered Apprenticeships, there are several ways in which training services will be used in conjunction with these programs:

- Registered Apprenticeships generally involve both classroom and on-the-job training. An On-the-Job Training (OJT) contract may be developed with a Registered Apprenticeship program for training participants. The OJT contracts are made with the employer. The OJT contract may be made to support some or all the OJT portion of the Registered Apprenticeship Program;
- A combination of an Individual Training Account (ITA) to cover classroom instruction along with an OJT contract to cover some or all the work-based training portion of the Registered Apprenticeship is allowed; and
- Incumbent worker training may be used for upskilling apprentices who already have an established working/training relationship with the Registered Apprenticeship program.

Local areas may also include support services, in coordination with career and/or training services to participants in a Registered Apprenticeship program. The supportive services must be consistent with the WIOA Section 134(d)(2) and state and local policies.

The State Apprenticeship Expansion Formula (SAEF) Grant was awarded to the Puerto Rico Department of Economic Development and Commerce to continue developing, expanding, and modernizing the Registered Apprenticeship Program in Puerto Rico.

3. TRAINING PROVIDER ELIGIBILITY PROCEDURE

Provide the procedure, eligibility criteria, and information requirements for determining training provider initial and continued eligibility, including Registered Apprenticeship programs (WIOA Section 122).

The Procedure for Initial and Continuous Eligibility for Training Providers contains the State policy applicable to WIOA training providers. The policies guide the procedures, directives, and the threshold criteria for achieving a determination of eligibility of educational institutions interested in providing training and learning services for adults and dislocated workers, in compliance with section 122 of WIOA. The procedure applies to training and learning programs provided using the Individual Training Accounts ("ITAs").

The following institutions may request an eligibility determination, initial or continuing, to provide training services under WIOA:

- Higher education institutions that offer a program that leads to a post-secondary recognized credential;
- Institutions that offer training programs registered under the National Apprenticeship Act;
- Any other public or private institution with training programs, which may include joint labor-management apprenticeship organization and occupational technical training; and
- Eligible adult education and literacy service provider under Title II, if these activities are provided in combination with training in occupational skills.

Any educational institution must complete the application for eligibility and submit the required information electronically to be assessed by the Local Board, in accordance with section 122 of WIOA.

The Local Board submits to the state and to the State Board the training service providers that comply with the minimum requirement established by the Board. Thereafter, the State will include the recommended eligible programs in the State list of training services providers and disseminate them in all the One Stop Centers via the electronic system. The electronic system will automatically update the list any time a training or education program is determined eligible. The State shall notify the Local Board through written communication of the update of the training service providers' list.

Extended Eligibility – Biennial Review: All training providers' eligibility is going to be reviewed at least every two years as indicated in the State Training Provider Policy. The State will review the performance of providers to ensure

they are meeting minimum levels of performance. The biennial review will also include verification of the registration status of registered apprenticeship programs.

RA sponsors on the ETPL:

All Registered Apprenticeship (RA) programs are work-based, employer-driven, and consist of two primary components: on-the-job training (or on-the-job learning) and related instruction (e.g., classroom training). How those components are structured varies based on industry needs. The state ETP list addresses one of the two components of RA programs – the related technical instruction – generally referred to as "RTI."

Under WIOA, all apprenticeship programs that are registered with the USDOL Office of Apprenticeship (OA) could be automatically eligible to be included on the State Eligible Training Provider List, as a wish of the sponsor RIT providers.

All RA programs will be informed of their automatic eligibility to be included on the list and will be provided with an opportunity to consent to their inclusion, before being placed on the State ETPL.

There are no WIOA performance requirements for RA programs and are not required to provide ongoing reports to the state or local boards.

Puerto Rico provides sponsors that, as part of the RI, in case of need a registration form with instructions, for contract external training services. If they wish to belong to the ETPLs in accordance with 20 CFR 680.470 A, the RI provider should complete the form to be in. All external RI providers are oriented on their right to decide to be a part of the ETPL.

It is important to highlight that in Puerto Rico, there is a tendency to offer the RI activity with internal resources. This is because many industries maintain training programs designed by their Subject Matter Experts (SME). SMEs, on certain topics, are also hired externally. These external SMEs do not meet the requirements to be registered on the ETPL. Generally, these external SMEs are private individuals, consultants, and advisers in specific areas. RI outlines containing courses offered by external SMEs are limited because the RI outline is offered by a range of internal and external professionals who are experts in specific knowledge and skills that are part of the RI outline.

Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDA) may not impose additional criteria, information, or reporting requirements on RA programs. Additionally, if an LWDA has a local ETPL, RA programs should be included and should be

noted as 'in-demand occupations". If an issue arises, LWDAs should contact the Workforce Development Program (WDP) for assistance.

RA programs must remain registered and in good standing with the OA to remain on the ETPL. Registered Apprenticeship program sponsors that have requested to be ETPs will remain on the ETPL as long as the program is registered or until the program sponsor notifies the WDP that it no longer wants to be included on the ETPL or until the RA program is determined to have intentionally supplied inaccurate information or to have substantially violated any provision of Title I of WIOA (e.g., civil rights of discrimination violations) or the WIOA regulations, including 29 CFR part 38. An RA program whose eligibility is terminated due to intentionally supplying inaccurate information or substantially violating WIOA provisions will be terminated for not less than two years and is liable to repay all youth, adult, and dislocated worker training funds if received during the period of noncompliance.

If instances of substantial violations are reported to the WDP, they will work in consent with the OA to make the determination of ineligibility. The opportunity for an appeal and hearing is described in the ETPL Appeal Procedures.

The biennial review will include verification of the registration status of RA programs and the removal of any RA programs that are not currently registered or do not wish to continue as ETPs. Although RA programs are not required to provide ETP Performance reports, voluntary reporting of performance information is encouraged under WIOA regulations, and outcomes for WIOA participants in WIOA funded RA programs must be included in the State's annual performance report. WIOA 116 (d) (2).

For Registered Apprenticeship programs to be included on the ETPL, completion of an abbreviated form is necessary to collect information needed for populating the ETPL. If the program is viable and active, the program will remain on the ETPL if the program is registered or until the program sponsor notifies the State that it no longer wants to be included on the list. Training programs must be approved by the Office of Apprenticeship.

Registered Apprenticeship can take many forms, and the sponsors are diverse, including:

- Employers who provide related instruction. Number of employers with Registered Apprenticeship programs provide formal in-house instruction as well as on-the-job training at the worksite.

- Employers who use an outside educational provider. Under this model, Registered Apprenticeship program sponsors do not provide the related instruction or educational portion of the apprenticeship but rely upon an outside educational two entities to deliver instruction. Employers can use two- or four-year post-secondary institutions, technical colleges, eligible providers of adult education and literacy activities under title II, or on-line courses for related instruction. The employer is ETP and must identify their instructional provider as defined locally.
- Joint Apprenticeship Training Programs. These programs are made up of employers and unions. They have an apprenticeship training school where the instructional portion of the Registered Apprenticeship program is delivered. The training schools are usually administered by the union.
- Intermediaries. Intermediaries can serve as program sponsors when they take responsibility for the administration of the apprenticeship program. They can also provide expertise such as curriculum development, classroom instruction, and supportive services, as appropriate. The intermediary is ETP and must identify the instructional provider if an outside organization is providing the educational portion of the apprenticeship. Intermediaries include:
- Educational institutions including two and four-year post-secondary institutions, technical colleges, or eligible providers of adult education and literacy activities under title II. In this model, the educational institution administers the program, works with employers to hire apprentices, and provides classroom or on-line instruction for the apprenticeship program.
    - It should be noted that as part of our assessment and outreach to disseminate the apprenticeship program, registered educational institutions, understanding community colleges, universities, and similar, are being oriented to offer their programs to the employers who will be part of that registry. These institutions are nationally registered and can provide federal financial aid to the students who qualify. Individuals who enter Apprenticeship Programs belonging to these institutions will have the RI and the opportunity to be placed with employers allied to the program for the OJL.

- Industry associations administer the program and work with employer/members and educational entities to implement the apprenticeship program; and,
- Community-based organizations administer the program and work with employers, educational entities, and the community to implement the apprenticeship program.

Eligible Training Providers Module

This module of PRIS, electronically integrates the entire process for eligible training service providers to: submit documentation to the Local Boards of trainings eligible for WIOA funds; allow the Local Board process for evaluate and approve recommended training in accordance with occupational demand; as well as the evaluation at state level and the creation of the ETPL. The module has the function of collecting the ETPL performance data element required in the ETA 9171.

Panel Consensus (Compliance): The Plan must accurately address the opportunity for RAP to be included in the ETPL, rather than be added automatically. In addition, the narrative does not define the required eligibility criteria, the process for removing a provider, the appeals process, or how performance information is collected. The procedure did not address the information required by the sponsor to be on the list. Additionally, the statement regarding the RI provider being on the list as opposed to the Sponsor is inaccurate.

RAP sponsors are automatically eligible to be part of the Eligible Training Providers (ETP) List. However, the Workforce Development Program will not add sponsors to the ETP List unless the sponsor submits an application, either directly through the Workforce Development Program or through the Office of Apprenticeship of the United States Department of Labor (if they are registered according to national program guidelines).

A. Procedure for the Inclusion of RAP in the ETPL and Information Requirements:

RAPs that choose to appear on the ETP List must be included without the application of additional eligibility requirements that may apply to other types of training providers. To streamline the inclusion process for RAPs, the state ETP List coordinator will collaborate with the Registered Apprenticeship Program. At a minimum, sponsors must provide the following basic information:

- Occupations included in the RAP;

- Name and address of the RAP sponsor and the employer;
- Name and address of the provider of the Related Instruction and the location where it will be offered, if different from the sponsor's address;
- Method and duration of the instruction; and
- Number of active apprentices.

B. Ongoing Eligibility and Performance Reporting:

RAP sponsors will remain on the list until:

- The RAP program notifies the DOL that it no longer wishes to be on the list.
- The program is de-registered under the National Apprenticeship Act.
- It is determined that the program intentionally provided inaccurate information.
- It is determined that the RAP has substantially violated any provision of Title I of WIOA or WIOA regulations, including 29 CFR Part 38.

C. Exemption of RAPs from Performance Reporting:

Similar to eligibility requirements, RAPs are also exempt from ETPL performance reporting requirements as outlined in sections 116(d)(4) and 122 of WIOA. This includes any additional ETPL performance reporting requirements that may be added by the DOL or the Local Board. This means that neither the state nor the Local Boards should establish specific performance reporting requirements for RAPs. However, RAPs may choose to voluntarily provide information on their performance outcomes.

Registered Apprenticeship Annual Report

As part of the process undergone to complete the ETPL annual performance report, the Workforce Development Program must coordinate with the Apprenticeship Team to verify the status of the State's Registered Apprenticeship programs to ensure that the list is current, and any Registered Apprenticeship programs that are no longer registered are removed from the ETPL.

The Registered Apprenticeship Team annually, must provide the Workforce Development Program the following data:

A. The number of active Puerto Rico Registered Apprenticeship programs included on the ETP List;

B. The percentage of active Puerto Rico Registered Apprenticeship programs included on the ETP List out of all Registered Apprenticeship programs that exist; and

C. The number of Registered Apprenticeship programs removed from the ETP List.

Appeal Process:

The appeals process for RA sponsors is the same as for other training service providers included in the ETP List.

- The Local Board will validate the information and documents provided by training service providers. The Local Board must notify the training service provider of the outcome of its evaluation for each program that was not recommended to the Workforce Development Program (WDP) for inclusion in the ETPL. This notification must include:

1. The reasons for the denial.
2. The opportunity to appeal the decision.

- Training providers wishing to appeal must submit their request in writing, specifying the training program in question, the basis for the appeal (including the facts and arguments supporting the appeal), and attach documentation supporting the basis of the appeal. If they wish to have a hearing, they must indicate this in the request. When appealing a decision related to performance data, the appeal must include verifiable information supporting that they have achieved a higher performance level for the program to maintain the ETP List designation.
- If the provider disagrees with this outcome, they will have ten (10) calendar days from receipt of the notification to submit an appeal to the WDP. If deciding to appeal, they must send a copy to the Local Board.
- The WDP will have twenty (20) calendar days from receipt of the provider's appeal to issue its decision, which will be final. A program that wins an appeal, based on the presentation of additional verifiable data, will be eligible to be part of the ETP List. A training program whose appeal is denied will not be eligible to receive WIOA funds and will be excluded from the ETP List. Depending on the reason for the denial, a training provider may be subject to a two-year waiting period before being able to submit a new application.

4. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR FOR THE ADULT PRIORITY OF SERVICE REQUIREMENT IN WIOA SECTION 134 (C)(3)(E) THAT REQUIRES AMERICAN JOB CENTER STAFF, WHEN USING WIOA ADULT PROGRAM FUNDS TO PROVIDE INDIVIDUALIZED CAREER SERVICES AND TRAINING SERVICES, TO GIVE PRIORITY OF SERVICE TO RECIPIENTS OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE, LOW-INCOME INDIVIDUALS, AND INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE BASIC SKILLS DEFICIENT (INCLUDING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS).

The State Board developed a uniform public policy that establishes the priority of services for individuals most in need. The publication of TEGL 7-20, which extends the priority for adult services that meet the criteria of most in need, makes the development of this public policy pertinent.

ETA envisions that giving priority of service to these individuals means ensuring that at least 75 percent of a state's participants receiving individualized career and training services in the adult program are from at least one of the priority groups mentioned above and expects this rate will be no lower than 50.1 percent in any state.

Policy WIOA-PP-02-23 - WIOA Adult Program Adult Program Services Priority

The state board approved the policy WIOA-PP-02-23, August 17, 2023, **WIOA Adult Program Adult Program Services Priority**, to set the priority of services in the AJC.

The purpose of the policy WIOA-PP-02-23 is to:

1. Provide guidance regarding the requirement to serve priority populations under WIOA's Title I Adult Program; and
2. Establish a requirement that Local Boards approve public policies and procedures to ensure that 75% of participants receiving individualized career and training services under the Adult Program belong to at least one of the priority groups required by WIOA and;
3. Establish a next priority level for:
    a. Persons with disabilities;
    b. Individuals involved in justice;
    c. Single Moms and Dads

The policy defines, in accordance with the rule, the terms and individuals that need to be considered as priority in the provision of services in the AJC. It includes a definitions section consistent with WIOA Section 3, DEFINITIONS. For

the purposes of the plan, only the general categories of the policy definition are summarized:

1. Individual with barriers to employment – are a member of one or more of the populations described in section WIOA 3(36):
2. Low-Income Individual - the term "low-income individual" means a person meeting the criteria of section WIOA 3(36)(A);
3. Basic Skills Deficient - the term "Basic Skills Deficient" refers to an individual who meets the criteria in WIOA Section 3(5);
4. Public Assistance Recipients - Includes individuals who receive cash payments from the federal, state, or local government for which eligibility is determined by an assessment of their needs or income, WIOA section WIOA 3(50).
5. Homeless Person - Any person included under the definition of the terms "homeless," "homeless individual," and "homeless person" which comply the criteria set in the 42 U.S. Code §11302 - General definition of homeless individual.
6. Veteran - a veteran is a person who has performed at least one day of active duty in military, naval, or air service, and who has been discharged or released from such service with a non-dishonorable discharge (Section 101 of Title 38 of the United States Code)

The policy sets forth the following requirements for the priority implementation required under the adult program:

1. Requirement to Serve Priority Populations Under WIOA's Title I Adult Program Priority required by WIOA Section 134(c)(3)(E):

For the WIOA Title I Adult Program only, priority for individualized career and training services must be given to participants who belong to at least one (1) of the following three (3) priority populations:

1.

    a. Recipients of public assistance;

    b. 2) Other low-income people;

    c. 3) Individuals who are deficient in basic skills

Veterans and their eligible spouses must continue to receive priority service in all WIOA Title I programs.

Priority established through this public policy:

The following individuals with barriers to employment should also be considered as priority populations for individualized training and career services, if they are not already within one (1) of the populations required by WIOA:

1.

    a. Persons with disabilities;

    b. 2) Individuals involved in justice;

    c. and 3) Single mothers and fathers

Process for Determining Service Priority

Eligible veterans and spouses continue to receive priority for service among all eligible individuals; however, they must meet the eligibility criteria of the Adult Program and meet the criteria set forth in Section 134(c)(3)(E) of WIOA. As described in TEGL 19-16, when programs are required by law to give priority, as is the case with the Adult Program, then priority must be provided in the following order:

1. Priority 1: Eligible veterans and spouses who are also recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, or individuals who are deficient in basic skills.
2. Priority 2: Individuals who are recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, or individuals who are deficient in basic skills.
3. Priority 3: Eligible veterans and spouses who are not included in WIOA's priority groups.
4. Priority 4: Priority populations established by the governor and/or the Local Workforce Development Board (Local Board).
5. Priority 5: Other individuals not included in WIOA's priority groups.

Once a priority level is assigned, participants cannot move to a lower priority level during their participation. Priority levels should be re-evaluated at the beginning of each new program involvement.

Required Percentage of Priority Populations Receiving Individualized Career Services or Training Services

Seventy-five percent (75%) of individuals enrolled in the Adult Program are required to be public assistance recipients, low-income, or with basic skills deficiencies, as identified in the previous section as a priority of service level

one (1) and two (2). Other priority groups identified in this policy or in JLDL's policy will not count towards the 75% calculation.

Other instructions established in the policy:

1. Process for Calculating the Service Priority Rate
2. Corrective Actions: JLDLs that fail to comply with this policy may be sanctioned under WIOA's Procedure for Determination of Violations and Imposition of Penalties approved by the State Labor Development Board (JEDL).
3. Requirement for LEDBs to develop a local service priority policy.
4. Local policy requirements
5. Service Priority Notification

Through this policy, local areas must establish the criteria and the process by which priority of service will be applied. Priority for individualized career and training services must be given to recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and/or individuals who are basic skills deficient. It is not necessary to determine that an adult is eligible in accordance with the priority of service until it is determined that the individual needs individualized career or training services. Veterans and eligible spouses continue to receive priority of service.

Local boards must review and update their policies and procedures, including the monitoring of the implementation of these policies and procedures in AJCs, according with the state policy.

Also, the WDP include instructions in the annual allocation guidelines for the fulfillment of this priority established in the TEGL 7-20. State board and local board will establish outcomes to measure the implementation of the policy, like the percentage of individuals in individualized career or training services from at least one priority group, or the percentage of individuals from at least one priority group receiving individualized career or training services.

Monitoring

Priority of Service is monitored as part of the state's WIOA programmatic reviews. The goal of programmatic reviews is to provide technical assistance, as appropriate, and ensure that established policies, procedures, and systems achieves quality program outcomes that meet the requirements and objectives of the WIOA and federal and state regulations.

The DEDC is in the process of doing monitoring instruments to ensure compliance with the priority of service policy for eligible participants. The tool will provide a review of overall eligibility as well as the priority of service based on the requirements of the state policy. Also, the monitoring instrument will verify that all local areas have established written policies and procedures to ensure that priority of service to participants is met. Currently, AJC staff in Puerto Rico keep the eligibility document for priority services in the participant's file.

5. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S CRITERIA REGARDING LOCAL AREA TRANSFER OF FUNDS BETWEEN THE ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKER PROGRAMS

The State Board approved the policy WIOA-PP-07-2023, December 12, 2023, **Transfer of funds between the Adult and Dislocated Workersr Programs**, to establish public policy and procedures for the transfer of funds between WIOA's Title I-B adults and dislocated workers programs.

In first instance, the policy states that underutilization of funds and the lack or limited number of participants in a given flow of funds do not automatically constitute a justification for transferring funds to another program. The WLB should make every effort to:

1. Use program funds appropriately in accordance with the local plan and the economic and business environment of the local area.
1. Use program funds appropriately in accordance with the mandatory service priority for adult funds; and
2. Explore innovative ideas for outreach and promotion of services to underserved populations.

Considerations for Transfers of Funds

Local Boards should consider the following considerations related to transfer:

1. When funds are transferred from one program to another, the transferred funds take on the identity of the new program and are subject to all the requirements of that program.
2. When considering the transfer of funds between WIOA Title I-B Adult and Dislocated Worker programs, career and training services should continue to be available to both Adults and Dislocated Workers in the UGC/AJC, through their remaining program funds, or through other partners.

3. To the extent that a Local Area requests to transfer part of its allocation of funds from the Dislocated Worker Program to the Adult Program, the WDP will not consider a request for additional funds from the Local Area to mitigate the loss of funds for dislocated workers resulting from the transfer. However, if a Local Area transfers funds from the Adult Program for Dislocated Workers and there is a major impact closure or layoff in the Local Area (e.g., the layoff of a specific employer or a disaster that changes local economic conditions), the state will consider requesting additional funds from a local area on a case-by-case basis and subject to availability.
4. All transfers of funds to the Adult Program are subject to the service priority requirement required by WIOA.
5. When funds are transferred, JLDLs should consider how the adjusted implementation levels for the primary performance indicators will be met. If the JLDL transfers 100 percent of a certain type of funds, it will remain responsible for meeting the adjusted implementation levels of the program from which the funds were transferred.
6. The WDP, as part of the review process, will examine relevant fiscal and programmatic information, including participant service levels and accrual/expenditure reports upon receipt of the application.

Transfer Request Process

JLDLs need prior approval from the DEDC to make the transfer. Transfer requests from local boards will be evaluated according to the needs of each local area, which must include:

1. Transfer of Funds Application Form - signed by the President of the Board of Mayors and the President of the Local Board.
2. Certification by the Local Board in quorum of approval of the transfer of funds application, along with the presentation of the minutes of the meeting discussing the scope of the transfer of funds, along with the vote taken to authorize it.
3. Certification must ensure that the transfer of funds will not adversely affect the provision of services to participants.
4. Narrative that includes the justification for the request to use funds from one program for the activities of the other program. This justification should include, but is not limited to:

1. The main reason for the transfer request (e.g., projection in the depletion of current funds, changes in labor market conditions in the local area, etc.).
2. A description of outreach activities undertaken to ensure underserved populations are aware of available services.
3. Labor market conditions contribute to the need for the transfer of funds between adult and dislocated worker programs. They must include statistical data on closures of businesses, industries, or employers, as well as dislocated workers or adults in need, that justify and demonstrate the need to increase services in the program whose funds will be transferred (applications received without this information will not be considered for evaluation).
4. Indicate whether the transfer is consistent with the broader strategies outlined in the current local plan.
5. Explanation of how the negotiated performance levels for the primary performance indicators will be met.
6. Measures to be implemented to avoid any adverse impact on the services of the program from which funds were transferred or reduced.

The Planning Guidelines is also the official document that sets the public policy and requirements for local area funds allocation regarding the Youth, Adult and Dislocated Workers programs. Section VIII of the guidelines establishes the public policy for transfer of funds between the adult and dislocated worker programs in accordance with section 133(b)(4) of WIOA allows for the transfer of 100 percent of funds between adults and dislocated workers programs, subject to the approval of the Governor. The local area's transfer requests are evaluated according to the need of each local area.

6. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S POLICY ON WIOA AND TAA CO-ENROLLMENT AND WHETHER AND HOW OFTEN THIS POLICY IS DISSEMINATED TO THE LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARDS AND REQUIRED ONE-STOP PARTNERS. TRADE ACT SEC. 239(F), SEC. 235, 20 CFR 618.325, 20 CFR 618.824(A)(3)(I).

DDEC-WIOA-05-20 – Training Service under Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Programs

The objective of TAA training is to achieve marketable skills for a participant's return to suitable employment. This policy provides the expectations, standards, and rationale required for justifying and approving TAA training. All six criteria must be documented to support approval or denial of

training. TAA case managers must approve training for a trade-affected worker if the following six criteria are met (20 CFR 618.610):

1. There is no suitable employment available for the trade-affected worker
2. The trade-affected worker would benefit from appropriate training.
3. There is a reasonable expectation of employment following completion of training
4. Training is reasonably available to the trade-affected worker.
5. The trade-affected worker is qualified to undertake and complete the training.
6. The training being considered is suitable for the worker and available at a reasonable cost.

The six training criteria will be completed by the TAA case manager after notification of the TAA training request has been received. Case notes must document enough information that will enable the TAA case manager to make an eligibility determination. Policy also set types of training for TAA participants:

1. Classroom/Occupational Skills Training
    a. Distance Learning
    b. Remedial, GED, HSE, and ESL Education
2. Work-based Training
1. Customized Training
2. On-The-Job-Training
3. Registered Apprenticeship

Assessments

Initial and comprehensive assessments need to be done for all TAA participants. These will help identify workers who possess skills needed by local employers or identify workers who need additional services.

Initial Assessment

The initial assessment will help determine which TAA benefits and services will be most beneficial for the worker. This assessment should consider:

1. the current local labor market information;

2. the worker's knowledge, skills, and abilities from their education and previous employment; any transferrable skills that would be of interest to local employers;
3. an evaluation of the individual's skill levels, aptitudes, abilities, and supportive service needs; and any barriers to reemployment.

Comprehensive and Specialized Assessments

The comprehensive specialized career assessment will help determine the potential occupations for the TAA participant and will serve as a guide in the development of the participant's training plan. A primary reason for conducting specialized career assessments is to demonstrate that participants have the abilities and qualifications to participate successfully in a specific training program. Specialized career assessments are detailed examinations of the participant's qualifications, skills, and capabilities and should explore any relevant facets that may impact negatively upon the successful completion of the proposed training plan.

Individual Employment Plan

If an Individual Employment Plan (IEP) is developed or has been previously developed for the worker, the results must support the proposed training determination. The IEP should incorporate the information collected from the initial and specialized assessments to develop the appropriate training strategy. Staff must ensure the plan includes the following:

- the worker's employment goals; the proposed training program;
- the services needed to obtain suitable employment, including supportive services provided through partner programs;
- any supplemental assistance (e.g., subsistence or transportation payments); the individual's responsibilities under the plan.

Funding

The case manager may approve training that is either fully funded by TAA or funded by a combination of TAA and other partner programs, such as WIOA Title I, Vocational Rehabilitation, Veterans Education Benefits, among others. Funds established by other private individuals or organizations to assist participants in the transition to reemployment may also be used. The case manager must document the funding sources in the case management file, including funding details, amounts, and periods being paid for. In addition, although TAA does not require participants to apply for Federal Financial Aid,

case managers should inform participants about this potential funding source in case TAA funding is not available in the future.

In determining the reasonable cost of training concerning a worker, it may be considered whether other public or private funds are reasonably available to the worker to lower the program cost. However, participants cannot be required to obtain such funds as a condition of approval of training. Section 236(a)(9)(B)(ii) of the 2015 Act ensures that training programs that would otherwise not be approved under TAA due to costs may be approved if a worker voluntarily commits to using public or private funds to pay a portion of the costs of training.

Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) and TAA

TAA training providers are not required to be on the Statewide ETPL for approved training. However, providers on the ETPL offering comparable training within a local area should be given first consideration over providers not on the list.

In some cases, participants may be co-enrolled in other programs while in training. Some of those programs may require the training provider to be listed on the Statewide ETPL as a condition of eligibility, and if a non ETPL provider is selected, eligibility might be affected. Therefore, it is essential that TAA case managers advise participants that co-enrollment with other programs may be adversely impacted if they choose non-ETPL training programs. Case managers must also document that participants were advised of and acknowledge this issue if they choose providers outside the list.

Whether part of the ETPL or not, the approved trainings are required to meet the following requirements:

1. are in occupational demand;
2. are aligned with the evaluation and the interests of the participant; and
3. lead to the achievement of a credential

Policy DDEC-WIOA-05-20 also set other process required for the delivery of services areas like: TAA State Coordinator; Pre-Separation Training; Higher Education and WIOA Programs; Documentation Requirements; process to Approval of Training; definitions of Statewide Commuting Area; Supplemental Assistance; Supportive Services; Tools, Equipment, and Supplies; Temporary Leave of Absence from Training; Request to Return to Training after

Withdrawal; Adversely Affected Incumbent Workers; Waiver of TAA Training Requirement; and Priority of Service

DDEC-WIOA-06-20 Definitions of Statewide Commuting Area

TAA allows for the payment of transportation or per diem to attend capacitation and training activities, job search outside the travel area, and a job relocation when travel is outside of the participant's travel area. The policy establishes the state level policy regarding the definition of a displacement area for the transportation allowance cost, per diem, job search, and relocation, under TAA. Under 5 CFR Sec. 550.703, commuting area means the geographic area surrounding a workplace that encompasses the localities in which individuals live and who can reasonably be expected to commute to and from work or training daily. Given the socioeconomic panorama that Puerto Rico has, and the limitation of public transportation, it is essential to encourage individuals with high levels of poverty to complete their training, without any transportation barriers. Effective as of the date of approval of the policy, the definition of "travel area" shall be nine (9) miles from a participant's residence in a single direction. Policy also includes the methodology to calculate the commuting area in the island.

7. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S FORMAL STRATEGY TO ENSURE THAT WIOA AND TAA CO-ENROLLED PARTICIPANTS RECEIVE NECESSARY FUNDED BENEFITS AND SERVICES. TRADE ACT SEC. 239(F), SEC. 235, 20 CFR 618.816(C)

See summary of policies **DDEC-WIOA-06-20** - **Definitions of Statewide Commuting Area**; and **DDEC-WIOA-05-20** – **Training Service under Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Programs** describe in the previous section.

8. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S PROCESS FOR FAMILIARIZING ONE-STOP STAFF WITH THE TAA PROGRAM. 20 CFR 618.804(J), 20 CFR 618.305

See summary of policies **DDEC-WIOA-06-20** - Definitions of Statewide Commuting Area; and **DDEC-WIOA-05-20** – Training Service under Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Programs describe in the previous section.

C. YOUTH PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS.

With respect to youth workforce investment activities authorized in section 129 of WIOA, States should describe their strategies that will support the implementation of youth activities under WIOA. State's must-

1. IDENTIFY THE STATE-DEVELOPED CRITERIA TO BE USED BY LOCAL BOARDS IN AWARDING GRANTS OR CONTRACTS FOR YOUTH WORKFORCE INVESTMENT

ACTIVITIES AND DESCRIBE HOW THE LOCAL BOARDS WILL TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THE ABILITY OF THE PROVIDERS TO MEET PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES BASED ON PRIMARY INDICATORS OF PERFORMANCE FOR THE YOUTH PROGRAM AS DESCRIBED IN SECTION 116(B)(2)(A)(II) OF WIOA.[11] FURTHER, INCLUDE A DESCRIPTION OF HOW THE STATE ASSISTS LOCAL AREAS IN DETERMINING WHETHER TO CONTRACT FOR SERVICES OR TO PROVIDE SOME OR ALL OF THE PROGRAM ELEMENTS DIRECTLY.

As provided in sec. 123 of WIOA, local boards must identify eligible providers of youth workforce development activities in the local area by awarding grants or contracts on a competitive basis based on the recommendation of the youth standing committee, whose establishment will be encouraged by the State Board.

The Local Boards must include the State plan criteria used to identify youth providers, taking into consideration the ability of the provider to meet performance accountability measures based on the primary indicators of performance for the youth programs. Also, must conduct a full and open competition to ensure that the selection of youth service providers is made in accordance with federal procurement guidelines in 2 CFR parts 200, in addition to applicable State and local procurement laws.

- WIOA-03-20 - Policy for the Competitive Selection of Eligible Youth Service Providers
- DDEC-WIOA-02-20 - Technical Assistance Guidelines to 14 elements of youth program - Guide to define concepts, eligibility, and other aspects related to the youth program.

Where the Local Board determines there is an insufficient number of eligible providers of youth workforce development activities in the local area, such as might be the case in a rural area, the Local Board might opt to award grants or contracts on a sole source basis (WIOA sec. 123(b)).

Local youth programs must be designed to provide for an objective assessment of each youth participant that meets the requirements of WIOA Section 129(c)(1)(A) and include a review of the academic and occupational skill levels, as well as the service needs, of each youth for the purpose of identifying appropriate services and career pathways for participants and informing the individual service strategy. Also, to develop and update, as needed, an individual service strategy for each youth participant and provide case management to youth participants, including follow-up services. Local areas must ensure that WIOA youth service providers

meet the referral requirements established in sec. 129(c)(3)(A) of WIOA for all youth participants.

According to sec. 129(c)(2) of WIOA, local areas must make each of the required 14 youth elements available to youth participants. According to WIOA sec. 129(c)(3)(C), the local areas must ensure that parents, youth participants, and other members of the community with experience relating to youth programs are actively involved in both the design and implementation of its youth programs. A minimum of 75% of State and local youth funding is to be used by local areas for out-of-school youth (OSY). At least 20% of local Youth formula funds must be used for work experiences, such as summer and year-round employment, pre-apprenticeship, OJT, internships, or job shadowing.

Youth program providers must provide a detailed description of each program element with youth performance information (for WIOA youth providers). Performance information for each training program will include a detailed description of the provider partnerships with business partners, and a provider must not be found in fault in criminal, civil, or administrative proceeding related to its performance as a training or educational institution and must not be included in any Federal, State, or local debarment and suspension lists.

For the fulfillment of these principles, the procurement process, and the provision of 14 elements of the youth program, the state board issued the following public policies:

- DDEC-WIOA-08-20 - Case Management and Record-Keeping Policy
- DDEC-WIOA-07-20 - Procedure for the follow-up service required by WIOA for participants of the Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Programs
- WIOA-03-20 - Policy for the Competitive Selection of Eligible Youth Service Providers
- DDEC-WIOA-02-20 - Technical Assistance Guidelines to 14 elements of youth program - Guide to define concepts, eligibility, and other aspects related to the youth program.

2. EXPLAIN HOW THE STATE ASSISTS LOCAL WORKFORCE BOARDS IN ACHIEVING RESULTS FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL AND IN-SCHOOL YOUTH. DESCRIBE PROMISING PRACTICES OR PARTNERSHIP MODELS THAT LOCAL AREAS ARE IMPLEMENTING AND THE STATE'S ROLE IN SUPPORTING AND SCALING THOSE

MODELS WITHIN THE STATE FOR BOTH IN-SCHOOL AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH.

Out of school youth are one of the most difficult populations to serve because their primary interest lies in attaining self-sufficiency. Local Areas received youth facing diverse economic and social barriers to achieve their academic or employment goals. Among these: below average academic and reading levels; risks of becoming dropouts, homeless, runaway, foster child, pregnant or parents, offenders; or in need of additional assistance to obtain and maintain employment. To improve the out of school youth outcomes the State will pursue the following strategies:

- Implementation of the Registered Apprenticeship. Registered Apprenticeship will be implemented as a useful strategy to increase youth attainment of industry-recognized credentials, as well as to improve youth outcomes.
- Puerto Rico Office of Apprenticeship will partner with the PRDE, community colleges, universities, and community partners to increase the opportunities for youth to transition from high schools into an apprenticeship or pre-apprenticeship program.
- Foster a structured approach for out of school youth emphasizing the importance of a youth program design that includes meaningful work experiences that integrate work-based learning and academic classroom learning, as a strategy to strengthen services to out of school youth. Local areas will be encouraged to design this activity by providing a greater number of hours of work experience combined with alternative secondary school, support service and academic learning for the out-of-school youth.
- Strengthening Employer Collaboration. Increase partnerships with employers to foster economic development and high-growth opportunities for out of school youth. The WIOA system has the mission to prepare and train workers, and to help businesses find qualified workers to meet their present and future workforce needs. Local areas will be encouraged to integrate employers to help define and support new strategies designed to better educate, train, and prepare out of school youth and to provide critical leadership in the creation of these pipeline strategies.
- Also, employers can help the workforce system by identifying the skills and competencies needed in the industry, particularly for entry-level positions; developing industry certification; collaborating with training

institutions in occupational-skills curriculum development; creating student internships and work experience opportunities; providing formal mentoring programs and partnerships that support youth in their interest to pursue careers in high-growth and high-demand industries; and acquiring employer and industry commitments to hire youth. Also, under WIOA, employers are the main partner in the implementation of Apprenticeship training opportunities and credentials.

When designing youth employment and training programming, State and local areas should consider the following design elements; promotion and increase of meaningful work experience opportunities as set forth in section 129(c)(2)(c) of WIOA, particularly for out of school youth; increase of service delivery for youth with disabilities; need to address the issues impacting service delivery for out of school youth; need to ensure quality case management through the monitoring process; and provision of effective follow-up services.

The state level will provide technical assistance to local areas for carrying out the necessary activities to improve the outcomes for out of school youth as described in section 129(a)(1)(B).

Case Management Certification

To improve case management at AJCs, WDP is implementing a Case Management Certification for case managers from the 15 ALDLs, in a contract with *Workforce180*, a training provider to workforce professionals from more than 500 organizations in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, US Virgin Islands and Guam. This credential will help case managers have a standardized view of the case management process for AJC participants and clients, with a specialized focus on WIOA. The training curriculum includes themes like the process of case management; effective assessment; service partnership; managing the caseload; follow-up; attitudes and behaviors; strategies for problem solving; and crisis case management, among others. Complete detail of de credential will be found in the Workforce180 electronic profile at Case Management Certification – Workforce180.

3. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE ASSISTS LOCAL WORKFORCE BOARDS IN IMPLEMENTING INNOVATIVE MODELS FOR DELIVERING YOUTH WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING EFFECTIVE WAYS LOCAL WORKFORCE BOARDS CAN MAKE AVAILABLE THE 14 PROGRAM ELEMENTS DESCRIBED IN WIOA SECTION 129(C)(2); AND EXPLAIN HOW LOCAL AREAS CAN ENSURE WORK EXPERIENCE, INCLUDING QUALITY PRE-APPRENTICESHIP AND REGISTERED

APPRENTICESHIP, IS PRIORITIZED AS A KEY ELEMENT WITHIN A BROADER CAREER PATHWAYS STRATEGY.

The state board approved the public policies WIOA-03-20, Policy for the Competitive Selection of Eligible Youth Service Providers; and WIOA -02-20 Technical Assistance Guidelines to 14 elements of youth program - Guide to define concepts, eligibility, and other aspects related to the youth program, which establish the parameters to be followed by local areas in the design of the youth program. The first requires the fulfillment of a procurement and open competence process in the selection of eligible providers, and the second helps to define the theoretical framework for the design of the 14 elements, establishing the allowable, not allowable activities, as well as examples of service delivery activities for this clientele. The WDP conducted several technical assistance sections for both policies.

WIOA eligible youth are individuals between the ages of 14 and 24 that are either Out of School Youth or In School Youth as defined by WIOA's section 129(a)(1). These must also meet one of the following additional conditions: being basic skills deficient; be an English language learner; an offender; homeless, runaway, in foster care or aged out of the foster care system; pregnant or parenting; an individual with a disability; or a person who requires additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program or to secure and hold employment.

Services are provided to eligible youth participants through a network of youth service providers, which are competitively procured. The Youth program is committed to providing, through local areas, the following required youth elements:

- Tutoring, study skills training, instruction and evidence-based drop-out prevention and recovery strategies;
- Alternative secondary school services or drop-out recovery services;
- Paid and unpaid work experiences;
- Occupational skills training;
- Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation;
- Leadership development;
- Supportive services;
- Adult mentoring;

- Comprehensive guidance and counseling;
- Financial literacy education;
- Entrepreneurial skills training;
- Labor market and employment information services;
- Activities that prepare for transition to post-secondary education and training; and
- Follow-up services.

In order to become an eligible Youth training provider, the entity must first contact the local area to apply. The area will conduct a competitive bidding process to award locally procured youth contracts. The statewide youth eligible provider list is a comprehensive list of those locally procured youth contracts. Once the entity has successfully completed the application process dictated in the local area policy, the application is then referred to the State program to be included on the statewide youth provider list.

4. PROVIDE THE LANGUAGE CONTAINED IN THE STATE POLICY FOR "REQUIRING ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE TO ENTER OR COMPLETE AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM, OR TO SECURE AND HOLD EMPLOYMENT" CRITERION FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH SPECIFIED IN WIOA SECTION 129(A)(1)(B)(III)(VIII) AND FOR "REQUIRING ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE TO COMPLETE AN EDUCATION PROGRAM, OR TO SECURE AND HOLD EMPLOYMENT" CRITERION FOR IN-SCHOOL YOUTH SPECIFIED IN WIOA SECTION 129(A)(1)(C)(IV)(VII). IF THE STATE DOES NOT HAVE A POLICY, DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL ENSURE THAT LOCAL AREAS WILL HAVE A POLICY FOR THESE CRITERIA.

State policy defers to local policy on the definition of "requires additional assistance to complete and educational program, or to secure and hold employment."

Puerto Rico compulsory education laws require children between the ages of 6 and 16 to attend school. However, for purposes of WIOA, the Workforce Development Program does not consider providers of Adult Education under title II of WIOA, YouthBuild programs, and Job Corps programs to be schools. Therefore, WIOA youth programs may consider a youth to be "not attending school" for purposes of WIOA youth program eligibility if he/she is attending Adult Education provided under title II of WIOA, YouthBuild, or Job Corps. It is the policy of the WDP that student attendance at a post-secondary institution qualifies as "attending school."

State policy defines “alternative education” as an option for students who are at risk of dropping out of high school to remain engaged in an alternative-learning environment that focuses on their skills, abilities, and learning styles.

Puerto Rico is using the basic skills deficient definition as contained in WIOA sec. 3(5). The term "basic skills deficient” means a youth that: has English reading, writing, or computing skills at or below the 8th grade level on a generally accepted standardized test; or is unable to compute or solve problems, read, write, or speak English at a level necessary to function on the job, in the individual’s family, or in society.

As included in WIOA Section 3(5)(B):

The term "basic skills deficient" means, concerning an individual -

- who is a youth, that the individual has English reading, writing, or computing skills at or below the 8th grade level on a generally accepted standardized test; or
- who is a youth or adult, that the individual is unable to compute or solve problems, or read, write, or speak English, at a level necessary to function on the job, in the individual's family, or in society.

An adult may be assessed as deficient in basic knowledge through observations by the case manager and documented in case notes. For example, the case manager may observe that the adult is not able to read or fill out an application form or have basic computer skills. It is expected that any such basic skills deficiencies will be determined by an objective, valid, and reliable assessment. There are several methods for evaluating basic skills. Each local area must use the test tabulation to classify the participant's performance levels. The participant's file must contain an academic test (including the participant's name, date of test, and results).

D. SINGLE-AREA STATE REQUIREMENTS

In States where there is only one local workforce investment area, the governor serves as both the State and local chief elected official. In such cases, the State must submit any information required in the local plan (WIOA section 106(d)(2)). States with a single workforce area must include—

1. ANY COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD THAT REPRESENT DISAGREEMENT WITH THE PLAN. (WIOA SECTION 108(D)(3).)

2. THE ENTITY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DISBURSAL OF GRANT FUNDS, AS DETERMINED BY THE GOVERNOR, IF DIFFERENT FROM THAT FOR THE STATE. (WIOA SECTION 108(B)(15).)

3. A DESCRIPTION OF THE TYPE AND AVAILABILITY OF WIOA TITLE I YOUTH ACTIVITIES AND SUCCESSFUL MODELS, INCLUDING FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES. (WIOA SECTION 108(B)(9).)

Not applicable.

4. A DESCRIPTION OF THE ROLES AND RESOURCE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE ONE-STOP PARTNERS.

Not applicable.

5. THE COMPETITIVE PROCESS USED TO AWARD THE SUBGRANTS AND CONTRACTS FOR TITLE I ACTIVITIES.

Not applicable.

6. HOW TRAINING SERVICES OUTLINED IN SECTION 134 WILL BE PROVIDED THROUGH INDIVIDUAL TRAINING ACCOUNTS AND/OR THROUGH CONTRACTS, AND HOW SUCH TRAINING APPROACHES WILL BE COORDINATED. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL MEET INFORMED CUSTOMER CHOICE REQUIREMENTS REGARDLESS OF TRAINING APPROACH.

Not applicable.

7. **HOW THE STATE BOARD, IN FULFILLING LOCAL BOARD FUNCTIONS, WILL COORDINATE TITLE I ACTIVITIES WITH THOSE ACTIVITIES UNDER TITLE II. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE BOARD WILL CARRY OUT THE REVIEW OF LOCAL APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED UNDER TITLE II CONSISTENT WITH WIOA SECS. 107(D)(11)(A) AND (B)(I) AND WIOA SEC. 232.**

Not applicable.

8. **COPIES OF EXECUTED COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WHICH DEFINE HOW ALL LOCAL SERVICE PROVIDERS WILL CARRY OUT THE REQUIREMENTS FOR INTEGRATION OF AND ACCESS TO THE ENTIRE SET OF SERVICES AVAILABLE IN THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM, INCLUDING COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH ENTITIES ADMINISTERING REHABILITATION ACT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES.**

Not applicable

E. WAIVER REQUESTS (OPTIONAL)

States wanting to request waivers as part of their title I-B Operational Plan must include a waiver plan that includes the following information for each waiver requested:

1. IDENTIFIES THE STATUTORY OR REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS FOR WHICH A WAIVER IS REQUESTED AND THE GOALS THAT THE STATE OR LOCAL AREA, AS APPROPRIATE, INTENDS TO ACHIEVE AS A RESULT OF THE WAIVER AND HOW THOSE GOALS RELATE TO THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN;

2. DESCRIBES THE ACTIONS THAT THE STATE OR LOCAL AREA, AS APPROPRIATE, HAS UNDERTAKEN TO REMOVE STATE OR LOCAL STATUTORY OR REGULATORY BARRIERS;

3. DESCRIBES THE GOALS OF THE WAIVER AND THE EXPECTED PROGRAMMATIC OUTCOMES IF THE REQUEST IS GRANTED;

4. DESCRIBES HOW THE WAIVER WILL ALIGN WITH THE DEPARTMENT'S POLICY PRIORITIES, SUCH AS:

A. SUPPORTING EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT;

B. CONNECTING EDUCATION AND TRAINING STRATEGIES;

C. SUPPORTING WORK-BASED LEARNING;

D. IMPROVING JOB AND CAREER RESULTS, AND

E. OTHER GUIDANCE ISSUED BY THE DEPARTMENT.

5. DESCRIBES THE INDIVIDUALS AFFECTED BY THE WAIVER; AND

6. DESCRIBES THE PROCESSES USED TO:

A. MONITOR THE PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING THE WAIVER;

B. PROVIDE NOTICE TO ANY LOCAL BOARD AFFECTED BY THE WAIVER;

C. PROVIDE ANY LOCAL BOARD AFFECTED BY THE WAIVER AN OPPORTUNITY TO COMMENT ON THE REQUEST;

D. ENSURE MEANINGFUL PUBLIC COMMENT, INCLUDING COMMENT BY BUSINESS AND ORGANIZED LABOR, ON THE WAIVER.

E. COLLECT AND REPORT INFORMATION ABOUT WAIVER OUTCOMES IN THE STATE'S WIOA ANNUAL REPORT.

7. THE MOST RECENT DATA AVAILABLE REGARDING THE RESULTS AND OUTCOMES OBSERVED THROUGH IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EXISTING WAIVER, IN CASES WHERE THE STATE SEEKS RENEWAL OF A PREVIOUSLY APPROVED WAIVER.

Commonwealth of Puerto Rico Submissions

I. WAIVER TO ALLOW USE OF SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

1. **Statutory/Regulatory Requirements to be Waived**

The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico is seeking a waiver from the requirements outlined in WIOA Section 134(d)(2) and 20 CFR 680.910 to allow use of supportive services.

2. **Removal of State or Local Barriers**

While there are no known state-level, local statutory, or regulatory barriers in Puerto Rico related to implementing the requested waiver, federal program design constraints limit Puerto Rico's ability to effectively provide supportive services to participants who would otherwise benefit from such assistance.

Specifically, current requirements under WIOA Section 134(d)(2) and 20 CFR 680.910 restrict the provision and flexibility of supportive services to circumstances that do not fully account for the realities of participants engaged in longer-term training, work-based learning, or employment retention pathways. These constraints create operational limitations for Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs), particularly in addressing intermittent or unexpected needs,such as transportation disruptions, childcare for non-traditional work hours, or essential work-related equipment, that directly impact a participant's ability to complete training or remain employed.

This could result, in otherwise eligible and progressing participants to be unable to continue in training or sustain employment due to short-term financial barriers that cannot be addressed under current program parameters. This limitation is particularly impactful in priority sectors requiring extended training timelines or non-standard work schedules, including advanced manufacturing, healthcare, and aerospace.

The requested waiver would remove these federal programmatic constraints by allowing greater flexibility in the timing, scope, and application of supportive services, thereby enabling Puerto Rico's workforce system to respond more effectively to participant needs, improve retention in training and employment, and align service delivery with the Commonwealth's broader workforce and economic development strategies.

3. **Puerto Rico's Strategic Goals**

This waiver request supports Puerto Rico's five strategic pillars:

1. Build a Talent-Ready Puerto Rico: Aligning workforce development with long-term economic growth and reshoring opportunities

High-growth industries require certifications that can take months to earn. Extending supportive services prevent employed individuals from dropping out due to a single life emergency, like a car breakdown or utility shut-off, ensuring a steady pipeline of talent. In addition, by covering services such as transportation or equipment, we can ensure that a talent-ready pool is drawn from the entire island, not just those living in urban centers near training facilities.

2. Establish a Workforce Reshoring Model: PRDEDC launched the Puerto Rico Workforce Reshoring Fund initiative, designed to assess workforce readiness and strengthen talent pipelines for priority industries such as pharmaceutical manufacturing, advanced manufacturing, medical devices, biotechnology, IT and aerospace.

Reshoring pharmaceutical and aerospace manufacturing requires a workforce capable of working in highly regulated, 24/7 environments. Extending childcare supportive services specifically for non-traditional hours is essential for parents to participate in these priority reshoring sectors.

3. Leverage Funding: Braiding WIOA resources, particularly state reserve funds—with new workforce initiatives to scale training programs that demonstrate strong employment outcomes.

4. Expanding Apprenticeships & Work-Based Learning: Scaling Apprenticeship and other work-based learning models across priority industries.

Supportive services provide a financial cushion during the early stages of an apprenticeship. This allows participants to stay in the program until they reach the journey-level wages that lead to self-sufficiency. Priority industries like aerospace and advanced manufacturing require expensive specialized tools or safety gear. Extending supportive services to cover these costs removes the upfront financial burden from the apprentice.

5. Create Sustainable Workforce Financing: Exploring innovative financing models, including a revolving workforce development fund, to ensure long-term sustainability and allow successful training initiatives to be reinvested and expanded.

Innovative models like revolving funds depend on successful employment outcomes - participants getting jobs and generating tax revenue. Data shows that participants with access to supportive services have significantly

higher job placement and retention rates. By investing in supportive services, we will be supporting higher employment retention rates which leads to the sustainable reinvestment needed to scale the model island-wide.

4. **Quantifiable Programmatic Outcomes**

DEDC would establish a goal of shifting the Employment Rate (2nd and 4th Quarter after Exit) upwards by 5 percent.

5. **Benefiting individuals and groups**

The requested waiver will benefit a broad range of participants served under the WIOA Title I programs, including Adult, Dislocated Workers, and Youth populations seeking employment. It will provide significant benefits to individual facing barriers to employment including low income, individuals' participants in training programs and those engage in workspace learning models such Registered Apprenticeships. Youth participants will benefit the most by providing a solution to transportation challenges, childcare responsibilities, and lack of access to necessary tools or equipment that may hinder their ability to remain engage in program activities or complete training.

Additionally, the waiver will benefit employers by supporting a more stable and reliable work force pipeline. By reducing participant attrition and improving completion rates business will have access to better papered individuals who are able to successfully enter and remain in employment with priority Industries sector.

6. **Monitoring of Waiver Implementation**

Several entities within Puerto Rico's Department of Economic Development & Commerce (DEDC) will monitor the waiver implementation in Puerto Rico:

- DEDC will provide guidance to the local areas on a supportive services policy and evaluate the impact implementing the waiver has on Puerto Rico's performance goals;
- DEDC's Monitoring and Compliance Unit will monitor Local Areas to ensure compliance with the new waiver requirements; and,
- DEDC's performance unit will stay abreast of waiver impact and all outcomes will be included in the WIOA Annual Report.

7. **Assurance of Posting for Public Comment**

DEDC will be posting this waiver for public comment in conjunction with the WIOA State Plan Modification

II. WAIVER TO ALLOW LOCAL AREAS to PROVIDE ISY WITH ITAS

1. **Statutory/Regulatory Requirements to be Waived**

The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico is seeking a waiver from the requirements outlined in 20 CFR 681.550 to allow local areas to provide In-School Youth (ISY) with individual training accounts (ITAs).

2. **Removal of State or Local Barriers**

While there are no known state-level, local statutory, or regulatory barriers in Puerto Rico related to implementing the requested waiver, federal regulatory limitation restrict the ability of Local Workforce Development Boards to provide individual training accounts to In-School Youth

20 CFR 681.550 states that ITAs are primarily authorized for Out-of-School Youth (OSY), which limits the flexibility of local areas to use this proven training mechanism for ISY participants. This restriction creates a programmatic barrier by preventing LWDBs from offering demand-driven, participant-centered training options to in-school youth who are ready and able to engage in occupational skills training aligned with in-demand industry sectors.

As a result, ISY participants may face limited access to industry-recognized credential programs available through the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL), particularly those that provide direct pathways to high-growth, high-wage occupations. This limitation reduces the ability of the workforce system to accelerate skill development and early labor market attachment for youth.

Hence, this waiver will expandaccess to high-quality training opportunities, enhancing alignment with labor market demand, and improving outcomes related to credential attainment, employment, and career pathways for youth.

3. **Puerto Rico's Strategic Goals**

This waiver request supports Puerto Rico's five strategic pillars:

1. Build a Talent-Ready Puerto Rico: Aligning workforce development with long-term economic growth and reshoring opportunities

Providing ITAs to ISY represents a positive strategic shift in workforce policy. Extending them to youth in Puerto Rico provides a faster-track to high-demand technical careers. ITAs empower students to move beyond the traditional education path and gain industry-recognized credentials while still in high school or early college. By providing ITAs, Puerto Rico aligns the career interests of its youngest workers with the island's long-term economic

growth sectors, i.e. aerospace and biosciences. This strategy also shortens the time between education and employment, creating a "talent-ready" workforce that can meet the immediate needs of companies reshoring to the island.

2. Establish a Workforce Reshoring Model: PRDEDC launched the Puerto Rico Workforce Reshoring Fund initiative, designed to assess workforce readiness and strengthen talent pipelines for priority industries such as pharmaceutical manufacturing, advanced manufacturing, medical devices, biotechnology, IT and aerospace.

Priority industries like pharmaceutical and medical device manufacturing require highly specific technical skills. ITAs allow In-School Youth to choose specialized training programs—such as those vetted by the Workforce Reshoring Fund—ensuring the youth pipeline is not just educated, but technically proficient in priority sectors. Because ITAs are used for programs on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL), they ensure that youth are only spending resources on curricula that have been validated by the very industries Puerto Rico is looking to reshore.

3. Leverage Funding: Braiding WIOA resources, particularly state reserve funds—with new workforce initiatives to scale training programs that demonstrate strong employment outcomes.

Providing ITAs to Youth maximizes our return on investment. ITAs are performance-based. By focusing these funds on programs with demonstrated employment outcomes, Puerto Rico ensures that braided federal and state dollars are only supporting the most successful training providers.

4. Expanding Apprenticeships & Work-Based Learning: Scaling Apprenticeship and other work-based learning models across priority industries.

ITAs can serve as the classroom component of a Registered Apprenticeship. For ISY, an ITA can fund the pre-apprenticeship training required to enter a high-level aerospace or IT apprenticeship. ITAs also reduces the financial burden on employers. If an ITA covers the cost of the Related Technical Instruction (RTI), small and medium-sized advanced manufacturing firms are more likely to take on young apprentices, as the training costs are already subsidized.

5. Create Sustainable Workforce Financing: Exploring innovative financing models, including a revolving workforce development fund, to ensure long-

term sustainability and allow successful training initiatives to be reinvested and expanded.

ITAs provide the perfect data-tracking mechanism for innovative financing models like revolving funds. Because ITAs are tracked individually in systems like PRIS, the state can measure the exact return on Investment for every youth participant. When youth trained via ITAs enter high-paying reshoring industries, the economic boost (through taxes or direct reinvestment models) feeds back into the workforce fund. This creates a sustainable cycle where the success of today's youth graduates funds the ITAs for the next generation of Puerto Rican students.

4. **Quantifiable Programmatic Outcomes**

DEDC would establish a goal of shifting the Employment Rate (2nd and 4th Quarter after Exit) upwards by 5 percent.

5. **Benefiting individuals and groups**

The requested waiver will primarily benefit ISY participants by expanding access to industry-recognized training opportunities aligned with Puerto Rico's in-demand and high-wage industry sectors, including advanced manufacturing, healthcare, information technology, and life sciences. By allowing the use of Individual Training Accounts (ITAs), youth will be able to pursue targeted occupational skills training earlier in their career pathways, reducing the time between education and employment. Particularly this waiver will benefit youth facing barriers to employment, including low-income individuals and those with limited access to postsecondary training opportunities. Increased access to ITAs will support improved outcomes in credential attainment, measurable skill gains, and employment placement.

Additionally, the waiver will benefit employers by strengthening the talent pipeline and ensuring access to a more skilled and job-ready workforce. By aligning training investments with labor market demand, business will have access to qualified candidates prepared to meet the technical requirements of priority Industries sector.

6. **Monitoring of Waiver Implementation**

Puerto Rico's Department of Economic Development & Commerce (DEDC) performance team will monitor the waiver implementation in Puerto Rico:

- DEDC's performance unit will stay abreast of waiver impact and all outcomes will be included in the WIOA Annual Report. Since ITAs are intended for talent-ready certification, the performance team will track

the Credential Attainment Rate specifically tied to the ETP (Eligible Training Provider) list.

- DEDC's Performance Team will also track the Measurable Skill Gains (MSG) during the training, such as passing a technical exam or completion of a specific reshoring training module. This will allow the team to intervene if a specific training provider has low MSG rates.
- The Workforce Development Unit at DEDC will also analyze and map these credentials against the Reshoring Fund priorities to determine success in feeding the reshoring pipeline.
- The Workforce Development Unit will also work with the PRIS administrator, Softec, to create a "Youth-ITA" in the PRIS system to track specific youth outcomes.

7. **Assurance of Posting for Public Comment**

DEDC will be posting this waiver for public comment in conjunction with the WIOA State Plan Modification.

III. WAIVER FOR LOCAL AREAS TO PROVIDE ALL 14 YOUTH PROGRAM ELEMENTS

1. **Statutory/Regulatory Requirements to be Waived**

The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico is seeking a waiver from the requirements outlined in WIOA section 129(c)(2) and 20 CFR 681.460 which requires each local area to make all 14 youth program elements available to eligible youth.

2. **Removal of State or Local Barriers**

While there are no known state-level, local statutory, or regulatory barriers in Puerto Rico related to implementing the requested waiver federal statutory and regulatory limitations create a programmatic constraint by requiring that all 14 youth program elements be made available in each local area.

Although, these elements collective support comprehensive service delivery framework, this requirement limit the ability of Local Workforce Development Board (LWDBs) to strategically prioritize and tailor service delivery based on regional labor market demands, participant needs, and available resources. This can result in the allocation of limited resources across all elements, rather than focusing investment on those services that have the greatest impact on employment outcome, such work-based learning, occupational skills training, and Registered Apprenticeships.

This requirement also presents operational challenges for smaller or resource-constrained local areas, which may not have the capacity to effectively deliver all 14 elements at the same level of quality or scale. Therefore, constraining efforts to implement innovative, sector-driven strategiesaligned with high-growth industries and workforce reshoring initiatives.

The requested waiver would provide LWDBs with the flexibility to prioritize, sequence, and deliver youth program elements in a manner that is responsive to local economic conditions and participant needs, while continuing to ensure access to the full range of required services through coordination with partners where appropriate. This flexibility will enable more efficient use of resources, strengthen alignment with labor market demand, and improve overall program effectiveness and outcomes for youth participants.

3. **Puerto Rico's Strategic Goals**

A cornerstone of Puerto Rico's workforce and business engagement strategy is the transformation of Registered Apprenticeship (RA) from a traditional training model into an engine for industrial growth. By leveraging WIOA funds, the DEDC is creating a labor pool tailored for the global reshoring movement.

Under the leadership of Governor González-Colón, apprenticeships are being institutionalized as a standard workforce solution for the Puerto Rican business community. More than $11 million in WIOA 2025 Governor Reserve funds have been strategically deployed to scale RA frameworks across the Island. As of early 2026, DEDC oversees 140 Registered Apprenticeship Programs, with a record-breaking 51 programs established in 2025 alone. Puerto Rico currently supports a robust ecosystem of over 2,200 active apprentices, with 324 graduates recently attaining industry-recognized credentials that serve as a gold standard for technical proficiency. The administration is aggressively diversifying the apprenticeship portfolio to move beyond traditional trades into high-complexity, high-wage technical sectors.

To support youth, DEDC has recently entered into an agreement with the Department of Education and the Association of Restaurants (ASORE) in Puerto Rico to establish a pre-apprenticeship program for youth. DEDC has also engaged in a partnership with the Pharmaceutical Industry Association of Puerto Rico (PIA) to align training programs with the specific technical skills needed for positions in meditech and life sciences. Lastly, DEDC has proactively engaged local and external non-**profits entities such as the Boys & Girls Club and Raices Cyber, as well as for profits entities such as the Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico,** [MV1]

While the standard WIOA Youth Program elements (such as alternative secondary school services and postsecondary preparation) provide a necessary academic foundation, they often lack the immediate, tangible connection to the labor market that high-growth industries require.

For Puerto Rico's specific goals of Workforce Reshoring and Talent Readiness, shifting the focus toward Registered Apprenticeships (RAs) and Pre-Apprenticeships offers several distinct advantages not directly available via the Youth Program Elements.

This waiver request supports Puerto Rico's five strategic pillars:

1. Build a Talent-Ready Puerto Rico: Aligning workforce development with long-term economic growth and reshoring opportunities

Traditional elements like postsecondary preparation focus on getting a student *to* the next stage of education. In contrast, Apprenticeships act as an options multiplier. Youth in RAs see the immediate relevance of their classroom learning by applying it in a pharmaceutical lab or an aerospace hangar. This significantly reduces dropout rates compared to traditional alternative secondary school settings where the connection to a career can feel abstract.

Apprenticeships often lead to both a nationally recognized credential and college credit, effectively achieving the goals of postsecondary transition while the student is already earning a paycheck. Pre-apprenticeship and RA models provide direct skill alignment where the training matches specific machine/software needs of reshoring firms.

2. Establish a Workforce Reshoring Model: PRDEDC launched the Puerto Rico Workforce Reshoring Fund initiative, designed to assess workforce readiness and strengthen talent pipelines for priority industries such as pharmaceutical manufacturing, advanced manufacturing, medical devices, biotechnology, IT and aerospace.

Pre-apprenticeships serve as a feeder for reshoring industries. They provide the basic technical and professional skills needed to pass entry exams for advanced manufacturing, making them more effective than general workforce preparation activities. Work Based Learning programs provide the opportunity for technical immersion since youth would gain cleanroom (manufacturing) or aerospace experience while finishing education.

4. Expanding Apprenticeships & Work-Based Learning: Scaling Apprenticeship and other work-based learning models across priority industries.

WIOA Youth elements that focus on education concurrently with workforce preparation often struggle to keep youth engaged because the workforce component is usually unpaid or simulated. Registered Apprenticeships provide a guaranteed wage progression. For youth in Puerto Rico, this immediate income can be the deciding factor in staying in a program versus entering the informal or low-wage economy.

Pre-apprenticeships serve as a feeder for reshoring industries. They provide the basic technical and professional skills needed to pass entry exams for advanced manufacturing, making them more effective than general workforce preparation activities.

Industry-specific work experiences build a direct relationship between the youth and the employer. This reduces the risk of training for a job that doesn't exist, which can occur in more academic-heavy postsecondary transition activities.

5. Create Sustainable Workforce Financing: Exploring innovative financing models, including a revolving workforce development fund, to ensure long-term sustainability and allow successful training initiatives to be reinvested and expanded.

The transition from preparation to immersion is the key benefit. By prioritizing Pre-Apprenticeships and Registered Apprenticeships, Puerto Rico ensures that its youth are not just preparing for a future career—they are active participants in the island's economic resurgence. This creates a workforce that is not only talent-ready but already talent-deployed. High completion and high wages of apprentices lead to a better pay-back into a revolving fund.

4. **Quantifiable Programmatic Outcomes**

DEDC would establish a goal of increasing Pre-Apprenticeship, Registered Apprenticeship and Work-Based Learning experiences by 5 percent.

5. **Benefiting individuals and groups**

The requested waiver will primarily benefit Youth participants by enabling Local Workforce Development Board (LWDBs) to deliver services in a more targeted and strategic manner, aligned with Puerto Rico's in-demand and high-wage industry sectors, including advanced manufacturing, healthcare, information technology, and life sciences. By allowing flexibility in the provision of program elements, local areas will be able to prioritize high impact services, such as work-based learning, occupational skills training,

and Registered Apprenticeships that more directly support employment outcomes.

Particularly this waiver will benefit youth facing barriers to employment, including low-income individuals and those with limited work experience, and those at risk of disengagement from education or the workforce. A more service delivery approach will improve participation, retention, and completion rates, as well as outcomes related to measurable skill gains, credential attainment, and employment.

Additionally, the waiver will benefit employers by strengthening the talent pipeline and ensuring access to a more skilled and job-ready workforce. By aligning youth services with labor market demand and industry needs, business will have access to qualified candidates equipped with the skills and competencies required to succeed in priority Industries sector.

6. **Monitoring of Waiver Implementation**

Puerto Rico's Department of Economic Development & Commerce (DEDC) performance team will monitor the waiver in coordination with the Workforce Development Unit and Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs) to ensure compliance, accountability, and effective service delivery::

- The Performance Team will track key Youth program outcomes, including measurable skill gains (MSG), credential attainment, placement in employment or education, and retention, to assess the impact of increased flexibility in the delivery of youth program elements.
- The Workforce Development Unit will monitor how LWDBs prioritize and deliver youth program elements, including the extent to which services are provided directly or through partner coordination, ensuring that all required elements remain accessible to participants.
- Data will be collected and analyzed through the Puerto Rico Information System (PRIS) and applicable federal reporting systems to evaluate program performance and identify areas for improvement.
- DEDC's Monitoring and Compliance Unit will monitor local areas to ensure compliance with program requirements, proper documentation of services, and alignment with local labor market needs and strategic priorities.
- To the extent that youth participants engage in work-based learning activities, including Registered Apprenticeships, relevant data may be

tracked through systems such as RAPIDS; however, such tracking will complement, not replace, the broader monitoring of youth program outcomes.

- DEDC will establish internal benchmarks and provide technical assistance or corrective actions, as needed, to ensure that the flexibility provided under this waiver results in improved outcomes for youth participants without reducing access to essential services.

7. **Assurance of Posting for Public Comment**

DEDC will be posting this waiver for public comment in conjunction with the WIOA State Plan Modification.

IV. WAIVER TO INCREASE FUNDS AVAILABLE FOR INCUMBENT WORKER TRAINING (IWT)

1. **Statutory/Regulatory Requirements to be Waived**

The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico is seeking a waiver from the requirements outlined in WIOA Section134(d)(4)(A)(i) and 20 CFR 680.770, which limits a Local Board to using no more than twenty (20) percent of its combined Adult and Dislocated Worker funds for Incumbent Worker Training (IWT).

The Commonwealth requests a waiver to increase the allowable limit for IWT to thirty-five (**35) percent** of combined Adult and Dislocated Worker formula funds. This will allow Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs) more flexibility to support business retention and worker upskilling in priority sectors.

2. **Removal of State or Local Barriers**

While there are no known state-level, local statutory, or regulatory barriers in Puerto Rico related to implementing the requested waiver federal statutory and regulatory limitations restrict the ability of Local Workforce Development Board (LWDBs) to fully utilize Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) as a strategic workforce development tool.

Specifically, WIOA Section134(d)(4)(A)(i) and 20 CFR 680.770 limit the amount of Adult and Dislocated Worker funds that may be used for IWT to no more than twenty (20) percent. Therefore, this cap constrains the ability of local areas to respond effectively to employer demand for upskilling existing workers, particularly in high-growth and high-skill industry sectors.

In Puerto Rico, where economic development strategies are increasingly focused on workforce reshoring and the expansion of advanced industries such as pharmaceutical manufacturing, medical devices, aerospace, and

information technology, employers require rapid and targeted upskilling of their current workforce. The existing funding limitation creates a programmatic barrier by restricting the scale at which IWT can be deployed to support these needs.

As a result, Local Workforce Development Boards may be unable to meet employer demand for training or fully leverage IWT as a tool to prevent layoffs, support business retention, and strengthen career pathways for incumbent workers.

The requested waiver would allow increased investment in IWT activities, thereby enhancing the ability of LWDBs to support employer-driven training, improve worker retention and advancement, and align workforce development efforts with Puerto Rico's economic priorities.

3. **Puerto Rico's Strategic Goals**

IWT funds have served as a powerful tool for businesses to both retain their current talent and strengthen the Registered Apprenticeship (RA) pipeline in Puerto Rico. While the Commonwealth leverages On-the-Job Training (OJT) to support the RA model, IWT is specifically designed to upskill existing employees.

IWT serves are part of our business engagement and economic development strategy since IWT funds act as a risk-reduction mechanism that allows business to modernize their workforce without bearing the full financial burden.

This waiver request supports Puerto Rico's strategic pillars:

1. Build a Talent-Ready Puerto Rico: Aligning workforce development with long-term economic growth and reshoring opportunities.

Increasing IWT funding ensures that the talent already in the system remains competitive, preventing layoffs and maintaining a high-skilled labor pool. As companies move operations (like semiconductor or advanced pharma) back to Puerto Rico, IWT funds will allow existing employees to learn the complex new processes required, making the island a more attractive destination for global firms.

2. Establish a Workforce Reshoring Model: PRDEDC launched the Puerto Rico Workforce Reshoring Fund initiative, designed to assess workforce readiness and strengthen talent pipelines for priority industries such as pharmaceutical manufacturing, advanced manufacturing, medical devices, biotechnology, IT and aerospace.

Increased IWT funding allows for deeper assessments of current worker skills. If an aerospace firm needs workers trained in specific composite materials, IWT funds bridge that gap immediately. By subsidizing the cost for companies to train their own staff in advanced manufacturing, the government lowers the entry cost for companies considering reshoring.

3. Expanding Apprenticeships & Work-Based Learning: Scaling Apprenticeship and other work-based learning models across priority industries.

IWT funds are increasingly being used to convert traditional jobs into Registered Apprenticeships in Puerto Rico. Instead of only using apprenticeships for new hires, IWT funds allow a company to place a current junior worker into an apprenticeship to become a journey worker. IWT funding also supports the time senior workers spend mentoring, which is critical for scaling these models in high-complex sectors like Medical Devices and Aerospace.

4. Create Sustainable Workforce Financing: Exploring innovative financing models, including a revolving workforce development fund, to ensure long-term sustainability and allow successful training initiatives to be reinvested and expanded.

By upskilling current workers, we increase their earning potential and tax contributions, which can eventually feed into revolving development funds.

4. **Quantifiable Programmatic Outcomes**

DEDC would establish a goal of increasing the percentage of workers who earn a recognized industry certification or state license by 5 percent.

5. **Benefiting individuals and groups**

The requested waiver will benefit incumbent workers by supporting employment retention, career advancement, and increased wages through access to targeted upskilling opportunities aligned with employer needs. By expanding the use of Incumbent Worker Training (IWT), workers will be better positioned to adapt to evolving job requirements, particularly in high-growth and high-skill industry sectors.

Specifically, this waiver will be beneficial to workers at risk of displacement due to technological changes, industry shifts, or evolving skill demands, as it enables timely training interventions that strengthen job stability and long-term employability. Additionally, it will benefit employers by providing greater flexibility to invest in the development of their existing workforce, reducing

turnover, increasing productivity, and supporting business retention and expansion. A more skilled workforce will enhance the competitiveness of businesses operating in Puerto Rico, particularly in priority sectors such as advanced manufacturing, life sciences, and information technology.

Finally, the waiver will support broader economic development efforts in the Commonwealth by strengthening the alignment between workforce development investments and industry needs, contributing to a more resilient, competitive, and talent-ready economy.

6. **Monitoring of Waiver Implementation**

Puerto Rico's Department of Economic Development & Commerce (DEDC) Workforce Development Unit will oversee the implementation of the waiver in coordination with the Performance Team and Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs) to ensure compliance, accountability, and effective use of funds::

- Since Registered Apprenticeship sits under the DEDC umbrella, incumbent workers serving as apprentices will be tracked via the Registered Apprenticeship Partners Information Data System (RAPIDS).
- The Workforce Development Unit will monitor the use of IWT funds, including the percentage of Adult and Dislocated Worker funds allocated to IWT activities, to ensure alignment with the approved waiver threshold and applicable federal and state policies.
- The Workforce Development Unit will establish internal benchmarks and conduct evaluations to assess the effectiveness of the waiver. Where performance outcomes fall below established expectations, corrective actions and technical assistance will be provided to ensure continuous program improvement.
- The Workforce Development Unit will also work with the Performance Team to track key outcome indicators associated with IWT, including employment retention, measurable skill gains (MSG), credential attainment, and, where applicable, wage progression of incumbent workers receiving training.
- Data will be collected and analyzed through the Puerto Rico Information System (PRIS), as well as required federal reporting systems, to assess program performance and measure the impact of increased IWT investment.

- DEDC's Monitoring and Compliance Unit will monitor Local Areas to ensure compliance with the program requirements, proper documentation of training activities, and alignment with employer needs and in-demand industry sectors.

7. **Assurance of Posting for Public Comment**

DEDC will be posting this waiver for public comment in conjunction with the WIOA State Plan Modification.

TITLE I-B ASSURANCES

The State Plan must include assurances that:

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The State has implemented a policy to ensure Adult program funds provide a priority in the delivery of training services and individualized career services to individuals who are low income, public assistance recipients and basic skills deficient;	Yes
2. The State has implemented a policy to ensure local areas have a process in place for referring veterans with significant barriers to employment to career services provided by the JVSG program's Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist;	Yes
3. The State established a written policy and procedure that set forth criteria to be used by chief elected officials for the appointment of local workforce investment board members;	Yes
4. The State established written policy and procedures to ensure local workforce investment boards are certified by the governor every two years in accordance with WIOA section 107(c)(2);	Yes
5. Where an alternative entity takes the place of a State Board, the State has written policy and procedures to ensure the alternative entity meets the definition under WIOA section 101(e) and the legal requirements for membership;	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
6. The State established a written policy and procedure for how the individuals and entities represented on the State Workforce Development Board help to determine the methods and factors of distribution, and how the State consults with chief elected officials in local areas throughout the State in determining the distributions;	Yes
7. The State will not use funds received under WIOA Title I to assist, promote, or deter union organizing in accordance with WIOA section 181(b)(7);	Yes
8. The State distributes adult and youth funds received under WIOA equitably throughout the State, and no local area suffers significant shifts in funding from year-to-year during the period covered by this plan;	Yes
9. If a State Workforce Development Board, department, or agency administers State laws for vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, that board, department, or agency cooperates with the agency that administers Wagner-Peyser services, Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and Youth Programs under Title I;	Yes
10. The State agrees to report on the impact and outcomes of its approved waivers in its WIOA Annual Report.	Yes
11. The State has taken appropriate action to secure compliance with the Uniform Guidance at 2 CFR 200 and 2	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
CFR 2900, including that the State will annually monitor local areas to ensure compliance and otherwise take appropriate action to secure compliance with the Uniform Guidance under section WIOA 184(a)(3);	

ADULT PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance 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 two years covered by the plan modification. 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 two years of the plan modification.

While states are not required to submit expected levels of performance for Effectiveness in Serving Employers for PY 2026 and PY 2027 all of core programs are expected to collect data and report as a shared indicator (as directed in guidance) for these years.

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	56.0%	59.0	56.5%	59.5
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	51.6%	62.0	52.1%	62.5
Median Earnings (Second	$3,500.00	$3,900.00	$3,800.00	$4,000.00

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Quarter After Exit)				
Credential Attainment Rate	54.0%	64.5	54.5%	65.0
Measurable Skill Gains	55.5%	70.5	56.0%	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 2026 and 2027.

DISLOCATED PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

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 two years covered by the plan modification. 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 two years of the plan modification.

While states are not required to submit expected levels of performance for Effectiveness in Serving Employers for PY 2026 and PY 2027 all of core programs are expected to collect data and report as a shared indicator (as directed in guidance) for these years.

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	60.0%	60.0	60.5%	60.5
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	60.0%	62.0	60.5%	62.5
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$3,600.00	$3,900.00	$3,900.00	$4,000.00
Credential Attainment Rate	64.0%	70.5	66.0%	71.0
Measurable Skill Gains	46.0%	71.0	47.0%	71.5
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 2026 and 2027.*

YOUTH PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

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 two years covered by the plan modification. 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 two years of the plan modification.

While states are not required to submit expected levels of performance for Effectiveness in Serving Employers for PY 2026 and PY 2027 all of core programs are expected to collect data and report as a shared indicator (as directed in guidance) for these years.

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	52.0%	60.0	52.5%	60.5
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	52.2%	58.0	52.7%	58.5
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$2,500.00	$2,800.00	$2,600.00	$2,900.00
Credential Attainment Rate	35.5%	40.0	39.5%	40.5
Measurable Skill Gains	42.0%	70.0	44.0%	71.5
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 2026 and 2027.

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR WAGNER-PEYSER PROGRAM (EMPLOYMENT SERVICES)

All Program-Specific Requirements provided for the WIOA core programs in this section must be addressed for either a Unified or Combined State Plan.

A. EMPLOYMENT SERVICE STAFF

1. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL STAFF THE PROVISION OF LABOR EXCHANGE SERVICES UNDER THE WAGNER-PEYSER ACT, SUCH AS THROUGH STATE EMPLOYEES, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO STATE MERIT STAFF EMPLOYEES, STAFF OF A SUBRECIPIENT, OR SOME COMBINATION THEREOF.

The Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources (PRDOL) is steadfast in its commitment to providing high-quality labor exchange services under the Wagner-Peyser Act (WP), adhering to recent amendments in regulations. Recognizing the pivotal role of qualified, nonpartisan personnel in ensuring effective service delivery, the Department is strategically leveraging State merit staff employees as the primary workforce for Employment Services (ES).

This strategic decision aligns with the objective of ensuring that labor exchange services are administered by professionals who meet specific and objective qualifications. State merit staff members will undergo comprehensive training to bolster their competence in delivering high-quality services. Furthermore, these professionals will be held to transparent performance standards, contributing significantly to the overall effectiveness and integrity of labor exchange services.

It is worth noting that PRDOL has embraced the 12 competencies developed by the National Employment Counselor Association as a framework for guiding the delivery of ES services. These competencies serve as a solid foundation for the professional development and training of State merit staff, ensuring their proficiency in addressing the diverse needs of individuals seeking reemployment services.

Moving forward, Employment Services under the Wagner-Peyser Act will primarily be facilitated through merit-based state employees. The PRDOL takes pride in its existing pool of human capital distinguished by excellence in knowledge, leadership, and high-quality management, aligning seamlessly with global trends and sectoral needs. The ongoing objective is to persist in recruiting and training talent endowed with exceptional knowledge and leadership capabilities.

Actively recruiting new personnel under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is vital for providing mandated services and meeting the overarching responsibilities of the WP. Equally crucial is the continuous training of existing personnel providing direct services to federally designated high-priority populations, such as veterans and eligible spouses, UI applicants with a higher likelihood of exhausting their benefits (including UCX), and other special target populations identified as in need of career services, such as Migrant and Seasonal Farm Workers (MSFW). This involves equipping them with the skills and tools necessary to deliver these services effectively.

Our commitment to continuous education and training extends to our staff, ensuring they stay updated on essential topics for effective case management with clients. We will persist in providing talent retraining on our island, staying aligned with global trends. This commitment ensures that our personnel remain highly skilled, demonstrating sensitivity and empathy in assisting clients to identify appropriate assistance tailored to their needs. This, in turn, facilitates stable employment and promotes community economic well-being and an enhanced quality of life.

Furthermore, our experienced staff and supervisors continue their training initiatives, actively sharing their knowledge with newly recruited personnel. This aligns with the overarching goal of expanding the knowledge base across all the service programs we offer. Leveraging digital technology, our staff undergoes online training from external entities and other government agencies. This collaborative approach, facilitated through interagency agreements, consistently results in a highly qualified workforce.

2. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL UTILIZE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES FOR EMPLOYMENT SERVICE STAFF TO ENSURE STAFF IS ABLE TO PROVIDE HIGH QUALITY SERVICES TO BOTH JOBSEEKERS AND EMPLOYERS

In the realm of workforce development, the significance of possessing the latest competencies and knowledge cannot be overstated. The commitment to providing high-quality services to both job seekers and employers is at the core of the State's approach within the Employment Services. Central to this commitment is the recognition that the WP staff plays a pivotal role in the success of the workforce system. As articulated in our strategy, we emphasize the imperative of equipping WP staff with the necessary competencies and skills through diverse and effective approaches.

Skills-based training stands out as a foundational element in our approach. By delivering targeted and effective training, we ensure that staff not only

acquire conceptual knowledge but also practice new behaviors and receives valuable feedback on their performance. This ensures a practical understanding of the information and behaviors crucial for delivering high-quality services.

Job assignments are another integral facet of our strategy, providing WP staff with real-world challenges and responsibilities to promote the seamless integration of innovative ideas into their existing roles. This hands-on approach enhances adaptability and problem-solving skills.

Building relationships is recognized as a crucial avenue for learning and development. Through interaction with others, WP staff gains insights and perspectives that contribute to their professional growth. The state is committed to investing necessary and eligible funds in consistent, ongoing, and strategic training, aiming to motivate staff and align their efforts with the goals of the workforce system.

Continuous professional development is not merely a pursuit of competence; it is a commitment to excellence. Actively seeking professional development ensures that knowledge and skills remain relevant and up to date, making WP staff more attuned to the ever-changing trends in the workforce system.

PRDOLHR has invested time and effort in implementing technological changes by integrating new platforms to enhance its services. In this regard, the PRDOLHR has adopted the United States government's Executive Order 13985, "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities through the Federal Government." This order establishes that promoting affirmative equity, civil rights, racial justice, and equal opportunities is the responsibility of the entire country. To address the need for equitable services and equal employment opportunities, funds have been allocated to integrate sign language interpretation services through technology.

Furthermore, our commitment to professional development extends to the training of WP staff on the provisions outlined in the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. This initiative aims to promote both physical and programmatic accessibility, ensuring that our services are accessible to individuals with disabilities. To support this commitment, eligible funds will be allocated for specialized training, including sign language, with the goal of enhancing our services to the deaf community. This underscores our unwavering dedication to inclusivity.

Additionally, our supervisors undergo real-time training using the ASLS VRI APP online platform. This platform addresses the need to effectively communicate with individuals who are audio-impaired and receiving unemployment

insurance, facilitating their access to employment services. This training equips supervisors with the skills necessary to provide personalized services to the deaf community, enabling seamless connections with individuals through online interpreters and further enhancing our ability to meet the unique needs of this community. Through the PRIS system, statistical data will be collected to identify people with disabilities, providing valuable information to integrate new services tailored to their needs.

Since the inception of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), workforce counseling through American Job Centers has remained a top priority. This collaborative process between WP workforce professionals and job seekers, whether conducted in groups or individual activities, empowers job seekers with insights into the labor market, realistic career perspectives, and adaptive career choices.

The responsibilities of WP staff extend to delivering direct services to high-priority populations, including veterans, eligible spouses, and UI applicants at a higher risk of benefit exhaustion. As the landscape of professional services evolves, our commitment to continuous learning and development ensures that WP staff remains at the forefront of excellence in workforce counseling, contributing to the overall success of the workforce system. To meet this responsibility, WP staff will receive specialized training focused on the minimum competencies required to effectively provide all professional services according to WIOA:

1. Individual Counseling (one to one): Refers to a private session (face to face) between an employment specialist and a job seeker. The main objective is to help the job seeker to explore his current situation regarding the selection or changing job or occupation.
2. Group Counseling: Refers to the process by which an employment specialist uses the principles and techniques of group dynamics and leadership roles in a continuous and meaningful way to help a job seeker who have trouble getting or keeping a job due to work-related attitudes, behaviors, or habits. Usually, these group interventions focus on the discussion of a common theme within the rest of the group.
3. Counseling Skills: Refers to the ability to establish a relationship of trust, open and useful to each client, accurately interpreting the feelings as well as verbal and nonverbal expressions, and convey that understanding to the client and any other relevant information and necessary assistance. The employment specialist must have the awareness and knowledge of career development theory and the

ability to support the job seeker through transitions and facilitate decision-making and goal setting. Must have the ability to recognize the need to refer the job seeker to appropriate resources to eliminate barriers to employment and the ability to obtaining (intake) the necessary and effective information to ensure that the job seeker is fit and able to benefit from the programs available in within the One-Stop Centers.

4. Individual and Group Skills Assessment: Refers to the ability to provide a continuous assessment using individual skills and group evaluation and use of formal and informal assessment methods that comply with the regulations of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC); the ability to provide continuous assessment, individual and group settings, involving the assessment and measurement of customer needs, characteristics, potential, individual differences and self-evaluation; and the ability to recognize the needs and special features of all kinds, for example, minorities, women seeking non-traditional and culturally different occupations, immigrants, the disabled, older workers and people with AIDS.

5. Market Information Utilization: Refers to the ability to access, understand and interpret the labor market information and job market trends; the ability to develop and use educational, occupational, and labor market information to help job seekers in their decision-making process and the formulation of employment and career objectives that lead to self-sufficiency; and the ability to develop and use skills standards.

6. Computer Skills: Refers to the ability to apply the principles of employment counseling to the use of the Internet and other online services, including but not limited to testing, job banks (PR.JOBS), job search, preparing and distributing resumes, reports, case management, counseling and maintaining confidentiality of customer data.

7. Individual Employment Plan and Case Management: Refers to the ability to help job seekers to develop and implement an appropriate individual employability plan to help them move from their current situation through any necessary service to improve their employability, including training and supporting services into a suitable job. It involves the knowledge of educational resources and training, sources for financial support, community resources and requirements of the local

labor market; and the ability to manage cases through placement and retention.

8. Placement Skills: Refers to the ability to identify and communicate an understanding of employers staffing needs to develop effective job development contacts and help the job seeker to present his/her qualifications in relation to the employer's needs; the ability to teach job search skills and for job development; the ability to help the job seeker in making decisions related to the work environment in which he/she could be more successful; and the ability to advocate for employment and career development of special target groups.
9. Community Relations Skills: Refers to the ability to help job seekers to get the services needed to address their employment barriers that may interfere with the successful employment and their career goals; the ability to make presentations to community groups and to participate in the working teams of such community groups; the ability to develop information packages; and the ability to associate and establish staff resources with other agencies within the One-Stop Centers.
10. Workload Management and Inter-Personal Relationship Skills: Refers to the ability to coordinate all aspects of the Employment Counseling Program as part of a team effort, resulting in a continuous and significant sequence of client services, agency staff, employers, and the community; and the ability to operate a comprehensive employment resource center.
11. Professional Development Skills: Refers to the ability to develop skills on an individual basis and within the position or profession and demonstrate by example the performance and standards expected of a professional Employment Specialist.
12. Ethical and Legal Aspects: Refers to the ability to meet ethical standards, knowledge of regulations and legislation affecting training and employment, employment services and social reform, such as the EEOC, the Americans with Disabilities Act, professional testing standards, Multicultural Affairs, Family Affairs and one Stop Centers.

Our goal is to have a comprehensive curriculum aligned with these competencies to equip staff with the necessary tools to provide high-quality services to both job seekers and employers. This includes intensive interview techniques, professional assessment administration, labor market information access and interpretation, personalized service strategies, identification of

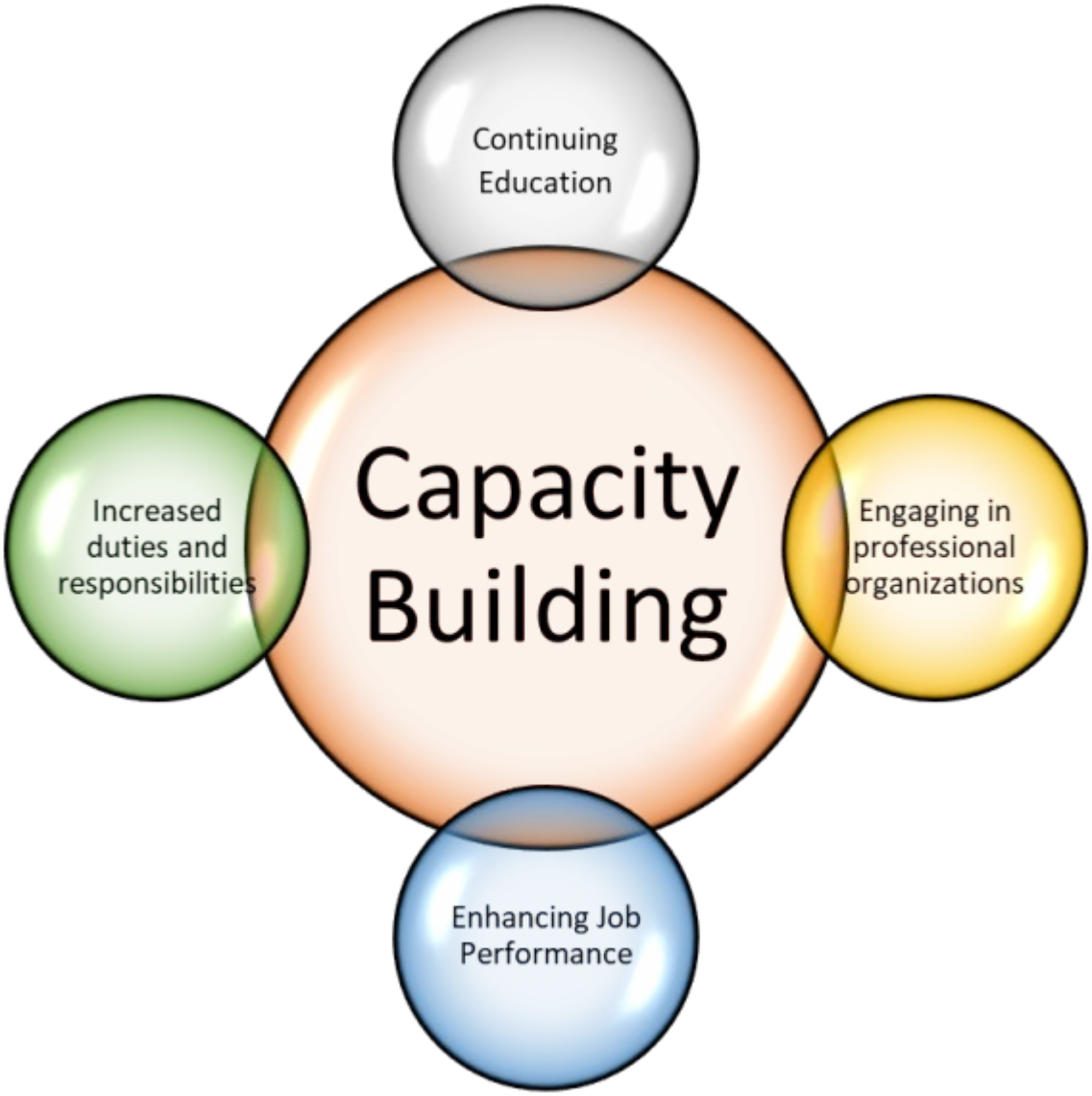
interpersonal skills training needs, partnership development with the workforce, and awareness of available support services.

Additionally, ongoing staff development activities may include:

1. Comprehensive online resources on the Employment Service's Intranet using MS SharePoint.
2. Comprehensive training on external online resources such as mynextstep.org and myskillsmyfuture.org.
3. On-the-job training for new staff in state and local offices.
4. Continuous assessment of training needs by local Employment Service Managers and partners.
5. Participation in Local Boards to stay informed about local, state, and national issues.

Our commitment is to continue training our staff, providing them with the necessary competencies and skills for professional service delivery, integrating advanced technology in education with digital tools that foster online learning. This involves:

1. **Continuing Education:** Offering In-person and virtual courses and workshops, certificates, accreditations, or other credentials through educational programs.
2. **Engaging in Professional Organizations:** Attending local, regional, national, and international meetings, conferences, and workshops sponsored by professional organizations; serving as an official, board member, or committee member; coordinating events sponsored by the Employment Service and/or the American Job Center.
3. **Enhancing Job Performance:** Receiving innovative training on new technological platforms, systems, and processes.
4. **Increased Duties and Responsibilities:** Taking on new challenges in the current position, short and long-term assignments.



The staff at American Job Centers under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) plays a pivotal role in supporting job seekers, and their effectiveness is crucial to the success of WIOA. To enhance the professional services provided, we have actively sought input from the WP staff through feedback mechanisms such as focus groups. This cooperative approach guarantees that the knowledge and experiences of the staff are effectively captured and disseminated through comprehensive training programs.

The feedback received has been instrumental in identifying key areas for inclusion in staff training. These encompass a range of topics essential for professional development, including HR practices, general skills, and supervisor-specific subjects. Noteworthy among the suggested topics are:

- Discrimination in Employment
- Diversity and Human Relations in the Workplace

- Documentation and Confidentiality: The Healthy Management of Information
- Empowerment and Development of a High-Performance Work Team
- Conversational English (Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced Levels)
- Conflict Mediation: Essential Tools for Today's Supervisor
- Results-Oriented Work Plans
- Strategic Planning in Public Relations

To facilitate the delivery of these training modules, we are establishing collaboration agreements with other government agencies that offer educational courses. The interagency training approach ensures a comprehensive and diverse learning experience for the WP staff, fostering continuous improvement and professional growth.

In summary, the proactive integration of staff insights and the incorporation of a wide array of relevant topics in training programs underscore our commitment to providing high-quality professional services to job seekers under WIOA. Through collaboration and ongoing learning, we aim to equip our staff with the knowledge and skills necessary for success in their roles.

3. DESCRIBE STRATEGIES DEVELOPED TO SUPPORT TRAINING AND AWARENESS ACROSS CORE PROGRAMS AND THE UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (UI) PROGRAM AND THE TRAINING PROVIDED FOR EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND WIOA STAFF ON IDENTIFICATION OF UI ELIGIBILITY ISSUES AND REFERRAL TO UI STAFF FOR ADJUDICATION

In order to provide supportive guidance to the staff of the Employment Service Division, the Unemployment Insurance (UI) Division, responsible for administering the Federal Unemployment Insurance Program (UI), and the Operators of the American Job Centers, for the implementation of the provisions of the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) regarding UI Programs, a system has been integrated to share training with all personnel from various programs aligned to assist individuals in job search, access employment, education, training services, and support services to succeed in the labor market and to align employers with skilled workers needed to compete in the global economy.

Cross Training

The UI provides training, technical assistance, and support to all personnel from key partners serving job seekers and local employers to ensure that

program partners are highly engaged in local and state workforce partnerships that allow for constant exchange of information on core programs, UI legislation, and available programs. This integration is designed to flow seamlessly within the One-Stop Centers.

Leveraging virtual platforms, training webinars have been integrated for staff with outstanding academic qualifications and extensive experience, qualifying them as internal educators who will continue to provide ongoing education to merit staff. These training sessions will be recorded and shared across each service program to keep staff updated with new information.

Our commitment is to continue providing cross-training on WP services to veterans, UI applicants, MSFW, and general job seekers. Additionally, training integration will cover areas such as the WP Complaint System, Agricultural Recruitment System (ARS), the refocusing of State Jobs for Veterans Grants (JVSG), and its impact on service delivery by WIOA partners, Reemployment Services, and Eligibility Assessment Program (RESEA), UI policies, rules, procedures, screening, and resolution of UI eligibility issues.

Identification of Unemployment Insurance (UI) Eligibility Issues

To meet the requirement of providing necessary information related to UI eligibility, the Employment Service Division coordinates with the Unemployment Insurance Division to ensure that:

1. An effective feedback system is in place to notify UI staff if the claimant reported as indicated, and participated in eligibility assessment and/or services, as applicable;
2. The feedback system is established for all reemployment services the UI claimant is required to participate in, including a process to refer any eligibility issues identified during the eligibility review to a UI adjudicator;
3. Employment Service staff are properly trained to conduct a comprehensive eligibility assessment and identify potential eligibility issues, referring them to a UI adjudicator;
4. Employment Service staff are adequately trained to document information for use by UI staff to adjudicate any UI eligibility issues, as applicable;
5. Only merit-based UI staff have the authority to resolve UI eligibility issues.

In accordance with the grant requirements for the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) Program, a comprehensive review of UI

eligibility is conducted under the Eligibility Review Program (ERP). Section 303(a)(1) of the Social Security Act (SSA) requires "methods of management... as the United States Secretary of Labor determines are reasonably calculated to ensure full payment of unemployment compensation when due." This necessitates the implementation of procedures and policies for UI eligibility information by ES and/or WIOA staff to promptly identify UI eligibility issues and refer them to UI staff for proper adjudication according to state UI law.

To ensure ES meets the needs of UI, there are policies and procedures to define and timely provide required information related to the participation or availability requirements of a claimant. UI applicants referred to RESEA will be subject to this eligibility review as part of their participation in RESEA. However, all UI applicants not referred to RESEA and receiving employment services will be subject to the same eligibility review by WP staff as part of the initial assessment. These services will be provided by merit-based WP state staff. WP/RESEA staff will review WP/RESEA participants who have completed assessment interviews and refer them to UI for adjudication, as appropriate.

B. EXPLAIN HOW THE STATE WILL PROVIDE INFORMATION AND MEANINGFUL ASSISTANCE TO INDIVIDUALS REQUESTING ASSISTANCE IN FILING A CLAIM FOR UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION THROUGH ONE-STOP CENTERS, AS REQUIRED BY WIOA AS A CAREER SERVICE

Consistent with the Employment Service policies and procedures which require an integrated approach to its reemployment strategy to strategically coordinate resources and activities serving the unemployed community, policies and procedures are in place to address the provision of services to UI claimants regarding assistance to individuals filing a claim for UI through the American Job Centers.

This operational guide established the guidelines, policies, and procedures to be followed by the WP and UI staff (responsible for the administration of the Federal Unemployment Insurance Program (UI)), in the implementation of the provisions of the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) with relation to UI Programs, and to:

1. Recommend the Division of Unemployment Insurance to continue working with other partners in the Workforce System, in the development and implementation of strategies that support WIOA's vision, as described in the Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 19-14.

2. Urge the Division of Unemployment Insurance and the Division of Employment Service to coordinate with State Boards and Local Boards on how best to most efficiently use UI programs including the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA), as they develop integrated strategies for service delivery through American Job Centers under WIOA.

Career Services under WIOA Include the Provision of "Information and Assistance" in Connection with the Filing of a UI Claim.

The integrated workforce system established by WIOA is intended to provide participants with a unique and comprehensive experience that includes a professional level of service provided in a timely manner. WIOA requires, as part of its career services, the provision of information and assistance to individuals in connection with the filing of a UI claim (WIOA Section 134(c)(2)(A)(x)), WIOA 20 CFR 678.430(a)(10)).

To provide this access and the meaningful assistance to individuals requesting assistance in filing a claim for unemployment compensation through the One-Stop Centers, assistance will be available through:

- UI orientation provided to every new claimant explaining the full range of workforce services available to help them return to work by Wagner-Peyser merit staff and/or duly trained WIOA staff.
- Online access via https://desempleo.trabajo.pr.gov/reclamantes/ where customers can file electronically from career centers, home, libraries, or any other Internet portal.
- Fully staffed resource centers at all career centers, including Internet access, copies, phones, fax, and resource libraries as permitted due to COVID-19 pandemic.
- Access points at One-Stop Centers and career centers across the State.
- An opportunity for each claimant to access in-person reemployment services as they come to career centers and One-Stop Centers to complete the UI filing process.
- Access to professional and experienced staff for the preparation of resumes, registration in ES as a requirement for claimants and job matching services.
- The availability of staff, technology, and written materials in a variety of languages to meet the needs of all customers.

- Fully accessible services, online and in person, to serve any customer with a disability.
- Joint participation of UI staff with other workforce partners in large layoff events.
- Daily referrals of customers from workforce partners to UI specialists to ensure that customers have access to all benefits to which they are entitled.

People who directly seek career services from the One-Stop Career System should receive services beyond what they could get on their own using self-service tools, such as public Internet portals and telephone services. The goal is for individuals to be able to receive more robust or "meaningful" staff-assisted services, as needed.

As set forth in 20 CFR 678.305(d), access to each partner's programs and services means:

- Have a representative of this program physically present in the American Job Centers.
- Have a representative of a different partner program, physically present at the American Job Center properly trained to provide information to clients about the programs, services, and activities available through all partner programs; or
- Have a direct link available, using technology, to a representative of a partner program who can provide meaningful information or services.

The methods or means of providing access to the different partner programs are contained in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). These have been coordinated with the Local Boards and the Operators of the One-Stop Career System.

In the context of providing assistance to UI's claimants, "significant assistance" means *having staff in the American Job Centers properly trained in the filing of a UI claim, and in the rights and responsibilities of the claimants*. Employment Service staff is responsible for providing the necessary assistance in filing UI's claims, if requested, or if the individual is identified as needing the service due to barriers such as limited Spanish proficiency, disabilities, or other barriers. The staff who provide this assistance may come from UI, Wagner-Peyser, or other AJC staff who have been duly trained to provide assistance and service in the taking of claims thus facilitating the daily acceptance of information. Costs associated with providing this information and assistance

to individuals filing UI claims may be met with administrative funds from UI's grant under Title III of the Social Security Act or through a combination of funds from other programs that are consistent with the language authorizing such programs and Federal cost principles.

The provision of meaningful information or services is carried out using technology or direct liaison to an appropriate representative of a partner program. As described in 20 CFR 678.305(d)(3)(i), a "direct link" means providing a direct connection at an American Job Center within a reasonable time, by telephone, or through real-time Internet communication, with a representative of a partner program who may provide program information or services to the customer.

The level and timeliness of the remote service is comparable to the assistance the person would receive if staff were assisting such an individual in person at the AJC. This means that, if an individual in an AJC is directed to a telephone for assistance regarding an UI claim, there must be a dedicated telephone line to serve the customer in a timely manner (20 CFR 20 CFR 678.305(d)(3)(i)). Individuals should not simply be directed to a general information line or dial-up line with UI Call Center, where the individual is placed on hold along with all other claimants who have called for service. Providing only a telephone number, link to a web page, information, pamphlets, or other resources and materials does not constitute a "direct link" (20 CFR 20 CFR 678.305(d)(3)(i)). ES must ensure that, if assistance is provided remotely using technology, it should be one that allows trained staff to provide assistance in a timely manner.

It is important to emphasize that UI eligibility determinations must be made by UI merit staff who are responsible for carrying out this activity. As set out in UIPL 12-01, *Outsourcing of Unemployment Compensation Administrative Functions*, and explained in more detail in UIPL 12-01, Change 1, *Outsourcing Unemployment Compensation Administrative Functions – Claim Taking,* only merit staff (state employee) will ask, either in person at the AJC, or remotely, answer questions, provide advice or make decisions that may affect UI eligibility of claimants. For example, for assistance in completing a UI claim, only UI merit staff may provide specific advice to the individual, including an indication of the possible effects on UI eligibility based on the individual's specific circumstances or actions. And, in relation to services to claimants, only UI merit staff can adjudicate UI issues that may arise and that may include the search for data by all parties (partners).

Some of the areas of opportunity that have been implemented to improve the integration of UI into the Single Management System include, but are not limited to:

-
    - Access by UI claimants to the full range of services available at the AJCs.
    - Referral of UI claimants to reemployment services through the Worker Profiling and Reemployment Services (WPRS) and/or the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment Programa (RESEA).
    - Ensure that claimants meet eligibility requirements (such as, job search, register with the Employment Service as provided by state law, participate in reemployment services as required under the RESEA and WPRS programs), and ensure that there is a feedback loop to provide UI Program staff with information about any potential eligibility issues.
    - Ensure that claimants are fully notified of the deadlines and eligibility requirements associated with TRA, the Alternative Trade Adjustment Assistance (ATAA) Program, and the Reemployment Trade Adjustment Assistance (RTAA) Programs, and that communication with the case managers of TAA participants is an enabler.
-
    - Coordination with the Rapid Response teams to provide services to employers and workers in situations of mass dismissal and carry out activities to file a UI claim to receive UI compensation benefits.

C. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S STRATEGY FOR PROVIDING REEMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE TO UI CLAIMANTS AND OTHER UNEMPLOYED INDIVIDUALS

Reemployment Services to UI Claimants

In March 2023, the Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources (PRDOLHR) contracted with The Policy & Research Group (PRG) to conduct an impact and lessons-learned evaluation of its Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program. The goal of this effort is to ensure that PRDOLHR meets the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) tiered-evidence

requirements for RESEA, while contributing to the evidence base on reemployment strategies.

Since 2010, PRDOLHR has operated the Reemployment Eligibility and Assessment (REA) program and its successor, the RESEA program. RESEA "remain a high priority" for DOL because there is "strong evidence that these types of reemployment programs and service delivery strategies are effective."

On February 9, 2018, amendments to the Social Security Act permanently authorized the RESEA program. The program is guided by four goals:

1. To improve employment outcomes of Unemployment Compensation (UC) recipients and to 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 alignment with the broader vision of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of increased program integration and service delivery for job seekers, including UC claimants.
4. To establish reemployment services and eligibility assessment as an entry point for claimants into other workforce system partner programs.

The foundational element of the RESEA program is an in-person orientation and one-on-one meeting (initial RESEA) between the claimant and a RESEA/Wagner-Peyser (WP) merit staff. The following core components are required by RESEA:

1. A UC eligibility review.
2. Provision of customized labor market and career information.
3. Co-enrollment in the Wagner-Peyser Act-funded Employment Service program.
4. Support with an Individual Reemployment Plan.
5. Referrals and information provided for additional reemployment services and other AJC services, resources, and trainings, as appropriate.

Primarily, RESEA activities are individual one-on-one appointments between the claimant and an RESEA career specialist. In Puerto Rico, all claimants are

assigned to in-person services at an AJC serving the municipality in which they live. PRDOLHR allows claimants to participate virtually, however, on a case by-case basis. This may involve meetings over Microsoft Teams, over the phone, or other virtual platforms deemed appropriate for the case. Although we have the flexibility to provide Reemployment services virtually, the priority is to provide services in person.

By providing comprehensive reemployment services that are targeted to priority populations, specifically those most likely to exhaust their UI benefits, the goal of the RESEA program in Puerto Rico is to increase employment, retention, and earnings of unemployment benefit recipients, and in doing so, improve the quality of the workforce to sustain economic growth and enhance productivity and competitiveness.

All RESEA participants attend an orientation during their initial RESEA visit. Orientations are conducted weekly at all AJCs that have RESEA service capacity. In most cases the orientation is an individual session, though local staff have the flexibility to schedule a group orientation if preferred. During the orientation presentation, claimants are introduced to the RESEA program. They are further provided with an overview of services available at the AJC and re-employment services available through WagnerPeyser and other partner programs. Claimants are also informed during orientation of the requirements for RESEA participation and of the adverse effects on their eligibility to continue receiving UI benefits if they do not fulfill these requirements. These include the requirement for the number of RESEA meetings required. The orientation is followed by the initial RESEA one-on-one appointment.

All UI claimants referred to RESEA must attend an initial RESEA appointment. During the initial RESEA, claimants undergo an unemployment benefits eligibility assessment, complete an initial evaluation with RESEA career coaches, create an Individual Reemployment Plan, and receive referrals to additional reemployment services as needed. In Table 1, we provide details of the initial RESEA content.

Subsequent RESEA sessions are provided if recommended by the RESEA coordinator. In practice, however, all claimants are scheduled for subsequent sessions if they are not reemployed by the time, he/she is scheduled for a subsequent .26 There are no limits on the number of subsequent sessions that can be provided under the current RESEA program. Each subsequent session includes an eligibility review, review of the claimant's job search activities, and any additional reemployment services offered in the local area.

Table 1. *Initial RESEA Overview27*

Topic	Content
Unemployment Benefits Eligibility Assessment	At each RESEA meeting, the RESEA representative conducts an eligibility review. The eligibility review is completed in a one-on-one setting by the RESEA representative using Microsoft Forms or on the identical paper form. The claimant's responses are recorded and then examined by RESEA staff, who determine if there are concerns that should be referred to the UI adjudications section for investigation. UI claimants in Puerto Rico are required to make at least three contacts per week with employers to demonstrate that they are actively searching for a job. The claimant is responsible for keeping a record of their job search activities and presenting this information during the eligibility assessment. If the claimant fails to present evidence of their job search efforts, the RESEA coordinator will notify the UI adjudications unit. The consequences of not meeting the job search requirement may include a temporary stop in UI payments or total disqualification of UI benefits.
RESEA Initial Evaluation	The initial RESEA evaluation focuses on reemployment services. The first step of the evaluation process includes an initial assessment to determine if the claimant is job ready using various assessment tools including the *Self-Assessment Form*, the *Job Search Skills*

Topic	Content
	Assessment Form, and the *Job Search Activity Log Form*. The claimant reviews completed forms with an RESEA representative and/or career counselor alongside a review of the claimant's employment history and educational level to determine their job prospects. As part of this step, the RESEA representative provides the claimant with LMI to assist in their job search. The evaluation process may also include the use of tools such as MiProximoPaso.org and MySkillsMyFuture.org, which are free and available to claimants at all AJCs through the Resource Center or online from their mobile devices, tablets, and computers. Following this step, an RESEA occupational counselor conducts a deeper review of the claimant's skills, knowledge, and abilities to identify the minimum acceptable skills necessary for the claimant to improve their chances of reemployment. These two reviews serve as the basis for preparing the PIR.
Development of Individual Reemployment Plan (*Plan Individual de Reempleo* – PIR)	An RESEA representative works with each claimant to help them to create a PIR. The PIR contains specific steps, agreed upon between the claimant and the representative, that have been determined to be most appropriate to achieve their reemployment. The cooperative creation of a PIR focuses on the

Topic	Content
	claimant's unique goals, relevant experience, and barriers to employment.28 The PIR includes reemployment services and job search activities (e.g., resume workshop, interview skills training) that the claimant should undertake, and any AJC services, approved training program, or other referrals that may benefit them. Scheduled reemployment services must be documented in the PIR, as well as details to reflect which party (i.e., claimant or staff) is responsible for each action. During development of the PIR, the claimant receives LMI specific to their individual skills and interests to assist in planning their job search activities. Staff review the PIR Responsibility Statement with the participant to clarify program responsibilities, and each party signs the document. A copy of the PIR is provided to the claimant for implementation, and any proposed changes to the plan are made jointly with the claimant and documented in the plan.
Referrals to Reemployment Services	As needed, claimants are referred to reemployment services. Each reemployment service provided must be electronically documented in the Participant Record Information System (PRIS) in accordance with the policies and procedures established in the *Puerto Rico Servicio de Empleo* 4-14,

Topic	Content
	Protocol for Referral to Career Services. The RESEA representative, Wagner-Peyser staff, AJC staff, or other WIOA partners may offer any number of career services to claimants; these services are authorized under the WIOA Act of 2014. The RESEA representative reminds the claimant that they may be subject to disqualification of their benefits if they do not attend any reemployment services to which they are referred.

Reemployment Services to Other Unemployed Individuals

Wagner-Peyser, along with other partner's staff, is responsible for the provision of comprehensive employment and placement services to jobseekers who are most in need and face multiple barriers to reemployment. This employment and placement services are available to job seekers thorough the American Job Centers on a customer–centric approach for the deliverance of services, aligned with WIOA, for providing reemployment assistance to UI claimants and other unemployed individuals (job seekers) as long they are eligible to work in the United States including, but not limited to:

- Providing the job seeker, not only job search assistance, but information on the AJC services.
- Encouraging job seekers to attend an AJC orientation and refer them to subsequent services, as appropriate.
- Detailed labor market information related to growth occupations and industries, and wage surveys to assist with decision making in the selection of a better career opportunity or looking for a new job.
- An orientation about the services available through the AJC with emphasis on access to information available on the labor market and careers, delivery of labor market information unique to the experience, skills, and desired occupation of the claimant.
- Assistance in the use of basic services available and self-help offered within the AJC through the use resources room or virtually (Internet).

- An initial assessment of skills relative to available jobs preferably with an Employment Counselor to identify strengths, weaknesses and barriers after the claimant receives the initial orientation by the ES/RESEA staff.
- Referrals to appropriate services offered by other partners within the AJC such as self-assessment, information on education and training, interviewing techniques, networking, occupational exploration, and online resources, among other services.
- Development of an Individual Reemployment Plan which should include job search activities, appropriate topics such as preparing resumes and strategies workshops, job search and/or authorized training.
- Workshops on effective job search.
- Interviewing techniques and resume development.
- An overview of multiple self-service employment resources.
- Direct referrals to job training, educational and supportive service opportunities in the community.

The provision of reemployment services is of high relevance during recessions and high unemployment periods. As a result, Wagner-Peyser will continue focusing its attention and resources to continue better integration and service connection with the services provided through the AJCs under WIOA. The goal is to ensure that jobseekers have access to the full range of employment services and training through the AJCs. Most of the employment and placement services are done through staff assisted services. Nevertheless, jobseekers have access to the whole range of services provided by the AJCs such as self-assisted services, group presentation and customized one-on-one assistance. Jobseekers who need more specialized services according to their needs (e.g., veterans, migrant and seasonal farmworkers, UI claimants) receive more in-depth career services to further their career goals through the respective programs.

D. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE W-P FUNDS TO SUPPORT UI CLAIMANTS, AND THE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN W-P AND UI, AS APPROPRIATE INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING:

1. COORDINATION OF AND PROVISION OF LABOR EXCHANGE SERVICES FOR UI CLAIMANTS AS REQUIRED BY THE WAGNER-PEYSER ACT;

The PRDOLHR administers the WP Labor Exchange System. During PY22, the Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources implemented

several initiatives and strategies utilizing the 10% Wagner-Peyser governor's reserve. Notably, one of these initiatives is Talento Infinito.

The Talento Infinito program was initiated by the Department of Labor and Human Resources in May 2023 with the aim of enhancing the employability of individuals with functional diversity in Puerto Rico. The program comprises various components:

1. Talent Education Program

The Talento Infinito program was tailored to the specific needs of its registered members, providing them with the essential employability skills required to succeed in the job market. The program covered a range of topics, including Growth Mindset, Resume & LinkedIn Preparation, Basic Knowledge of My Rights, Managing Anxiety and My Emotions, Job Interviews & Job Search Tools, and Assertive Communication.

2. Service Provider Education Program

Education service providers were certified to create a sustainable employability ecosystem for talent. It is crucial for them to understand the labor market's needs, job offers, and employers' requirements. The program covered various topics, including the most in-demand technical and essential skills, the latest trends in resumes, interviews, and job search platforms, as well as training on the exclusive Radiography Talento Infinito tool, which aims to align talent effectively with the demanded positions in the labor market.

3. Employer Education Program

As part of the program, participating companies were certified as Inclusive Companies of Talento Infinito. The programmer covered legal aspects of employability in infinite talent, recruiting infinite talent, and integrating infinite talent.

4. Talento Infinito Integrated Services Center

The Talento Infinito Service Center is responsible for coordinating and facilitating various services for talent, companies, and educational service providers. These services include x-rays, resume creation or revision, interview internships, career coaching, professional photography, job search assistance, and job application support, among others.

In addition, by 2024, the PRDOLHR will implement a new Labor Exchange System powered by leading technology based on AI to improve the lives and careers of its citizens known as Portal de Empleo y Reclutamiento para

Facilitar la Integración Laboral (PERFIL). Through this effort, Puerto Rico will be able to create family-sustaining career opportunities for jobseekers and connect employers to the skillsets they need to thrive. The platform may allow jobseekers to register and create their online professional profile. Everyone can access through www.perfil.trabajo.pr.gov.

With this leading technology:

- **Employers will have faster access to qualified candidates:** Easily source with high quality candidate pipelines, deep understanding of candidates' skills and broad outreach through campaigns and access to diverse talent.
- **Job seekers have a consumer-like self-service experience:** Career planner, recommended jobs, personalized resumes, mentoring, and mobile device support.
- **Matching talent at scale with AI:** Match candidates to specialized training and career development opportunities. Build faster time to value as a strategic service provider.
- **Centralized marketplace for employers and job seekers:** Manage employers, job posting and job seeker application workflows in one centralized marketplace.

From a job seeker's point of view, the platform provides the ability to:

- **Make Job Searches a Thing of the Past**: Explainable AI-matching empowers candidates to discover the best fit roles for them.
- **Intelligently Personalize Engagement**: Tailor messages over the channel of their choice, all for specific candidates or an entire talent pool.
- **Reduce Hiring Friction**: Use intelligence and automation throughout the entire hiring process to keep candidates engaged.

From an employer's perspective, the platform provides the ability to:

- **Access top candidates matched by AI**: See high quality pipeline of candidates coming to the employer through AI matching.
- **Interact with Job Seekers**: Contact Job Seekers through email, invite the best ones to apply, and manage the best prospects efficiently.
- **Calibrate positions to fine tune AI**: Define the skills, experience, ideal candidates, and target companies for your positions.

The platform is Internet based therefore job seekers may access it through AJCs resource centers where job seekers can conduct job search and resume creation activities by using resources such as computers and phones, respond to employment opportunities. In addition to self-service options, claimants can also receive staff-assisted services, such as job search workshops, assistance with access and navigating the new platform, individualized labor market information, referral to veteran services, and referral to education, training, and supportive services, including Federal electronic tools such as MyNextMove and MySkillsMyFuture and use of fax and copier machines, telephone, resume writing and development, career exploration, among other services. These services are available to all job seekers including UI claimants. Both UI and WP program representatives are party to the MOU with other local area partners to identify the service delivery. The PRDOLHR programs, including UI, are committed to their roles as partners within the AJCs and consistently collaborate internally and with the local areas to further support the spirit of WIOA. These two partners are also coordinating internally within the PRDOLHR as this agency administers both programs.

In summary, PRDOLHR will use WP funding to support the reemployment and related services to UI claimants. ES continues providing labor exchange services as required by 20 CFR 652.3.

2. REGISTRATION OF UI CLAIMANTS WITH THE STATE'S EMPLOYMENT SERVICE IF REQUIRED BY STATE LAW;

UI claimants are mandated by state law to register with the employment service (WP) as a prerequisite for eligibility to receive UI compensation. After filing their UI claim online, claimants must visit the nearest career center to complete their registration with WP.

Beginning around the end of the first quarter in 2024, the new UI platform system, Geographic Unemployment System (GUS), will initiate a request to the WIOA State Management Information System (PRIS). This request aims to verify if a claimant is registered within the system as a WP participant, as mandated by law. GUS will transmit a daily file to PRIS containing information about all claimants in the system.

Subsequently, PRIS will respond to GUS, confirming whether the listed claimants are registered WP participants. Claimants reported as not registered will experience a suspension of their UI benefits until PRIS verifies their WP registration status.

3. ADMINISTRATION OF THE WORK TEST FOR THE STATE UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION SYSTEM, INCLUDING MAKING ELIGIBILITY ASSESSMENTS (FOR REFERRAL TO UI ADJUDICATION, IF NEEDED), AND PROVIDING JOB FINDING AND PLACEMENT SERVICES FOR UI CLAIMANTS; AND

UI claimants in Puerto Rico receiving UI benefits must be able and available to work as required by law and be actively seeking full-time work. Amendments to the UI law in Puerto Rico in 2012, established that if an individual earned most wages in the base period used to establish the claim from part-time work, the individual would be allowed to restrict their work search part-time and can reject a full-time job offer. The only exceptions to the work search requirements in Puerto Rico are for the following:

- Individuals with a job attachment, which would include individuals for whom their employer has filed a "partial" unemployment claim for them or those individuals with a definite recall to work (the law does not establish a predetermined period to return to work).
- Union members in good standing.
- Individuals who are approved and enrolled in an approved training program by the Director of the Bureau of Employment Security.

The primary work test is done through the UI benefit certification Form 566, which includes a question about whether the individuals can be available and actively seeking employment. A negative response places an issue on the certification, which cannot be removed until a statement is obtained regarding availability. If an issue is determined, a benefits eligibility review is performed by the UI benefits interview specialist or claims examiner and a determination released, if in order. During the initial claims filing application, individuals are asked questions regarding their availability. Negative responses require adjudication of the potential availability issue by a UI claim examiner or service specialist.

Administration of the work test is also performed through the RESEA. During the in-person appointments, a UI eligibility review is performed, and the RESEA staff interview the claimant about been able and available for work and any barriers to employment they may be facing. During this work test staff review the individual's work search, discuss the individual's availability, and any barriers to work. WP Placement Officer staff have regular contact with employers and receive notice when individuals fail to report to an interview or refuse work – resulting in an issue on the individual's claim. This can include employers reporting individuals who do not report for interviews, individuals who are incarcerated, or are otherwise not able, available, and/or actively

seeking work. In the event a potential issue is discovered from any source, an unemployment benefits interview is scheduled with a claim examiner. If the individual is not able, available, and actively seeking work (and is not exempted from work search), an appropriate determination regarding UI benefits is released.

The other work test is done through WP at the one-stop-centers. If a UI claimant walk-in into an AJC for employment and/or placement services, WP staff will perform the work test and contact the UI adjudication unit when they become aware of UI claimant's refusal of suitable employment or failure to attend scheduled interviews.

4. PROVISION OF REFERRALS TO AND APPLICATION ASSISTANCE FOR TRAINING AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES.

The integration of WP within the American Job Centers in Puerto Rico allows for the orderly provision of services to job seekers and the provision of referral to and application assistance for training and educational programs and resources. It is of utmost importance to WP to coordinate the integration of these services, which is a primary goal under WIOA. This brings together the core programs to provide the whole range of services seamlessly and coordinated to individuals seeking services at the career centers providing information to job seekers on community resources, labor market information, GED, occupational training, OJT, and support services that make training possible to enhance an individual's ability to return to work. The network works as the "front door" to the workforce system. WP staff from roles are inserted in the workflow with the responsibility of identifying job seekers' needs, assist them with UI, employment and reemployment assistance, trade services, automated resources, workshops, and referrals to more intensive services such as training, which are provided by WIOA through local boards, and other partners.

RESEA participants are referred to the Dislocated Workers program for eligibility and leverage of resources for other services not provided by WP. This will serve as an access point to inform UI customers about other WIOA Title I and other partner programs and services. This collaborative partnership facilitates a streamlined referral process for UI customers to WIOA programs and services within the AJC system.

E. AGRICULTURAL OUTREACH PLAN (AOP). EACH STATE AGENCY MUST DEVELOP AN AOP EVERY FOUR YEARS AS PART OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN REQUIRED UNDER SECTIONS 102 OR 103 OF WIOA. THE AOP MUST INCLUDE AN ASSESSMENT OF NEED. AN ASSESSMENT NEED DESCRIBES THE

UNIQUE NEEDS OF FARMWORKERS IN THE AREA BASED ON PAST AND PROJECTED AGRICULTURAL AND FARMWORKER ACTIVITY IN THE STATE. SUCH NEEDS MAY INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO: EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING, AND HOUSING.

1. ASSESSMENT OF NEED. PROVIDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF FARMWORKERS IN THE AREA BASED ON PAST AND PROJECTED AGRICULTURAL AND FARMWORKER ACTIVITY IN THE STATE. SUCH NEEDS MAY INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO: EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING, AND HOUSING.

The Agricultural Outreach Plan (AOP) is a crucial component mandated under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) for each State agency, requiring a comprehensive update every four years as part of the Unified State Plan outlined in sections 102 or 103 of WIOA. The primary objective of the AOP is to conduct a needs assessment.

In alignment with the amendments introduced by WIOA, the Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources (PRDOLHR) assumes responsibility for delivering services to Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers (MSFW) in a manner that is both qualitatively equivalent and quantitatively proportionate to services offered to non-MSFWs. Recognizing the considerable challenges faced by MSFWs in achieving basic educational goals and securing sustainable employment, the PRDOLHR addresses impediments such as transportation issues, language barriers, and workplace hazards.

Efforts are directed at overcoming these challenges, with the PRDOLHR ensuring transportation for MSFWs through their employers. A range of services, including job search assistance, counseling, testing, and referral services, along with various training programs available under WIOA and the National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP), is extended to all MSFWs. Outreach activities involve in-site visits to MSFWs, offering orientation and counseling services. To mitigate exposure to workplace hazards, the PRDOLHR employs a housing checklist compliant with safety and security regulations.

According to WP regulations (20 CFR 653.107), an Agricultural Annual Outreach Plan (AOP) must be submitted annually. As part of the Unified State Plan mandated by WIOA, the AOP for Program Year (PY) 2024 is included,

outlining strategies for serving domestic MSFWs and H-2A foreign guest workers not reached by standard intake activities. This plan spans from July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2027.

The Wagner-Peyser Act, amended by WIOA, emphasizes that the full spectrum of employment and training services for the agricultural community, encompassing both MSFWs and agricultural employers, must be provided within the One-Stop Centers network. This commitment ensures equitable access to a comprehensive array of services for MSFWs, aligning with the Charles R. Richey Order of 1973 addressing civil rights violations against MSFWs.

Puerto Rico holds historical significance as a designated MSFW State reflecting a high number concentration of MSFW in the following local areas: Southwest, Mayaguez, North Central, Southeast, Guayama, and South Central.

(***1) Assessment of Need. Provide an assessment of the unique needs of farmworkers in the area based on past and projected agricultural and farmworker activity in the State. Such needs may include but are not limited to employment, training, and housing.***

The Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources (PRDOLHR) recognizes the unique needs of farmworkers in the region. To address these needs comprehensively, the department has implemented the Agricultural Outreach Plan (AOP) and associated outreach initiatives, aligning with the requirements of the 2023-2027 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) State Unified Plan.

A Comprehensive Assessment:

The Agricultural Outreach Plan (AOP) mandates a thorough assessment of the specific requirements of farmworkers, encompassing employment, training, and housing. This assessment is grounded in historical and anticipated agricultural and farmworker activities within the state. The AOP

serves as a guide for the 20 CFR 653.107(i-p) requirement, directing the PRDOLHR to operate an Outreach Program targeting MSFWs who may not typically engage with local Employment Service offices.

Geographical Focus:

The PRDOLHR has strategically established six significant career centers in agriculturally significant areas across the state. These centers play a crucial role in serving MSFWs by providing a range of employment-related services.

These needs will be a priority for the following six significant career centers:

Career Service Servicing Areas serving MSFW

Career Center Locations	Municipalities served
North Central Region	Quebradillas, Camuy, Hatillo, Arecibo, Lares, Utuado, Jayuya, Adjuntas
Southeast Region	Humacao, San Lorenzo, Juncos, Las Piedras, Maunabo, Patillas, Yabucoa
AMSI Guayama Region	Guayama, Arroyo
South Central Region	Coamo, Villalba, Juana Díaz, Santa Isabel, Salinas,
Southwest Region	San Germán, Cabo Rojo, Hormigueros, Lajas, Sabana Grande, Maricao, Yauco, Guayanilla, Peñuelas, Guánica
Mayaguez/Las Marías Region	Mayagüez, Las Marías

Source: PRDOLHR.

By positioning these centers strategically, the PRDOLHR ensures a proactive approach to meeting the employment-related needs of MSFWs in various localities.

Outreach Initiatives:

The Outreach Program delineates activities designed to furnish an extensive array of employment and training services to the farmworker community, coupled with outreach initiatives targeting Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers (MSFW):

- Provide the full range of services available at the Unified Management Center to MSFWs who, for various reasons, do not reach the Center
- Referrals to job opportunities
- Referrals to the National Farmworkers Jobs Program (PathStone)
- Information about the labor market
- Orientation on the right of MSFWs and assistance in filling complaints These efforts aim to bridge the gap and engage farmworkers who might otherwise be underserved.

In compliance with the Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by WIOA, the Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources (PRDOLHR) is committed to ensure that Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers (MSFW) receive services through American Job Centers that are both quantitatively proportional and qualitatively equivalent to those provided to non-MSFWs. Furthermore, the Wagner-Peyser Act is committed to ensuring that H-2A foreign guest workers and domestic farmworkers are well-informed about their rights and acquainted with labor laws designed to protect them.

Puerto Rico retains its designation as a significant MSFW State, driven by special circumstances such as the estimated high number of MSFWs in the service area. Despite the absence of One-Stop Career Center MSFW data in PY2022, Significant MSFW One-Stop Career Center designations for PY2023 remain unchanged. Puerto Rico continues to serve as a supplier state for various entities in the Eastern Region of the United States.

Nevertheless, the significant barriers faced by MSFWs in securing agricultural employment in the U.S., exacerbated by discriminatory practices of some H-2A employers in the mainland U.S.A., demanding increased job experience, have led to a substantial decrease in the number of MSFWs seeking agricultural jobs on the mainland. This trend not only impedes local workers from applying for these positions but also creates opportunities for employers to hire non-U.S. citizen workers.

Table 1: MSFWs Referred to USA Agricultural Jobs

	PY15	PY16	PY17	PY18	PY19	PY20	PY21	PY22	PY23
Total MSFWs Referred	1003	435	142	60	14	14	13	12	13
Total MSFWs Interviewed	451	134	26	13	8	4	3	1	4
Total MSFWs Hired	347	89	27	43	5	6	9	9	8

The State Monitor Advocate is actively engaged in advocating for MSFWs, coordinating efforts with various federal agencies to identify unscrupulous H-2A employers who consistently violate H-2A, Wagner-Peyser, and labor-related laws.

The subsequent enumeration outlines some prevalent needs within the MSFW population, accompanied by strategies employed by PRDOLRH to address them:

NEEDS	STRATEGY
Lack of flexibility in their work schedules prevents them from accessing basic services, as agricultural work hours do not coincide with typical business hours.	The PRDOLRH provide services to MSFWs by means of Outreach Workers, including their family members, and coordinate referrals to supportive services, assistance in arranging appointments and transportation for individual MSFW or a member of their family to and from American Job Centers or other appropriate agencies.
Poor access and/or assistance with transportation not only to their workplace but also to basic services such as health, legal advice, and education. Limited or poorly equipped housing facilities near your workplace.	MSFWs lack of transportation is provided by means of available transportation in the area provided by collective transportation or other means provided by the municipality or other community-based organizations in the area.
Lack of coordination of assistance to access educational development opportunities, as many appear to lack basic skills such as low educational level, some totally illiterate.	Most MSFWs lacks basic skills which impede them from being competitive in the labor market, amid that transportation issues aggravate the situation. Outreach workers are essential in addressing these needs by providing MSFWs with career pathway information and making referrals to other partners to address these barriers. AJCs may provide transportation to and from the Center to receive appropriate educational and training services to overcome these barriers.
The lack of young farmworkers since 65% of the island's agricultural workforce is over 55 years old. The decline in new farmworkers will have significant negative effects on the	Puerto Rico has some municipalities that have implemented strategies to address this need by enabling disused schools to develop training and tree nurseries training, in planting coffee, banana, oranges, bread fruit,

NEEDS	STRATEGY
island's agriculture in the coming decades.	guanabana. In addition, the municipality of Utuado has integrated the participation of youth people in agriculture through its Agriculture Program at the University of Puerto Rico. Also, the PRDOLRH considers evaluating whether students who receive assistance from the HEP/CAMP Program can be recruited to meet this need.
Lack of knowledge and adequate training to protect oneself from occupational risks.	The National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP), operated by PathStone, provides MSFWs with safety training in the use of pesticides and other chemicals used for crops. This includes the use of safety equipment such as gloves and masks when required.
Discriminatory practices in the hiring process reduce your chances of obtaining employment.	MSFWs have experienced discriminatory treatment in the past from employers on the mainland. This trend continues to date. However, the stream of local MSFWs to mainland farms has been extensively reduced to a point where only a small handful of workers migrate to USA farms. There is no expectation that this despair treatment will disappear in the long term. The PRDOLHR provides assistance to MSFWs, if needed, to complete and submit a complaint if the need arises.

PRDOLHR will continue its commitment to helping MSFWs overcome these barriers by ensuring that WP services, such as job search assistance, counseling, testing, and referral services, including the wide range of training services available under WIOA and the National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) are made easily available to them.

2. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITY IN THE STATE MEANS: 1) IDENTIFYING THE TOP FIVE LABOR-INTENSIVE CROPS, THE MONTHS OF HEAVY ACTIVITY, AND THE GEOGRAPHIC AREA OF PRIME ACTIVITY; 2) SUMMARIZE THE AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS' NEEDS IN THE STATE (I.E. ARE THEY PREDOMINANTLY HIRING LOCAL OR FOREIGN WORKERS, ARE THEY EXPRESSING THAT THERE IS A SCARCITY IN THE AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE); AND 3) IDENTIFYING ANY ECONOMIC, NATURAL, OR OTHER FACTORS THAT ARE AFFECTING AGRICULTURE IN THE STATE OR ANY PROJECTED FACTORS THAT WILL AFFECT AGRICULTURE IN THE STATE

In 2020, the agriculture industry in Puerto Rico constituted over $800 million (0.62%) of the island's gross domestic product. This sector constitutes 15% of the food consumed locally. It is expected that these crops could cover approximately 30% of local demand, especially for smaller vegetables such as tomatoes, lettuce, and different types of tubers that are currently being imported. The existence of a prosperous agricultural economy has been hindered due to a heavy focus on industrialization, bureaucratization, poor land management, lack of alternative methods and a poor workforce. Its geographic location within the Caribbean exacerbates these issues, causing already scarce crops to suffer the devastating effects of hurricanes.

Puerto Rico has 487,775 acres of cropland, with a total value of agriculture sales of $485,053,483. Agriculture is Puerto Rico's oldest industry and will continue to be a significant economic driver for the next four years in most of the Island's regions. During 2022, the agriculture industry in Puerto Rico was responsible for approximately 30,122 jobs on a permanent or temporary basis which represents and increase when compared to 2017 (21,029)

As of December 2023, the total number of workers (not seasonal adjusted) was 18,000, according to PRDOLHR's statistics for this worker group, experiencing an increase in total workers with respect to October 2023 (16,000) of 2,000 workers. In June 2023, the government increased the Puerto Rico minimum wage to $9.50. The agricultural industry is exempt from the state minimum wage. Nevertheless, agricultural employers are paying between $8.50 and $9.50 in an attempt to attract a workforce and to retain the current one.

According to the Puerto Rico Statistics Institute for 2019, we can pinpoint the top five labor intensive crops as follows based on the quantity harvested:

Gross Income of Agriculture in Puerto Rico

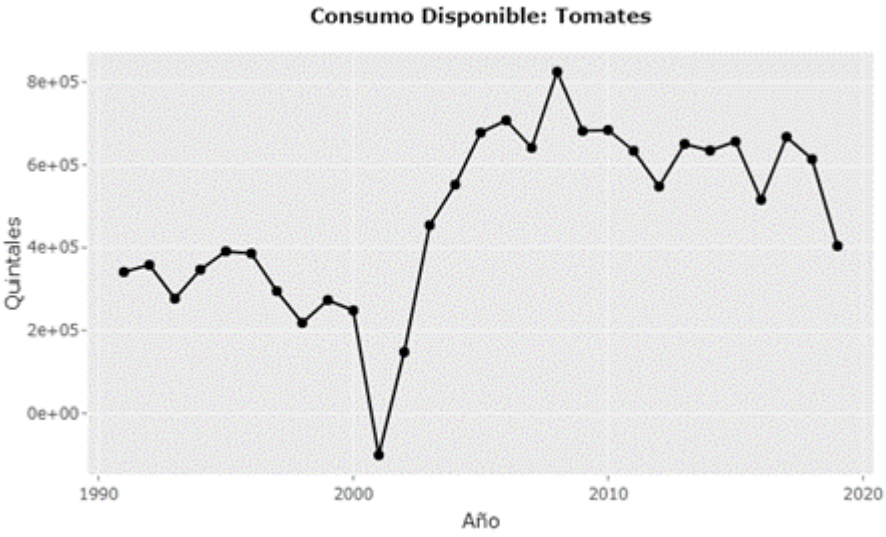
Statistics Department of Agriculture

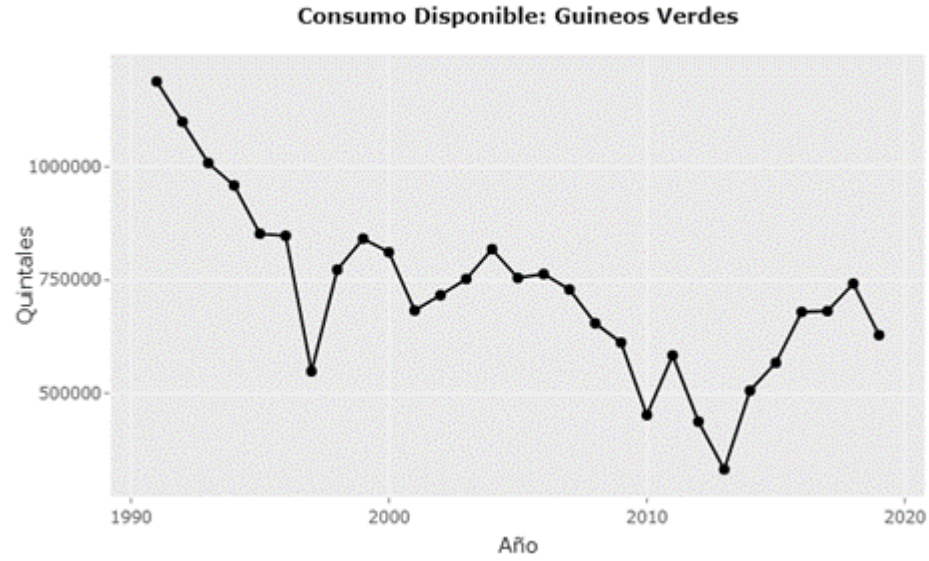
Crops	**Unit**	**2019/2020**	**2020/2021**
Traditional			
Coffee	quintal	28,943	20,768
Starchy			
Bananas	thousand	253,748	239,865
Plantain	thousand	179,067	197,190
Yams	quintal	67,496	75,102
Taro	quintal	18,962	81,021
Cassava	quintal	14,324	15,938
Fruits			
Watermelons	quintal	75,595	83,670
Papayas	quintal	67,596	60,748
Variety Mango**	tons	12,818	13,345
Oranges	thousand	10,905	11,353
Big and Mayaguez Mango	thousand	9,037	9,408
Vegetables and Legume			
Local Lettuces	dozen/bunches	325,201	380,397
Squashes	quintal	200,747	206,206
Tomatoes	quintal	154,735	150,167
Cilantro	quintal	41,287	40,322
Cucumber	quintal	36,968	44,302

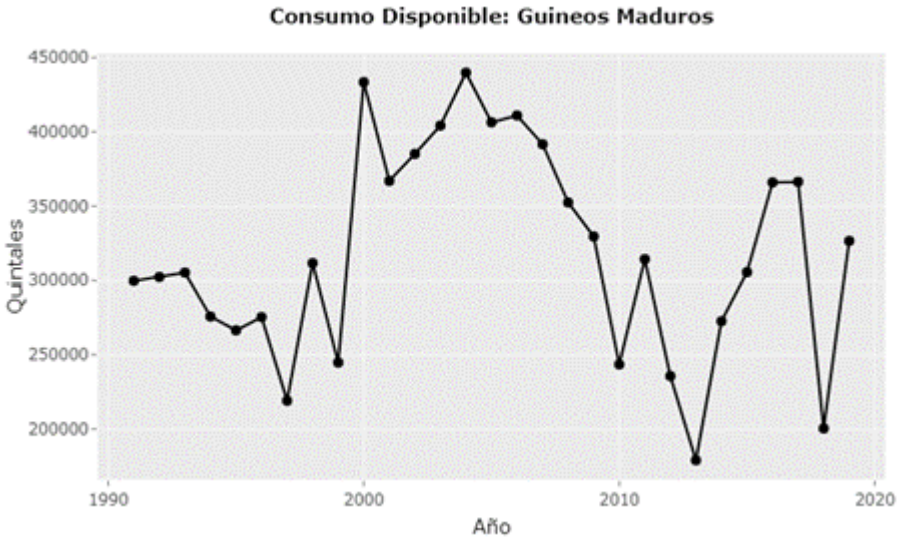
Additionally, the plantain and banana industry remains among the top five crops that require the most labor. In the fruit category, watermelons and papayas have surpassed the list of most harvested products. Regarding the group of vegetables and legumes, country-grown lettuce tops the list, followed by pumpkin, with tomatoes ranking third. Coffee cultivation

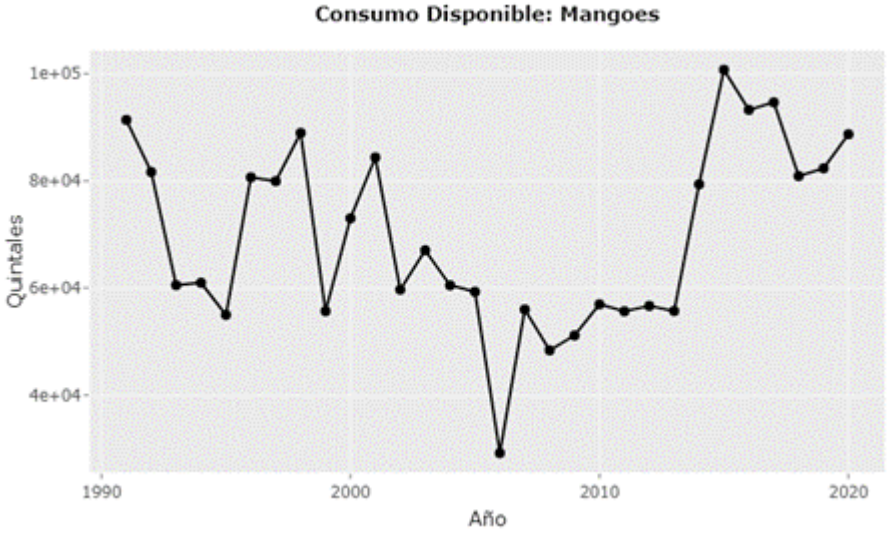
represents one of the significant contributors to Puerto Rico's economy, serving as a primary business and way of life for a large part of the population in the central area of the island. According to the 2017 USDA Census, there are approximately 1,251 coffee farms, with the majority being small to medium-sized producers. Coffee farms are primarily located in the central and western regions of Puerto Rico, although the 2017 Agricultural Census indicates the presence of other small farms in the Caguas region. The largest coffee harvests were recorded in the regions of Utuado, Lares, and San Germán, comprising 15 municipalities in the central and western region. The peak months of activity for this cultivation are September, October, and November.

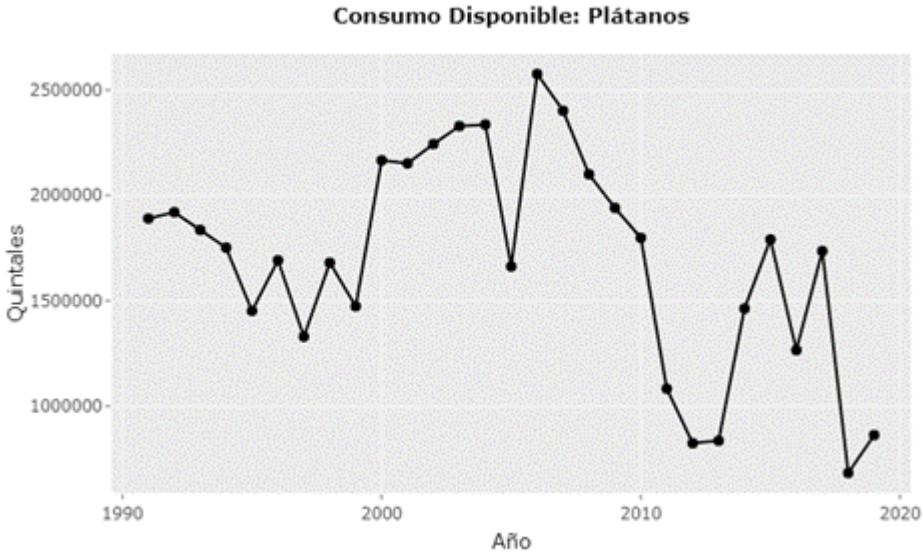
Consumption of Puerto Rico's main crops in the last 30 years











Agricultural Regions

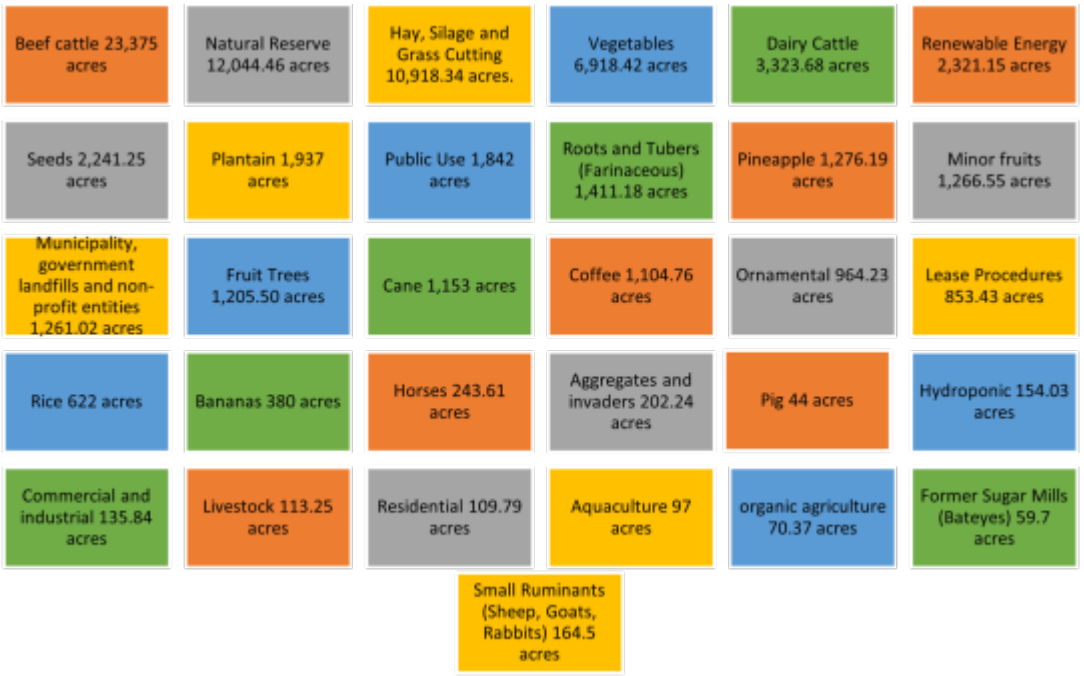
The Ponce region is the major producer of vegetables accountable for approximately 46,302,725 pounds of harvested vegetables with approximately 104 farms and 2,201 acres harvested.

Plantains and bananas are one of the most economically important crops in Puerto Rico. In 2018 it contributed $53.2 million combined to the Gross Agricultural Income (2018 Agricultural Census). These industries are a source of income and jobs in the central area and in the coastal plains. Mayaguez, Ponce, Caguas, Naranjito and Lares regions are the major producers of plantains in Puerto Rico accountable for approximately 2,035 farms with an aggregate harvested of 10,624 acres which produces a total aggregate of 169,073 (thousands) plantains.

Plantains and bananas are usually ready for harvest anywhere from 14 to 20 months depending on the climate and other factors. Flowering usually happens within 10-15 months, while an additional 4-8 months is needed for fruit it develops and ripen.

Public Agricultural Land

The 85,798 acres of the Land Authority are distributed in 31 lines. As of May 2020, there were some 5,439 acres available, and 2,544 acres that could not be rented due to their conditions.



In Puerto Rico, we can see pineapple crops in the municipalities of Lajas, Manatí, Santa Isabel, Guayanilla and Guánica. According to one grower, the varieties that are usually produced on the island are cabezona, Pan de Azúcar and MD-2. The latter turns out to be the most cultivated for commercial purposes since it can produce more than once per season. The good thing about this variety is that you can have several cycles in a single season. Through a good fertilization plan a grower can have several harvests a year. Naturally, the main harvest lasts about six months.

Pineapple crops have contributed $3 million to the Gross Agricultural Income in past years. This industry, along with the ones described above are a source of income and jobs in the valleys and coastal plains. Ponce, Lares, and San Germán regions are the major producers of Pineapple in Puerto Rico. They account for 90 farms for a total of 497 acres harvested.

Table 45. **Pineapples Harvested for Sale: 2018**

[Harvested and planted cuerdas were assumed to be the same. For meaning of abbreviations and symbols, see introductory text.]

Geographic area	Pineapples					
	Farms	Cuerdas	Plants			Quantity harvested (tons)
			Total	Nonbearing age	Bearing age	
Puerto Rico	131	652	8,517,292	3,847,466	4,669,826	4,725
Region 1 - Utuado	6	(D)	10,202	(D)	(D)	(D)
Region 2 - Arecibo	7	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)
Region 3 - Mayagüez	16	50	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)
Region 4 - Ponce	7	199	2,018,500	1,273,900	744,600	563
Region 5 - Caguas	6	3	4,700	3,740	960	8
Region 6 - Naranjito	6	11	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)
Region 7 - Lares	62	118	2,292,362	1,077,956	1,214,406	1,923
Region 8 - San Germán	21	180	2,004,782	1,192,376	812,406	581

Table 46. **Plantains Harvested for Sale: 2018**

[Harvested and planted cuerdas were assumed to be the same. For meaning of abbreviations and symbols, see introductory text.]

Geographic area	Plantains					
	Farms	Cuerdas	Trees			Quantity harvested (thousands)
			Total	Nonbearing age	Bearing age	
Puerto Rico	2,035	10,624	10,352,963	4,079,341	6,273,622	169,073
Region 1 - Utuado	489	1,191	979,106	482,588	496,518	7,543
Region 2 - Arecibo	90	286	297,440	143,280	154,160	3,465
Region 3 - Mayagüez	196	1,617	1,570,790	714,700	856,090	17,728
Region 4 - Ponce	137	1,257	1,228,878	469,128	759,750	19,161
Region 5 - Caguas	284	1,971	2,094,120	770,195	1,323,925	29,263
Region 6 - Naranjito	279	1,934	1,953,720	680,231	1,273,489	58,918
Region 7 - Lares	438	1,828	1,773,539	718,292	1,055,247	26,824
Region 8 - San Germán	122	542	455,370	100,927	354,443	6,171

Table 47. **Bananas Harvested for Sale: 2018**

[Harvested and planted cuerdas were assumed to be the same. For meaning of abbreviations and symbols, see introductory text.]

Geographic area	Bananas					
	Farms	Cuerdas	Trees			Quantity harvested (thousands)
			Total	Nonbearing age	Bearing age	
Puerto Rico	1,157	5,207	4,300,538	1,229,234	3,071,304	226,981
Region 1 - Utuado	350	1,362	1,294,764	515,964	778,800	33,576
Region 2 - Arecibo	48	90	56,264	12,060	44,204	3,283
Region 3 - Mayagüez	52	110	65,632	10,466	55,166	1,057
Region 4 - Ponce	57	933	755,688	72,768	682,920	109,442
Region 5 - Caguas	74	187	150,531	35,151	115,380	6,002
Region 6 - Naranjito	101	355	305,616	56,400	249,216	12,173
Region 7 - Lares	341	1,234	962,723	235,922	726,801	22,565
Region 8 - San Germán	134	936	709,320	290,503	418,817	38,883

Agricultural employers are facing a shortage of workers, which is affecting the agricultural industry. According to one agricultural employer, the number of social aids provided by the federal government to low-income persons such as food stamps is the main reason why people refuse to work not only in agriculture but also in non-agricultural jobs. Other reasons for the shortage of workers can be attributed to the low wages paid in agriculture when compared with other non-agricultural industries that increase their minimum wage up to $9.50/hour. In June 2023, the Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR) increased to $9.70. This increase is applicable only if the employer hires foreign workers.

Data from the Office of Agricultural Statistics of the Department of Agriculture indicate that about 85% of the food consumed in the Puerto Rican archipelago comes from abroad and that local foods have higher sales prices than imported foods. These high prices reflect the struggles farmers face in their profession. According to the statistics of the Department of Agriculture, we can pinpoint some of the reasons for this:

- Labor – One of the reasons is due to higher productions costs. While labor in countries that export food to Puerto Rico is cheaper, in many Latin American countries, agricultural workers sometimes receive less than $2.00 an hour. Puerto Rico must comply with a minimum wage for agricultural workers that amounts to $7.25 an hour; sometimes more.
- Expensive machinery and increase in fuel - Many farmers in the archipelago have chosen to mechanize their agricultural operation. To achieve this, many farmers purchase imported machinery, which in turn must comply with federal regulations, such as compliance with the EPA's gas emissions limit. Added to this are the costs of fuel, which are

100% imported because Puerto Rico does not have oil sources. On the other hand, the salaries of machinery operators also contribute to higher costs since they exceed $15 per hour.

- Rises in temperatures - According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Puerto Rico is in a region where the manifestations of climate change can be observed more intensely. In recent years, the average temperature has risen, which affects agricultural production. For example, in the dairy sector, heat stress in cows in Puerto Rico is greater than in most regions of the United States, which reduces milk production in these animals.
- High costs of water and electricity - The costs associated with utilities, such as electricity and drinking water, are costly in Puerto Rico, and agricultural rates are even higher. In fact, the cost of electricity and drinking water in Puerto Rico is one of the highest in Latin America and the United States.

According to the United States Energy Information Administration, by 2022, in Puerto Rico an average of 29.4 cents per kilowatt hour was paid, which represented more than double the US average, which is 12.9 cents per kilowatt. These costs reduce farmers' profits, forcing them to sell their products at higher prices.

Other problems persist, as Dr. Orville M. Disdier Flores, executive director of the Puerto Rico Statistics Institute, performed a series of electronic surveys to farmers throughout Puerto Rico. Some of the issues farm owners mentioned were as follows:

- During the 2020-2021, 73% of the farmers interviewed indicated that the biggest barrier they had in their business was the high costs of materials.
- Additionally, 59% indicated that they faced problems with a lack of employees.
- On the other hand, 54% indicated they had problems due to weather events.
- Furthermore, 64% of farmers indicated that the greatest cause of their losses due to weather events was hurricanes.
- 50% of farmers indicated having had to change crops in the last 5 years due to production problems.

- Similarly, 47% of farmers indicated having had to change the cycle or season to plant in the last 5 years.

As a result of the backdrop described above, agricultural employers began to turn their view to the H-2A Program for the first time in Puerto Rico.

The already difficult situation of a severe lack of workers turned into a real crisis forcing many agricultural employees, including coffee, banana, and vegetable growers, to go to social media to implore people for help to save their crops. To overcome this situation, some agricultural workers had to recur to the H-2A program. According to the Puerto Rico Employment Service Foreign Labor Certification Unit a total of 83 agricultural employers have submitted a total of 140 Agricultural Job Orders (ETA-790) associated to an H-2A Visa application requesting 1,166 H-2A visas to bring foreign worker to work in the different crops in Puerto Rico. From this CNPC has approved 123 Job Orders. As of the time of this annual plan, 720 foreign workers were hired by agricultural employers in Puerto Rico from October 2019 to December 31, 2023.

	2019	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**Total**
Employers	2	17	29	27	8	83
H-2A Job Orders Received	2	22	35	56	25	140
H-2A Job Orders Approved by CNPC	2	20	30	51	20	123
H-2A Visas Requested	14	177	266	491	218	1,166

Another element to consider in the present volatile employment environment of the MSFWs in Puerto Rico is Public Law #87, approved on June 22, 1962 (Public Law #87). It allows employers to conduct active recruitment in Puerto Rico to perform work in the U.S. mainland. These job offers are typically not for agricultural employment although every so often there are farming jobs and offers for landscaping, processing plants and food packagers. The job offers promoted under this law could be temporary or permanent in nature. The increase in this type of employment offers have significantly impacted the MSFWs in Puerto Rico because they are gravitating towards these jobs with better chance of permanency, much better salaries, and the possibility of

permanent relocation rather than pursuing the regular Interstate Job offers that are posted from other states under the ARS.

There is a need for educational opportunities and incentives for these new farmers, farmers looking to shift to new crops or alternative farming methods, and MSFWs interested in becoming entrepreneurs. Directing more efforts and resources to these needs will promote the development of new agricultural employers and increase the employability of the MSFWs of Puerto Rico. In addition to these challenges, the agricultural community does not have up to date agricultural data. The lack of agriculture statistics is forcing farmers, private entities, and government agencies to plan without adequate information on the status of the agricultural industry. The PRDOLHR, with the assistance of the SMA, will explore the possibilities of joining efforts with partners and organizations such as PathStone, the Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE), the University of Puerto Rico Agricultural Extension, Puerto Rico Farm Bureau, the PRDOA and others, to create a series of orientation sessions to be offered in every region to promote existing and upcoming educational opportunities and incentives aimed to alleviate the above listed issues.

NOTE 1: In preparing the Agricultura Outreach Plan for 2023-2027, we faced the lack of statistics and data from governmental agencies responsible for keeping track of agricultural activities in Puerto Rico. Even the most Federal Agricultural Census for 2020, is still not been published by the US Department of Agriculture. This poses a big challenge to provide up to date data for the AOP.

3. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF FARMWORKERS MEANS SUMMARIZING MIGRANT AND SEASONAL FARM WORKER (MSFW) CHARACTERISTICS (INCLUDING IF THEY ARE PREDOMINANTLY FROM CERTAIN COUNTRIES, WHAT LANGUAGE(S) THEY SPEAK, THE APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF MSFWS IN THE STATE DURING PEAK SEASON AND DURING LOW SEASON, AND WHETHER THEY TEND TO BE MIGRANT, SEASONAL, OR YEAR-ROUND FARMWORKERS). THIS INFORMATION MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT DATA SUPPLIED BY WIOA SECTION 167 NATIONAL FARMWORKER JOBS PROGRAM (NFJP) GRANTEES, OTHER MSFW ORGANIZATIONS, EMPLOYER ORGANIZATIONS, AND STATE AND/OR FEDERAL AGENCY DATA SOURCES SUCH AS THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR (DOL) EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ADMINISTRATION

Assessing the unique needs of farmworkers entails a comprehensive summary of Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker (MSFW) characteristics. This involves analyzing factors such as the predominant countries of origin, languages

spoken, the estimated number of MSFWs during peak and low seasons, and their classification as migrant, seasonal, or year-round farmworkers. This information necessitates collaboration with WIOA Section 167 National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) grantees, MSFW organizations, employer associations, and relevant state and federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Employment and Training Administration.

The farmworker demographic in Puerto Rico has undergone changes since 2019, primarily due to the recruitment of foreign workers in response to the shortage of local agricultural labor. Based on non-seasonally adjusted data, agricultural employment was estimated at 22,000 people in December 2023. When compared to December 2022 (21,000), the number of farmworkers reflected an increase of 1,000 people.

Despite this, farmworkers in Puerto Rico continue to represent the predominant agricultural workforce, totaling 21,000 as of November 2023, according to data from the Worker Group Survey (Table 6, Not Seasonally Adjusted).

Total MSFWs Served	
PY2020	59
PY2021	198
PY2022	268

In the graph below, the data illustrates the number of MSFWs served by Wagner-Peyser over the last three (3) years, showing a notable rise from 2021 to 2022. Anticipating a growth in the total number of MSFWs served during 2024-2027, this projection aligns with the implementation of new policies and procedures aimed at enhancing the classification of participants as MSFWs.

The reliance on foreign workers stems from the scarcity of an indigenous agricultural workforce, with individuals arriving from countries such as Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Colombia, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Mexico.

A diminishing number of migrant workers are being referred through the Agricultural Recruitment System (ARS) to agricultural job opportunities in the United States (See Table 1). This decline is also attributed to the availability of longer-lasting and higher-paying employment opportunities through the Promotion of Employment Opportunities Abroad Program (P.L. 87 of June 22, 1962, as amended). Consequently, MSFWs are increasingly gravitating

towards alternative types of employment on the U.S. mainland. A prevalent barrier faced by MSFWs in Puerto Rico is the combination of a low educational level and a limited understanding of the English language, rendering them perceived as unprepared for insertion into the non-farm labor market. This perception results in fewer services being offered to them, exacerbating the challenges posed by their educational shortcomings. Overall, most farmworkers in Puerto Rico are economically and educationally disadvantaged, possessing low-level skills that hinder their readiness for non-farm labor market participation.

4. OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

The local offices outreach activities must be designed to meet the needs of MSFWs in the State and to locate and contact MSFWs who are not being reached through normal intake activities. Describe the State agency's proposed strategies for:

Efforts are being made to hire four Outreach Workers due to retirement and/or resignation. These efforts are addressed to the hiring Outreach Workers for the local areas of South-east (Humacao), AMSI Guayama (Guayama), Mayaguez, and North (Arecibo). Currently we have only two active Outreach workers for the local areas of Coamo and San Germán. This is a hard to fill position that requires staff persons designated as Outreach Workers to be in the field visiting employers and performing outreach to MSFWs to overview their rights not been violated such as wages, housing, working conditions, etc. The PRDOLHR is committed to comply with 20 CFR 653 to conduct Outreach activities as required by law and regulations. The following sections contain the Outreach activities to be carried out during the period of July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2027.

A. CONTACTING FARMWORKERS WHO ARE NOT BEING REACHED BY THE NORMAL INTAKE ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED BY THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE OFFICES

Puerto Rico has been designated as a significant MSFW supplier. As such, MSFWs significant offices will operate an Outreach program to locate and contact MSFWs not being reached by regular intake procedures. The lack of Outreach Workers put Puerto Rico in a non-compliance situation. We are committed to addressing the situation and to having all remaining Outreach workers hired by the end of June 30, 2024.

Outreach workers are full time staff and contact MSFWs all year-round and during peak agricultural activity periods, which vary dependent on the crop. Contacts are made at locations where MSFWs live and congregate. Written and oral presentations are provided to MSFWs on services such as, but not limited to:

- Information regarding the full array of services offered in the career centers.
- Referral to agricultural, H-2A orders, and non-agricultural employment.
- Referral to training.
- Referral to supportive services.
- Career counseling.
- Job development.
- Information on the Wagner-Peyser complaint system.
- Summaries of farm worker rights (terms and conditions of employment)

The following table shows the MSFWs contacted by Outreach workers from July 1, 2020, to September 30, 2023. To comply with the goal of Outreach Contacts per week, per ETA-5148, Part 3, every quarter, Outreach workers must contact an aggregate of 520 MSFWs. This number is then divided by 13 and the result must be forty (40) contacts or more per week. The table below shows that Puerto Rico complied with this goal during PY2021 through PY2023. PY2020 was the year for the pandemic. Also, the table shows an increase in Outreach contacts throughout the years 2020 to 2023.

Total MSFWs Contacted by Outreach Workers[1]

Program Year	1QTR	2QTR	3QTR	4QTR	Total
PY2020	234	171	73	44	522
PY2021	596	638	350	1,067	2,651
PY2022	1,185	829	997	865	3,876

Program Year	1QTR	2QTR	3QTR	4QTR	Total
PY2023	1,072	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,072

When visiting MSFWs, Outreach workers must obtain authorization from the agricultural employer to conduct outreach activities within the limits of the employer's property. During the contact, Outreach workers provide valuable information about services available to them (see above) in the career centers and encourage MSFWs to visit the nearest career center for the full range of employment, placement, and training services available to them.

In the event MSFWs cannot or do not wish to visit a physical one-stop system location, Outreach staff will provide the services on-site by assisting MSFWs to complete an application form (ES-511), provide referrals to employment opportunities for which the workers are qualified, assist them in preparing complaints, or make appointments for needed services. As appropriate, Outreach staff will carry out follow-up contacts with MSFW customers.

The State Monitor Advocate also performs a variety of advocacy activities, including, but not limited to:

- Overseeing the operation and performance of the MSFW complaint system.
- Contributing to the State AOP and reviewing the daily reports of outreach workers.
- Participating in public meetings throughout the state.
- Meeting with farm worker groups and employers to promote the use of the career center services.

The State Monitor Advocate also meets and works with other workforce agencies to coordinate services to MSFWs and raised issues, as appropriate, to ensure that the development of new systems and strategies for service delivery will address the needs of MSFW customers. The State Monitor Advocate conducts onsite reviews at One-Stop Centers, ensuring local workforce systems follow the designated equity indicators and minimum service levels for MSFWs. The State Monitor Advocate also provides training

and technical assistance, as needed, to staff of partner agencies regarding outreach and services to MSFWs, and the ES complaint system.

Significant American Job Centers are located close to high MSFWs populations. Since the staff is strategically located close to these MSFWs population we can reach as many MSFWs as possible from the estimated number of 22,000 farmworkers during the period of July 1, 2024, and June 30, 2027. The goal is for Outreach Workers to contact at least twenty-five (25) MSFWs per week during a program year to provide services to MSFWs working on the farm during and after the harvest season. The goal is to keep an aggregate average of MSFWs contacts of at least 40 contacts per week to comply with the established performance goal per ETA-5148. Below is a table showing the total workload for the Outreach workers per local office and the designated status for each Outreach worker in the service area.

Staffing and minimum contact levels per program year (PY 2023-2027)

Area/service location	Outreach workers	Contacts per year	Designated outreach worker status
North Central Region	1	1,200	Vacant
Southeast Region	1	1,200	Vacant
AMSI Guayama Region	1	1,200	Vacant
South Central Region	1	1,200	Hired
Southwest Region	1	1,200	Hired
Mayaguez/Las Marías Region	1	1,200	Vacant
Total	6	7,200	

[1] Data from the ETA-5148 report for Program Years 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023.

B. PROVIDING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO OUTREACH STAFF.

For outreach workers to make an efficient job that could be beneficial to farmworkers and agricultural employers, they must be trained in all required areas and competencies to comply with 20 CFR 657.103 and be able to:

- Develop strategies and techniques to locate and contact MSFWs to provide information for services available at the local One-Stop Centers.
- Use the information of the Labor Market Information to inform MSFWs of specific job openings (agricultural and non-agricultural) available to them. Also, to assist agricultural employers in securing workers and acquiring information on labor market trends.
- Provide the necessary competencies on labor related laws affecting MSFWs such as the Fair Labor Standard Act (FLSA), the Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers Protection Act (MSPA), Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, H-2A Regulation, Housing, and other State regulations governing MSFWs.
- Assist MSFWs in filling job applications, preparing worker complaints, making appointments, and arranging for transportation.
- Provide information about services available through electronic means and teach them how to access this information.
- Identify qualified MSFWs seeking employment, using 20 CFR Part 653. Initial and follow-up outreach efforts will be made to provide needed services and assist MSFWs in landing a job or improving employability.
- Contact agricultural and non-agricultural employers, program operators, community or faith-based organizations, and education-and-training providers on behalf of MSFWs.
- Soliciting jobs, training opportunities and employment related services for MSFWs.
- Provide agricultural and non-agricultural employers with information, services and assistance requests related to labor issues and needs.
- Accept job postings while performing field outreach activities.

- Refer qualified MSFWs from the MSFWs Outreach log and from previous contacts through follow-up activities if there are job openings for referral.
- Select qualified MSFWs from the MSFWs Outreach log to perform job development activities to enhance MSFW applications by including their additional occupational skills, transferable occupations, and matching positions with non-agricultural jobs, when no suitable, agricultural job openings are available for referral.

In addition to providing information about the AJC services, the Outreach workers frequently inquire about the working conditions, wages, and overall wellbeing of the MSFWs and encourage them to visit the nearest career center for the full range of employment, placement, and training services. A network of American Job Center will allow the referral of workers to both agricultural and non-agricultural jobs.

Coordinated efforts will continue between the ES, the Wage and Hour Division, OSHA, and the State Legal Services Farmworker Division, to provide training to outreach workers and the local WP staff. These efforts will result in highly trained Outreach workers in areas such as agricultural workplace safety information to assist and inform MSFWs how to undertake work safety measures, services provided by the Legal Services Program including how to file a complaint with this office, labor laws protecting the MSFWs such as MSPA, etc.

The SMA is responsible for meeting with other workforce agencies to ensure that services provided to MSFWs are rendered in a manner that is quantitatively proportional and qualitatively equivalent to those provided to non-MSFWs. To accomplish this task, the SMA must use monitoring designed and approved by ETA for the timely and accurate identification of issues, strategies and protocols for service delivery that will ensure continuity and increase success rate when addressing the needs of MSFW customers.

During the onsite reviews, the SMA must analyze all available data regarding the provision of services of the local workforce systems to determine their compliance with the designated equity indicators and minimum service levels for MSFWs. The SMA will also provide training and technical assistance to staff and partner agencies as needed.

C. INCREASING OUTREACH WORKER TRAINING AND AWARENESS ACROSS CORE PROGRAMS INCLUDING THE UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (UI) PROGRAM AND THE TRAINING ON IDENTIFICATION OF UI ELIGIBILITY ISSUES

To comply with federal regulations, all WP must be trained in the Agricultural Recruitment System (ARS). The training provides important information to staff on the use of the ARS system, to fill the need for workers during the harvest season and for other available agricultural jobs. Outreach staff must attend an ARS training session once per year. This will provide the Outreach staff with a refreshment session on all matters related to the ARS.

To better serve the needs of agricultural employers, WP merit staff must focus on employer issues. Employer services are planned and implemented based on each career center service delivery plan. To make sure that agricultural employer needs are met, career centers must provide key activities in the agricultural referral process, such as integrating services for agricultural employers and workers; identifying job- ready workers once they arrive at the work site; and providing employers with labor market information related to their specific industry, such as farmworker rights and support service information, among other services.

The efforts to be provided by Outreach staff will cover those described in 20 CFR 653.107(a-c). These efforts are the minimum required, but staff will be more thorough in their presentation, providing a comprehensive outline of services available in their area. The purpose of the MSFW outreach program is to take available services directly to where MSFWs live and work if they are unable to come to the One-Stop Centers. The MSFW program provides the necessary framework for the One-Stop Centers staff to locate, contact, and enhance employability of MSFWs in Puerto Rico. Outreach interviewers provide services at the point of contact or at the One-Stop Centers office. If needed, services which are not available at the local One-Stop Centers will be provided by the Outreach worker by means of referrals to other WIOA partners, agencies and organizations that provide the needed assistance.

To accomplish the above, Outreach training sessions will be carried out to reinforce awareness across core programs including UI and training on identification of UI eligibility issues. Regarding UI and WIOA, policies and procedures are in place which provide guidance to WP staff, including Outreach Workers with regards to the provision of services to UI claimants, in special the assistance to file a UI claim. Training will be provided in coordination with WIOA partners to cross train Outreach workers in other WIOA programs such as Title 1A (Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Youth Program), the National Farmworkers Jobs Program (NFJP), etc.

Outreach workers staff contact growers during the harvesting seasons to plan for upcoming labor needs. Coordination is made with the growers and with other career centers to match the labor needs of employers with workers

qualified to fill the jobs. In line with PRDOLHR's focus on services to business, State merit staff provide Outreach personnel with comprehensive listings of area growers to aid in scheduling visits throughout the agricultural community. PRDOLHR also collaborates with the Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture to ensure all resources for growers and agricultural workers are coordinated in a seamless fashion. Additionally, Outreach workers have a strong relationship with the UPR's Agricultural Extension Service/Department of Agriculture regional field staff to collaborate and improve services to agricultural employers and MSFWs.

PRDOLHR's focus is on services to business, while the state merit staff provides Outreach staff to aid in scheduling visits throughout the agricultural community. The SMA will reach out to the Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture to design strategies that could ensure all resources available to the agricultural community are coordinated in a seamless fashion. Capitalizing on the long-standing relationship between the Outreach workers with the University of Puerto Rico's Agricultural Extension Service/PRDOA regional field staff, joint meetings will be coordinated to collaborate and improve services to agricultural employers and MSFWs. Efforts will be made to request from the UI Division the possibility that key staff will be granted access to the local UI system to allow WP staff to access basic UI information of MSFWs, which could be used to assist them with issues related to application for benefits, employment records, interstate claims and eligibility issues. Training in the basic unemployment data system will be arranged for the selected staff.

D. PROVIDING STATE MERIT STAFF OUTREACH WORKERS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES TO ENSURE THEY ARE ABLE TO PROVIDE HIGH QUALITY SERVICES TO BOTH JOBSEEKERS AND EMPLOYERS

Both the WIOA State Unified Plan for 2020-2024 and 2024-2027 contain provisions for professional development of all WP staff ensuring the provision of high-quality services to both jobseekers and employers, including MSFWs. To achieve this, the Puerto Rico Government provides to all its public service staff tools to enhance their current skills by means of online platforms in collaboration with the state university, and the Office for the Administration of Human Resources (OATRH, by its acronym in Spanish). The PRDOLHR will also engage in the identification of other sources of professional development for Outreach Workers.

MSFW Outreach Specialists and the American Job Centers staff participate in cross-training from the standpoint of sharing information on Wagner-Peyser programs and Career Centers programs as well as learning the basics of the

array of programs offered within and outside the Centers. Program cross-training is a continuous process to be able to offer a more integrated plan of service. Training will include information on Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Outreach Program, MSFW classification, Agricultural Job Orders, Welfare Transition (WT)/Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Job Corps, business services, resource rooms, workshops, Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), Veterans, and Wagner-Peyser programs. For the purposes of referring participants to other support services, training will also include information on vocational rehabilitation, GED programs, childcare, and transportation.

In addition to the above, Outreach workers will be provided with workshops on issues related to MSFWs such as child labor, human trafficking and sex harassment, use of pesticides, OSHA Sanitation Standards, Housing, etc., to provide Outreach staff with the professional development and tools required to serve the MSFW population.

E. COORDINATING OUTREACH EFFORTS WITH NFJP GRANTEES AS WELL AS WITH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COMMUNITY SERVICE AGENCIES AND MSFW GROUPS

The newly designated SMA must enter an MOU with the NFJP Grantee, PathStone. As the ETA designated grantee for Puerto Rico, PathStone operates the National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) and provides career and training services and related assistance for MSFWs. The cooperative agreement will serve to assist in establishing and demonstrating effective outreach coordination, enhance service delivery to MSFWs and increase registration activities between PathStone and significant career centers staff. The partnership provides for the sharing of labor market information, training, supportive services, and job-related resources available to MSFWs. The cooperative agreement will improve mutual capacities and the likelihood of effective customer service, by sharing the responsibilities for this population and displaying an efficient use of available resources.

The primary benefits of the cooperative agreement with PathStone are:

1. The information exchange process is streamlined, something that will improve the occurrence and accuracy of shared information.
2. Each organization will be better prepared to coordinate actions, including those that may require immediate intervention when serving MSFWs.
3. Staff awareness of emerging issues regarding the MSFW community has increased.

4. The establishment of a vehicle of communication with the career centers and PathStone to periodically review and assess quality services to MSFWs.
5. Reports are shared on the staff hours spent performing MSFW outreach activity.

PathStone also has cooperative agreements with several career centers and community partners focusing on integrated service strategies and resource sharing. Collaborative approaches reduce duplication of effort and ensure that resources are used effectively for the benefit of customers.

PathStone Corporation is also the NFJP housing grantee for Puerto Rico and provides housing support services to MSFWs through rental and utility assistance. The State Monitor Advocate and the PRDOLHR Outreach workers will continue to coordinate with PathStone staff in their efforts to assist growers in providing safe and affordable housing for farmworkers, hence expanding the range of services available to this population.

5. SERVICES PROVIDED TO FARMWORKERS AND AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS THROUGH THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM

Describe the State agency's proposed strategies for:

A. PROVIDING THE FULL RANGE OF EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICES TO THE AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITY, BOTH FARMWORKERS AND AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS, THROUGH THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM. THIS INCLUDES:

I. HOW CAREER AND TRAINING SERVICES REQUIRED UNDER WIOA TITLE I WILL BE PROVIDED TO MSFWS THROUGH THE ONE-STOP CENTERS

II. HOW THE STATE SERVES AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS AND HOW IT INTENDS TO IMPROVE SUCH SERVICES

(i) How career and training services required under WIOA Title I will be provided to MSFWs through the One-Stop Centers

Each outreach staff establishes a list of available resources and develops partnerships with local organizations serving MSFWs. Resources include, but are not limited to: Department of Health, Farmworker Health Program, State Workers Compensation, Migrant Legal Services, PathStone Corporation, PRDE's Adult Education program, and ESL and GED services to MSFWs. Career centers will collaborate with Local Boards to ensure MSFWs have training opportunities for jobs in demand in the area. We believe there are enough resources for Outreach but will continue to seek additional resources to meet the needs of MSFWs as they are identified.

Although Outreach services are provided to MSFWs who cannot or do not wish to visit a physical career center location, other MSFWs visit the career centers in search of employment, placement, or training services. At the career center, these MSFWs receive a Center orientation which is a requirement prior to receiving any services they might apply for. Through this orientation, workers will become aware of the range of services available to them and how to apply for such services.

Once the workers are informed of all the services available to them, depending on their personal employment needs, might opt to use the self-service resource area where they can access the Internet to perform job searches, preparation of resumes, browsing of job offers, among other services. If in need of employment and placement services, the worker is referred to a Wagner-Peyser Employment Specialist. Here, the worker is registered in Wagner-Peyser and assessed to determine his/her job readiness. Depending on the assessment, the MSFW might be referred to an available job offer/job development, or to an Occupational Counselor for additional career services. If deemed not job ready, the MSFW is referred to one of the several partners located in or out of the center to provide the necessary assistance in attaining the skills necessary to get a suitable job.

Once registered, a farmworker might receive the following career services:

- Assistance for program compliance
- Preparation of job applications
- Job information per type of referral to specific employment opportunities (agricultural and non-agricultural), training, counseling, and other services
- Support service referrals for individuals or family members
- Information and referrals to PathStone or other appropriate program services
- Information about farm worker rights (Federal and State employment related protections laws such as MSPA and FLSA)
- How to contact other organizations servicing MSFWs, such as the Migrant Legal Services, Migrant Health, and others
- When applicable, Outreach Staff will make appropriate referrals to PathStone, Inc. as stipulated under the Job Service Cooperative Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

The ARS System is operated and coordinated within the One-Stop Centers by WP and other partners. As a result, the Foreign Labor Certification Unit can share Agricultural Job Orders, both local, intrastate, and interstate, with the AJCs staff and PathStone and receive referrals from the different AJCs. The FLC Unit receives job orders from the different State Order Holding Officers asking for qualified workers for open agricultural jobs. These job orders are mainly associated with an H-2A application. The job orders are accessible via https://seasonaljobs.dol.gov distributed to the local Employment Service Offices via SharePoint lists where they be placed for job seekers applying for these agricultural jobs.

Outreach workers and WP staff at the career centers will identify workers and screen them against employer requirements; coordinate referrals with the Puerto Rico FLC Unit and assist with scheduling interviews with employers and make travel arrangements.

One-Stop Centers will continue making efforts to strengthen the working relationships with MSFWs and employers. AJC staff assists Outreach workers in providing MSFW with the full range of services available through the One-Stop Centers.

Federal requirements call for services to be provided to MSFWs in a "qualitatively equivalent and quantitatively proportionate" to the services provided to other non-MSFWs. This means that MSFWs are to receive all workforce development services, benefits, and protections on an equitable and non-discriminatory basis (i.e., career guidance, testing, job development, training, and job referral). It is necessary, therefore, to continue strengthening the capability of the WP staff to serve the needs for farm working jobs, by helping them find employment through the Labor Exchange System. Also, ES provides a Job Bank where MSFWs can search for jobs they may qualified for.

Career centers staff assist employers by referring qualified workers to the different job orders posted. However, the process still poses challenges for career center staff to provide farmworkers with available jobs since jobs available in the Puerto Rico Job Bank are mostly in professional jobs which require college preparation, advance skills, and job experience. Information on services, including how to register for services, is provided online ensuring that farmworkers have the full range of services available whether services are received in the field or a career center. Bilingual staff are also made available to assist non-Spanish speaking customers.

The career centers receive Job Orders through the Interstate Clearance System. Concerted efforts are made with Order Holding States to refer qualified MSFWs to these job openings. To make sure that employer labor needs are met, WP merit staff works with job matching results to ensure that qualified MSFWs are referred to the corresponding job opening. Outreach efforts are used to recruit workers outside the local job site recruiting area. The outreach staff is committed to providing information on the services provided at the career centers and will help employers posting agricultural job orders and referring workers to these very same opportunities.

(ii) How the State serves agricultural employers and how it intends to improve such services.

PRDOLHR plans to continue implementing strategies and the use of best practices to address the needs of agricultural employers including the following topics:

- Limited knowledge of State/Federal employment laws and regulations. Career centers will continue to host Forums/Workshops to educate employers and agricultural crew leaders regarding State/Federal laws and regulations.
- Lack of efficient use of local human resources. Career centers staff must encourage/facilitate communication between growers, regarding farmworkers' specific needs. One possible resource is Puerto Rico's Agricultural Extension Program.
- Lack of facilities/staff to screen and interview potential farmworkers. Career centers might provide temporary office space that agricultural employers might use as a job-interviewing facility. Workforce Center staff might also provide intake and referral activities at the growers' locations.
- Encourage farm labor contractors to register. Career centers staff might provide forms and instructions for completing crew leader registrations and ensure that farm labor contractors' registration cards are kept current.
- Housing. The ARS requires employers to provide housing at no cost to workers who cannot reasonably return to their place of residence after each working day. This is one of the unique challenges Puerto Rico agricultural employers faces when using ARS; especially when providing housing for coffee pickers. Also, the PRDOLHR is planning to coordinate efforts and grant activities with PathStone, Inc., the Housing

Grant coordinator for the NFJP grantee under the WIOA 167 housing grant for Puerto Rico, to address the housing needs of farm workers and their families.

Agricultural employers and MSFWs are critical to the State's workforce, especially in the geographic areas where agriculture is the key economic industry. Serving the needs of the agricultural industry requires coordination among the following stakeholders:

- State Monitor Advocate
- WIOA Section 167, PathStone, Inc.
- Groups that represent MSFWs
- Agricultural employer organizations
- Wage and Hour Division (Caribbean District)
- Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)
- Federal agencies with regulatory responsibilities for enforcing laws related to agricultural labor.
- Other organizations such as OSHA

Each of the above organizations has been instrumental in the ongoing efforts of providing support for the benefit of agricultural employers and their workers. They were provided with the opportunity to comment on and participate in the development of this plan.

B. MARKETING THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE COMPLAINT SYSTEM TO FARMWORKERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

In fulfilling its responsibilities under Federal regulations, the PRDOLHR has established a Uniform Complaint System under WP pursuant to 20 CFR 658.400. With this complaint system in place, career centers have the capacity to resolve MSWF complaints and any others job seeker impacted by WP activities. The state and local managers have the responsibility to resolve complaints filed pursuant to 20 CFR 658.400.

The State Monitor Advocate is responsible for the oversight, operation, and performance of the complaint system. The Monitor is also responsible for the marketing and promotion of the complaint system to other MSFW advocacy groups and partners such as MSFWs served by PathStone. The State Monitor Advocate also oversees that Outreach workers inform MSFWs about their

rights and the way to contact the complaint system, and that provides them help to file a claim, as appropriate.

During the required career center orientation, job seekers are briefed on the Wagner-Peyser complaint system. During registration, a WP Employment Specialist explains the complaint system to the worker and how to properly file a complaint. A complaint form is handed out to the worker at that moment. He is also informed of his rights as an MSFW.

C. MARKETING THE AGRICULTURAL RECRUITMENT SYSTEM FOR U.S. WORKERS (ARS) TO AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS AND HOW IT INTENDS TO IMPROVE SUCH PUBLICITY.

ES is committed to marketing the use of the ARS among employers in the local service areas by reinforcing Outreach Workers' skills and knowledge to promote the ARS within agricultural employers, including ES staff assigned to placement tasks. Regarding the H-2A program, agricultural employers have started using it regardless of its cost since they face a shortage of local laborers. This provides additional guarantees to MSFWs such as housing, and transportation, reimbursement, as required by applicable regulations. Regarding the H-2A program, agricultural employers fear using the system due to the high costs it represents to provide additional guarantees to MSFWs such as housing, transportation, and reimbursement, as required by applicable regulations. State laws have been forwarded to stimulate and regulate the employment of foreign workers with no avail since this is a Federal occupied field.

The agricultural industry in Puerto Rico is far different from the agricultural industry in the United States and local agricultural employers cannot afford the costs of implementing the required guarantees they need to provide to MSFWs, local or foreign guest workers.

To enhance the advertising of the agricultural recruitment system, the Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources (PRDOLRH) is utilizing various media channels such as radio, television, and billboards to promote the employment platform. This platform provides employers access to a personal resource bank of available workers and links for registration on the platform for recruitment.

6. OTHER REQUIREMENTS

A. COLLABORATION

Describe any collaborative agreements the state workforce agency (SWA) has with other MSFW service providers including NFJP grantees and other

service providers. Describe how the SWA intends to build upon/increase collaboration with existing partners and in establishing new partners over the next four years (including any approximate timelines for establishing agreements or building upon existing agreements).

Cooperative agreement with PathStone

As mentioned before, an MOU must be entered between the SMA and the NFJP Grantee. The former MOU must be reviewed and evaluated as a starting point to develop the new MOU which must provide a better comprehensive outreach approach to MSFWs in Puerto Rico. The MOU must be developed and executed not later than June 30, 2024, to enforce the responsibilities of each partner in the agreement.

Legal Services of Puerto Rico

The PRDOLHR has linkages with the Legal Services Program and establishes collaboration to provide orientation and valuable information to MSFW who migrate to the United States to work in farm work through the Federal Agricultural Job Order Clearing System. Before departing to work in the USA, workers are briefed on the rights available to them as MSFWs. Coordination is made with Legal Services if any worker needs legal services due to the violation of his/her rights by the agricultural employer while working in the USA.

U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the United States Department of Labor (DOL) and the Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources (PRDOL&HR) exemplifies a collaborative commitment to effective communication and cooperation in areas of mutual interest. Entered voluntarily, this MOU signifies the shared dedication of both entities to enhancing compliance assistance for employers and employees. Importantly, the agreement does not involve any financial commitments, exchanges of funds, personnel, property, or services. The collaboration encompasses various initiatives, including coordinated investigations, sharing of training materials, cross-training of staff, and the facilitation of outreach events. Through this MOU, DOL/WHD and PRDOLHR aim to foster a synergistic partnership that promotes efficiency and delivers valuable support to the workforce and business community.

The PRDOLHR is actively engaged in exploring additional Memoranda of Understanding MOUs with potential partners to fortify ongoing initiatives. In line with its commitment to strategic collaborations, PRDOL&HR seeks to

establish MOUs with entities currently contributing support to existing efforts. This proactive approach underscores the department's dedication to expanding its network of partnerships, fostering cooperation, and maximizing the impact of its programs. Through these prospective MOUs, PRDOLHR aims to create synergies that will further enhance the effectiveness and reach of its initiatives, reinforcing its commitment to the welfare of the workforce and the advancement of labor-related objectives.

Agricultural Technology/University of Puerto Rico at Utuado (UPRU)

The collaborative agreements between the State Workforce Agency (SWA) and the University of Puerto Rico at Utuado (UPRU) showcase a comprehensive partnership aimed at advancing the agricultural sector and supporting the unique needs of Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker (MSFW) participants. Here's a breakdown of the key points:

Educational Programs at UPRU:

UPRU offers Associate Degree Programs in Agricultural Production, Food Processing, Horticulture, Pest Control, and Livestock Industries. The university boasts modern laboratories dedicated to various aspects of agriculture, including Food Processing, Livestock Industries, Horticulture, and Pest Control. Facilities for plant propagation, Soil Science, Food Quality Control, and a Pilot Plant contribute to a holistic learning environment. UPRU provides 108 acres of land for practical training in Agriculture, offering hands-on experience for students.

Mission and Vision of UPRU's Department of Agricultural Technology:

The mission is to contribute to Puerto Rico's agricultural development by establishing academic programs that promote the adoption of new technology. The department aims to support the growth and advancement of agriculture while ensuring environmental sustainability. The vision is to foster the development of a competitive agriculture sector that operates in harmony with the environment, focusing on economic viability and environmental responsibility.

Success Stories of Visually Impaired Students:

The narrative includes inspiring stories of visually impaired students excelling in sustainable agriculture, demonstrating determination and a clear vision of their goals. Specific examples highlight expertise in crop production and dedication to mastering coffee planting techniques and soil conservation.

Puerto Rico's Historical Significance and Commitment to MSFWs:

Puerto Rico is designated as a state for Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Workers (MSFW), emphasizing its historical importance in this regard. The Wagner Peyser Annual Performance Report (WP) underscores the high participation of MSFWs in the WP Program. The Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources (PRDOLHR) is committed to providing equitable services to MSFWs, ensuring they receive opportunities comparable to non-MSFW individuals. Recognizing challenges faced by MSFWs in education and employment, PRDOLHR strives to support their needs.

The collaborative efforts between SWA and UPRU reflect a holistic approach to education, skill development, and support for MSFWs in Puerto Rico. The success stories of visually impaired students add a personal touch, showcasing the inclusivity and determination within the educational programs. Puerto Rico's commitment to the equitable treatment of MSFWs aligns with broader goals of providing opportunities for this community. That is why PRDOLRH envisions continuing to join efforts with other entities that provide services in collaboration with existing partners to address their needs.

B. REVIEW AND PUBLIC COMMENT

In developing the AOP, the SWA must solicit information and suggestions from NFJP grantees, other appropriate MSFW groups, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations, and other interested organizations. In addition, at least 45 calendar days before submitting its final AOP, the SWA must provide a proposed plan to NFJP grantees, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations, and other organizations expressing an interest and allow at least 30 days for review and comment. The SWA must: 1) Consider any comments received in formulating its final proposed AOP; 2) Inform all commenting parties in writing whether their comments have been incorporated and, if not, the reasons therefore; and 3) Transmit the comments and recommendations received and its responses with the submission of the AOP.

The AOP must include a statement confirming 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. Include the list of organizations from which information and suggestions were solicited, any comments received, and responses to those comments.

The PRDOLHR will provide the opportunity for all interested parties to review and comment on the AOP draft. A copy of the draft will be forwarded to the following organizations for comments. As the program year progresses and the needs of the agribusiness community evolves, the PDOLHR will continue to work with partners of the agricultural community to explore new approaches to meeting the demands of Puerto Rico's expanding agricultural industry through collaborative agreements.

The following organizations will receive the AOP draft:

1. Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE) / Migrant Education Program.
2. Puerto Rico Farmworker Health Program.
3. Puerto Rico Legal Services Farmworker Division.
4. Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture.
5. Department of Export and Commerce (PRDEDC) / WDP.
6. PathStone Corporation.
7. USDOL Wageand Hours Division.

Request for public comments were sent by the time this section was entered into the portal. We are in the process of receiving feedback and or comments from the organizations listed above.

C. DATA ASSESSMENT

Review the previous four years Wagner-Peyser data reports on performance. Note whether the State has been meeting its goals to provide MSFWs quantitatively proportionate services as compared to non-MSFWs. If it has not met these goals, explain why the State believes such goals were not met and how the State intends to improve its provision of services in order to meet such goals.

The PRIS system is being enhanced to add additional functionality and make it more in compliance with the ARS system and to better record services to MSFWs to comply with the Equity Ratio Indicators (ERIs). Changes to the system are expected to be in place by June 30, 2024.

The table below shows actual data taken from WIPS regarding the registration of MSFWs during PY2020, PY2021, and PY2022. The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic was reflected in the data collection of 2020.

[1]	Non-MSFW	MSFWs
PY2020	5,566	59
PY2021	8,111	198
PY2022	11,674	268
PY2023 (1QTR)[2]	2,122	22
Total	64,316	547

Policies and procedures are in place to address this situation and for the proper classification of MSFWs in the PRIS system. Changes are being made to the system to automate this process by including the required questions and as they are being answered by WP staff, the system will complete both elements 413 and 808. These changes are projected to be completed by June 2024. The goal is to comply with program regulations and to resolve findings in previous monitoring reports and to be able to capture the must number of MSFWs as possible in the system.

Given the above scenario, corrective actions must be taken to:

- Ensure MSFWs are registered in Wagner-Peyser and classified appropriately.
- Ensure services to MSFWs are entered appropriately into the PRIS System.
- Ensure Outreach Workers are not only reaching out to MSFWs but providing the services they are entitled to.

[1] ETA-9129, Annual Performance Report for Wagner-Peyser

[2] ETA-9173, Quarterly Performance Report for PY2023, 1QTR

D. ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS

The plan must include an explanation of what was achieved based on the previous AOP, what was not achieved and an explanation as to why the State believes the goals were not achieved, and how the State intends to remedy the gaps of achievement in the coming year.

MSFWs contacted by outreach activities.

For the period of July 1, 2020, to June 30, 2022, the current AOP plan calls for at least 11,520 MSFWs. During the same period, a total of 8,121 MSFWs were contacted. This is 3,399 contacts less than the planned 11,520 MSFWs to be contacted. In PY22, two out of the five Outreach workers resigned. In PY2023, one Outreach worker was promoted to SMA. This impacted the total MSFWs to be contacted during this AOP period of performance.

We are committed to continue reinforcing the Outreach Program to comply with regulations as required by 20 CFR 653.107, which requires PRDOLHR to operate an Outreach Program to reach farmworkers who for different reasons normally did not reach ES local offices. Once the vacant positions are filled out, ES will be in a position to provide the whole range of services to MSFWs dwelling in significant agricultural areas to increase the number of MSFWs served and provide outreach services to more than half the population of farm workers that at this time cannot be reached.

Equity Performance Indicators

The lack of performance data from the PRIS System and the failure of local offices to appropriately classify MSFWs in the system are the main barriers to properly identifying if Puerto Rico complies with the equity performance indicators.

To address this issue, PRDOL is currently working with DDEC to improve the PIS system. Among these improvements are changes to the service module so that Wagner-Peyser staff have the full range of possible services to MSFWs and non-MSFWs, including those included in the Equity Performance Indicators and not currently on the PRIS list of services. In addition, Wagner-Peyser staff, including Outreach staff, will be trained on the services to be provided to MSFWs, emphasizing those services required and conducive to meeting the Equity Performance Indicators. The expectation is that the improvements will go live by the end of July 2024 and will help solve the problem of correctly reporting services to MSFWs that impact the Equity Performance Indicators. PRDOLHR is committed to working closely with and assessing these issues to meet the performance goals for MSFWs.

Referral of MSFWs to interstate agricultural job orders

The number of MSFWs interested in applying for agricultural jobs in the mainland has decreased in the past years. Several factors have contributed to this as explained in Section E (2), such as the Promotion of Jobs Abroad Program under P.L. 87 which provides better job conditions and the possibility of permanent relocation. The few MSFWs referred to interstate agricultural job orders are those we were recalled by their previous employers.

E. STATE MONITOR ADVOCATE

The plan must contain a statement confirming the State Monitor Advocate has reviewed and approved the AOP.

A new SMA was designated. A copy of this plan will be provided to the SMA for review and approval.

As the State Monitor Advocate (SMA), I have reviewed and approved the AOP.I commend the collaborative efforts put forth in developing this plan and endorse its implementation as a crucial step in fostering positive outcomes for both MSFWs and the agricultural industry.

WAGNER-PEYSER ASSURANCES

The State Plan must include assurances that:

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service is co-located with one-stop centers or a plan and timeline has been developed to comply with this requirement within a reasonable amount of time (sec 121(e)(3));	Yes
2. If the State has significant MSFW one-stop centers, the State agency is complying with the requirements under 20 CFR 653.111, State Workforce Agency staffing requirements;	Yes
3. If a State Workforce Development Board, department, or agency administers State laws for vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, that board, department, or agency cooperates with the agency that administers Wagner-Peyser Act services, Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and Youth Programs under Title I; and	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
4. SWA officials: 1) Initiate the discontinuation of services; 2) Make the determination that services need to be discontinued; 3) Make the determination to reinstate services after the services have been discontinued; 4) Approve corrective action plans; 5) Approve the removal of an employer's clearance orders from interstate or intrastate clearance if the employer was granted conditional access to ARS and did not come into compliance within 5 calendar days; 6) Enter into agreements with State and Federal enforcement agencies for enforcement-agency staff to conduct field checks on the SWAs' behalf (if the SWA so chooses); and 7) Decide whether to consent to the withdrawal of complaints if a party who requested a hearing wishes to withdraw its request for hearing in writing before the hearing.	Yes
5. The SWA has established and maintains a self-appraisal system for ES operations to determine success in reaching goals and to correct deficiencies in performance (20 CFR 658.601).	Yes

WAGNER PEYSER PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

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 two years covered by the plan modification. 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 two years of the plan modification.

While states are not required to submit expected levels of performance for Effectiveness in Serving Employers for PY 2026 and PY 2027 all of core programs are expected to collect data and report as a shared indicator (as directed in guidance) for these years.

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	48.0		48.5	
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	58.0		50.5	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	3,900		3,950	
Credential Attainment Rate	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Measurable Skill Gains	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

[1]

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 2026 and 2027.

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAMS

The Unified or Combined State Plan must include a description of the following as it pertains to adult education and literacy programs and activities under title II of WIOA, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA).

A. ALIGNING OF CONTENT STANDARDS (WIOA SECTION 102(B)(2)(D)(II)(I))

Describe how the eligible agency has aligned its content standards for adult education with State-adopted challenging academic content standards, as adopted under section 1111(b)(1) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (20 U.S.C. 6311(b)(1)).

The Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE), through the Assistant Secretary for Alternative Education and the Adult Education Program (AEP), serves as the eligible agency responsible for the implementation of Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

The curriculum standards are a pillar. For Program Years 2026-2028, the AEP will continue to refine and fully implement standards-aligned curricula that integrate:

- College and Career Readiness (CCR) Standards for Adult Education.
- Workforce preparation skills aligned with in-demand occupations.
- Digital literacy competencies.
- English language acquisition standards; and
- Contextualized instruction models connected to career pathways.

Strengthened Alignment with Workforce and Industry Needs: the DE-AEP will be In alignment with the federal emphasis on industry-driven strategies, following the federal priorities identified in the Five Strategic Pillars, detailed in AMERICA'S TALENT STRATEGY. The Program will work toward the efforts to integrate existing workforce development systems to maximize efficiency and effectiveness, provide accountability for workforce training programs, upskill incumbent American workers, and develop alternatives new credentials. The AEP will ensure that academic content standards are not implemented in isolation but are delivered within instructional frameworks that connect foundational skills development with occupational relevance. Curriculum alignment will support adult learners' transitions into Integrated

Education and Training (IET) programs, post-secondary education, Registered Apprenticeships, and employment in high-demand sectors.

Standards implementation will emphasize the following: Contextualized mathematics, reading, and writing instruction embedded within workforce preparation activities; integration of problem-solving, adaptability, communication, collaboration, and technology use; alignment of instructional objectives with labor market information and regional workforce priorities; and incorporation of transferable skills necessary for economic mobility.

Curriculum Implementation and Faculty Development: To ensure high-fidelity implementation of aligned standards, the AEP will maintain a structured professional development system that includes:

- Academic facilitators are assigned to core instructional areas to provide statewide technical assistance.
- Training for instructors in standards-based instruction, assessment indicators, and curriculum integration.
- Professional development on career pathways alignment, artificial intelligence (AI) literacy, and workforce preparation.
- Specialized training to address the instructional needs of adults with disabilities and English language learners; and
- Capacity building for instructional strategies that support concurrent academic and occupational skill development.

Professional development will incorporate research-based adult learning principles and instructional practices consistent with the essential components of reading instruction and scientifically valid research.

Continuous Curriculum Review and Improvement: The AEP will maintain a continuous curriculum review process to ensure responsiveness to learner outcomes and labor market shifts. This process includes:

- Instructor feedback logs and structured curriculum review cycles.
- Regular meetings of curriculum review committees composed of instructional staff.
- Analysis of student performance data to inform curriculum refinement.
- Updates to workforce preparation and career pathways components as labor market demands evolve.

This approach ensures that academic content standards remain rigorous, relevant, and aligned with both postsecondary expectations and employer-defined skill requirements.

Consistent with the Industry-Driven Strategies priorities of ETA and USDE for the workforce system to transform it into a reliable pipeline of American talent led by industry and aligned with America's economic priorities, the Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE) Adult Education Program will emphasize the alignment of curriculum and all other Title II activities with employer needs, aiming to reduce the lack of coordination between education systems, workforce agencies, and businesses. The main goal will be to prioritize industry needs and align WIOA Title II workforce program with private sector training investments and evolving skill demands.

In general, to evaluate the curriculum effectiveness the AEP will maintain a continuous teachers log system of feedback annotations on curriculum improvement needs as per students' interactions in the lessons and activities. A committee selected from teachers implementing the curriculum will meet regularly to discuss the log notes and plan for future improvements to the curriculum.

B. LOCAL ACTIVITIES

Describe how the eligible agency will, using the considerations specified in section 231(e) of WIOA and in accordance with 34 CFR 463 subpart C, fund each eligible provider to establish or operate programs that provide any of the following adult education and literacy activities identified in section 203 of WIOA, including programs that provide such activities concurrently. The Unified or Combined State Plan must include at a minimum the scope, content, and organization of these local activities.

ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY ACTIVITIES (SECTION 203 OF WIOA)

- Adult education;
- Literacy;
- Workplace adult education and literacy activities;
- Family literacy activities;
- English language acquisition activities;
- Integrated English literacy and civics education;

- Workforce preparation activities; or
- Integrated education and training that—

1. 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
2. Is for the purpose of educational and career advancement.

Special Rule. Each eligible agency awarding a grant or contract under this section shall not use any funds made available under this title for adult education and literacy activities for the purpose of supporting or providing programs, services, or activities for individuals who are under the age of 16 and are enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under State law, except that such agency may use such funds for such purpose if such programs, services, or activities are related to family literacy activities. In providing family literacy activities under this title, an eligible provider shall attempt to coordinate with programs and services that are not assisted under this title prior to using funds for adult education and literacy activities under this title for activities other than activities for eligible individuals.

1. **Local Activities**. Describe how the eligible agency will fund eligible providers to establish or operate integrated English literacy and civic education programs under Section 243 of WIOA, using the considerations specified in Section 231(e) of WIOA and in accordance with 34 CFR 463 subpart C, fund each eligible provider to establish or operate programs that provide any of the following adult education and literacy activities identified in Section 203 of WIOA, including programs that provide such activities concurrently. The Unified or Combined State Plan must include, at a minimum, the scope, content, and organization of these local activities.

Local activities will be focus in promote worker mobility as per required by Pillar II in American Talent Strategy, including the innovative use of technology and labor market data, to promote workforce support and attain economic mobility to high-wage jobs and career paths.

Multiyear Competition Process: The Puerto Rico Department of Education, Adult Education Program (PRDE-AEP), conducts a full and open multiyear competition for the award of Title II funds in accordance with WIOA Sections 231, 225, and 243, and consistent with 34 CFR 463 Subpart C. The multi-year competition process ensures direct and equitable access to funds for all

eligible providers and is designed to promote program quality, industry alignment, accountability, and responsiveness to regional workforce needs.

Who are eligible individuals and providers?: The Adult Education Program recognizes adult learners as participants in the broader workforce development system and will ensure that services are designed to promote educational advancement, economic mobility, and transition to employment in in-demand industries. Service providers will deliver services to eligible individuals who have attained at least 16 years of age, are not enrolled, are required to be enrolled in a secondary school under the Puerto Rico law, lack basic skills, do not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, or are English language learners. Organizations eligible to apply for funding must have demonstrated effectiveness and comply with the 13 considerations established by WIOA in providing adult education and literacy services. These organizations include local education agencies, community-based organizations or faith-based organizations, volunteer literacy organizations, institutions of higher education, public or private non-profit agencies, libraries, a public housing authority, a non-profit institution that has not been described previously in this paragraph and has the ability to provide adult education and literacy activities to eligible individuals, a consortium or coalition of the agencies, organizations, institutions, libraries, or authorities described previously, and a partnership between an employer and an entity described previously. Other organizations that meet the criteria of demonstrated effectiveness under AEFLA, in accordance with the provisions of 34 CFR 463.23.

The use of the thirteen considerations Of WIOA in funding eligible providers: The PRDE's - AEP, will fund each eligible provider using the considerations specified in section 231(e) of WIOA, to establish or operate programs that provide any of the adult education and literacy activities identified in section 203 of WIOA, including programs that provide such activities concurrently. Organizations interested in funding to provide services must complete RFP to solicit funding. When completing the RFP, they must provide evidence that complies with the 13 Considerations of WIOA to be eligible providers and be granted funding.

Competitive Grant Structure: Under the current and upcoming grant cycle (2026–2028), the PRDE-AEP will continue implementing the four-year multiyear competition structure consisting of:

- An initial one-year grant award.

- Continuation awards for up to three additional years, contingent upon demonstrated effectiveness, compliance with fiscal and programmatic requirements, and availability of federal funds.

Continuation funding is not automatic and is subject to:

- Achievement of negotiated performance targets under WIOA Section 116.
- Demonstrated progress in measurable skill gains.
- Alignment with local workforce development board (LWDB) plans.
- Compliance with fiscal integrity standards; and
- Satisfactory monitoring outcomes.

This structure ensures both program stability and accountability.

Promotion of Industry-Driven and Career Pathways Strategies: In alignment with federal priorities emphasizing industry-driven workforce development, the multiyear competition requires applicants to demonstrate how proposed activities:

- Align with local and regional labor market information.
- Support career pathways connected to in-demand occupations.
- Integrate adult education with workforce preparation and Integrated Education and Training (IET).
- Coordinate with employers and workforce system partners; and
- Contribute to economic mobility for individuals with barriers to employment.

Applicants must clearly describe how instructional activities will connect adult learners to recognized postsecondary credentials, apprenticeship opportunities, or employment pathways in high-demand sectors within the local workforce area.

Promotion of AI literacy in adult education: The Adult Education Program will incorporate artificial intelligence (AI) literacy as a core component of workforce preparation activities, equipping adult learners with the foundational knowledge and practical skills needed to navigate an increasingly AI-driven labor market. Participants will engage in structured learning activities designed to develop an understanding of AI concepts and

terminology, the responsible and ethical use of AI tools in workplace settings, and the application of AI-powered platforms for job searching, resume development, and occupational skills enhancement. These activities will be integrated into career pathways instruction and Integrated Education and Training (IET) models to ensure that adult learners are prepared to meet the evolving digital skill demands of in-demand industries and to support their transition to employment, credential attainment, and long-term economic self-sufficiency.

Demonstrated Effectiveness Requirement: All applicants must demonstrate effectiveness in improving the literacy skills of eligible individuals, consistent with WIOA Section 231(e) and 34 CFR 463.24. To be considered for funding, eligible providers must demonstrate:

- Capacity to deliver high-quality adult education and literacy activities.
- Ability to serve individuals with barriers to employment.
- Data management systems capable of reporting performance outcomes under Section 116.
- Commitment to integrating services within the local workforce development system.

Providers must describe how proposed activities will:

- Support career pathways aligned with regional labor market demand.
- Incorporate workforce preparation, digital literacy and artificial intelligence (AI) skills.
- Offer integrated education and training (IET), where appropriate.
- Coordinate with one-stop partners and post-secondary institutions.
- Facilitate transitions to recognized credentials and employment.

Applicants previously funded under Title II must submit National Reporting System (NRS) data reflecting performance against state-adjusted levels for primary indicators under Section 116. Applicants not previously funded must provide verifiable performance data demonstrating effectiveness in serving individuals with basic skills deficiencies in reading, writing, mathematics, and English language acquisition. Applications that do not meet the demonstrated effectiveness threshold will not be considered for

funding. There are two methods for an eligible provider to meet the following requirements:

1. An eligible provider that has received funds under Title II of the WIOA must provide the National Reporting System (NRS) performance data required in Section 116 of WIOA to demonstrate past effectiveness.
2. An eligible provider who has not previously received WIOA Title II funding must provide performance data to demonstrate past effectiveness in serving eligible individuals deficient in basic skills in all the following areas: Reading, Writing, Mathematics, and Learning English.

To meet the effectiveness requirements demonstrated, applicants must submit their performance records and results. All applicants must complete a Past Effectiveness Data Table to determine their demonstrated effectiveness. Each application is reviewed to determine whether it meets the standard of demonstrated effectiveness. Applications that did not provide sufficient evidence of demonstrated effectiveness for two years were eliminated from the competition. The following results will be used to determine the effectiveness of the eligible educational service providers:

1. Number of eligible people served who are deficient in the basic skills of Reading, Writing, Math, and English
2. Achievement of high school diploma/equivalent
3. Transition to post-secondary education and training.

To meet the effectiveness requirements demonstrated, applicants must submit their performance records and results. All applicants must complete a Past Effectiveness Data Table to determine their demonstrated effectiveness.

Applicants Previously Funded Under Title II: Eligible providers that have received Title II funding in the preceding program years must submit National Reporting System (NRS) performance data demonstrating past effectiveness.

Applicants Not Previously Funded Under Title II: Applicants that have not previously received WIOA Title II funding must submit verifiable performance data demonstrating past effectiveness in serving eligible individuals with basic skills deficiencies. Applicants must provide sufficient documentation to demonstrate successful educational outcomes over at least two program years or other comparable evaluation periods. Data must be reliable, documented, and capable of validation.

Alignment with Performance Accountability Framework: Demonstrated effectiveness requirements are directly aligned with the primary indicators of performance described in WIOA Section 116. Providers must show capacity to contribute to statewide performance goals, including:

- Measurable skill gains.
- Credential attainment.
- Employment in the second and fourth quarters after exit.
- Median earnings after exit.
- Effectiveness in serving employers.

This alignment ensures that funding decisions reinforce accountability and promote continuous improvement across the adult education system.

Continuous Performance Monitoring: Demonstrated effectiveness is not limited to initial eligibility. Providers receiving funding must maintain satisfactory performance throughout the grant period. Continuation awards are contingent upon:

- Meeting or exceeding negotiated performance targets.
- Compliance with data reporting requirements.
- Participation in monitoring and corrective action processes when necessary.

Providers failing to demonstrate sustained effectiveness may be subject to technical assistance requirements, corrective action plans, or non-renewal of continuation funding.

Service to Individuals with Disabilities and Barriers to Employment: The PRDE-AEP will evaluate the provider's demonstrated ability to serve individuals with disabilities, including learning disabilities, and other individuals with barriers to employment. Applicants must describe: Reasonable accommodation policies and instructional adaptations and support services.

Program Quality, Instructional Intensity, and Research-Based Practices: Applicants must demonstrate that proposed programs:

- Are of sufficient intensity and duration to achieve measurable learning gains.
- Incorporate the essential components of reading instruction, as appropriate.

- Use instructional practices grounded in scientifically valid research.
- Integrate contextualized instruction that links foundational skills with workforce preparation.

The PRDE-AEP will prioritize programs that integrate adult education with workforce preparation and occupational training through Integrated Education and Training (IET) and career pathways frameworks.

The "continuation award" process

The continuation of the award process is as follows: If an eligible service provider is approved and funded, it will receive an initial one-year grant. After the first-year grant, the PRDE can provide a continuation grant for up to three additional years. Continuation grants are subject to demonstrate effectiveness in service delivery. Furthermore, they are subject to the availability of grant funds. After the four-year period, the PRDE may complete a new competition. The PRDE may also extend the competition during an ongoing period if it is considered appropriate and necessary to serve a particular region or rural area where no service providers have shown in or been approved, and no services have been provided for disadvantaged individuals and population groups. An eligible provider can meet these requirements in two ways:

1. An eligible provider that has been funded under Title II of the WIOA must provide the NRS performance data required under Section 116 of the WIOA to demonstrate past effectiveness.
2. An eligible provider that has not been previously funded under Title II of WIOA must provide performance data to demonstrate its past effectiveness in serving eligible individuals with basic skills deficiency in all the following areas: reading, writing, mathematics, and English language acquisition.

The following outcomes will be used to determine the effectiveness of eligible education service providers:

1. The number of eligible individuals who were deficient in basic skills such as reading, writing, math, and English language skills.
2. Attainment of secondary diploma/equivalent
3. Transition to post-secondary education and training.

The following will not be considered eligible applicants: Applicants that are not in compliance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 or those applicants that

discriminate based on nationality, origin, race, gender, religion, or handicap, sexual orientation, or gender identity, political or religious ideology, disability or physical or mental disability, being a victim of domestic violence, sexual aggression, or stalking. As required by federal regulations, service providers are prohibited from using federal funds to supplant state or local dollars. All federal funding will be used to enhance learner services, as outlined in this Plan. The Adult Education program will conduct competitions under WIOA upon receiving guidance from the USDOE, Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE). Awards to eligible providers will be made available through a Request for Proposal (RFP) application process. To help ensure direct and equitable access to funds for adult literacy and basic skills activities, RFP's will be announced directly to providers and through the regional media. In addition, all providers are considered for grants based on the same criteria. These criteria are aligned with the requirements in this Plan and the thirteen (13) considerations required by WIOA federal legislation.

Providers' grants distribution criteria

The PRDE's Adult Education Program uses the following parameters to distribute funds to approved applicants:

1. No less than 82.5 percent of the grant funds will be used to award grants and contracts under Section 231 and to conduct Section 225, of which no more than 20 percent of such amount shall be available to conduct Section 225.
2. Shall not use more than 12.5 percent of the grants to conduct State Leadership activities under Section 223.
3. Shall not use more than 5 percent of the grant funds, or $85,000, whichever is greater, for the administrative expenses of the eligible agency.
4. Every effort is made to select at least one eligible provider for each local area of the workforce system in Puerto Rico.

Providers' grants will be distributed based on the ability to meet the following AEFLA purposes outlined in WIOA:

1. Assist adults in becoming literate and obtaining the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and economic self-sufficiency.
2. Assist adults who are parents or family members to become full partners in the academic development of their children.

3. Promote the transition from adult education to post-secondary education and training through career pathways.
4. Assist adults in completing high school and holding a diploma or equivalent certificate.
5. Assist immigrants and English language learners to improve reading, writing, math, and comprehension of the English language and acquire an understanding of the American government, individual freedom, and responsibilities of citizenship.

Expansion of Access and Geographic Coverage: The PRDE-AEP will utilize the multiyear competition process to ensure that services are accessible across all Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDAs), including rural and underserved communities. The Request for Proposals (RFP) will be widely disseminated across all workforce regions to encourage participation from qualified eligible providers capable of expanding access, particularly in areas with limited-service availability or underserved populations. The AEP will prioritize ensuring that at least one eligible provider operates in each local workforce area, consistent with statutory requirements.

How Applications will be reviewed for local plan alignment: Integration with Local Workforce Development Boards: As required under 34 CFR 463.21, all applications will be submitted to the appropriate Local Workforce Development Board(s) for review and comment to ensure consistency with local plans. If a proposed service area spans multiple local workforce regions, applications will be submitted to each corresponding Local Board for feedback. Recommendations from Local Boards will be considered in final award determinations, particularly where they: Identify alignment gaps; recommend adjustments to better serve regional workforce needs; or suggest enhanced coordination with one-stop partners.

The recommendations will be analyzed and incorporated whenever appropriate if they demonstrate alignment with regional needs as identified in the local workforce development plan and serve individuals in the community who were identified in such a plan as most in need of adult education and literacy activities.

As described previously in this section, the PRDE's - AEP will fund each eligible provider using the 13 considerations specified in section 231(e) of WIOA to establish or operate programs that provide any of the adult education and

literacy activities identified in section 203 of WIOA, including programs that provide such activities concurrently.

Innovation and Program Modernization: Consistent with TEGL 05-25 and federal guidance promoting flexibility and innovation, the PRDE-AEP encourages applicants to incorporate:

- Technology-enhanced instructional delivery.
- Hybrid and distance education models.
- Accelerated and concurrent instructional strategies.
- Employer-informed curriculum design; and
- Evidence-based models that improve participant outcomes.

Innovation proposals must remain compliant with AEFLA statutory requirements and demonstrate measurable impact on student performance and workforce outcomes.

Equity, Access, and Non-Discrimination: All eligible providers must comply with applicable federal and state civil rights laws and demonstrate commitment to equitable access for individuals regardless of race, gender, national origin, age, disability, or other protected status. Providers must describe how reasonable accommodations will be provided to individuals with physical, mental, or learning disabilities, consistent with WIOA Section 231(e)(2) and Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA).

Commitment to Integrated Service Delivery: Consistent with the Puerto Rico Unified State Plan, eligible providers will serve as active partners within the local workforce system. Providers are expected to coordinate with: American Job Centers (One-Stop Centers); Workforce development boards; post-secondary education institutions; Career and technical education programs; Community and social service agencies; and Employers and industry sector partners. Through this integrated approach, Title II services will contribute to a unified workforce strategy that prepares adult learners for participation in high-demand sectors and supports long-term economic self-sufficiency.

Responsiveness to Regional and Workforce Needs: The PRDE-AEP will evaluate the extent to which each applicant demonstrates responsiveness to:

- Regional needs identified in the applicable Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB) plan.

- Populations most in need of adult education and literacy services, particularly individuals with low literacy levels and English language learners.
- High-demand industry sectors and occupations identified through state and local labor market information.

Applicants must demonstrate clear alignment between proposed services and the economic and workforce priorities of the local area, including career pathways connected to in-demand occupations.

Effective Use of Technology and Innovative Delivery Models: Consistent with federal guidance encouraging modernization and innovation, the PRDE-AEP will assess the extent to which providers: Utilize technology and distance education effectively; Expand access through hybrid or flexible instructional models; Strengthen digital literacy skills among participants and demonstrate that technology use contributes to improved learning outcomes. Technology implementation must support instructional quality and measurable performance improvement.

Coordination with Workforce and Community Partners: Applicants must demonstrate meaningful coordination with: American Job Centers and WIOA core partners; Post-secondary education and training providers; Employers and industry associations and Social service agencies providing supportive services. Strong partnerships must support career pathways development, participant referrals, and transition to employment.

Flexible Scheduling and Support Services: Providers must offer flexible schedules and coordinate with available support services, such as childcare, transportation, and career counseling, to enable participation and program completion.

Data Management and Continuous Improvement: Each applicant must demonstrate the capacity to:

- Maintain high-quality data systems.
- Accurately report measurable outcomes.
- Use performance data to inform program improvement.
- Participate in monitoring and evaluation activities conducted by the PRDE-AEP.

English learners: For areas demonstrating need for English language acquisition applicants must document community demand and describe how services will address these needs.

Review Monitoring, Corrective Action and Technical Assistance: Providers identified as high-risk due to performance deficiencies, fiscal irregularities, or compliance concerns may be subject to additional monitoring and technical assistance. If a provider fails to meet performance expectations or compliance requirements, the PRDE-AEP may require:

- Submission of a corrective action plan.
- Participation in targeted technical assistance.
- Enhanced reporting requirements.
- Performance improvement benchmarks within a specified timeframe.

Failure to demonstrate improvement may result in reduction, suspension, or non-renewal of continuation funding.

Availability of Funds: Continuation awards are also subject to: Federal appropriations; State-level allocation determinations and Compliance with statutory funding limitations for Sections 231, 225, 243, and 223. The PRDE-AEP reserves the authority to adjust award amounts based on performance, demonstrated need, geographic coverage requirements, and federal funding levels.

Ensuring Service Continuity and System Stability: The continuation award process is designed to balance program stability with accountability. While the multiyear framework promotes continuity of services to adult learners, it ensures that public funds are directed toward providers demonstrating measurable results and alignment with workforce system priorities. The PRDE-AEP retains authority to initiate a new competition at the conclusion of the four-year cycle or earlier if necessary to ensure adequate geographic coverage, address unmet regional needs, or strengthen service delivery in underserved communities.

Statutory Allocation Requirements: In compliance with WIOA funding limitations, the PRDE-AEP will allocate funds as follows:

- Not less than 82.5 percent of the grant funds will be used to award grants and contracts under Section 231 and to carry out Section 225 activities, of which not more than 20 percent of such amount may be used for correctional education and education for other institutionalized individuals under Section 225.

- Not more than 12.5 percent of the grant funds will be used to carry out State Leadership activities under Section 223.
- Not more than 5 percent of the grant funds, or $85,000 (whichever is greater), will be used for State administration, as permitted under WIOA.

These allocations ensure compliance with federal law while maintaining the capacity to support leadership, oversight, and system improvement.

Geographic Distribution and Access: The PRDE-AEP will make every reasonable effort to ensure that at least one eligible provider operates in each Local Workforce Development Area (LWDA) in Puerto Rico, consistent with statutory assurances. Grant distribution decisions will consider: Demonstrated need within the local area; Population density and service demand; Availability of qualified eligible providers and Coverage of rural or underserved communities. The goal is to ensure equitable access to adult education services across the Commonwealth.

Alignment with AEFLA Statutory Purposes: Funds awarded to eligible providers must support the purposes of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), including:

- Assisting adults in becoming literate and obtaining the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and economic self-sufficiency.
- Supporting parents and family members in becoming full partners in the educational development of their children.
- Promoting transition from adult education to postsecondary education and training through career pathways.
- Assisting adults in attaining a secondary school diploma or recognized equivalent.
- Assisting English language learners in achieving proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension of the English language, while understanding the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Performance-Informed Funding Decisions: In addition to statutory compliance, grant distribution decisions will be informed by:

- Demonstrated effectiveness and past performance outcomes.
- Capacity to meet negotiated state performance targets under Section 116.

- Implementation of career pathways and Integrated Education and Training (IET).
- Alignment with regional labor market priorities.
- Quality of proposed instructional design and service integration.

The PRDE-AEP reserves the authority to adjust award amounts based on performance, service capacity, geographic coverage, and available funding.

Fiscal Integrity and Supplement-Not-Supplant: All awarded funds must comply with: The supplement-not-supplant requirement under Section 241(a) of WIOA; Federal cost principles and audit requirements; Buy American Act provisions, as applicable and Civil rights and nondiscrimination laws. Providers must demonstrate fiscal accountability, internal controls, and capacity to manage federal funds responsibly.

Productivity Principles in Service Delivery by Approved Applicant Activities. The AEP will implement the following productivity principles:

1. The delivery of adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually, with both workforce preparation activities and workforce providers for a specific occupation or occupational cluster.
2. Delivery of programs that provide participants with contextualization of English language acquisition with employability, workplace, and financial literacy skills, as described in Sec. 129(b)(2)(D) of the WIOA, under the individual career services category.
3. Fostering the requirements of collaborative agreements and formal partnerships as part of the service provider grant application. If an eligible provider does not have the financial and staff resources to provide comprehensive instructional and support services on their own, they must document how they will partner with other adult education providers and partner agencies to fulfill the career pathway plan components and the Thirteen Considerations of WIOA.
4. The delivery of services to adults who are English language learners fully implementing Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IEL/CE) is described below: (1) integration of civics engagement skills into career pathways and workforce preparation activities, including professionals with degrees and credentials; (2) integration of educational technology and hybrid learning (blended learning) models into civics educational activities, including the use of

technology and social media to increase learner opportunities for responsible civic engagement; and (3) training and technical assistance on research and evidence-based instructional strategies.

Integration with Workforce and Career Pathways: Productive service delivery requires alignment with workforce system priorities. Providers must ensure that instructional activities: support career pathways linked to in-demand sectors; prepare participants for Integrated Education and Training (IET); promote transition to credential-bearing programs and coordinate with workforce partners to support employment outcomes. This integration strengthens the contribution of Title II services to Puerto Rico's unified workforce development system.

Technology and Innovation in Service Delivery: Consistent with federal guidance encouraging modernization, providers are encouraged to implement distance and hybrid instructional models; digital learning platforms; technology-supported assessment and progress tracking and flexible service models that expand access for working adults. Technology use must support measurable learning outcomes and comply with data reporting requirements.

Activities under Integrated Education and Training (IET): The PRDE-AEP prioritizes the delivery of Integrated Education and Training (IET) models that combine adult education, workforce preparation, and occupational training concurrently and contextually. IET programs are designed to accelerate participants' attainment of postsecondary credentials and employment in in-demand sectors, consistent with WIOA Section 203(9) and applicable federal guidance. Adult Education Program (PRDE-AEP) recognizes Integrated Education and Training (IET) as a primary strategy for aligning adult education with workforce development and economic mobility objectives. Consistent with Section 203(11) of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Integrated Education and Training is defined as 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.

Core Components of IET: All IET programs funded under Title II must include the following three required components, delivered concurrently and in a coordinated manner:

1. Adult education and literacy activities.

2. Workforce preparation activities; and
3. Workforce training aligned with a specific occupation or occupational cluster.

These components must be integrated into instructional design and scheduling to ensure that participants receive contextualized instruction that accelerates both academic skill development and occupational competency.

Alignment with Career Pathways and In-Demand Occupations: IET activities must align with career pathways frameworks that:

- Support attainment of recognized postsecondary credentials.
- Prepare participants for employment in in-demand industry sectors.
- Provide opportunities for wage progression and career advancement.

Eligible providers must demonstrate that IET programs are informed by local labor market information and aligned with Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB) priorities.

Where feasible, IET programs will coordinate with:

- Workforce training providers.
- Career and technical education programs.
- Postsecondary institutions.
- Registered Apprenticeship sponsors.
- Employers and industry sector partnerships.

Concurrent and Contextualized Instruction: IET instructional models must ensure that foundational academic skills are delivered in the context of occupational content. Programs must:

- Integrate reading, writing, mathematics, and English language acquisition with occupational terminology and tasks.
- Incorporate problem-solving, teamwork, digital literacy, and workplace readiness competencies.
- Utilize instructional approaches that accelerate participant progression through educational functioning levels.

- Scheduling structures must allow participants to engage in adult education and workforce training activities concurrently, reducing time to credential and employment.

Access and Equity in IET Participation: The PRDE-AEP will ensure that IET opportunities are accessible to individuals with barriers to employment, including:

- Adults with low literacy levels.
- English language learners.
- Individuals with disabilities.
- Individuals transitioning from correctional settings.

Providers must describe accommodation and support mechanisms to enable equitable participation and successful completion.

Performance Expectations and Outcomes: IET programs must contribute to measurable outcomes consistent with WIOA Section 116 indicators, including:

- Measurable skill gains.
- Secondary credential attainment, where applicable.
- Recognized postsecondary credential attainment.
- Employment outcomes.

Providers must demonstrate the capacity to track participant progress across academic and occupational components.

Expansion and Continuous Improvement of IET: For Program Years 2026–2028, the PRDE-AEP will continue to expand the availability and quality of IET offerings across Local Workforce Development Areas. Expansion efforts may include:

- Technical assistance to providers on IET design and implementation.
- Professional development on contextualized instruction.
- Strengthened coordination with workforce partners.
- Evaluation of IET outcomes to inform continuous improvement.

The PRDE-AEP will prioritize IET models that demonstrate measurable success in supporting participant transition to employment or postsecondary education.

Emphasis in recognized credentials: During 2026-2028, under the Unified Plan for Title II, the AEP will develop, at the local level, under local activities, with local eligible service providers, and several IET credentials projects through higher education university partners in high-demand occupations for the hospitality, health care, and business services industries. To address the findings of the new post-pandemic marketplace situation of hard-to-hire occupations, the AEP will expand the offering of activities under 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 for the purpose of educational and career advancement. Service providers will be required to develop integrated education and training that provides adult education and literacy activities, concurrently and contextually with both workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster. The industrial and service sectors and conglomerates to be targeted include manufacturing, health professions, technology, and the hospitality industry. In addition, the AEP will promote partnerships with accredited post-secondary and higher education institutions to design and implement programs aimed at credentials for adult education clientele, providing concurrent basic education and occupational training.

Acceleration and Career Pathway Progression: Concurrent models are designed to reduce barriers that traditionally separate academic remediation from occupational training. This approach supports the Commonwealth's commitment to worker mobility by enabling adults to obtain credentials more efficiently while strengthening foundational skills.

Access and Equity Considerations: Concurrent models must be designed to ensure equitable access for individuals with barriers to employment, including individuals with disabilities and English language learners. Providers must describe accommodations, support services, and instructional adaptations that enable successful participation in both academic and occupational components.

Alignment with Workforce System Priorities: The PRDE-AEP ensures that local activities are responsive to workforce system priorities through structured coordination with Local Workforce Development Boards and workforce partners.

Local providers are required to demonstrate alignment with local workforce development plans; participation in American Job Center coordination efforts; integration with career pathways connected to in-demand sectors and strategies to support transition to credential-bearing programs and employment. This alignment strengthens the role of adult education as a core component of the Commonwealth's unified workforce development system.

Commitment to Equity and Access: All local activities are designed to ensure equitable access for individuals with disabilities, English language learners, and other individuals with barriers to employment. Providers must implement accommodation, flexible scheduling, and coordination with support services to enable meaningful participation and successful completion.

C. CORRECTIONS EDUCATION AND OTHER EDUCATION OF INSTITUTIONALIZED INDIVIDUALS (WIOA SECTION 102(B)(2)(D)(II)(II)(BB))

Describe how the eligible agency will, using the considerations specified in section 231(e) of WIOA and in accordance with 34 CFR 463 subpart C, fund eligible providers to establish or operate programs that provide any of the following correctional educational programs identified in section 225 of WIOA:

- **Adult education and literacy activities;**
- **Special education, as determined by the eligible agency;**
- **Secondary school credit;**
- **Integrated education and training;**
- **Career pathways;**
- **Concurrent enrollment;**
- **Peer tutoring; and**
- **Transition to re-entry initiatives and other post release services with the goal of reducing recidivism**.

Each eligible agency using funds provided under Programs for Corrections Education and Other Institutionalized Individuals to carry out a program for criminal offenders within a correctional institution must give priority to serving individuals who are likely to leave the correctional institution within 5 years of participation in the program.

The Puerto Rico Department of Education, Adult Education Program (PRDE-AEP), allocates funds for correctional education and education of other institutionalized individuals in accordance with Section 225 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).Not more than 20 percent of the 82.5 percent of funds reserved for local activities under Section 231 may be used to support correctional education and education for institutionalized individuals.

Purpose and Scope: Correctional education activities are designed to: Assist incarcerated individuals in attaining literacy skills and secondary credentials; Improve English language proficiency, where applicable; Develop workforce preparation competencies and support transition to postsecondary education, occupational training, and employment upon release. These services are intended to improve educational attainment, enhance employability, and support successful reintegration into the community.

Eligible Participants: Services under Section 225 are provided to individuals who are: incarcerated in correctional institutions; or confined in community-based residential facilities or other institutional settings. Participants must meet the definition of an eligible individual under Section 203(4) of WIOA.

How the PRDE Adult Education Program will award section 225 activities: The awards to service providers serving corrections and other institutionalized individuals will follow the same process as other service providers in the competition held. These service providers will participate in the same multi-year competition and must comply with the 13 considerations of the WIOA legislation and the demonstrated effectiveness criteria. The PRDE's AEP will reserve no more than 20 percent of its Federal grant received under WIOA to provide programs for corrections education and education for other institutionalized individuals, as described in Section 225. Areas targeted through this program will include increased basic skills to obtain a high school diploma; readiness to transition successfully into the community and workforce; adults with disabilities literacy and adult secondary education skills; integration of digital literacy skills; English literacy courses; education and development of workforce preparation skills through coordination with vocational education; and use of the career pathway model for fostering a transition from correction facilities to employment and professional development for adult education teachers participating in correction programs through innovative strategies, which include the development of 21st century skills, STEM, and employability skills in a contextualized environment.

Each eligible agency using funds provided under Programs for Corrections Education and Other Institutionalized Individuals, to conduct a program for criminal offenders within a correctional institution, must give priority to serving individuals who are likely to leave the correctional institution within 5 years of participation in the program. Section 225 (a) of WIOA states that, from funds made available under Section 221(a)(1) for a fiscal year, each eligible agency shall conduct corrections in education or education for other institutionalized individuals. The funds should be used for the cost of education programs for criminal offenders in correctional institutions, other institutionalized individuals, and other individuals, including programs for adult education and literacy services, special education as determined by the eligible agency, secondary school credits, integrated education and training, career pathways, concurrent enrollment, peer tutoring and transition to re-entry initiatives, and other post-release services with the goal of reducing recidivism.

Reentry and Transition Strategies: The PRDE-AEP emphasizes coordination between correctional education providers and community-based workforce and education partners to facilitate smooth transitions upon release. Reentry-focused strategies may include:

- Pre-release educational planning.
- Coordination with American Job Centers.
- Referral to postsecondary education or training programs.
- Enrollment in Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs post-release.
- Information sharing with community providers to support continuity of services.

These transition strategies are designed to reduce barriers to employment and promote economic self-sufficiency.

Continuous Improvement: The PRDE-AEP monitors correctional education programs through performance review, technical assistance, and corrective action procedures when necessary. Programs demonstrating strong educational and transition outcomes may be considered for continuation funding within statutory limits.

D. INTEGRATED ENGLISH LITERACY AND CIVICS EDUCATION PROGRAM (WIOA SECTION 102(B)(2)(D)(II)(II)(CC))

Describe how the eligible agency will, using the considerations specified in section 231(e) of WIOA and in accordance with 34 CFR 463 subpart C, fund eligible providers to establish or operate Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) programs under section 243 of WIOA. Describe how adult English language learners, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries, are served in IELCE programs.

Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will be offered in combination with integrated education and training activities found in 34 CFR section 463.36.

Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will include instruction in literacy and English language acquisition and instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation.

Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will be designed to prepare adults who are English language learners for, and place such adults in, unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency.

Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will be designed to integrate with the local workforce development system and its functions to carry out the activities of the program.

3. **Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education Program**.

Describe how the eligible agency will, using the considerations specified in section231(e) of WIOA and in acbyFR 463 subpart C, fund eligible providers to establish or operate Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) programs under section 243 of WIOA. Describe how adult English language learners, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries, are served in IELCE programs.

The PRDE-AEP will not provide IELCE activities under section 243 of WIOA.

Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will be offered in combination with integrated education and training activities found in 34 CFR section 463.36.

Consistent with statement made in the previous sub-section, the PRDE-AEP will not provide IELCE activities under section 243 of WIOA.

Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will include instruction in literacy and English language acquisition and instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation.

Consistent with statement made in the previous sub-section, the PRDE-AEP will not provide IELCE activities under section 243 of WIOA.

Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under Section 243(a) of the WIOA will be designed to prepare adults who are English language learners for and place such adults in unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency.

Consistent with statement made in the previous sub-section, the PRDE-AEP will not provide IELCE activities under section 243 of WIOA.

Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will be designed to integrate with the local workforce development system and its functions to conduct the activities of the program.

Consistent with statement made in the previous sub-section, the PRDE-AEP will not provide IELCE activities under section 243 of WIOA.

E. STATE LEADERSHIP (WIOA SECTION 102(B)(2)(D)(II)(III))

1. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE THE FUNDS TO CARRY OUT THE REQUIRED STATE LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES UNDER SECTION 223 OF WIOA

The Puerto Rico Department of Education, Adult Education Program (PRDE-AEP), uses funds reserved under Section 223 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to carry out State Leadership activities designed to strengthen the quality, effectiveness, and accountability of adult education services statewide. In accordance with statutory requirements, not more than 12.5 percent of the total Title II allocation will be used to support permissible State Leadership activities. State Leadership funds are used to build system capacity, enhance instructional quality, promote workforce alignment, and support continuous improvement across all Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDAs). The Adult Education Program (AEP) will work toward more Flexibility & Innovation in line with Pillars IV and V of the America Talent Strategy.

AI-driven economic transformation and Flexibility & Innovation. Consistent with description of AI literacy activities including previously under Local Activities section, the AEP will seek AI transformation to adapt to workers new skills to share in the prosperity that AI will create. The AEP will promote flexibility and innovation, prioritizing AI literacy and skills development across the Adult Education Program developing pilot projects to drive rapid reskilling through AI-era innovations. New models of workforce innovation will be created to match the speed and scale of AI-driven economic transformation as AI is transforming work faster than the workforce system and workers will require new skills to share in the prosperity that AI will create. This pillar of the vision will be achieved by leveraging existing statutory authorities to promote flexibility and innovation, prioritizing AI literacy and skills development across the workforce system, and developing pilot projects to drive rapid reskilling and fuel other AI-era innovations.

The DEPR- AEP will perform the following specific **required activities** under Section 223, including:

1. Sign and implement a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Perkins Program. The purpose of the MOU is to establish a framework for coordination and collaboration among the Parties to support the development and implementation of a coordinated talent development system in Puerto Rico, in accordance with: (1) the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA); (2) the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins V); and (3) the Puerto Rico State Plan for WIOA Title II state Plan. This MOU promotes the alignment of strategies, the reduction of duplication of efforts, and the strengthening of occupational pathways from education to employment. The MOU will be formalized pursuant to: (1) Sections 101, 102, 121, and 203 of WIOA; (2) Sections 122 and 124 of Perkins V; (3) federal guidance on Unified and Combined State Plans; and (4) applicable laws and policies of the Government of Puerto Rico. The Parties agree in the MOU to collaborate under the following principles: (1) Alignment of educational and workforce strategies; (2) Participant-centered service delivery; (3) Employer-driven program design; (4) Data-informed decision-making; (5) Efficient use of public resources; and (6) Continuous improvement.
2. Operate high-quality professional development programs to improve adult education instruction, including incorporating essential components of reading instruction, instruction related to the specific needs of adult learners, instruction provided by volunteers or other

personnel and dissemination of information about models and promising practices. The professional development activities will include artificial intelligence (AI) literacy.

3. Provision of technical assistance to local providers receiving funds including the development and dissemination of instructional and programmatic practices based on the best available research in reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, English language acquisition, distance education, and staff training. Promoting the role of local providers as one-stop partners and helping with the use of technology, including staff training, and improving efficiency.

4. Monitoring and evaluation of the quality of and improvement in adult education and dissemination of information about models and proven or promising practices within the State. State Leadership funds support system oversight and continuous improvement through:

- Monitoring of local providers for compliance and performance.
- Data analysis and reporting under the National Reporting System (NRS).
- Risk assessment and performance review processes.
- Development of corrective action plans when necessary.
- Ongoing evaluation of program effectiveness.

6. Employer-based training activities in partnership with employers as a tool to help workers learn new skills and evolve within their companies or industries in small businesses in on-demand hospitality, tourism, and health occupations. Increased employer engagement would help the workforce system expand access to new industries and occupations, as well as increase the credibility of training in the business community. The ability to acquire training and skills at work provides an advantage for workers looking to improve their skills more easily and quickly.

7. Provide specialized professional training to teachers in the 21st Century, STEM, employability, and workforce preparation skills are important for competitiveness in the global labor market. The PRDE-AEP will provide ongoing professional development and technical assistance to eligible providers and instructors, including:

- Training on College and Career Readiness (CCR) Standards implementation.
- Support for Integrated Education and Training (IET) design and delivery.

- Development of contextualized instructional strategies aligned with workforce preparation.
- Training in digital literacy integration and technology-enhanced instruction.
- Support for serving individuals with disabilities and English language learners.
- Evidence-based instructional practices are grounded in adult learning research.

8. Update and expand the career pathways initiative: The DEPR-AEP will update and expand the implementation of the Career Pathways system during the 2026-2028 Unified Plan period. It is the goal to have 100% of eligible education providers centers island-wide in Puerto Rico certified with career pathways strategic plan tailored to their local needs. The career pathway initiative is under implementation, including the development of an individual employability plan for each participant with career pathway options. In addition, the AEP has initiated a process for registering participants in the One Stop American Job Center's to maximize the integration of services. The career pathways initiative will be expanded with the following goals:
9. Making use of the Career Pathways Plan as a strategic planning tool that aligns and bridges training, education, employment, and supportive services at the local and state levels, partnering with employers, enabling individuals to move beyond adult basic education and succeed in post-secondary education, earn industry-recognized credentials, and advance along a career path.
    a. Integrating adult basic education and occupational skills training to enable individuals to increase their educational learning gains and earn industry-recognized credentials while completing basic skills training, as well as connecting the systems and structures that serve individuals with lower skills through mechanisms such as effective contextualized programs that result in increased mastery of basic skills and attainment of credentials that are relevant to employers. The AEP career pathways model will include partnerships with providers, including community-based organizations, community and technical colleges, human services and workforce agencies, and employers. The model will be designed to allow entries, exits, and re-entries, depending on

skill levels and prior training, employment prospects, and changing personal situations.

b. The AEP is aware of the existing gap between labor force skills and the needs of employers in many high-growth industries, including healthcare, technology, tourism, and manufacturing. This gap creates structural unemployment, while well-paying jobs go unfilled, and many low-skilled adults are trapped in low-wage jobs with little opportunity for career advancement. The career pathways model aims to address the economy's vital need for skilled workers while offering low-wage workers the opportunity to obtain education and training they need to succeed in the labor market. To achieve these goals, the career pathways approach offers low-skilled adults well-articulated training and employment ladders targeted at locally in-demand jobs combined with supportive services. This approach presupposes that post-secondary education, and training should be organized as a series of manageable steps, leading to successively better credentials and employment opportunities in growing occupations. Each step is designed to prepare participants for the next level of employment and education and to provide credentials with labor market value.

The PRDE-AEP ensures that leadership expenditures directly support system improvement rather than supplanting local provider responsibilities.

2. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE THE FUNDS TO CARRY OUT PERMISSIBLE STATE LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES UNDER SECTION 223 OF WIOA, IF APPLICABLE

1. **Describe how the State will use the funds to conduct permissible State Leadership Activities under Section 223 of the WIOA, if applicable.**

The DEPR-AEP will perform several permissible activities under Section 223, including technology instruction investments, curriculum development, achieving performance objectives, and transition to post-secondary education. The Adult Education Program (AEP), as previously detailed in the required activities section, will work toward more Flexibility & Innovation in line with Pillars IV and V of the America Talent Strategy seeking match the speed and scale of AI-driven economic transformation and Flexibility & Innovation. As described under the required State Leadership activities above, the AEP will continue to advance AI literacy and workforce innovation initiatives. The following permissible activities further support this

commitment and the broader workforce development objectives of the Program.

PRDE's - AEP will work collaboratively with other core programs and partner's agencies to expand access to education, training and employment opportunities for adults, people with disabilities and individuals facing barriers to employment, thus contributing to further our economic development. The AEP program will provide resources and services through One-Stop Centers that include orientation for Adult Education program opportunities, career pathways, transition resources, referral processes, and other joint mechanisms developed through agency partnerships. The PRDE Adult Education Program will develop the following permissible activities under Section 223 of the WIOA:

- Technology and Data System Enhancement and Fostering a Technology Culture. Foster a technological culture for the development and implementation of technology applications, translation technology, distance education, and professional development to support the use of instructional technology. Improving statewide infrastructure through: Enhancement of student data systems; strengthening reporting and data validation processes; supporting technology-enabled instruction and expanding distance education capacity where appropriate.

Technology investments will directly support performance improvement and administrative efficiency. Identifying and disseminating model programs and effective practices across providers, particularly in areas such as:

- Integrated Education and Training (IET).
- Concurrent academic and occupational instruction.
- Strategies for improving retention and measurable skill gains.
- Instructional innovations supporting digital literacy.
- prioritize AI literacy and AI use skills development across the workforce system and develop pilot projects to drive rapid reskilling and fuel other AI-era innovations.
- Preparation and setting of interactive classrooms in instruction centers.
- Incorporating the online public domain and subscription-based search platforms in interactive classrooms.

- Promoting the role of local providers as one-stop partners and helping with the use of technology, including staff training, and improving efficiency.
- Professional development activities will address strategies for overcoming connectivity challenges in virtual environments, selecting appropriate EdTech tools, and maximizing technology use during synchronous and asynchronous instruction.

DEPR-AEP will foster the development and implementation of technology applications, translation technology, distance education, and professional development to support the use of instructional technology. This activity will be performed in compliance with the criteria number seven (7) of the 13 considerations of WIOA, that requires to consider "whether the eligible provider's activities effectively use technology, services, and delivery systems, including distance education, is sufficient to increase the amount and quality of learning and how such technology, services, and systems lead to improved performance". Considering this commitment, the DEPR-AEP will develop and implement the following activities:

1. Incorporation of Internet service technology into any remaining adult education classrooms without that service. DEPR-AEP will expand efforts to incorporate Internet technology into adult education classrooms. The internet has become a powerful tool for communication. It has revolutionized communication, to the extent where we utilize the Internet in everything we do. In education classrooms, the Internet breaks down communication barriers, as its portability enhances collaboration between students and teachers. Internet access is one of the important technologies in education; it allows the adult education clientele to connect to Internet technology without wires. The school Internet facilitates better education through dependable, secure, and supported wireless connectivity, which provides students and staff with the ability to work and connect across all areas of the campus. Internet technology facilitates learning through distance education.
2. Preparation and setting of interactive classrooms in instruction centers. The AEP will continue to invest funds in developing interactive classrooms with smart boards, Internet access, learning platforms, online resources, and learning material libraries to enhance learning on any remaining adult education classrooms without that service. An interactive classroom fosters spontaneity and flexibility, allowing teachers to draw and comment on a wide variety of web resources. It

allows teachers to save time in the classroom, print if necessary, including notes made during the lesson, reduce duplication of effort, and facilitate review. It can be used to conduct video conferences, attractive presentations, staff training, distance meetings, information sessions and group discussions. Therefore, it is also an excellent information technology and telecommunications (ICT) resource for teachers' professional development. Other benefits that teachers and students can find with the use of the interactive classroom is to have a tool that, in addition to the contents of the book, presents a technological combination in a reflective, contextualized, and strategic way, which gives students the possibility of access to critical and constructive education, in which each one is the manager of their own change and pedagogical progress.

3. Provision of portable notebooks in classrooms. The AEP will continue equipping classrooms with portable computers notebooks in any remaining adult education classroom without that service. Schools across the country have experimented by providing students with notebooks to facilitate learning. Providing students with notebooks for use in the classroom and at home improves their learning in several subjects, including science, math, and English. Students receive more feedback on their writing, editing, and revising their work more often, drawing on a wider range of resources to write, publish, or share their work with others. The benefits of using computer notebooks in adult education classrooms include the following:

- Fostering online collaboration with other students.
- Providing curriculum support and additional information to students.
- Promoting better organization: Notebooks help students keep track of their assignments and utilize online school calendars.
- Allowing students to receive and view assignments online and submit their work via e-mail rather than being required to print them.

4. Expansion of the distance education program: The AEP will expand the actual distance education program to provide the necessary space to allow teachers to boost the learning and skill gains of adult learners in geographical areas, including limited access or remote areas, in the mountain zones of Puerto Rico where the availability of education-eligible service providers is limited. The distance education strategy will include two modalities: blended (hybrid) distance education and full-distance education in a long-range stage, with emphasis on the last

one. The distance education program initiative will provide the necessary space to allow teachers to boost the learning and skill gains of adult learners. The distance education strategy will include two modalities:

- blended (hybrid) distance education. This strategy uses a combination of face to face and online learning activities where computer-mediated activities replace "seat-time" in the classroom. It is the "blend" that makes each course unique; thus, blended/hybrid courses can take on different attributes, adjusted to the situation of each classroom and student.
- Full distance education in a long-range stage, in which education is provided without the teacher and students being physically present together at any or most part of the program.

The initiative will allow teachers to develop supplemental activities and materials, fill gaps and address skills as they become more familiar with the curriculum over time. AEP will promote the use of technology platforms for distance education. The AEP will promote a full-distance educational approach using technology platforms.

5. Collaboration with other core programs and partner agencies: PRDE's AEP will work collaboratively with other core programs and partner agencies to expand access to education, training, and employment opportunities for adult learners. The AEP will provide resources and services through American Job Centers (One-Stop Centers) including orientation about program opportunities, career pathways, transition resources, referral processes, and other joint mechanisms developed through agency partnerships. The Adult Education Program has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the 16 American Job Centers (AJC) for collaboration and is, under the financial possibilities of the agency, contributing to infrastructure costs for the operations of the AJC. The AEP maintains a staff member on each of the 16 One-Stop Centers one day a week to evaluate potential adult education participants and make referrals to the adult education service providers approved by the AEP for services. These AEP employees make cross referrals between the One-Stop centers and the AEP service providers.
6. Activities under Integrated education and training: State leadership activities will support the statewide implementation and quality of Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs, as described

previously in Section (b) of this Plan. Leadership funds will be used to provide technical assistance, professional development, and capacity building to eligible providers implementing IET models.

7. Promoting apprenticeship programs. The Adult Education Program will perform activities toward the expansion and integration of Registered Apprenticeship pathways in alignment with federal WIOA priorities and the Administration's goal of reaching 1 million active apprentices nationwide. To support this effort, the Adult Education Program will undertake the following activities:

- Apprenticeship Awareness and Outreach: Inform adult learners about Registered Apprenticeship opportunities available in Puerto Rico, with emphasis on in-demand occupations and sectors critical to economic competitiveness, including manufacturing, construction, healthcare, and technology.
- Pre-Apprenticeship and Work-Based Learning Integration: Incorporate pre-apprenticeship, internship, and other work-based learning models into program offerings as structured on-ramps to Registered Apprenticeships, prioritizing models that demonstrate strong labor market outcomes and clear progression toward employment.
- Alignment with Employer-Driven Standards: Coordinate with local employers, industry partners, and intermediaries to ensure that adult education instruction and workforce readiness activities align with industry-approved apprenticeship program standards, enabling participants to transition seamlessly into apprenticeship programs.
- Referral to Registered Apprenticeship Programs: Establish and maintain referral protocols to connect eligible adult learners to Registered Apprenticeship sponsors, intermediaries, and joint labor-management partnerships operating in Puerto Rico.
- Data Tracking and Accountability: Track and report the share of program participants who transition into Registered Apprenticeships or work-based learning models, in accordance with federal performance accountability requirements under WIOA Title II.
- Coordination with State and Federal Partners: Collaborate with the Puerto Rico Department of Labor, the WIOA Title I programs, and Perkins V CTE partners to support a coordinated ecosystem that grows apprenticeship participation, reduces barriers to enrollment, and leverages federal funding strategically.

- Credential Attainment Support: Provide instruction and support services that prepare adult learners to meet the educational and skills requirements for apprenticeship entry, including digital literacy, occupational readiness, and recognized postsecondary credential attainment.

8. Update the Implementation effort of the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCR Standards). The College and Career ready standards are designed to be relevant to the real world, allow students to master more critical thinking and unique critical thinking skills, and reflect the knowledge, skills, and social foundations that our students need for success in both college and work. These standards require the implementation of the critical skills and knowledge expected by employers and are required for success in workforce training, post-secondary education, and employment. The College and Career Readiness Standards (CCR) for adult education presents a set of College and Career Readiness Standards that reflect the content most relevant to preparing adult students for success in colleges, technical training programs and transition to work. This effort will also promote English language acquisition and civic education. DE-AEP will also focus on updating the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCR Standards) to link basic education for adults, post-secondary education, and the world of work.

9. Operating high-quality professional development programs: The DEPR-AEP is committed to developing high-quality professional development activities and support services that will help teachers and instructors better understand the career pathway systems and expand their professional knowledge.

10. Professional development for career pathway updates. Areas and themes related to the development and delivery of career pathway systems that would help low-skilled adults transition into post-secondary education and employment or those with disabilities include the following:

- Design of Contextualized Instruction, including the STEM approach.
- Integration of employability skills into the classroom.
- Integration of career pathways into the curriculum framework of adult education programs.
- Integration of career counseling and planning into adult education.

- Focusing participants on career pathways.

11. Implementation of online professional development for teachers**:** The AEP will develop an online professional development program for adult education teachers. There are several benefits for adult education in the efforts for professional development for teachers: students have better learning outcomes and teachers learn better ways to teach, develop better organization and planning skills and gain knowledge. Online professional development adds flexibility to teachers. In an online class, teachers can work at their own pace and access classes at any time of the day from any working technical location. Online professional development provides an open schedule and great flexibility and can decrease stress for teachers and students. Online courses are typically more affordable than in-person ones. Technology reduces the cost of delivering professional development in several ways. Teachers can save money on gasoline, clothes, and books. The Department of Education can save money on renting spaces, printed materials, and furniture. Therefore, it is an excellent choice for both parties to consider online professional development courses.

12. Provision of technical assistance to eligible providers of adult education and literacy activities: The plan for providing technical assistance to service providers will include the following:

- Technical assistance in curriculum thematic areas.
- Academic supervision offers mentoring and coaching in both the content and the andragogy process.
- Training and technical assistance for the integration of digital literacy skills into adult education and literacy activities.
- Training on the administration of pre- and post-tests standardized by the National Reporting System (NRS) and the descriptors of each level of functioning were used to measure educational gain and training on the monitoring of achievements of the core measures for the NRS.

13. Methodologies for the implementation of activities data analysis, evaluation, and career pathways development: The AEP will implement several methodologies for the implementation of activities data analysis, evaluation, and career pathways development. The data analysis will be focused on compliance with the following NRS requirements: the Assessment policies, NRS quarterly reports, NRS Data quality checklist for collecting and producing accurate and reliable data and the NRS annual narrative report, including activities evaluation of outcomes. The AEP Will also monitor on a

regular basis the career pathways implementation strategy by reviewing the local career pathways plan developed and approved by the AEP for each local education service providers.

F. ASSESSING QUALITY (WIOA SECTION 102(B)(2)(D)(II)(V))

Describe how the eligible agency will assess the quality of providers of adult education and literacy activities under title II. Describe how the eligible agency will take actions to improve such quality, including providing the activities described in section 223(a)(1)(B) of WIOA. Describe how the eligible agency will use evaluations, data analysis, program monitoring, or other methods to improve the quality of adult education activities in the State.

Quality assessment integrates performance accountability, monitoring, technical assistance, data analysis, and continuous improvement processes.

Performance Accountability Framework: Program quality is evaluated in alignment with the primary indicators of performance established under Section 116 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), including:

- Measurable Skill Gains (MSG).
- Credential attainment.
- Employment in the second and fourth quarters after exit.
- Median earnings after exit.
- Effectiveness in serving employers, where applicable.

The PRDE-AEP establishes state-adjusted performance levels and monitors provider progress through quarterly and annual data reviews. Performance outcomes inform continuation funding decisions and targeted technical assistance.

Data Management and Reporting Integrity: Accurate and timely data reporting is essential to assessing program quality. All providers are required to:

- Maintain complete and verifiable participant records.
- Enter data into the state-approved management information system.
- Ensure compliance with National Reporting System (NRS) guidelines.
- Participate in data validation and review processes.

The PRDE-AEP conducts routine data quality reviews to identify discrepancies, reporting errors, or compliance concerns.

Monitoring and Risk Assessment:

The PRDE-AEP implements a structured monitoring system that includes:

- Annual risk assessments based on fiscal, administrative, and performance indicators.
- Desk reviews and on-site monitoring visits.
- Review of programmatic documentation and fiscal controls.
- Follow-up corrective action procedures when necessary.

Monitoring protocols are designed to ensure compliance with federal and state requirements while supporting program improvement.

Describe how the eligible agency will take actions to improve such quality, including providing the activities described in section 223(a)(1)(B) of WIOA.

Continuous Improvement and Technical Assistance: Quality assessment is not limited to compliance review. The PRDE-AEP uses performance data and monitoring findings to guide continuous improvement efforts. Technical assistance may include:

- Targeted professional development.
- Instructional coaching.
- Data analysis training.
- Support in implementing Integrated Education and Training (IET).
- Guidance on improving measurable skill gains and retention strategies.

Providers demonstrating strong performance may serve as model sites for replication of effective practices.

How the eligible agency will use evaluations, data analysis, program monitoring, or other methods to improve the quality of adult education activities in the State.

Evaluation of Instructional Effectiveness: Program quality also includes evaluation of instructional practices and program design. The PRDE-AEP assesses whether providers:

- Deliver instruction aligned with College and Career Readiness Standards.

- Implement contextualized and concurrent instructional models.
- Integrate workforce preparation and digital literacy competencies.
- Provide sufficient instructional intensity and duration to achieve learning gains.

Equity and Access Monitoring: The PRDE-AEP monitors equitable access to ensure that services are available to:

- Individuals with low literacy levels.
- English language learners.
- Individuals with disabilities.
- Individuals with barriers to employment.

Other quality assessment measures: To assess quality, the DEPR-AEP will enforce criteria number 3 of the 13 considerations of the WIOA, regarding the past effectiveness of the eligible education service providers in improving the literacy of eligible individuals. This follows the requirement of meeting state-adjusted levels of performance for the primary indicators of performance described in WIOA Section 116, especially with respect to eligible individuals who have low levels of literacy. In addition, all applications submitted for funding must comply with Section 231 and the stipulations of this Plan regarding the submission of applications. In addition to those included in the application, applicants must comply with the following requirements and activities implementation criteria:

1. Submit clear and measurable goals and objectives that promote higher student achievement and performance. Their performance levels must satisfy those established at the state level.
2. Demonstrate through measurable outcomes and performance measures, their past effectiveness in helping participants attain higher literacy skills, especially at the lowest levels of literacy.
3. Student performance, retention and promotion must be reported to the State, as might be required, through its new student information system.
4. Programs must be of sufficient intensity and duration; therefore, they must meet the requirements established by the State for programs that assist participants in attaining a high school diploma or in the transition to post-secondary education and training using career pathways. Sufficient intensity and duration must be demonstrated by an

operational design that is appropriate for meeting the established performance measures. The integration of prioritized literacy-based workforce preparation skills and digital literacy skills in the instruction delivered under the content domains will be strongly encouraged for all programs.

5. Programs must be based on adult education practices that are supported by the most rigorous or scientifically valid research available and the use of strategies that have proven to be effective and documented through research, such as career pathways, standard-based education and PRDE's adult education academic content standards.
6. Service providers must hold programs in a non-threatening environment where real-life and lifelong learning skills are promoted. These strategies are critical for participants in preparing productive and contributing members of the community for the global economy.
7. Professional development for all adult education program personnel must meet the high-quality standards established by the PRDE in terms of credit hours and intensity of training. PRDE supports adult educators in learning and applying practices based on the most rigorous or scientifically valid research available.
8. Local service providers must demonstrate how they will implement a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with all appropriate agencies such as universities, training programs, schools, employers, and other government agencies to effectively coordinate services for adults in their programs.
9. Local service providers must commit to providing all the required data to the PRDE and comply with the Student Information System. Student performance, retention and promotion must be reported to the State, as might be required, through the new student information system. This element is essential for tracking students and assessing their performance. Local providers will be trained for data collection and submission procedures and will be required to submit all the required data within the deadlines established by the Adult Education program.
10. Local service providers of English Literacy and Conversational English must substantiate the need for these programs in the community and describe how their programs will effectively address participants' needs and document program outcomes.

11. The Adult Education program encourages service providers to offer programs on a flexible schedule and ample support services to enable adults to attend and complete these programs. Workplace literacy providers must offer flexible schedules and locations to accommodate the needs of working adults. The Adult Education program promotes support services, such as childcare and transportation among local service providers.

Local providers will be accountable for meeting and complying with quality standards for the administration and instruction of basic adult education activities. The effectiveness of the programs, services and activities of funding recipients will be assessed through the DEPR Monitoring Division. The Division employs the following methods to assess programs and evaluate program improvement: data reviews, monitoring visits, on-site program reviews and self-assessment of program functions and performance. Any time a service provider is asked for a corrective action plan to improve in a particular area, AEP personnel will provide technical assistance and support to improve the quality of the adult educational activities of the service provider.

The monitoring of programs implementation: The AEP implements a monitoring process for program implementation activities. The monitoring process consists of three key components: ongoing, data-based desk audits, educational program reviews and on-site program monitoring.

1. The AEP state office will review a sample of programs for compliance with the WIOA requirements. Programs that score high on risk analysis for such things as having a new director, consistent late or incorrect reporting, not meeting objectives, or fiscal irregularities become priorities for monitoring. Programs that do not meet their responsibilities and/or objectives are provided with additional technical assistance to help them achieve full compliance.
2. The AEP Student Information System staff at the central office will regularly review student performance data and other program information. Programs receiving AEFLA or state funds must enter student data at least monthly into the managed student information system, our NRS compliant managed information system. Local programs must collect and document student information regarding their goals, educational functioning levels, progress, and achievements. Programs review data at least quarterly to ensure completeness and accuracy and to determine their standing regarding projected outcome targets. The managed platform will

generate annual reports on student performance measures for submission to OCTAE.

3. The AEP will conduct on-site reviews at least every five years guided by a review instrument. Onsite program reviews provide an additional effective tool for continuous improvement.

Assessing the quality of activities for professional development: Section 223(a)(1)(B) of WIOA (B) requires… "the establishment or operation of high quality professional development programs to improve the instruction provided pursuant to local activities required under section 231(b), including instruction incorporating the essential components of reading instruction as such components relate to adults, instruction related to the specific needs of adult learners, instruction provided by volunteers or by personnel of a State or outlying area, and dissemination of information about models and promising practices related to such programs." Participants in professional development activities were surveyed after all workshops, conference presentations, and webinars to evaluate and provide feedback on the activity or event. The annual training plan includes state priorities, input from surveys on training needs and advice from professional development presenters. Survey results are reviewed by the professional development team at the AEP central office. In designing an annual professional development plan, the AEP uses an assessment tool to assess the professional development activities implemented to determine the extent to which adult service professionals have core competencies and skills relevant to their competence field. The assessment tool will include a list of items to examine competencies relevant to the core adult participants' activities. The assessment will identify areas of strength, areas for improvement, and the next steps for planning. The assessment tool will inform the AEP about the quality of staff capacity and will also serve as a baseline for evaluating the outcome of the professional development plan. The staff will rank how relevant they believe each competence is to their job responsibilities, how knowledgeable or skilled they believe they are in each competence, how much training they have in each competence, and other competencies.

Performance accountability: Performance accountability assesses the effectiveness of grantees in achieving continuous improvement in adult education and literacy activities. The performance outcome measures consist of the following core indicators:

1. Percentage of program participants in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after program exit.

2. Percentage of program participants in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after program exit.
3. The median earnings of program participants in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exiting the program.
4. The percentage of program participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized post-secondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains toward such a credential or employment.
5. Indicators of effectiveness in serving employers were established pursuant to the WIOA.
6. Measurement of the effectiveness of service providers in the previous delivery of services.
7. Review and consideration of the local workforce Boards comments on the service providers' proposal in terms of alignment with the regional plan of each concerned local area.

Program accountability is measured using the following outcome measures:

1. Measurable skill gains (MSG) are reported during regularly established survey schedules as required by the National Reporting System. This is based on the lowest functioning level in which the participant earned at least one eligible literacy completion point, earned a diploma in secondary education, or exited and enrolled in a post-secondary career and technical education by the end of the reporting year.
2. Credential Attainment Rate measures student attainment of a secondary school diploma, recognized equivalent, or enrolled in post-secondary education or career training within one year of exit.
3. Employment Rate (second quarter after exit) measures the number of participants that exit during the reporting period who are employed during the second quarter after exit divided by the number of those that exited during the reporting period.
4. Median Earnings (second quarter after exit) for all doing exit in a core program, the report of the wage that is at the midpoint between the highest and lowest wages earned in the second quarter after exit.
5. Employment Rate (fourth quarter) for the number of participants doing exit during the reporting period who are employed during the fourth

quarter after exit divided by the number of those exiting during the reporting period.

Each fiscal year, the Adult Education program negotiates the proposed target percentages for each of the core indicators of performance with the USDOE, Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE). Each local program is responsible for meeting or exceeding negotiated performance targets.

ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAM CERTIFICATIONS

States must provide written and signed certifications that:

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The plan is submitted by the State agency that is eligible to submit the plan;	Yes
2. The State agency has authority under State law to perform the functions of the State under the program;	Yes
3. The State legally may carry out each provision of the plan;	Yes
4. All provisions of the plan are consistent with State law;	Yes
5. A State officer, specified by title in the certification, has authority under State law to receive, hold, and disburse Federal funds made available under the plan;	Yes
6. The State officer who is submitting the plan, specified by the title in the certification, has authority to submit the plan;	Yes
7. The agency that is submitting the plan has adopted or otherwise formally approved the plan; and	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
8. The plan is the basis for State operation and administration of the program;	Yes

ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAM ASSURANCES

The State Plan must include assurances that:

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The eligible agency will expend funds appropriated to carry out title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) only in a manner consistent with fiscal requirements under section 241(a) of WIOA (regarding the supplement-not-supplant requirement);	Yes
2. The eligible agency will ensure that there is at least one eligible provider serving each local area, as defined in section 3(32) of WIOA;	Yes
3. The eligible agency will not use any funds made available under title II of WIOA for the purpose of supporting or providing programs, services, or activities for individuals who are not "eligible individuals" within the meaning of section 203(4) of WIOA, unless it is providing programs, services or activities related to family literacy activities, as defined in section 203(9) of WIOA;	Yes
4. Using funds made available under title II of WIOA to carry out a program for criminal offenders within a correctional institution, the eligible agency will give priority to serving individuals who are likely to leave the	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
correctional institution within five years of participation in the program.	
5. The eligible agency agrees that in expending funds made available under Title II of WIOA, the eligible agency will comply with sections 8301 through 8303 of the Buy American Act (41 U.S.C. 8301-8303).	Yes

AUTHORIZING OR CERTIFYING REPRESENTATIVE

CERTIFICATION REGARDING LOBBYING

Certification for Contracts, Grants, Loans, and Cooperative Agreements

The undersigned certifies, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

(1) No Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid, by or on behalf of the undersigned, to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of an agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with the awarding of any Federal contract, the making of any Federal grant, the making of any Federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement.

(2) If any funds other than Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions.

(3) The undersigned shall require that the language of this certification be included in the award documents for all subawards at all tiers (including subcontracts, subgrants, and contracts under grants, loans, and cooperative agreements) and that all subrecipients shall certify and disclose accordingly. This certification is a material representation of fact upon which reliance was placed when this transaction was made or entered into. Submission of this

certification is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required certification shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than $10,000 and not more than $100,000 for each such failure.

Statement for Loan Guarantees and Loan Insurance

The undersigned states, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

If any funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this commitment providing for the United States to insure or guarantee a loan, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions. Submission of this statement is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required statement shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than $10,000 and not more than $100,000 for each such failure.

Please download and sign the forms below. Please scan and return the forms to wioa@ed.gov at the same time you submit your State Plan via the portal.

1. SF424B - Assurances – Non-Construction Programs (http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html)
2. Grants.gov - Certification Regarding Lobbying (http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html)
3. SF LLL Form – Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (required, only if applicable) (http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html)

APPLICANT'S ORGANIZATION	**Enter information in this column**
Applicant's Organization	Puerto Rico Department of Education
PRINTED NAME AND TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE	**Enter information in this column**
First Name	Eliezer
Last Name	Ramos Pares
Title	Secretary

APPLICANT'S ORGANIZATION	Enter information in this column
Email	ramospr@de.pr.gov

GENERAL EDUCATION PROVISION ACT SECTION 427 ASSURANCE

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to applicants for grant awards under this program. All applicants for new grant awards must include the following information in their applications to address this provision in order to receive funding under this program. (OMB Control Number 1894-0005)

The State Plan must include	Include
I assure that the proposed project complies with the requirements in section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (20 U.S.C. 1228a).	Yes

Compliance can be found on the following page(s) of the application:

(b) Local Activities

Competitive Grant Structure: Under the current and upcoming grant cycle (2026–2028), the PRDE-AEP will continue implementing the four-year multiyear competition structure consisting of:

- An initial one-year grant award.
- Continuation awards for up to three additional years, contingent upon demonstrated effectiveness, compliance with fiscal and programmatic requirements, and availability of federal funds.
- Equity, Access, and Non-Discrimination: All eligible providers must comply with applicable federal and state civil rights laws and demonstrate commitment to equitable access for individuals regardless of race, gender, national origin, age, disability, or other protected status. Providers must describe how reasonable accommodations will be provided to individuals with physical, mental, or learning disabilities, consistent with WIOA Section 231(e)(2) and Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA). Page 10 of modification.

(f) Assessing Quality

- Compliance with GEPA: All eligible providers must comply with applicable federal and state civil rights laws and demonstrate commitment to equitable access for individuals regardless of race, gender, national origin, age, disability, or other protected status. Providers must describe how reasonable accommodation will be provided to individuals with physical, mental, or learning disabilities, consistent with Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA). Page 32 of modification.

ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

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 two years covered by the plan modification. 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 two years of the plan modification.

While states are not required to submit expected levels of performance for Effectiveness in Serving Employers for PY 2026 and PY 2027 all of core programs are expected to collect data and report as a shared indicator (as directed in guidance) for these years.

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	35.7%	35.7%	35.8%	35.8%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	34.0%	40.0%	34.5%	40.3%
Median Earnings (Second	3,625	3,625	3,630	3,626

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Quarter After Exit)				
Credential Attainment Rate	35.0%	42.0%	36.0%	42.3%
Measurable Skill Gains	45.8%	60.0%	46.9%	60.3%
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 2026 and 2027.

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (COMBINED OR GENERAL)

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan must include the following descriptions and estimates, as required by sections 101(a) and 606 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA.

A. STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL.

1. ALL VR AGENCIES, EXCEPT FOR THOSE THAT HAVE AN INDEPENDENT CONSUMER-CONTROLLED COMMISSION, MUST HAVE A STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (COUNCIL OR SRC) THAT MEETS THE CRITERIA IN SECTION 105 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT. THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPLICABLE, HAS:

Select A or B:

(A) is an independent State commission

(B) has established a State Rehabilitation Council

(B) has established a State Rehabilitation Council

2. **IN ACCORDANCE WITH ASSURANCE (A)(1)(B), IF SELECTED, PLEASE PROVIDE INFORMATION ON THE CURRENT COMPOSITION OF THE COUNCIL BY REPRESENTATIVE TYPE, INCLUDING THE TERM NUMBER OF THE REPRESENTATIVE, AS APPLICABLE, AND ANY VACANCIES, AS WELL AS THE BEGINNING DATES OF EACH REPRESENTATIVE'S TERM**.

Select 'Edit' to edit the narrative.

Note, please do not edit the table header or formatting. Only edit the table contents.

If you accidentally edit the table headers and structure, open this link to the blank table. You can copy and paste the table into the narrative field, and start over if needed.

Council Representative	Current Term Number/Vacant	Beginning Date of Term Mo./Yr.
Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)	Ongoing	07/2024
Parent Training and Information Center	Ongoing	05/2024

Council Representative	Current Term Number/Vacant	Beginning Date of Term Mo./Yr.
Client Assistance Program	Ongoing	01/2017
Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor (Ex Officio if Employed by the VR Agency)	First Term	09/2024
Community Rehabilitation Program Service Provider	Vacant	
Business, Industry, and Labor	First Term	12/2025
Business, Industry, and Labor	Vacant	
Business, Industry, and Labor	Vacant	
Business, Industry, and Labor	Vacant	
Disability Advocacy Groups	First Term	05/2026
Current or Former Applicants for, or Recipients of, VR services	First Term	10/2023
Section 121 Project Directors in the State (as applicable)	N/A	
State Educational Agency Responsible for Students with Disabilities Eligible to Receive Services under Part B of the Individuals with	Ongoing	06/2021

Council Representative	Current Term Number/Vacant	Beginning Date of Term Mo./Yr.
Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)		
State Workforce Development Board	Ongoing	07/2024
VR Agency Director (Ex Officio)	Ongoing	02/2025
Parent, Family Members or Advocates for People with Disabilities	Vacant	

3. IF THE SRC IS NOT MEETING THE COMPOSITION REQUIREMENTS IN SECTION 105(B) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT AND/OR IS NOT MEETING QUARTERLY AS REQUIRED IN SECTION 105(F) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, PROVIDE THE STEPS THAT THE VR AGENCY IS TAKING TO ENSURE IT MEETS THOSE REQUIREMENTS.

The Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor vacancy was filled in September 2024. The SRC sent the announcement to the VR State Agency and the Graduated School of Rehabilitation Counseling and the Rehabilitation Counselors' College (Association).

The State Independent Living Council has representation on the Council. Its president began her duties as a member of the CERPR in July 2024.

There are currently vacancies on the Puerto Rico State Rehabilitation Council (CERPR). On December 2023 the SRC sent to the Governor's Office a recommendation of a candidate to fill the Business, Industry and Labor Sector vacancy. Waiting for approval. Still having other vacancies for this sector, but no candidates identified yet. The Office of Executive and Judicial Appointments at La Fortaleza, under the Governor's Office, received the recommendation of other three (3) candidates interested in joining the Council to fill the vacancies of the Community Rehabilitation Programs, Disability Advocacy Groups, and Parents, Family Members or Advocates of People with Disabilities. These candidates have already been interviewed by the CERPR and are awaiting their appointment by the Governor.

The Puerto Rico Vocational Rehabilitation Administration (PRVRA) recommended one candidate to fill the vacancy representing the Disability Advocacy Groups category, and the individual was appointed in May 2026. The PRVRA will continue its review to identify qualified candidates for the remaining vacancies and expects to submit, before August 30th, additional nominations to the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for interviews and subsequent referral to the Governor's Appointments Office for formal appointment; however, the VRA will continue to follow up with the expectation that the appointments will be processed before December 2026.

4. IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS IN SECTION 101(A)(21)(A)(II)(III) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, INCLUDE A SUMMARY OF THE COUNCIL'S INPUT (INCLUDING HOW IT WAS OBTAINED) INTO THE STATE PLAN AND ANY STATE PLAN REVISIONS, INCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COUNCIL'S ANNUAL REPORTS, THE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER SATISFACTION AND OTHER COUNCIL REPORTS.

The Puerto Rico State Rehabilitation Council (CERPR by its Spanish acronym) has fulfilled its mission of advising and making recommendations, contributing to the development of the Puerto Rico's Vocational Rehabilitation Administration's (PRVRA or VRA) public policy. This has been achieved through collaboration in providing information for the PRVRA Portion of the Unified State Plan, as well as through the analysis, discussion, and submission of observations on the Normative Communications referred to the Council.

Also, the CERPR participated in the actions carried out during 2023 by the PRVRA to comply with the development of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and had the opportunity to provide its feedback regarding the Goals, Priorities and Strategies developed based on the study. Therefore, it provides the following recommendations to the VRA.

Goal 1

Achieve greater effectiveness in the process of providing services to applicants/consumers for a successful integration into the labor force.

Recommendations or Input of the CERPR:

1. Agrees and sees the established goals, priorities, and strategies as favorable, however, it recommends the agency makes sure to have the appropriate professionals to carry out and achieve the proposed strategies.

2. Requests information related to the established protocol for an employer to request the salary incentive.
3. It recommends that the protocol of granting the salary incentive is accessible and viable for the employers that are interested in requesting it.
4. Volunteers to collaborate with the VRA offering guidance to employers related to the benefits of hiring people with disabilities and other possible topics of interest. It also recommends offering guidance to the employers about the tax credits or exemptions that may be available to provide reasonable accommodations to its employees. The ADA National Network can be approached to receive guidance and assistance about these matters.
5. Recommends examining the viability of providing training to the agency's personnel in current affairs and to the employers in matters of interest, through the Technical Assistance Centers or other resources.
6. Recommends approaching the Manufacturers Association and requesting allowing the VRA to have some type of participation in the association's activities, with the objective of encouraging the employment of persons with disabilities.
7. Recommends approaching the Secretary of the Puerto Rico Department of Economic Development and Commerce to achieve an alliance to allow greater approximation with the employers and collaborative employment projects.

Goal 2

Contribute to increasing the skills and opportunities of students with disabilities through the provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services.

Recommendations or Input of the CERPR:

1. Agrees with the strategies designed for the provision of Pre-Employment Transition and Transition Services.
2. Recommends serving the greatest number of youths and students with disabilities possible and provide more attention to the least served students with disabilities outside of the metropolitan area, especially in the center of the island.
3. Recommends maintaining the participation of the VRA personnel in the meetings of the Programming and Placement committee (COMPU by

its Spanish acronym) of the young persons in transition and, for that, to have more communication between the Department of Education and the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration to find strategies to allow greater participation of the VRA personnel in those meetings during the whole year.

Goal 3

Strengthen administrative, programmatic, and technological procedures to achieve the required institutional efficiency.

Recommendations and input of the CERPR:

1. Recommends approaching the universities that offer careers in marketing, public communication, production, and digital video editing to explore a possible collaboration that allows the students to develop tools to accelerate the broadcasting of information and services; among them videos directed toward the students with disabilities, applicants/consumers, and employers. Among the possible educational institutions and other entities that could be contacted would be, for example: Sagrado Corazón University (Community Outreach area), Cinematography Science, Arts and Television College (CCAT by its Spanish acronym), Atlantic University College, Ana G. Méndez University, Channel 6, Arts and Technology Lyceum, among others.
2. Recommends the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration includes on its webpage an area where all Normative Communications can be available to the people with disabilities, family members and public that want to know the public policy of the Administration. It recommends using the webpage of the Department of Education as reference, which is accessible and has the procedures manual, circular letters, forms, etc. for the benefit of the population which they serve. The PRVRA does not currently have its Procedures Manual, Circular Letters, Forms, or other documents considered to be public in nature available on its website.
3. Requests the VRA to continue sharing with the with CERPR the Normative Communications in the draft stage, so that the Council can carry out its role, established by the Rehabilitation Act, to actively participate in the development of the public policy of the Agency. The recommendation is currently being implemented; however, the CERPR is unaware of whether the VRA has taken into consideration the recommendations submitted in the draft Normative Communications,

as we have not received any information indicating whether our input was accepted.

5. PROVIDE THE VR AGENCY'S RESPONSE TO THE COUNCIL'S INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS, INCLUDING AN EXPLANATION FOR THE REJECTION OF ANY INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

List each recommendation/input followed by the VR agency response

The VRA reviews the recommendations made by the CERPR to the VRA Portion of the Unified State Plan and presents the following information:

Goal 1

1. The VRA is constantly evaluating the personnel and recruiting needs, as well as the opportunities to establish collaboration with other entities to carry out some of the plan strategies.
2. Normative Communication No.: 2025-11, establishes the updated procedure for the granting of salary incentives. It has already been shared with the CERPR for its awareness and reference.
3. The protocol established for granting incentives requires the employers to present the documents established by law to comply with the granting of contracts in the Government of Puerto Rico (ex. Certificate of Good Standing, among others).
4. We accept the recommendation. During the period from July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025, the Central-East region, through the Support and Employment Modalities Centers (SEMC, or "CAME" by its Spanish acronym), reached 42 employers. During this same period, the Northern region reached 65 employers. The Southern region succeeded in reaching 180 employers, and the Western region reached 121 employers.
5. We accept the recommendation. During PY 2024, the Agency fulfilled its commitment to provide training to both agency employees and employers, as reflected in the progress report.
6. On October 31, 2025, a meeting was held with the President and representatives of the Industrialists Association to discuss the draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and review the proposed terms prior to its signing. They committed to reviewing the draft MOU and returning it with their comments and recommendations. It was returned on February 23, 2026.

7. We accept the recommendation and inform you that the VRA participates in the meetings of WIOA State Board, that take place at the Department of Economic Development and Commerce. Also, VRA participates in the 15 Local Boards of Labor Development, island wide.

Goal 2

1. We accept the reaction.
2. VRA provides services to youths and students with disabilities throughout the island following the same procedure in all regions.
3. We accept the recommendation and will approach the Department of Education to evaluate possible strategies.

Goal 3

1. We inform that, on February 26, 2025, the VRA presented an initiative to create a video providing information on the mission, vision, and purpose of vocational rehabilitation services. A second video in sign language was also presented, containing the agency's office contact information, and additional videos featuring basic sign language have been produced as part of ongoing accessibility efforts. Furthermore, on February 4, recordings began for new sign language videos, with sessions continuing on February 20, to promote awareness, accessibility, and inclusion of the Deaf community within the agency.
2. The VRA webpage now includes a "Documents" tab, within which the "Public Policy" section is located. The Information Systems Office will be uploading the documents shortly to ensure that relevant information is accessible to applicants, consumers, and the general public.
3. We accept the recommendation and, as agreed previously with CERPR, the Agency is committed to ensuring that draft documents continue to be shared with the CERPR, as has been the established practice. Likewise, feedback is being provided by copying them on the communication once it has been reviewed, so that the Council is informed of which of its recommendations were incorporated into each draft.

B. COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT (CSNA).

Section 101(a)(15), (17), and (23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to provide an assessment of:

1. THE VR SERVICES NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES RESIDING WITHIN THE STATE, INCLUDING:

A. INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES AND THEIR NEED FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT;

The VRA has now completed the evaluation of the proposals submitted in response to the Request for Proposals (RFP) for the 2026–2027 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) and will begin the study during 2026. The results will be used to develop the goals and activities to be included in the VRA portion of the 2028–2031 State Plan.

In this and the following sections, the results of the previously completed Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment of Rehabilitation Services, carried out by the company Énfasis Puerto Rico, are presented. The contract for said study was signed in June 2023 and the final findings report was presented in November 2023. It should be noted that the VRA has worked on several of the findings presented below.

Before presenting the specific needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, required under this section, we will present the Executive Summary explaining the methodology and general recommendations of the researchers.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

- Goal: The Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment of the Vocational Rehabilitation Services in Puerto Rico 2023, from now on 'the Study', has as its goal: to provide the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration (VRA) and the State Rehabilitation Council of Puerto Rico with a document with valid and reliable quantitative and qualitative data on the needs of people with disabilities and the needs for rehabilitation services in Puerto Rico that allow them to develop their goals, priority areas and strategies; as well as review and strengthen vocational rehabilitation services as part of the Unified State Plan that will be submitted to the federal government in 2024. One of the objectives was to analyze the needs of specific groups with the purpose of identifying unmet or poorly met needs and emerging needs [individuals with most significant disabilities, students (14 to 21 years old, studying at the secondary or post-secondary level), young people (14 to 24 years old, studying or not), and individuals belonging to minorities]. Énfasis is an independent consulting firm created in 1999 by

Dr. Myrna Rivas, a social psychologist, which develops studies, assessments, and technical assistance for public and private entities in the social, education, health, and economic development areas. Énfasis was responsible for the previous 2020-2021 Study.

- Methodology: The information was collected through various primary and secondary sources. This multi-methods approach allowed us to contrast and compare the data obtained and conduct the triangulation of the findings, which provided greater reliability and validity to the analysis. As part of the Study, 41 semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with VRA key individuals and 46 with external key individuals, including Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) partners. The Consumer Survey was administered, which achieved the participation of 382 applicants/consumers from six VRA regions (with a margin of error of +/- 5% for a 95% confidence level); another Survey was administered that achieved the participation of 172 professionals and employers; eight focus groups were held with applicants/consumers; innovative and successful practices were identified; the socio-economic context of Puerto Rico was analyzed; and conclusions and strategic recommendations were prepared.

- Consumer profile: 53% of the applicants/consumers surveyed were men; this proportion was reversed in the focus groups. The average age was 25.9 years. 67% were between 16 and 24 years old. 41% were studying without working and 32% were working at the time of the consultation. 49% are outside the labor market, either because they study, are unemployed and are not looking for work, have conditions that prevent them from working, and so forth. Among those who work or worked, 51% indicated that they do so with a full-time employer; 35% part-time, and 14% do it in self-employment or their own business. 14% were supported employment consumers. Compared to the 2020-2021 Study, it was found that they carry out a greater diversity of jobs; the increase in jobs related to health, administrative, professional, and manufacturing services is striking. In the focus groups, a third of the individuals were working, another was studying, and another was unemployed and looking for work.

- Profile of professionals and employers: 68% were women; and 48% had been in their jobs for between 0 and 8 years, although key individuals had been in their jobs for much longer. 38% of those surveyed were from the VRA; 24% from other public agencies; 19% from employers, employment agencies, and so forth; 10% from community entities; and 10% from post-secondary institutions. Conditions that they serve or employ the most: Cognitive disorders; autism spectrum disorder; specific learning problems; psychosocial; attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; and depression. VRA employees perceive a significant increase in cases of autism compared to the previous Study. The families were identified as having limited economic resources (below the poverty line) and with little support.

Applicants/consumers consulted and their relationship with the VRA

- Initial processes: The majority of applicants/consumers indicated that they had learned about the VRA services through the public school where they studied. Several focus group participants who studied in public and private schools indicated that in private schools they were not told about the VRA. The majority indicated that the initial orientation they received at the VRA was "very good" (52%). Their main recommendations were: to have information and requirements accessible online; provide information in writing and with easy-to-understand writing and language; guide students and their families at various grade levels; and that the VRA staff be more receptive to repeat the orientation as many times as necessary.

- Eligibility process: 44% described the process for determining eligibility as "very good." This was the only topic where the perception of consumers with supported employment was more negative than the rest (in all the others, their evaluations were more positive). Consumers in the Southern Region expressed more positive satisfaction. In the focus groups, opinions were more divided: about 60% described the process as clear, that it lasted a reasonable time, and that the documents required were also reasonable; and the others indicated the opposite, that it took too long, they required many documents and evaluations and that they had to visit the VRA offices many times. 52% of those surveyed indicated that the process was carried out within the time established by the agency (60 days). A higher proportion of individuals in the Metro East and Central East regions expressed that the process "took longer." The main recommendations were: to

expedite and comply with the stipulated time; inform and communicate to applicants what is happening with their case; follow up on cases, especially if they are under evaluation by other professionals or there was a change of counselor; request fewer evaluations, have professionals who can do them faster and at no cost to the applicant; have greater sensitivity and empathy; and effectively integrate technology and applications (apps) in the procedures and monitoring of the process. In the focus groups, they recommended that counselors communicate periodically with applicants, especially if the process has exceeded 60 days.

- Start of services: 42% indicated that the information they received about procedures and next steps (after being eligible) was "very good." Half of the people in the focus groups indicated that everything was very good, and the other half felt confused and had many doubts about what services would be offered to them, when, how, and so forth; who would call them; how often, and so forth. 37% indicated that the waiting time to receive the VRA services was "very good." This was one of the topics where lower satisfaction was observed (as in the previous Study). The majority recommended that once eligibility is reported, clearer written information should be provided on the procedures and next steps to initiate services and that it should be clearer on the VRA portal site. Several also indicated that they did not fully understand what services they would receive; they found out along the way.

- Relationship with counselors: 45% of respondents indicated that communication with their counselor was "very good." 22% indicated that they saw or spoke to each other at least once a month; and 19% every two to three months. 8% indicated that they had never spoken to or seen their counselor, only their technician. Only 30% of surveyed rated the frequency as "very good." In the focus groups, the majority rated the frequency as insufficient. This was one of the topics with the lowest satisfaction (as in the previous Study). The Metro East Region had the most negative opinions and the South, West, and North regions had the most positive opinions. These recommended the counselors to be more receptive to answering questions; establish from the beginning what means they will use for communication between the parties; and how often the appointments would be.

- The counseling service: 45% of those surveyed described the services they have received directly from their counselor as "very good." 42% consider that their counselor did help them a lot in selecting an appropriate employment goal, and 33% expressed that they were "very satisfied" with the employment goal they selected with their counselor. In the focus groups, about 60% described the services as very positive for their personal development, respectful when defining goals, and expressed gratitude, but the others described counselors as deficient and shared their displeasure and dissatisfaction. They allege that the process of defining the goal was overwhelming. 43% indicated that communication with their counseling services technician was "very good." The main recommendations for counseling services were: to increase the frequency of contacts; listen, be more receptive, empathetic, and respectful of consumers' interests; review, increase, and expedite financial aid; give more follow-ups; and be more up-to-date with new careers, occupations, and youngsters' interests.

- Relationship with other VRA employees: 50% of those consulted did not give an opinion about the Assessment and Adjustment Centers (AAC, or "CAA" by its Spanish acronym) and 65% did not give an opinion about the Support and Employment Modalities Centers (SEMC, or "CAME" by its Spanish acronym) because they had not received these services. Among those who did respond, 47% indicated that AAC's communication and services were "very good"; and 47% also indicated that SEMC's communication and services were "very good". Several unemployed consumers expressed in the focus groups their frustration for not receiving more support in their job search and recommended that SEMC counselors and promoters work more as a team and be more initiative-taking in supporting and monitoring consumers. On the other hand, 44% indicated that the treatment of VRA employees was "very good" (it was 38% in the previous Study), as well as the administrative staff treatment.

- Support for employment and self-employment/own business: Only 19% of consumers indicated that they achieved some type of employment experience or job through VRA support. The highest proportion of individuals who did achieve support was observed in the Metro East

Region; this is striking because this Region obtained a lower level of satisfaction on other issues. When compared with the previous Study, a reduction is observed in the perception of support received (it went from 28% to 19%). Only 31% expressed being "very satisfied" with the support, it was one of the topics with the lowest satisfaction. Much dissatisfaction was also expressed in focus groups; however, some participants were very grateful for the support received both for jobs and for businesses of their own. 59% of consumers indicated that they are interested in self-employment or businesses of their own and recommended that VRA focus much more on this alternative because even if someone is not interested at the moment, they could be interested later at another time in their life.

The needs of people with disabilities and underserved groups

Applicants/consumers' needs: The main general needs were: reasonable accommodations in employment (61%); financial aid; coordination with employers and employment agencies to achieve a first opportunity or employment experience; vocational or technical training, courses, or workshops; mental health services (including pharmacological); transportation; and development of innovative projects. The main needs in the area of vocational rehabilitation were: reasonable accommodations (59%); financial aid; coordination with employers and employment agencies; vocational or technical training, courses, or workshops; transportation (including driving classes and vehicle adaptation); coordination of services; and development of innovative projects. The need for more support was highlighted in the focus groups to obtain and retain employment; financial aid (faster and larger amounts); study and assistive technology equipment and materials arriving on time; and having access to psychological services (the topic of mental health came up in all groups).

Regarding unavailable services: 47% of those consulted indicated that "all the services" they have required from VRA have been available (it was 39% in the previous Study). Still, those who indicated that "very few were available" also increased (it went from 8% to 16%). They perceive that services that have been missing the most are: financial aid, which does not arrive or arrives very late (40%); support in finding or retaining employment and employment accommodations; vocational counseling and evaluation; and "all have been absent." Other services also mentioned were: psychological services; physical and other therapeutic therapy; occupational therapy, adjustments, and refreshers; transportation and mobility (including driving classes and vehicle adaptation); assistive technology equipment (including wheelchairs

and equipment for the visually and hearing impaired); and of independent living and activities of daily living. 37% described the services as "very agile." The results were slightly more negative than in the previous Study: the "poorly" and "very poorly" totaled 14% and now 20%. Individuals who responded poorly or very poorly explained that they did so because of: the slowdown in the procedures to obtain a response or resolution for their case (45%); poor communication with the counselor; lack of access to financial aid, equipment, and materials; the lack of support for job search and placement; the lack of evaluations; little access to psychological services and therapies of all kinds; and the lack of support to obtain any professional license or certification when finishing school. In the focus groups, the individuals most satisfied and grateful with VRA had participated in supported employment services, Employment Clubs, and Work-Based Learning Experiences (pre-employment) or had received direct support for their jobs or own businesses.

Professionals and employers' opinions

The main general needs of the population with disabilities identified by professionals and employers were: reasonable accommodations in employment (47%); coordination with employers and employment agencies; vocational or technical training, courses, or workshops; mental health services (including pharmacological); financial aid; transportation; and self-intercession. Numerous complaints were collected about APS Healthcare's mental health services in all regions and their unwillingness to coordinate. The main needs in the area of vocational rehabilitation were: vocational or technical training, courses, or workshops (38%); reasonable accommodations in employment; coordination with employers; development of innovative projects; independent living services; coordination of services; and supported employment services for the most significant. Internal key people highlighted the need for the VRA to have more and better-paid employees (counselors, vocational evaluators, transition analysts, occupational therapists, and sign language interpreters). People from other sectors highlighted: the need to insert the VRA into the business ecosystem to improve coordination with employers; strengthen employment services; interagency coordination; and those referred to independent living services.

Employers, factors preventing employment, and market trends in the VRA

- Employers' perception: Consumers gave 4.3 (on a Likert scale from 1 to 10) to the willingness of employers to recruit people with disabilities in Puerto Rico, professionals, and employers 4.5, internal key people 6.5, and external key people 7.5. Consumer evaluations were more

negative than in the previous Study. Although the labor market appears to be more open to recruiting, they still do not experience it. In the focus groups, half expressed a negative perspective, and the other half observed a greater willingness and talked about their positive experiences with employers. The majority of professionals and employers consulted indicated that employers, although they need to recruit, still do not know how to make reasonable accommodations in the workplace, since they think they are expensive or complicated (65%); they fear lawsuits; Today's jobs require the employee to master multiple skills; and they are unaware of the positive qualities and successful experiences with this population. The premise "previous negative experiences with this population" was only mentioned by 3%. The majority recommended training employers, employment agencies, and Human Resources Managers on VRA services, legislation, reasonable accommodations, and successful cases. Key people recommended: training on accommodations with practical examples and successful cases that show the good qualities of these employees (stability, loyalty, responsibility, and so forth); creating a network of employers who are available to hire; and that the VRA has a more initiative-taking approach to the business sector. To further engage employers with the employment of students and young people with disabilities, it was recommended to continue with the Work-Based Learning Experiences model of the pre-employment transition services (PRE-ETS), which is perceived as one of the primary areas of the VRA progress in recent years.

- For applicants/consumers, the factors that prevent people with disabilities from obtaining or retaining employment were: "society's attitude, cultural prejudices" (49%); the bureaucracy and complexity of VRA processes; lack of support and monitoring in the workplace; adequate reasonable accommodations are not made in the workplace; and the disconnection between goals, skills and the labor market; lack of relation between what is studied and the employment. In the focus groups, they highlighted the need to have more support from the VRA in the employment search; more monitoring once they are at work; and access to mental health services to stay stable. For their part, half of professionals and employers pointed out the "little willingness of employers to recruit people with disabilities, fear of reasonable accommodation, lawsuits, dismissal, and so forth." Other factors were: the lack of a robust public transportation system;

reasonable accommodations are not made; today's jobs require multiple skills to be mastered; lack of support and monitoring in the workplace; and lack of access to mental health and emotional support services (including pharmacological); and the family's attitude or circumstances toward employment. Again, many criticisms of APS Healthcare services became known.

- Market trends in the VRA: The professionals and employers surveyed gave 4.6 (on a scale of 10) to the topic of how adapted VRA services are to labor market trends, internal key people 6.4; and external people 6. The recommendations were: training employers, employment agencies, and Human Resources Managers on VRA services, legislation, reasonable accommodations, and successful cases (41%); training counselors; and integrating more STEM occupations, teleworking, and innovations in employment options. Key people from other sectors were more insistent that the VRA must continue to create more links with the business ecosystem; continually train all their staff on the labor market since topics are continuously changing; promote more remote employment and teleworking; and promote more self-employment and/or own business initiatives.

Employee training, interagency collaboration

Training: The main recommendations of those surveyed were: to have a continuous training system within the VRA for all employees; offer mentoring and support for several months to new employees to facilitate their immersion and increase their retention and loyalty; training to manage the growing population with autism spectrum disorder; training on how to integrate technological goals, remote work, and self-employment. Learn more about the latest trends in the current job market (new jobs, changes in application processes, new resumes, interview formats, and so forth) and new assistive technology equipment. Key people from other sectors further emphasized that the VRA must strengthen its staff's knowledge of reasonable accommodations and how to communicate them clearly and in simple language to employers; employment statistics, occupation projections, and the business ecosystem of Puerto Rico; types of assessments (ecological, adaptive, test work experiences, simulations in real scenarios and other alternative vocational assessments). Other recommended topics were: mental health and drugs; self-employment and owning businesses; new careers and occupations of interest to new generations; the generation of Centennials, their interests and how to work on social skills (soft skills); and the

effective treatment, communication, and follow-up of younger consumers (customer service).

Interagency coordination: Although there have been specific advances in the past three years, coordination between entities that serve people with disabilities in Puerto Rico is still perceived as weak and disjointed and with few links with the labor and business markets. The recommendations for coordination between the VRA and the DEPR were: to strengthen interagency communication at the central and regional levels through the designation of liaison people in each region who serve as a bridge to alleviate the communication of situations, attend to special cases, communicate agreements and guidelines, guide, and so forth; and to review public policy and sign new agreements between both agencies that clarify issues such as evaluations and assistive technology equipment. Other recommendations were: that the VRA attend the COMPU and the DEPR inform more about the dates; and that the VRA periodically visits and guides school staff and families in the schools themselves. The recommendations for coordination between the VRA and post-secondary institutions were: to clarify and modernize the VRA's public policy on the offer of training and programs that it can support; and that the VRA periodically guides key personnel of these institutions about their role and services, as well as the importance of the employment goal ("We are not a scholarship"); appoint liaison people; that the VRA be more open to communicate and address students' particular situations; that the VRA visit these institutions and learn more about the changing academic offerings; and establishing more agreements between the VRA and institutions that train professionals in the agency's difficult-to-recruit areas to offer incentives to students, internships and practical work exposure experiences. Recommendations to improve overall the VRA coordination efforts were: to designate liaisons at the central level and in each region to improve communication with other agencies; sign an interagency agreement for the management of cases of children and young people with disabilities in the custody of the Department of the Family (exempt from parent authorization); guide other agencies and employer/business associations about their role, employment accommodations with practical examples and successful cases; sign agreements with new private health service providers; ask APS Healthcare for more collaboration and better service for its consumers; co-organize collaborative training (cross training) with various entities; sign more agreements with other public and private agencies; and attend to more activities and special events organized by other entities. It was also recommended that the VRA ask for support from the technology staff of the

Department of the Treasury to support the technological transformation and modernization.

General recommendations

1. Applicants/consumers: The main recommendations are summarized as follows: more support in the search and placement of employment and the necessary accommodations; financial aid and equipment; greater agility in all agency processes, especially in the eligibility process, evaluations, and aid payment; more communication and monitoring of counselors; and access to mental health services. The top priority services: more support for employment, self-employment, and accommodations; more financial aid for studies, food, transportation, equipment, materials, and so forth; improving counseling service, communication with counselors and follow-up; further agility in all services; faster assessments; and access to psychological services.

2. Professionals and employers: The main recommendations are summarized as follows: to review, temper, and update the VRA public policy to simplify, streamline, and optimize internal administrative processes; have more and better-paid staff and offer them ongoing training; and increase the VRA communication, agreements, and collaboration with the business/labor ecosystem and other public or private agencies. To attract individuals over 30 years old, they recommended: outreach campaigns that show people of all ages; and doing more outreach work in communities, municipalities, schools with the Adult Education Program, health service institutions (specialized hospitals, 330 Primary Health Centers), and so forth. The highest priority services were: counseling; search and placement services (regular or sustained -CRP-); vocational evaluation; occupational therapy, adjustments, and skills review; physical therapy and other rehabilitation services; and DEPR/VRA transition. The VRA employees emphasized the need for more and better-paid staff in all positions, especially vocational counselors and evaluators, occupational therapists, sign language interpreters, and transition analysts. Additionally, the need for more staff for AAC services, physical therapy, and other rehabilitation services was highlighted; to improve the facilities where these services are offered at the Medical Center. People from other sectors emphasized more the need to strengthen job search and placement; integrate technology into administrative issues; and offer all services more comprehensively - counseling, SEMC,

and AAC - ("They have to achieve more organic services, so people don't feel like they are always fighting against the current to get services"). In addition, they recommended continuing to increase what has worked: CRPs, Employment Clubs, and pre-employment services.

3. Innovative and successful practices: The people consulted shared fewer examples than in the previous Study. Some of these were: Integrated Community Service Centers (One Stop); Youth Apprenticeship, On the Job Training, and new Work-Based Learning Experiences with specific profiles of young people that last all year; Summer Camps (public housing and non-public housing) to reinforce pre-employment and independent living skills; outreach campaigns with the model of the Fundación Adecco (Spain); projects aimed at promoting business incubation with family support; Independent Living Housing Projects; Sheltered Workshop Programs; and the PEERS® Certificate: Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills that has proven to be effective with young people with autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, anxiety, depression and other socio-emotional problems.

Conclusions and Recommendations of the Research Team

Context analysis: The socio-demographic context of Puerto Rico has changed profoundly in the past ten years. The population has decreased by about 459 thousand people between 2010 and 2021, -12%, due to migration and a sustained decrease in the birth rate according to Census data. In 2021, 17% were under 18 years old, 61% were between 18-64 years old and 22% were over 65 years old. The population with disabilities has also decreased, although less than the rest of the population, going from 726,334 in 2010 to 712,517 in 2021, a slight reduction of 2%. This figure represents 21.8% of the population of Puerto Rico. Compared to data from the United States, the population in Puerto Rico is almost double that of the United States (13.0%). People with disabilities between 18-64 years old went from 378,514 in 2010 to an estimated 319,046 in 2021, which represents a reduction of 16%. However, the most important redaction occurred among those under 18 years old, from 67,585 in 2010 to 52,025 in 2019, a reduction of 23%; and to 42,913 in 2021, a reduction of 18% between 2019 and 2021.

Among people with disabilities, the poverty level is above that of people without disabilities, 47.0% compared to 38.7%, according to the ACS 2021. According to data from the Planning Board (2023), 47% of personal income

comes from government transfers and other sources; in 2005 they were 29%. Government transfers favor the population that is not of working age, but also the working-age population that does not have a job or is actively looking for one. According to ACS 2021 data, 49.5% of households in Puerto Rico (577,665) received financial aid for food. One or more people with disabilities lived in 46.7% (269,619) of these homes. According to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate in Puerto Rico has been decreasing in recent years, it went from 16% in 2011 to 8% in 2019 and 2020 and decreased to 6.0% in 2022. 25% of people with disabilities of working age (18-64 years) in PR are employed (79,881 people), compared to 58.3% of people without disabilities at that same age, according to data from the ACS 2021. In total, 7.7% of employed people in PR have some type of disability. The proportion of people with disabilities outside the workforce is very high, 69.9% of the total ACS 2019. In 2021, this proportion increased slightly to 70.1%. The groups with a higher proportion of active people (18-64 years) in the labor market (employed or unemployed) are people with vision and hearing difficulties, on the other hand, the groups with a higher proportion of people outside the labor market are those with independent living, self-care, and cognitive difficulties. Although the groups with the most people employed, in absolute terms, are those with vision, hearing, and cognitive difficulties, two of these are also the groups with the greatest number of people outside the labor market: individuals with mobility and cognitive difficulties, followed by independent living.

When comparing the validated fiscal year 2019-2020 data with the Department of Education's 2009-2010 enrollment data, we see a significant decrease of -41% in just 10 academic years. In the case of private schools, the reduction is even more marked with a -49% reduction in enrollment. For its part, the proportion of special education students compared to total enrollment is increasing in both public and private schools. The DEPR in 2020-2021 reported that they have an enrollment of 276,413 active students and 86,301 of these are special education; which represents 31% of the enrollment (DEPR, 2020). The student ratio in the fiscal year 2022-2023 is 81,309, accounting for 32% of enrollment. In 2022-2023, the most frequent categories of disabilities for students in the Special Education Program were: specific learning problems; other health impairments; speech and language problems; autism; and intellectual disability.

Conclusions of the Research Team: The review of the contextual data presents us with Puerto Rico facing important challenges such as the low birth rate, the migration of younger families with children, and a significant decrease in enrollment at the school and post-secondary level. But at the

same time, there has been an increase in the proportion of students with special needs and a rise in conditions such as autism spectrum disorder. The context also presents us with a historically low unemployment rate and strong demand among multiple economic sectors that proactively seek labor. Although the economic and labor scenario is much more positive than three years ago, the VRA has not been able to capitalize on it favorably, and therefore, generate benefits and consequent opportunities for people with disabilities whom it must guide towards an employment goal. The agency must be more initiative-taking, effective, and responsive in its relationship with four main players: (1) applicants/consumers and their families; (2) potential employers; (3) agency employees; and (4) other entities that serve this population.

Ten recommendations from the Research Team:

(1) Towards greater agility: It is urgent to review, temper, and update the VRA public policy to simplify steps, shorten times, and optimize administrative and programmatic processes, in order to offer faster and quality services to participants.

(2) Towards greater transparency: Completely refocus the application, eligibility determination, and direct service processes to align it with the viewpoint and needs of the applicant/consumer and their families.

(3) Towards greater effectiveness: Modernize and diligently process everything related to the request, management, and disbursement of direct financial aid to consumers; and payments or disbursements to post-secondary institutions and purchases from suppliers or other entities.

(4) Towards more models such as the CRP: Continue, expand, and allocate more economic resources to Community Rehabilitation Programs and bring more supported employment services to people with more significant disabilities in all regions.

(5) Towards a clear answer: Establish a Special Working Group (Task Force) that works for a defined time in the identification, resolution, or closure of cases that are in the process of determining eligibility and that are over 60 days or more; those that are in evaluation or reconsideration processes or that have been denied on several occasions.

(6) Towards a specialized service: Create a Specialized Unit to provide vocational rehabilitation service to students, young people, and adults with autism spectrum disorder.

(7) Towards a focused and motivated human resource: Have more and better-paid personnel, who receive continuous training. The professionals most in need are: vocational counselors, vocational evaluators, occupational therapists, transition analysts, sign language interpreters, physical therapists, and other rehabilitation services.

(8) Towards more and better allies: Establish clearer agreements with the DEPR that clarify multiple issues such as evaluations and assistive technology equipment, and other entities to provide mental health services, among others.

(9) Towards leadership: The VRA must establish and lead a Work Committee to promote the successful employment of people with disabilities in Puerto Rico.

(10) Towards new populations: Bring guidance to schools and educational programs outside the DEPR, homeschooling associations, children's shelters, foster homes, and so forth.

1. **INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES**

Most significant needs: No differences were observed between the needs identified by consumers of supported employment services and the others; although these emphasized more the need for mental health services (including pharmacological), general health, physical therapies, and other rehabilitation services. The main needs identified by them were: reasonable accommodations in employment; coordination with employers and employment agencies; vocational or technical training, courses, or workshops; coordination of interagency services; transportation; and development of innovative projects. 85% of these indicated that all or most of the services they needed were available (the average for all respondents was 47%). As indicated before, except for the eligibility process, this group expressed a more positive perception of the services received. The main needs for the group of professionals and employers surveyed were: coordination with employers; vocational or technical training, courses, or workshops; reasonable accommodations in employment; development of innovative projects; and independent living services. Most key people highlighted: the need to continue expanding supported employment services in all regions; promote more agreements with Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP); and guide employers on accommodations with practical examples.

Recommendations to improve VRA services for people with most significant disabilities do not differ from those of the rest of the population. However, professionals and employers insisted on the need to have more CRPs for supported employment services in all regions; have more staff, especially counselors, vocational evaluators, occupational therapists, and sign language interpreters; streamline the eligibility process; and review, temper, and update the VRA public policy to make the agency more agile, effective, and technological.

B. INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO ARE MINORITIES AND INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR PROGRAM;

According to the ACS 2021, 99.2% of people in Puerto Rico were hispanic or latinos (any race). PRVRA provides services to all eligible individuals with disabilities and no particular minority group was identified as part of this study. However, with the purpose to expand and serve a larger group of people with disabilities, the Agency maintains collaborative efforts with different agencies that can refer to the VRA, such as the Alliance of Autism, Significant Intellectual Disability (Department of Health), State Insurance Fund , Department of the Family, Department of Education, Deaf-Blind Project, Homeless Project. These collaborations allow us to reach into some of the groups identified as underserved.

Professionals and employers identified the following groups of individuals with disabilities as less served:

In general: Individuals with most significant disabilities (46%); private school students; Department of Education of Puerto Rico (DEPR) students who are and are not in the Special Education Program; individuals with autism spectrum disorder; young people who dropped out of school; minors in State custody; homeschooling students; individuals who reside in rural areas; individuals with transportation difficulties; and interested in self-employment or own business. Internal key people highlighted more individuals with most significant disabilities, with orthopedic situations, blind, deaf, deafblind, and over 30 years of age; in contrast, external people highlighted students from private schools, young people with autism, intellectual disabilities, minors in State custody and individuals who were victims of accidents or violent incidents. Race, national origin, or membership in the LGBTQ community

were not identified as exclusion factors in this Needs Study or the previous one.

With most significant disabilities: People with intellectual disabilities; with autism spectrum disorder; with transportation difficulty; blind or visually impaired; who reside in rural areas; those over 30 years old; and with mobility impairments, orthopedic or wheelchair users. The VRA employees expressed that they previously served more people with orthopedic conditions, in wheelchairs, blind, deaf, deafblind, over 30 years of age, and accident victims (referred by the State Insurance Fund Corporation and the Administration of Compensation for Automobile Accidents (ACAA by its Spanish acronym). Recommendations to improve VRA services for people with more significant impairments do not differ from those of the rest of the population. However, professionals and employers insisted on the need to have more CRPs for supported employment services in all regions; have more staff, especially counselors, vocational evaluators, occupational therapists, and sign language interpreters; streamline the eligibility process; and review, temper, and update the VRA public policy to make the agency more agile, effective, and technological.

Students and youth: Students with disabilities from private schools (41%); students and young people with autism spectrum disorder; DEPR students who are and are not in the Special Education Program; young people who dropped out of school; students and young people with more significant disabilities; homeschooling students; minors under State custody; young victims of crime or accidents; and with intellectual disabilities. Key people were very vocal in expressing their concern about the increase in students and young people with autism spectrum disorder and the few job alternatives that are being opened for this group in Puerto Rico, unlike other jurisdictions in the United States, Europe, and other countries.

C. INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES SERVED THROUGH OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM; AND

Job Connection Centers: Good collaboration was found between these Centers and VRA. The main recommendations were: to have personnel specialized in sign language; have specialized equipment for people with visual and hearing impairments; to review the agreements between the VRA and each Local Development Area to establish a more systematic and frequent calendar of counselor visits; train all its staff to provide good service to the population with disabilities; develop collaborative training or cross

training with the VRA and other WIOA partners; reach agreements on what information can be exchanged; and have accessible facilities for people with mobility impairments and wheelchairs. Few people knew about the "Proyecto Talento Infinito" [Infinite Talent Project], but they were interested in learning more about this initiative and recommended that it be made known to the VRA employees so they can refer applicants and consumers to these services.

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.

Students and young people's needs: No differences were observed between the needs of students (14 to 21 years, studying at secondary or post-secondary level) and young people (14 to 24 years, studying or not), nor were differences observed between these groups and the rest of the population with disabilities. The main needs they identified were: reasonable accommodations in employment; vocational or technical training, courses, or workshops; financial aid; coordination with employers and employment agencies to achieve a first opportunity or labor experience; driving classes and vehicle adaptation; coordination of services; vocational rehabilitation counseling; vocational evaluation; communication skills; and placement and employment services. In the focus groups, the following stood out: financial aid for post-secondary studies; financial aid for other expenses (food, gasoline, lodging, materials, equipment); more support in the search and placement for employment (includes employment accommodations); and monitoring by their advisors. Services that they have required from the VRA and have not been available and/or have had to wait a long time before receiving them were: financial aid; employment and the need for accommodations; vocational counseling and evaluation; all the services; access to mental health services (including pharmacological); occupational therapy, adjustments, and refreshers; transportation and mobility (includes driving classes and vehicle adaptation); and assistive technology equipment. Internal key people focused more on vocational counseling and assessment services; guidance to their families; and independent living and activities of daily living services. Key people from other sectors further emphasized the need to expand the offering of pre-vocational and technical workshops with innovative topics of interest to younger generations (baristas, graphic arts, pet care, drones, cosmetology, massage, tattoos, social networks, and so

forth); interagency coordination; job search and placement services (includes accommodations); and access to quality mental health services. The employees of the Job Connection Centers identified as a problem the fact that young people arrive at them very disoriented regarding their vocational interests, without occupational skills, and with few communication skills. Furthermore, graduates of the DEPR Special Education Program do not have a Diploma with a degree, which makes it difficult to find a job.

As mentioned in section C, professionals and employers surveyed identified as the less served group of students and youth with disabilities, the followings: students with disabilities from private schools (41%); students and young people with autism spectrum disorder; DEPR students who are and are not in the Special Education Program; young people who dropped out of school; students and young people with more significant disabilities; homeschooling students; minors under State custody; young victims of crime or accidents; and with intellectual disabilities. Key people were very vocal in expressing their concern about the increase in students and young people with autism spectrum disorder and the few job alternatives that are being opened for this group in Puerto Rico, unlike other jurisdictions in the United States, Europe, and other countries.

IDEA Act Transition Services: The average score that consulted professionals and employers gave to the transition services provided by the DEPR was 5.5 (on a scale of 10) and the VRA was 6.5. Key people gave an average score of 6.5 to both agencies on this transition. About a third of those surveyed indicated that they have seen some positive developments in these services in the past three years as a result of the agreements reached between both agencies for pre-employment services (under the WOIA Act). The main complaints focused on: the DEPR beginning the transition late; students arriving without basic skills for life or work; the VRA not having the necessary personnel to participate in the Special Education Programming and Placement Committees (COMPU, by its Spanish acronym), and to begin offering services (transition analysts, counselors, vocational evaluators, occupational therapists, and so forth); and that VRA does not process requests from students in transition quickly. The main recommendations were: offer occupational counseling, counseling for full career exploration and in earlier grades; recruit occupational or rehabilitation counselors; deliver assistive technology equipment to students on time and allow students to keep the equipment; and offer training for the development of social skills and independent living. As in the 2020-2021 Study, the issue of evaluations raised controversy and discomfort. On the one hand, the VRA staff understand that evaluations are often obsolete for the student's age, are not

correct, and are of poor quality, therefore they have to be updated. The DEPR staff and people from other sectors understand that these reasons are valid and re-applying significantly affects the transition process, delays the prompt provision of services at the VRA, affects timely entry into post-secondary studies, and discourages applicants and their families. The topic of evaluations also came up in all focus groups; some participants expressed their complaints about the continuous evaluations they had to undergo for the VRA as part of the eligibility process, paying for them out of pocket. The main recommendations were: to have more transition counselors and analysts; participate in COMPUs; clarify public policy between agencies (DEPR and the VRA) on evaluations and equipment; request fewer evaluations and have professionals who can do these evaluations faster and at no cost to the applicant; streamline and simplify administrative procedures; incorporate electronic and virtual processes; and better communicate to families the requirements, next steps to follow, services, and times/calendar.

WIOA Act Transition Services: Although the number of applicants/consumers who used pre-employment services (Pre-ETS) was very low, they expressed high satisfaction with them. Several focus group participants spoke very positively about their Work-Based Learning Experiences (WBLE). The services best valued by professionals and employers consulted were WBA (9.2), followed by Career Exploration Counseling, Self-Advocacy Instruction, Counseling for Transition to Postsecondary Education or Employment, and the Workplace Readiness Training Service to Develop Social and Independent Living Skills. They highlighted that the VRA has given significant importance to the development of these services in the past three years and also expressed a good opinion of the external entities contracted. The main recommendations were: to have more personnel to coordinate these services; expand and diversify WBLE employers; connect these services with counseling; develop orientations, workshops, and experiences focused on specific groups (for example, those with autism disorders); and prepare virtual material so that students and their families can request them and take some of the tests, interactive workshops, or orientations remotely (online).

2. IDENTIFY THE NEED TO ESTABLISH, DEVELOP, OR IMPROVE COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE.

CRP: Consumers expressed high satisfaction with the services of Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) that offer supported employment services; 80% indicated that the services were "very good" or "good"; and also, that all services were available. The professionals and employers surveyed gave

them an average score of 8.5 (on a scale of 10); internal key people 8.2 and external key people 8.5. As in the previous Study, they were identified as one of the most positive areas of vocational rehabilitation services in the past three years. However, 95% of those consulted indicated that there are not enough CRPs and supported employment services to meet the demand in Puerto Rico. The main service gaps were identified in the western, eastern, and central areas of the Island. Some training recommendations were: types of evaluations (ecological, adaptive, test work experiences, simulations in real scenarios, and other alternative vocational evaluations); labor market trends and innovative strategies for placement and employment; and the management of groups with specific conditions (autism spectrum disorder). The main recommendations were: to expand the contracts and quotas of people served by the CRP; that the VRA promote the creation of more CRPs; that CRPs diversify the types of jobs they offer; that the VRA be more flexible about the length with certain groups and listen more to the CRPs perspective; and to strengthen communication between the CRPs (Network).

ILC: Although the number of applicants/consumers who used the services of the Independent Living Centers (ILC) was very low, they expressed good satisfaction with them. For their part, the score given by professionals and employers was 6.5; key people also gave 6.5, similar to the previous Study. The main recommendations were: to establish more specific agreements between these Centers and the VRA for the referral of applicants and consumers; that the VRA train its staff on what ILCs are, when and how to refer them; to have more ILCs covering all regions; bring information from these ILCs to the DEPR so that no young person stays home after finishing school, especially those who are not eligible for VRA services; and that the State Independent Living Council, the Department of Health, and the VRA strengthen their communication about independent living services.

C. GOALS, PRIORITIES, AND STRATEGIES

Section 101(a)(15) and (23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to describe the goals and priorities of the State in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs. The goals and priorities are based on (1) the most recent CSNA, including any updates; (2) the State's performance under the performance accountability measures of Section 116 of WIOA; and (3) other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including any reports received from the SRC and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under Section 107 of the Rehabilitation Act. VR agencies must—

1. DESCRIBE HOW THE SRC AND THE VR AGENCY JOINTLY DEVELOPED AND AGREED TO THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES AND ANY REVISIONS; AND

Based on the results of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, monitoring and performance results, State's priorities and other sources of information, the VRA, in coordination and collaboration with the State Rehabilitation Council (CERPR), identify the goals and priorities necessary to carry out vocational rehabilitation and supported employment programs. The SRC participates in the development activities of the CSNA and provides its input. Draft goals, priorities and strategies are developed by VRA and discussed with the Council in a formal meeting. Second year revisions are carried out in the same way.

2. IDENTIFY MEASURABLE GOALS AND PRIORITIES IN CARRYING OUT THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS AND THE BASIS FOR SELECTING THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES (E.G., CSNA, PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES, SRC RECOMMENDATIONS, MONITORING, OTHER INFORMATION). AS REQUIRED IN SECTION 101(A)(15)(D), (18), AND (23), DESCRIBE UNDER EACH GOAL OR PRIORITY, THE STRATEGIES OR METHODS USED TO ACHIEVE THE GOAL OR PRIORITY, INCLUDING AS APPLICABLE, DESCRIPTION OF STRATEGIES OR METHODS THAT—

A. SUPPORT INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES;

B. OVERCOME BARRIERS TO ACCESSING VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;

C. IMPROVE AND EXPAND VR SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THE COORDINATION OF SERVICES DESIGNED TO FACILITATE THE TRANSITION OF SUCH STUDENTS FROM SCHOOL TO POSTSECONDARY LIFE (INCLUDING THE RECEIPT OF VR SERVICES, POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES); AND

D. IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS IN ASSISTING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES TO ACHIEVE QUALITY EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES.

List and number each goal/priority, noting the basis, and under each goal/priority, list and number the strategies to achieve the goal/priority

As mentioned in the previous section, the VRA developed its goals, priorities and strategies based on the results of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs

Assessment of VR Needs, performance accountability measures, SRC recommendations, monitoring results and State's priorities, among others.

The goals, priorities, and strategies included in this section were developed for the next two program years (PYs 2026-2027). The Agency retained the previously established goals because a new Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) had not yet been conducted and because the provision of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), as well as programmatic and technological improvements, continue to be Agency priorities.

Achievement of these goals will be measured through the successful completion of the activities established. The goals will be reviewed and updated, as appropriate, for the 2028 State Plan based on the findings of the 2026–2027 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA).

Goal 1

Achieve greater effectiveness in the process of providing services to applicants/consumers for a successful integration into the labor force.

Related to this goal and CSNA recommendation 1, the VRA is in the process of reviewing/amending several of the regulatory communications associated with the service delivery process to applicants/consumers in accordance with the requirements of the Law and the recommendations made in federal monitoring. The Agency will train the VRCs in the implementation of guides and processes, with the purpose of offering successful service delivery. Likewise, results will be measured through reports generated annually on participants with employment outcome and consumer satisfaction surveys that will be carried out annually.

Priorities:

1. Emphasize the importance of applying public policy, counseling, and employment alternatives, in tune with the times and needs of the consumer.
2. Promote collaboration with other agencies and resources to ensure that applicants/consumers receive information and services necessary to enter the labor force.

3. Strengthen approaches and services to employers to promote the recruitment of people with disabilities.
4. Promote information exchange with applicants/consumers related to their vocational rehabilitation process.

Strategies:

- Increase the provision of general counseling service, career counseling and information exchange with applicants/consumers related to their vocational rehabilitation process.
- Implement and promote the use of the document sharing platform between counselor and consumer (PED)
- Promote the development of a platform for the applicant-consumer that allows the latter to learn about the status of his case (for instance: Awaiting documents from the applicant to determine eligibility; Referred to Vocational Evaluation; etc.).
- Offer formal training (with presentations), by the Central Level programmatic offices, directly to Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, and technical assistance to the personnel of the Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Services Centers in areas related to the new labor market trends (technological goals, remote work, online services); effective management of specific populations such as students and youth on the autism spectrum, with multiple conditions or mental health issues, among others; the ecological assessments, the new assistive technology equipment, self-employment initiatives, the registry and documentation of data for the RSA-911 report and performance indicators, among other topics.
- Promote the development of self-employment and remote job projects with other entities or agencies.
- Promote the development of job projects, work-based learning or job-related experiences for specific groups with significant or most significant disabilities.
- Refer VRA consumers and ineligible people with disabilities to Independent Living Centers.
- Strengthen coordination with the DLHR in order for the VRA personnel and consumers to participate, at least once a year in each region, in orientations and receive up-to-date information about the job market, high-demand jobs, and available opportunities.

- Develop an online referral exchange process with the Labor Connection Centers (formerly "Americans Job Centers").
- Continue the implementation of the electronic sharing of referrals with other entities, namely, the Department of Education, and the State Insurance Fund Corporation.
- Develop printed material, also accessible through the VRA website, about community resources available to address consumer's various needs.
- Coordinate the presentation of formal orientations to the VRA Rehabilitation Counselors on the services offered by programs under WIOA, at least once a year in each region.
- Expand outreach efforts to cover other demographic groups (e.g., municipalities, specialized hospitals, health providers, non-profit organizations that provide services to populations with significant disabilities, among others).
- Provide training and technical assistance to employers on: VRA services, recruitment of qualified people with disabilities, reasonable accommodation, among others. This includes approaches to individual employers and through public and private employer associations and agencies.
- Promote the granting of wage incentives to employers to increase employment opportunities for consumers.
- Continue providing physical and mental restoration services that are identified as necessary to achieve integration into the workforce.

Goal 2

Contribute to increasing the skills and opportunities of students with disabilities through the provision of Pre-Employment and Transition Services.

Priorities:

1. Serve as many youths and students with disabilities as possible.

In compliance with the total use of 15%, the VRA has developed the following measurement strategies to meet the implementation requirements and internal controls for the provision of pre-employment transition services:

- Quarterly meetings between the Pre-Employment Transition Services areas and the Finance Division to determine the amount of the minimum federal reserve and the amount spent.
- The Development of Internal Invoice Control and the Quarterly Report on Pre-Employment Transition Services.
- Training will be developed for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC) and personnel who offer pre-employment transition services.
- Interagency coordination will be worked on with the University of Puerto Rico so that VRA consumers, who meet the criteria established for pre-employment transition services, participate in an Occupational Practice Work Experience.

Other Strategies:

- Maintain the participation of the VRA personnel at the meetings of the Committee on Programming and Placement (COMPU, by its acronym in Spanish) of youth in transition.
- Offer Pre-Employment Transition Services: Pre-Employment Transition Services Fairs, Boot Camps, Work-Based Learning Experiences and other activities will be carried out.Regarding the service delivery, training was coordinated for personnel who offer direct pre-employment transition services. The Pre-Employment Transition Area, under the VR Counseling Services Office, coordinates, develops and plans pre-employment transition services in accordance with WIOA requirements for students with all disabilities.
- Continue to identify new Transition referrals and the number of Transition referrals beginning to receive services during the program year.
- Continue orienting school staff, parents, and students about VRA services.
- Provide guidance on VRA services to home school and private schools students.
- Coordinate with the Department of Housing, Department of the Family, and community support groups to offer orientations in strategic places to identify out-of- school youths with disabilities who could benefit from VRA services.

Goal 3

Strengthen administrative, programmatic, and technological procedures to achieve the required institutional efficiency.

This goal will be measured through the activities directed towards that goal. For example, at least one new video, module or material developed by each programmatic area and published during the State Plan period and trainings provided to employees at least once a year.

Related to this goal and CSNA recommendations 5 and 7, the VRC receive trainings and follow up through their supervisors and work plans regarding timely actions for eligibility determination. IPE development and other actions.

Regarding staff motivation, through the Job Classification Plan, steps were taken to increase Counselor's salaries.

Priorities:

1. Facilitate processes using technology, review of public policy and staff strengthening.

Strategies:

- Implement technology projects to facilitate case management and document sharing, among others.
- Integrate visual information resources (videos) to the website for people with disabilities interested in VRA services, and students with disabilities.
- Integrate videos and material geared to employers and make them accessible through the social media networks of the VRA (e. g. videos of success stories of consumers who have been employed and how the VRA can help employers to recruit qualified individuals with disabilities).
- Offer training to personnel to strengthen the knowledge and skills necessary to perform their duties.
- Offer orientations (through formal presentations), once a year, for all the personnel on the VRA Portion of the Unified State Plan, the Strategic Plan/Annual Execution Plan and its Goals and Strategies.

- Continue to conduct periodic performance evaluations of agency employees to ensure institutional effectiveness.
- Update administrative, fiscal, and programmatic procedures in line with established state and federal regulations, as necessary, and to promote institutional efficiency.
- Carry out programmatic monitoring of the service provision process and quality control monitoring to ensure compliance with public policy, quality of reported data and to identify areas for improvement.
- Provide technical assistance based on the findings of the monitoring processes and identification of needs by personnel at the central or regional level or during studies conducted.
- Establish goals (quotas) of consumers placed in regular employment by the personnel of the Support and Employment Modalities Centers (SEMC).
- Establish goals (quotas) for the coordination of job experiences carried out directly by the personnel of the SEMC.

A. Support innovation and expansion activities;

Strategy:

- Continue funding the SCR and CILs to assist and support their operations, as well as develop, in conjunction with the VRA, better employment and independent living opportunities for our applicants/consumers.

B. Overcome barriers to accessing VR and supported employment services;

The VRA has services available and accessible to all individuals with disabilities. There is no difference as to the availability of services for groups of specific disabilities, or specific cultural or racial groups. For the purpose of promoting the participation in vocational rehabilitation services and supported employment, the personnel of the agency participate in community orientation activities, which is evidenced by quarterly reports submitted to the Central Office including activities and number of people oriented.

Also, the VRA carries out actions as necessary to continue ensuring that its facilities are accessible to all individuals with disabilities. For example: Leasing

contracts with facility owners and contracts with Pre-ETS providers include a clause establishing structural accessibility requirements according to ADA.

C. Improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities, including the coordination of services designed to facilitate the transition of such students from school to postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, post-secondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services); and

See Goal 2 and strategies above.

D. Improve the performance of the VR and Supported Employment programs in assisting individuals with disabilities to achieve quality employment outcomes.

Goal 1 and its strategies, specified above, apply to individuals under the VR and supported employment programs. However, additional goals and strategies for supported employment are included under description e.

The VRA continues to implement the following strategies to improve the performance with respect to evaluation standards and performance accountability measures:

- Continue the practice of regularly sharing statistical information with regional staff and providing technical assistance on WIOA Performance Indicators and data entry for the RSA-911 report (See Goal 1, fourth strategy, and Goal 3, eighth and ninth strategies, above).
- Continue promoting, among the Counseling Service Centers' staff, the use of the reports developed that allow them to see a list per work zone (caseload) with or without the information registered in the required fields, including:

1. MSG Active Cases: Shows the active cases of participants in each caseload and the registered dates for the elements 85, 343-347, and 401.
2. Cases st.26 and 28 Registration of Credentials: Shows closed cases upon receiving services, if they were registered as "Enrolled" in elements 78, 84 or 400, and whether they have Credential registration. This report allows the Counselor to identify cases that require follow-up for the Credential registration before concluding the period of one year after exiting. Furthermore, the projection is to develop a similar report for cases in st.20 and 22 (ready for employment and working).

3. Quarters for Post Exit Follow Ups: Displays a list of participants who exited the program after receiving services and the post exit employment data registered for second and fourth quarter follow-up. Staff have been provided with information on the importance of carrying out said follow-ups and data collection for performance indicators. In addition, the Office of Quality Control and Programmatic Management has referred to the Office of Information Systems the requirements for adjustments that the system needs in order to prevent data entry errors by the users and provide alerts for the registration of MSG and Credentials.

- Continue emphasizing the importance of services to employers, including the orientation and training to raise awareness of the benefits of recruiting and retaining individuals with disabilities, and technical assistance after placement (See Goal 1, strategies fourteenth and fifteenth, above).
- Continue sending or making available to the personnel of the Center for Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Services the information of the Unemployment Insurance to complete the information about the employment indicators of the second and third quarters under WIOA.
- Continue promoting postsecondary education among its consumers and providing them with follow-up for the presentation of Credentials and proof of Measurable Skills Gained.

D. EVALUATION AND REPORTS OF PROGRESS: VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT GOALS

For the most recently completed program year, provide an evaluation and report of progress for the goals or priorities, including progress on the strategies under each goal or priority, applicable to that program year. Sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to describe—

1. PROGRESS IN ACHIEVING THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED FOR THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS;

List the goals/priorities and discuss the progress or completion of each goal/priority and related strategies

The following progress report corresponds to the Goals and Strategies established for PY 2024.

Goal 1

To achieve greater effectiveness in the service delivery to applicants/consumers for a successful integration into the workforce.

Strategy:

- Increase the provision of services such as general counseling, career counseling, and information sharing with applicants/consumers in connection with their vocational rehabilitation process.

Progress Report:

During PY 2024, the Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Service Centers (VRCSC or "CSCRV" by its acronym in Spanish) certified as service provided 7,160 authorizations for counseling and guidance services under the Individualized Plan for Employment/Amendment and
393 authorizations for employment counseling services.

Strategy:

- Implement and promote the use of the document-exchange platform between counselor and consumer (PED – Digital Electronic Portal).

Progress Report:

The PRVRA implemented the PED on March 8, 2024. Through the PED, the following was achieved:

96,103 tasks sent/received
98,067 documents sent/received
4,088 applicants/consumers using the PED
321 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors using the PED

Strategy:

- Promote the development of a platform that allows applicants/consumers to access information regarding the status of their case (for example: Pending applicant documents for eligibility determination; Referred for Vocational Evaluation; etc.).

Progress Report:

The Vocational Rehabilitation Administration (VRA) participated in the creation and implementation of the Unified Digital File for Persons with Functional Diversity, as required by Act No. 6 of April 11, 2025, as amended.

Once the Unified Digital File is developed, the VRA will reassess the development of the applicant/consumer access platform to avoid duplication of information, given the integration of data and documents that will be shared through the Unified Digital File.

Strategy:

- The programmatic offices at the Central Level will provide formal trainings (with presentations) directly to Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, as well as technical assistance to staff at the Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Service Centers, in areas such as new labor-market trends (technological goals, remote work, online services); effective management of specific populations such as students and youth with autism spectrum disorder, individuals with multiple conditions or mental-health challenges; ecological evaluations; new assistive-technology equipment; self-employment and small-business initiatives; and the recording and documentation of RSA-911 report data, among other topics.

Progress Report:

During PY 2024, the Quality Control and Programmatic Management Office (QCPMO) monitored compliance with the Performance Indicators established by WIOA and the Local Evaluation Criteria. It sent statistical information and reports to all Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Service Centers (VRCSC or CSCRV) on the following dates:

Date	Topic
September 23, 2024	Achievements on Performance Indicators during PY 2023
December 22 and 27, 2024	Post Exit Follow Ups
February 20, 2025	Partial Performance Report
February 25, 2025	Number of days in status 02, 06, 10, 12, 20 and 22
February 25, 2025	Post Exit Follow Ups (updated report and instructions)
March 18, 2025	Availability of the achievements report by caseload

Date	Topic
March 25, 2025	Cases in st.22 (placed in employment)-updated
March 28 and June 6, 2025	Post Exit Follow Ups Report

The QCPMO also provided 794 individual technical assistances to the Counseling Services Centers' staff and 11 group technical assistances through electronic communication to the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs) on specific topics related to performance indicators, as detailed below:

Date	Topic
November 18, 2024	Adjustments to the post-exit follow-up screens
December 4, 2024	Required fields to record Credentials or Measurable Skill Gains (MSG)
December 12, 2024	Post-exit follow-ups and timeframes for entering or editing information
December 18, 2024	Editing post-exit quarters and Retention coding
January 8, 2025	Important reminders about recording Credentials
February 11, 2025	Data Element #85 (Used to calculate MSG)
February 21, 2025	Instructions about the Placement in Employment screen
March 24 and 26, 2025	Reminder about recording Credentials before closing the case file
May 21, 2025	Information at IPE, Barriers, Enrollment, Credentials, MSG, Post-Exit and other fields
June 26, 2025	Recording of Credentials before closing the case file

The Finance and Budget Divisions offered ongoing technical assistance to counselors and support staff throughout the period and responded to

inquiries from Central Level management staff as needed. This assistance was provided through telephone communication, electronic correspondence, and/or informal meetings.

At the CSCRV, regional directors and supervisors trained Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs) and Support Staff through administrative meetings in which they discussed matters related to service delivery and the analysis of communications established to comply with public policy, among other topics.

The Office of Evaluation and Adjustment (OAA) offered, participated in, and coordinated the following:
It provided 33 technical assistances to approximately 35 VRCs and CSCRV staff on topics related to public policy, the services offered at the Evaluation and Adjustment Centers/Units (CAA/UAA), the consumer referral process, the scope of vocational evaluation services, and other relevant matters.
It offered one (1) training related to the Case Management Integrated Systems (CMIS) platform, in which it clarified questions regarding the referral process to the CAA/UAA, held on October 2, 2024.

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Services (OSCRV, by its Spanish acronym) provided 958 technical assistances to CSCRV staff related to the service delivery process.

Strategy:

- Promote the development of self-employment and remote-employment projects with other entities or agencies.

Progress Report:

The Office of Support and Employment Modalities (OSEM or "OAME", by its Spanish acronym) established 12 contacts with various organizations and entities for the purpose of providing guidance and promoting the self-employment model and available supports.

The Support and Employment Modalities Centers (SEMC, or "CAME" by its Spanish acronym) achieved the following:
24 consumers in the economic self-employment modality achieved an employment outcome during the period.
13 agencies were contacted to promote self-employment projects.
0 agencies were contacted to promote remote-employment projects.
7 projects were implemented.

Strategy:

- Promote the development of employment projects, work-based learning experiences, or employment-related experiences for specific groups with significant or most significant disabilities.

Progress Report:

The CAME achieved:
Three (3) employment projects.
Zero (0) work-based learning experiences.
Two (2) employment-related experiences (general).
Nine (9) meetings to establish a pilot employment project for a particular group.

The CAME in the Southern Region is planning Agro-Employment Experiences for consumers with the most significant disabilities. To this end, it has conducted:
Seven (7) meetings, with a total participation of 27 individuals, detailed as follows:

Date	Participants
December 4, 2024	5
January 28, 2025	3
January 31, 2025	3
February 28, 2025	10
May 7, 2025	2
May 16, 2025	2
June 4, 2025	2
Total	27

The CAME of the East-Central Region achieved the following:
Two (2) meetings for the establishment of an Employment Pilot Project.
One (1) self-awareness workshop for consumers with Autism Spectrum Disorder, offered on April 15, 2025.

The CAME, CAA, and CSCRV of the East-Central Region developed the activity titled "Working Together: Inclusion and Autism" on April 3, 2025, with the participation of 18 consumers.

The OAA participated in one (1) virtual meeting aimed at developing a special project between the Southern CAME and the Western CAA, held on December 17, 2024, with the participation of three (3) professionals.

The OAME reviewed certain public policies and developed programmatic processes to guide and assist CAME personnel.

The OSCRV developed two (2) activities for participants with Autism Spectrum Disorder, as detailed below:

Date	Activity	Participants
April 2 and 3, 2025	Working Together: Inclusion and Autism	79
June 27, 2025	Working Together: Social Skills Development	16

Through interagency coordination, a group of employers was provided orientation regarding work-based learning experiences.

Strategy:

- Refer VRA consumers and ineligible individuals with disabilities to the Centers for Independent Living.

Progress Report:

The VRCSC made 18 referrals to the CIL, of which:

6 were eligible to receive services at the CIL

12 were not eligible for CIL services.

Strategy:

- Reinforce the coordination with the Department of Labor and Human Resources (DLHR) for the VRA personnel and consumers to receive conferences and up-to-date information of the labor market, high-demand jobs, and available opportunities, at least once a year in each region.

Progress Report:

The Support and Employment Modalities Centers:

Coordinated 18 activities with the DTRH to learn about employment trends and types of employers.
Provided 373 orientations to consumers.
Provided 81 orientations to VRCs and CAA staff on labor-market trends and high-demand occupations.

The Office of Support and Employment Modalities coordinated:

One (1) activity with the Auxiliary Secretariat for Training and Employment Promotion of the DTRH on October 29, 2024, with the participation of 16 professionals.
One (1) workshop on the ADA National Network and Ticket to Work on June 30, 2025.

The VR Counseling Service Office processed 213 forms submitted by the "Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)" Program of the DTRH's Employment and Reemployment Program, as part of employer certification requests for having hired consumers served by the Agency.

The VRA Administrator and the local DOL Secretary visited the Industry Program for Blind Persons and Individuals with Physical, Mental, and Developmental Disabilities on June 18, 2025, with the purpose of promoting the products manufactured, observing mop production, the performance of employees with disabilities, and the procedures used for the sale of the

products produced.

Strategy:

- Develop an electronic referral-exchange process with the Labor Connection Centers (formerly American Job Centers).

Progress Report:

The OAME began reviewing public policies and developing the process in order to coordinate a meeting with the staff of the Workforce Development Program.

Strategy:

- Continue implementing electronic referral exchanges with other entities, such as the Department of Education and the State Insurance Fund Corporation.

Progress Report:

The Office of Information Systems (OSI) achieved:
Six (6) meetings with OSI and Department of Education (DE) staff.
Six (6) meetings with DE staff.
Six (6) visual representations of the data-exchange interface screens.

The Operational Policy Area, represented through Interagency Coordination, participated in one (1) in-person meeting with a VRA contractor and staff from the State Insurance Fund Corporation in July 2024. However, the agreement was not finalized.

Strategy:

- Develop printed materials, also accessible on the VRA's website, regarding community resources available to address various needs.

Progress Report:

The VRA prepared five (5) sign-language posters addressing communication needs related to atmospheric emergencies. The posters are available on the

website and in printed form at Regional Offices and Central Level. It also redesigned six (6) brochures related to the service-delivery process, available both online and in printed form at Regional Offices and Central Level.

Strategy:

- Coordinate the presentation of formal orientations to Rehabilitation Counselors of the VRA on the services offered under WIOA programs, at least once a year in each region.

Progress Report:

The OVRCS and VRCSCs:

- Did not coordinate presentations to the VRC on the services offered under WIOA programs.

Strategy:

- Expand outreach efforts to reach other demographics (e. g. municipalities, specialized hospitals, health providers, nonprofit organizations that provide services to populations with significant disabilities, among others).

Progress Report:

The SEMCs (CAME) provided 27 orientations to other service providers. They also disseminated 12 promotional announcements, including:
1. A feature titled "Recognition in the Department", highlighting the work of a consumer placed at LUMA Energy Puerto Rico through the supported-employment modality.
2. A call for a workshop for employers titled "Vocational Rehabilitation Services: Support and Employment for Persons with Disabilities," offered on October 9, 2024.
3. A call for a workshop titled "Inclusive Leadership," coordinated by the Southern Region CAME and the Ponce Region Employers' Committee, with workshop topics including "Infinite Talent Ready to Work" and "Use of Orientation and Mobility Techniques for Blind Individuals," offered on November 22, 2024.

On the Facebook social-media page, several features were posted, including:
Training of 11 individuals with disabilities through the Self-Employment course offered by the Southern Region CAME at the Ana G. Méndez University Ponce campus.

Training of more than 30 employees of Corteva Agriscience Salinas on "Building Bridges—Inclusion, Empathy, and Support Services for Persons with Functional Diversity," offered on October 22, 2024.
Training of CSCRV and CAA staff in the Southern Region on "Preparing Consumers for the Realities of Today's Labor Market," offered on March 25, 2025.
Participation of consumers in the Labor Connection Center Job Fair held in Salinas on March 27, 2025.
Training of CSCRV, CAME, and CAA staff in the Southern Region through a workshop provided by the Statistics Unit of the DTRH on May 8–9, 2025.
The OAME provided 10 orientations to other potential service providers.

The VRA, represented by staff from the Administrator's Office, coordinated one (1) meeting with the Director of the Graduate School of Rehabilitation Counseling and the Associate Professor at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus, on May 15, 2025, to follow up on collaborative agreements and extend their validity to five (5) years.

Strategy:

- Provide training and technical assistance to employers on VRA services, recruitment of qualified individuals with disabilities, workplace accommodations, among other topics. This includes outreach to individual employers and to employer groups through public and private associations and agencies.

Progress Report:

The VRA:
Offered 47 orientations to educational entities, government agencies, mental-health providers, hospitals, municipalities, and others.
Disseminated information on opportunities for the provision of specialized services through social media and the Agency's website.
Disseminated information on available pre-employment transition services through Work-Based Learning Experiences, featured on the Agency's social media with over 300,000 views.
Achieved an increase in social-media followers, particularly on Facebook, with 38% growth.
The OAME distributed materials in person and electronically and provided orientation to employees and the general public during National Disability Employment Awareness Month through the campaign created by the U.S.

Department of Labor in October 2024.
The OSCRV provided 25 orientations to participants of the Ticket to Work Program.

Strategy:

- Promote the granting of salary incentives to employers to increase job opportunities for consumers.

Progress Report:

The CAME provided eight (8) orientations and ten (10) technical assistances to employers regarding wage-incentive alternatives aimed at expanding and developing employment opportunities for VRA consumers with disabilities. However, although the corresponding orientation was provided, no wage-incentive contracts were formalized during Program Year 2024.

Strategy:

- Continue providing physical and mental restoration services identified as necessary to achieve integration into the workforce.

Progress Report:

The CSCRV certified 1,972 authorizations for physical and mental restoration services. Some services were provided through comparable benefits.

The Avaluation and Adjustment Centers served 2,209 cases through physical and mental restoration services, as detailed below:

Service Area	Served Individuals
Occupational Therapy	697
Physical Therapy	23
Physiatry	140
Speech-Language Pathology	357
Audiology	168
Psychology	824
Total	2,209

There is a possibility that some reported cases may have received professional services in more than one service area. This data was collected

through manual records kept by the CAA/UAA professionals, since the CAA-ARVI digital platform was inoperative and the CRIS Platform (managed by the CRV) was also undergoing work; resulting in a significant impact on the flow of referrals directed to the CAA/UAA.

Goal 2

Contribute to the increase in skills and opportunities for students with disabilities through the provision of Pre-Employment Transition and Transition Services.

Strategy:

- Maintain the participation of the VRA personnel at the meetings of the COMPU of youth in transition.

Progress Report:

The Rehabilitation Counseling Analysts achieved a total of 3,197 participations at COMPU at meetings of the Committee on Programming and Placement (COMPU, by its acronym in Spanish).

Strategy:

- Provide Pre-Employment Transition Services: Pre-ETS Service Fairs, Boot Camps, Work-Based Learning Experiences, and other activities.

Progress Report:

The VRA served 11,913 students with disabilities through pre-employment transition services.

The OSCRV, through the Pre-Employment Transition Unit, developed: 61 Pre-ETS service fairs; 14 Pre-ETS Boot Camps; 27 contracts for Pre-ETS services; 16 collaborative agreements for Pre-ETS services.

The Regional Pre-Employment Transition Service Areas provided approximately 16,700 orientations on the transition process, as follows: Parents: 700; Teachers: 5,000; Students: 11,000

Strategy:

- Continue identifying new Transition referrals, and those Transition referrals that begin to receive services during the program year.

Progress Report:

The VRA achieved:

- 2,972 referrals from schools that completed applications for service.
- 2,282 Individualized Plan for Employment were developed for youths between the ages of 14-24 years.
- 901 consumers referred from schools and transition had an employment outcome.

Strategy:

- Continue offering orientations to the school personnel, parents, and students about the VRA services.

Progress Report:

9,167 orientations were offered about the transition process and PRVRA services, to the following:

- Parents: 3,396
- Teachers:1,201
- Students: 4,570

Strategy:

- Provide orientations about VRA services to homeschoolers and students of private schools.

Progress Report

The VRCSO offered 8 orientations to home schooling students and 66 orientations at private schools.

Strategy:

- Coordinate with the Department of Housing, the Department of the Family, and community support groups to offer orientations in strategic places to identify out of school youths with disabilities who could benefit from VRA services.

Progress Report:

The Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Service Centers of the North-Central Region provided 17 orientations in non-school settings, successfully identifying seven (7) youth with disabilities.

Goal 3

Strengthen the administrative, programmatic, and technological procedures to achieve the required institutional efficiency.

Strategy:

- Implement technology projects to facilitate case management and document sharing, among others.

Progress Report:

The Information Systems Office (ISO) continued working on the post-implementation of the Vocational Rehabilitation Information System (VRIS) and one of its integrated modules, the Case Management Information System (CMIS). Also, initiated two (2) new projects related to technological innovations and improvements.

- Fiscal Module for the Finance Division
- Platform for the Evaluation and Adjustment Centers and Units

Strategy:

- To integrate information resources (videos) to the website for individuals with disabilities interested in VRA services.

Progress Report:

The PRVRA:

Presented one (1) initiative to develop a video providing information on the Agency's Mission and Vision and the purpose of vocational rehabilitation services on February 26, 2025.

Presented a second video in sign language providing contact information for the Agency's offices on March 25, 2025.

Developed a tutorial on the Procedure for Enrolling in Direct Deposit, available as a video on the Agency's website, directed to applicants/consumers receiving maintenance, transportation, or lodging services, as applicable.

The OSI integrated four (4) informational resources into the Agency's website, achieving three (3) measurable reach indicators in views and reproductions.

Strategy:

To develop videos and materials directed to employers and make them accessible through VRA social media (e.g., videos with success stories of employed consumers and information on how VRA can assist employers in hiring qualified individuals with disabilities).

Progress Report:

The OSI did not receive requests from the CAME to publish employer-directed videos or materials on the Agency's website.

The Southern Region CAME developed:

One (1) video in collaboration with the Department of Labor and Human Resources for an employer activity held on November 22, 2024.

Five (5) employer-directed materials:

1. One PowerPoint — Employer workshop at the Labor Connection Center: Vocational Rehabilitation Services: Support and Employment for Persons with Disabilities, offered October 9, 2025.
2. One PowerPoint — Workshop: Building Bridges: Inclusion, Empathy, and Support Services for Persons with Functional Diversity, offered October 22, 2025.
3. Promotional sheet for the workshop Inclusive Leadership (November 2024).
4. One PowerPoint — Interactive employer workshop: Inclusive Leadership: How I Can Support My Blind Employee, offered November 22, 2024.
5. One PowerPoint — Employer workshop: Infinite Talent Ready to Work, offered November 22, 2024.

The Western Region CAME developed two (2) quarterly informational bulletins (July–September 2024 and October–December 2024).

The VRA presented an educational campaign of visual posters in sign language for emergency situations and basic daily-life signs as a prelude to hurricane season, presented on April 3, 2025.

Strategy:

- To offer training to the personnel to strengthen their knowledge and skills as necessary for the performance of their duties.

Progress Report:

The Office of Labor Affairs and Human Resources coordinated 144 training activities for the VRA personnel, achieving 1,444 participations (includes professionals who participated in various trainings during the period).

Some of the topics of higher interest were:

- Hands Up Conference
- Suicide Prevention in Men: A Matter of Humanity
- Government Contracting
- Rehabilitation Counseling as an Agent of Social Change
- Self-Care Strategies to Prevent and Address Emotional Fatigue
- Microsoft TEAMS, One Drive y VPN
- Suicide Prevention in Children and Youths
- Managing Crisis Situations in Telephone Calls
- Integrating Self-Care in the Workplace
- Personnel Transactions
- Effective Supervision
- Good Public Governance
- Artificial Intelligence
- Effective Pre-Intervention
- The Deaf Community and Counseling: A Holistic Approach to Rehabilitation
- Silenced Voices: Deaf Women as Victims of Gender-Based Violence
- The Hope Model: Linking Pathways in Rehabilitation Counseling
- Cybersecurity and Microsoft MFA
- Active Shooter and Personal Defense
- Supervising with Emotional Intelligence
- Progressive Discipline in Supervision
- Cybertherapy Practice in Puerto Rico: Ethical Considerations, Security, and Evidence-Based Techniques
- Law 194 of 2000: Patient Bill of Rights and Responsibilities

- 2nd Convention of the Educational Interpreter Program – Uprooting the Ethics of Self-Promotion: Impacting the Personal Environment in Interpretation
- Understanding the Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Deaf Community: Health with Access and Dignity

The Administrator's Office coordinated the following activities, as detailed below:

- One (1) training titled Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder: Characteristics, Associated Behaviors, and Practical Strategies for Effective Management, offered on May 30, 2025, with the participation of 107 professionals.
- Five (5) programmatic meetings in which the OSCRV, OAME, and OAA presented the services offered in each of their respective offices and centers, among other relevant matters. These meetings were held from May 12 to 15 and from May 19 to 20, 2025.

The OSI coordinated and delivered 17 trainings and activities, reaching 194 participations. These are detailed below:

Date	Training/Activity Topic	Participants
July 1st and Sept. 18, 2024	Voc. Rehab. Information System (VRIS) Training	30
July 9, 2024	Case Management Information System (CMIS) Training	7
August 15 and Sept. 13, 2024	Avaluation and Adjustment Center ("CAA") Module Presentation	14
August 19 and Oct.3, 2024	CMIS Presentation	23
Sept. 10, 2024	CMIS, CAA and Digital File Portal (PED, in Spanish) Presentation	9

Date	Training/Activity Topic	Participants
Sept. 22, 23, 2024	CMIS-Fiscal System Training	20
Oct. 1,2, 2024	CMIS Presentation at Metro East Region	27
Oct. 1,2, 2024	CMIS Presentation at North Central Region	43
May 29, 2025	Discussion about CAME Module	8
June 12, 17, 2025	Discussion about CAA Module for Professionals	13

Note: It is important to highlight that the statistics provided include employees who participated in multiple trainings and activities during the period. Likewise, some topics were offered on two or more dates, with groups divided between morning and afternoon sessions.

The Office of Support and Employment Modalities (OAME, in Spanish) offered one (1) training on the services of the Department of Labor and Human Resources on November 29, 2024, with 16 professionals participating.

The OAA and the CAA/UAA coordinated or participated in several trainings and activities, as detailed below:

Date	**Training or Activity**	**Participants**
July 3, 2024	Annual Execution Plan 2024-2025 Discussion	3
July 3, 2024	Dressing Code for VR Personnel	1
August 19, 2024	CMIS Platform Presentation	14
September 18, 2024	CMIS, AAC and Digital File Portal (PED, in Spanish) Platforms Presentation	23
October 1, 2024	Effective Strategies to Reduce Access to Lethal	1

Date	Training or Activity	Participants
	Means in Suicide Prevention	
October 2 and 6, 2024	Suicide prevention in men	3
October 11, 2024	Rapid response to situations involving suicidal behavior	2
October 18, 2024	Suicide Prevention in Children and Youth	3
October 18, 2024	CAA New Platform	24
November 20, 2024	Suicide Prevention Protocol	1
December 11, 2024	Important Cases in Government Contracting	1
December 18, 2024	Establishing the 2025 Work Plan	3
December 19, 2024	The Importance of the Interpreter's Professional Practice	1
December 20, 2024	Social Factors Contributing to the Academic Underachievement of Puerto Rican Children	1
January 17, 2025	Introduction to Community-Based Occupational Therapy in Emerging Areas	5
January 24, 2025	Perspective of the Puerto Rican Deaf Community and Interactive Sign Language Workshop for Health Professionals	1

Date	Training or Activity	Participants
January 24, 2025	Self-Care, Health, and Wellness Strategies for Occupational Therapy Professionals (Research)	4
April 4, 2025	Annual Execution Plan 2025–2026	5
April 4, 11, 18 and 25, 2025	Intermediate Workshop on the JAWS Program	8
March 4, 2025	Orientation on "American Printing House for the Blind" (APH)	4
March 10, 24 and April7 and 28, 2025	Intervention Strategies and Best Practices for the Education of Children and Youth with Deafblindness	6
March 12, 2025	Vision Screeners Optec 5000	15
March 17, 2025	The Deaf Community and Counseling: A Holistic Approach to Rehabilitation	4
March 26, 2025	Supporting Deaf Students: Strategies for Campus Access	1
April 1, 2025	Supervising with Artificial Intelligence	1
April 7, 2025	Teaching Strategies for Access to the Curriculum / Orientation and Mobility	25
April 11, 2025	Data Migration to the VRIS Platform	1

Date	Training or Activity	Participants
April 11, 2025 and June 6,13, 20, 2025	Sign Language Project	4
May 23, 2025	Assistive Technology for Social Inclusion	44
May 30, 2025	Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder	107
June 6, 2025	PATSI Assistive Technology Project	10
June 12, 2025	How to Use Artificial Intelligence Correctly	1

The OAA, the OSCRV, and the OAME participated in five (5) programmatic meetings convened at the request of the Office of the Administrator. During these meetings, the services offered by each of the offices and centers under their purview were presented, among other relevant matters. The meetings were held from May 12 to 15 and from May 19 to 20, 2025.

The OSCRV provided training to 267 employees from the pre-employment transition area regarding the contracts formalized for the provision of these services. The orientation was delivered in person.

Strategy:

• Provide an annual orientation (through a formal presentation) to all personnel on the VRA portion of the Unified State Plan, the Strategic Plan/Annual Execution Plan, and its Goals and Strategies.

Progress Report:
The Quality Control and Programmatic Management Office (QCPMO) delivered four (4) formal trainings, with a total participation of 152 professionals, as detailed below:

Date	Training Topic	Participants
July 2, 2024	Presentation on the 2024–2025 Annual Execution Plan for Central Office Staff	13
July 8, 2024	Presentation on the 2024–2025 Annual Execution	42

Date	Training Topic	Participants
	Plan for North and North Central Regions	
July 9, 2024	Presentation on the 2024–2025 Annual Execution Plan for South and West Regions	55
July 11, 2024	Presentation on the 2024–2025 Annual Execution Plan for Metro East and Central East Regions	42

Strategy

- Continue conducting periodic employee performance evaluations to ensure institutional efficacy.

Progress Report:

The Office of Labor Relations and Human Resources (OLRHR) received 819 performance evaluations during the period.

Note: The performance evaluations are performed after each semester concludes. Based on this criterion, 344 evaluations correspond to the period from January to June 2024; 396 to the period from July to December 2024; and 79 to the period from January to June 2025.

The Training and Development Division responds to inquiries and provides guidance to supervisory staff regarding the evaluation procedure for their supervisees, as well as the training activities available and requested.

Strategy:

- Update administrative, fiscal, and programmatic procedures in accordance with the established state and federal regulations, as needed, and to promote institutional efficiency.

Progress Report:

Office of the Administrator:
- Developed Informative Communication No. 2025-01, Validation of Contact Hours for Rehabilitation Counselors, on August 5, 2024.
- Developed Informative Communication No. 2025-08, First Congress on Rehabilitation Counseling, on February 19, 2025.

- Developed Informative Communication No. 2025-09, 2025 Annual Convention/Assembly of the College of Rehabilitation Counseling Professionals of Puerto Rico, on February 24, 2025.
- Developed Informative Communication No. 2025-10, Proclamation Ceremony for Rehabilitation Counselor Week, on February 24, 2025.
- Developed Informative Communication No. 2025-11, Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Professionals Week 2025.
- Reviewed and updated the 2024–2025 Annual Execution Plan (AEP). To this end, it:
- Evaluated the communication dated February 19, 2025.
- Coordinated a meeting with the Directors of the programmatic offices and the Project Manager to review and update the AEP 2024–2025. The meeting was held on April 4, 2025, with the participation of five professionals.
- Participated in public hearings on the following legislative bills:
 - House Bill 387: Single Digital Record for Persons with Functional Diversity Act, March 27, 2025.
 - Senate Bill 413: Single Digital Record for Persons with Functional Diversity Act, March 28, 2025.
 - Senate Bill 461: Independent Living Program Act, April 14, 2025.
 - Senate Bill 635: Pilot Program for Centralization of Services for Persons with Disabilities Act, May 29, 2025.
- Submitted three explanatory memoranda for Senate Bills:
 - Bill 387: Single Digital Record for Persons with Functional Diversity.
 - Bill 439: Public Schools of Inclusion.
 - Bill 413: Single Digital Record for Persons with Functional Diversity.

- Reviewed Memorandum No. 2025-001 from the Office of the Secretary of the Governorship, titled "Internal Measures to Promote Transparency and Integrity in Governmental Processes of Executive Branch Entities in Accordance with the Code of Ethics for Contractors", on March 28, 2025.

Avaluation and Adjustment Office:
- Reviewed Normative Communication No. 2015-09, Amendment to the Service Delivery Procedure in Evaluation and Adjustment Centers/Units.
- Reviewed the Service Delivery Procedure Manual for Evaluation and Adjustment Centers/Units.
- Participated in a meeting with agency executives regarding the permissibility parameters of the Rehabilitation Act, on September 30, 2024.
- Participated in a meeting with program area directors to review Normative Communication No. 2025-11, Procedure for Granting Wage Incentives to Employers Who Hire Vocational Rehabilitation Consumers, on May 5, 2025.

- Managed the process to obtain the Regulated Biomedical Waste Management Permit, holding two meetings (November 21, 2024, and January 29, 2025).
- Established a Corrective Action Plan in response to the audit conducted by the Puerto Rico Office of the Comptroller, submitted January 30, 2025.
- Reviewed the Visual Rehabilitation Guide of the VR Administration on February 5, 2025.
- Responded to an information request from the Office of the Inspector General of Puerto Rico on February 18, 2025.
- Reviewed Form ARV-26 Part II on June 5, 2025.

VR Counseling Services Office:
- Reviewed multiple Normative Communications (2004–2023) related to referrals, advisory committees, personal assistance services, record transfers, interpreter and assistant service documentation, adapted driving evaluations, equipment repossession procedures, and training recommendations.
- Developed draft communications on:
    - ACAA referrals to VR.
    - Home modification services.
    - Use of the VR Mobile Unit.
    - Pre-employment transition services.
    - Recording and coding staff time dedicated to pre-employment transition services.
    - Handling service records of children or relatives of VR employees.
    - Direct deposit procedures for consumers receiving maintenance/transportation services.
- Developed Normative Communication No. 2025-03, Procedure for Applying Eligibility Criteria, on July 23, 2024.
- Reviewed and updated the Supervision Manual for the Rehabilitation Counseling Service Center (October 2024).
- Participated in the analysis of:
    - Senate Bill 423: Amendments to the Organic Act of the Department of Health.
    - House Bill 387: Single Digital Record for Persons with Functional Diversity.

Quality Control and Programmatic Management Office:
- Developed the Procedures Manual on Productivity Indicators under WIOA, to be published.
- Developed a draft communication to follow up on performance indicator data entry and service reporting, to be published.
- Provided ongoing updated technical assistance and instructions to the VR

staff regarding performance indicators and technical assistance to the higher management staff regarding federal regulations related to the VR program and services, in order to support public policy development and updates.
- Through project management, carried out:
    - Annual Execution Plan (AEP) 2024–2025.
    - 2024 Results Report for the 2023–2024 AEP / 2023–2026 Strategic Plan.
    - Update of the Data Collection Form for CAME and central-level offices/divisions.
    - Semiannual review and tabulation of achievement reports.
    - Focus groups with Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors.
    - Adjustments to the Case Management Information System (CMIS).

Support and Employment Modalities Office:
- Reviewed Normative Communication No. 2019-08, Procedure for Recommending Commercial Enterprise under the Randolph-Sheppard Act.
- Reviewed Normative Communication No. 2023-08 (wage incentive procedure), which was repealed.
- Reviewed Normative Communication No. 2023-12, Update to the Stipend as Monetary Support for Consumers Participating in Job Clubs.
- Developed Informative Communication No. 2025-05, Supported Employment Service Contracts with Community Rehabilitation Programs for 2024–2025, on October 3, 2024.
- Developed Normative Communication No. 2025-01, Update to the Stipend as Monetary Support for Job Club Participants.
- Developed Normative Communication No. 2025-11, Procedure for Granting Wage Incentives to Employers Who Hire VR Consumers, on June 25, 2025.

Finance Division:
- Developed Administrative Communication No. 2025-03, Amendment to Administrative Communication 2016-01: Reduction of Administrative Expenses, on March 5, 2025.
- Developed Normative Communication No. 2025-09, Authorization, Control, and Registration of Authorized Signatures for Invoice Certification and Nullification, on March 7, 2025.

Documents Division:
- Developed Informative Communication No. 2025-13, Preventive Measures for the Protection of Public Documents During Hurricane Season, on May 27, 2025.

Strategy:

- Carry out program monitoring of the service delivery process and monitoring of quality control to ensure compliance with the public policy, the quality of data reported and identify areas for improvement.

Progress Report:

The CSCRV conducted 5,787 internal monitoring reviews of 6,935 applicant/consumer service case files to evaluate the management of the vocational rehabilitation process carried out by the counseling personnel under their supervision.

The QCPMO carried out the following quality-control monitoring activities:

1. Conducted the annual quality-control review of RSA-911 data for 18 physical case files from the Metro East, Central East, and North Central regions (Report completed on May 2, 2025).*
2. Reviewed approximately 564 electronic case files as part of the quarterly data-cleaning process.
3. Reviewed approximately 167 cases or electronic records in response to requests for corrections to Social Security numbers or identification numbers.

**Note: Staffing shortages within the QCPMO limited the number of monitoring reviews or examinations of physical and electronic case files.*

The CAA of the Metro East Region conducted:

Thirteen (13) monitoring reviews of referral movement and cases served, resulting in:
• 358 referrals or cases that received follow-up
• 15 CAA professionals impacted

One (1) monitoring review to verify and correlate electronic data with physical case files.

The OSCRV conducted 29 internal monitoring reviews of 715 applicant/consumer service case files to evaluate the service-delivery process and the corrective actions implemented to ensure the quality of services provided, achieving the following:

- 2 internal monitoring reviews of the service-delivery process, with 18 case files reviewed

- 4 internal monitoring reviews analyzing expired Individualized Plans for Employment (St.12), with 282 case files reviewed
- 3 internal monitoring reviews of the service-request process (60-day analysis in St.02), with 146 case files reviewed
- 4 internal monitoring reviews of the eligibility-determination process (St.10), with 72 case files reviewed
- 5 internal monitoring reviews of the development of the Individualized Plan for Employment (St.12), with 50 case files reviewed
- 2 internal monitoring reviews of the training process (St.18), with 18 case files reviewed
- 1 internal monitoring review of cases ready for employment (St.20), with 7 case files reviewed
- 2 internal monitoring reviews of the stabilization, transition to extended support, and closure process (St.22), with 16 case files reviewed
- 3 internal monitoring reviews of the pre-employment transition process, with 75 case files reviewed
- 1 internal monitoring review of the work-experience process for evaluative purposes/extended evaluation (St.06), with 15 case files reviewed
- 2 internal monitoring reviews of referrals from the State Insurance Fund Corporation, with 16 case files reviewed.

Strategy:

- Provide technical assistance based on the findings of the processes for monitoring and identification of needs by the central level or regional personnel.

Progress Report:

VRCSO provided 2,315 technical assistances.

The Quality Control and Programmatic Management Office (QCPMO) provided eleven (11) group technical assistances to VR Counselors, through electronic communication, on specific topics related to performance indicators, as detailed below:

Date	Topic
December 4, 2024	Required Fields for Recording Credentials and Measurable Skills Gained (MSG)
December 12, 2024	Post Exit follow ups and periods to record or edit information
December 18, 2024	Editing Post-Exit Quarters and Retention Coding
January 8, 2025	Important reminders about Credentials recording
February 11, 2025	Data Element #85 (for MSG calculation)
February 21, 2025	Instruction about the Placement screen
March 24 and June 26, 2025	Reminder about Credential recording before case closure
May 21, 2025	IPE information, Barriers, Enrollment, Credentials, MSG, Post Exit and other fields.
June 26, 2025	Credential recording before case closure

The QCPMO also provided:

- Individual technical assistance was provided to VR Counselors during the period as part of the error-correction process in data entry during case management.
- Through the Project Management unit of the OCCGP, a total of 379 orientations/technical assistances were provided, and participation was carried out in six (6) informal meetings with staff from the programmatic offices at Central Level.

Strategy:

- Establish quotas for the SEMC of consumers placed in a regular job by the personnel of said centers, as well as employment experience coordination quotas.

Progress Report:

CAME placed 113 consumers in Regular Employment.

Strategy:

- Establish quotas for the coordination of employment experiences carried out directly by the SEMC.

Progress Report:

CAME coordinated 24 employment experiences in competitive employment.

2. PERFORMANCE ON THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY INDICATORS UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA FOR THE MOST RECENTLY COMPLETED PROGRAM YEAR, REFLECTING ACTUAL AND NEGOTIATED LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE. EXPLAIN ANY DISCREPANCIES IN THE ACTUAL AND NEGOTIATED LEVELS; AND

Negotiated levels and performance for PY 2024:

Performance Indicator	Negotiated Level for PY 2024	Achievement
Employment Second Quarter After Exit Quarter	41.00%	28.60%
Employment Fourth Quarter After Exit Quarter	41.70%	33.10%
Median Earning Second Quarter	$4,600	$4,800
Credential Attained	32.20%	15.10%
Measurable Skills Gain	43.60%	42.30%

The VRA was unable to meet the negotiated levels in four of the five indicators. The three most affected indicators were: employment in the second quarter after exit (for cases closed between July 2023 and June 2024), employment in the fourth quarter after exit, and credentials attained (for cases closed between January and December 2023). The deficiencies in meeting the established performance indicators are attributed to the following factors:

Employment Rate in the Second Quarter After Exit
Counselors closed most cases between April and June 2024. Cases closed during the last quarter of the Program Year have less time available to

complete post-exit follow-up, which reduces the number of cases that meet the requirement when the necessary data are not obtained within the six-month window assigned for this purpose.

Employment Rate in the Fourth Quarter After Exit
Between October and December 2023, the VRA closed a significant number of inactive cases that would be included in the performance calculations for PY 2024. Because these cases were closed due to the inability to establish contact, there was an inherent risk of not being able to obtain post-exit employment information, which ultimately occurred. Most of these individuals also did not appear in employment records (UI wage files), resulting in a performance percentage for this indicator that was significantly lower than in previous years and below the negotiated target. It is important to note that, prior to beginning the indicator-negotiation process, the VRA had previously notified that this would affect this indicator's performance during PY 2024.

Credentials Attained
This indicator was also calculated during PY 2024 for inactive cases closed between January and December 2023. Most of these cases did not have a credential record, as the information could not be obtained due to the lack of contact with the participant both before and after case closure.

To emphasize the importance of complying with performance indicators and the timeframes for data entry in the case-management system, the Office of Quality Control and Programmatic Management provided ongoing training and technical assistance to staff at the Counseling Service Centers. In addition, it reviewed and updated visual and explanatory resources, which were published on the agency's internal page so that staff could access them at any time. After the monitoring visit in June 2023, additional information was shared with the Directors of the Counseling Centers, Counseling Supervisors, and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, highlighting the advantages of closing as many cases as possible during the first two quarters of the program year, as this provides more time to complete second-quarter follow-ups.

3. THE USE OF FUNDS RESERVED FOR INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES (SECTIONS 101(A)(18) AND 101(A)(23) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT) (E.G., SRC, SILC).

During PY 2024 the VRA carried out the following activities using innovation and expansion funds:

Activity: Continue funding the SCR and CILs to assist and support its operations as well as developing, in conjunction with the VRA, better

opportunities for employment and independent living for our applicants/consumers.

Progress Report: The VRA provided a fund allocation to both councils. Furthermore, it maintains its representation in the agency as well as its collaboration with both councils.

Invoices processed (expenditures) during PY 2024 were:

SRC: $123,904.88

ILC: $91,849.46

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:

(A) VR agency requests to receive title VI funds.

2. IF THE VR AGENCY HAS ELECTED TO RECEIVE TITLE VI FUNDS, SECTION 606(B)(3) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT REQUIRES VR AGENCIES TO INCLUDE SPECIFIC GOALS AND PRIORITIES WITH RESPECT TO THE DISTRIBUTION OF TITLE VI FUNDS RECEIVED UNDER SECTION 603 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES. DESCRIBE THE USE OF TITLE VI FUNDS AND HOW THEY WILL BE USED IN MEETING THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES OF THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM.

The VRA has developed the following goals and plans for the distribution of Title VI, Part B funds:

Goal A

Continue to provide services to consumers identified for supported employment modality.

Goal B

Maintain a level of satisfaction of 85% of those consumers who received supported employment services at the closure of the case.

Plans, Strategies:

- Use other sources of funding, in addition to the ones from Title VI, Part B, needed to expand the provision of supported employment services.

- At the Support and Employment Modalities Centers (SEMC), receive and evaluate at least 160 new candidates for Supported Employment services, referred from the VRC.
- Contract and support community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) throughout the Island so that at least 80 consumers, who received supported employment services, are able to achieve an employment outcome.
- Provide services at the CRP to at least 170 new cases during the period.
- Expand outreach in order to attract other potential service providers. This, by providing orientations in graduate schools (e.g., counseling, occupational therapy) that might develop projects to provide supported employment services as part of internships and through greater dissemination in the media, among others.
- Strengthen the provision of supported employment services through training and technical assistance to the staff of the CRPs. The Support and Employment Modalities Office (SEMO) and the Support and Employment Modalities Centers (SEMC) will provide such technical assistance in aspects such as:

1. Guidance to new proponents about supported employment services, as requested.
2. Other aspects related to the provision of supported employment services and extended supports services.

- Continue administering satisfaction surveys of the consumer in terms of the services received in the CRPs and in the SEMC, in order to identify areas to be strengthened or improved.
- Continue conducting monitoring interventions to the CRPs in order to validate compliance with the provision of services established in the contracts.

Distribution of Title VI, Part B funds:

The estimated total of projected funds for the provision of supported employment services for is $2,720,000.00 distributed as follows: $300,000 from Title VI-B for the contracting of a CRP; and $2,420,000.00 from Title I for the contracting of other CRPs and for expenses related to the supported employment services. Use of Title VI funds after placement is set forth for the PRCs.

During PYs 2026 and 2027, the Office of Support and Employment Modalities will administer the Supported Employment Program by identifying eligible individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities, coordinating supported employment services through Community Rehabilitation Programs, determining the appropriate funding source based on applicable grant requirements, and coordinating with the Budget and Finance Divisions to ensure expenditures are recorded in accordance with Federal requirements applicable to the SE-A and SE-B awards.

VRA issued Regulatory Communication No. 2022-10 establishing procedures related to the administration of Supported Employment funds. The agency has identified the need to update the communication to reflect current RSA guidance regarding the administration of the SE-A and SE-B awards, including procedures for identifying youth with the most significant disabilities, documenting the use of SE-B funds, the required non-Federal match, and the coordination of programmatic and fiscal responsibilities. The revision of Regulatory Communication No. 2022-10 is planned during PY 2026 and 2027.

3. SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES MAY BE PROVIDED WITH TITLE 1 OR TITLE VI FUNDS FOLLOWING PLACEMENT OF INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES IN EMPLOYMENT. IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 101(A)(22) AND SECTION 606(B)(3) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, DESCRIBE THE QUALITY, SCOPE, AND EXTENT OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED TO INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES; AND THE TIMING OF TRANSITION TO EXTENDED SERVICES.

Quality:

The *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act* (WIOA) of July 22 of 2014, emphasizes on the provision of the supported employment services for the consumers with the most significant disabilities. Therefore, the VRA in its mission to integrate the people with disabilities into the labor force and towards a more independent living promotes the provision of the supported employment services leading to an employment outcome.

The Support and Employment Modalities Office (SEMO), at the central level of the VRA, intends to collaborate, provide assistance and facilitate the applicability of the public policy to the Support and Employment Modalities Centers (CAME, in Spanish), at the regional level, on career development services, services to employers and development of support and

employment modes for the consumers. The SEMO staff contributes with other operational/administrative offices of the VRA, in the coordination and collaboration of efforts regarding the assessment services and the programmatic monitoring and interpretation of data/relevant information to ensure compliance with the VR Portion of the Unified State Plan and the Strategic Plan of the agency.

The VRA, through its CAME, develops inter/transdisciplinary work teams to ensure that the supported employment services offered by the CRPs are provided uniformly, agile and responsive to the needs of the consumers with the most significant disabilities.

SEMO and CAME staff also carry out monitoring activities with the purpose of verify compliance, project development, quality of services, identify limitations, use of resources, and consumer's participation, among others.

Scope and extent:

Individuals can receive up to 24 months of supported employment services, or more if necessary to achieve job stabilization. In addition, youth with disabilities may receive up to four years of extended services until the youth reaches 25.

The VR counselor identifies those consumers with the most significant disabilities who could benefit from supported employment, in accordance with the federal provisions set forth in 34 CFR 361.34. Such identification begins with the initial interview, the analysis of medical evidence, the analysis of pre-employment skills and any other aspect relevant to the evaluation process.

The supported employment modality is provided through the SEMC of the VRA; which offer support to the VR counselor in order to validate the vocational strengths and needs of the applicants/consumers, as well as to promote them towards competitive integrated employment under such supported employment modality. Prior to the consumer's referral to the CAME, he may receive services in the center of Assessment and Adjustment Centers (AAC) of the VRA in order to be evaluated in the following areas:

- Personal skills, daily/family/community living
- Cognitive-Psychosocial skills
- Perceptual-Psychomotor skills
- Training, Job and Work skills

The referral to the AAC will identify that the consumer will be sent to a community rehabilitation program (CRP) to be serviced under the supported employment modality, whereby the evaluation process must have an ecological approach.

The supported employment process has been framed within the following five (5) stages developed for the provision of these services:

Stage I. Determination of Needs

- Revision of documents: assessment of pre-employment skills, needs and support resources
- Comprehensive situational evaluation
- Determination of needs through profile evaluation
- Support: consumer and family
- Drafting of the Intervention and Support Plan for Placement in Supported Employment

Stage II. Occupational Preparation

- Ecological evaluation
- Possible revision of the Intervention and Support Plan for Placement in Supported Employment
- Continuous support

Stage III. Placement Services

- Marketing Plan
- Promotion
- Occupational analysis
- Job proposal
- Reasonable accommodation
- Recruitment process
- Revision of the Intervention and Support Plan for Placement in Supported Employment (if it applies)
- Meetings with the employer and the family
- Continuous support

Stage IV. Job Retention, Intensive and Moderate Training

- Intensive and moderate training
- Development of natural support networks
- Revision of the Intervention and Support Plan for Placement in Supported Employment (if it applies)
- Evaluation/monitoring
- Submittal of reports
- Meetings with the employer and the family
- Continuous support

Stage V. Stabilization, Transition to Extended Support, and Closure within 90 Days

- Meetings with the employer and the family
- Beginning of the employment monitoring phase (minimum of 90 days)
- Consumer's performance evaluation carried out by the employer, supervisor and job coach.
- Identification of extended support to be provided by family, employees (co-workers), and community.
- Satisfaction survey about services provided to consumer/family/employer/counselor.

The previous information about quality, scope and extent of services apply also to youth. The VRA will continue to provide SE and Extended Services to youth with the most significant disabilities. Through CRIS case management system, the CAME will identify those consumers between ages 14-24.

The timing of transition to extended services:

In accordance with WIOA, the VRA will make resources available for extended services to youth with more significant disabilities, for a period not to exceed four (4) years. These services will be provided through contracting of CRPs. The CAME Analysts will receive the request for extended support services from employers and will negotiate with the CRP the service to be provided and the number of interventions needed to stabilize individual in employment. An authorization for services document will be created on the case management system.

In order to improve the quality, the scope and the extent of the supported employment services, the VRA is committed to meet the goals and the strategies established and described in the previous section e.2.

4. SECTIONS 101(A)(22) AND 606(B)(4) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT REQUIRE THE VR AGENCY TO DESCRIBE EFFORTS TO IDENTIFY AND ARRANGE, INCLUDING ENTERING INTO COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS, WITH OTHER STATE AGENCIES AND OTHER APPROPRIATE ENTITIES IN ORDER TO PROVIDE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES. THE DESCRIPTION MUST INCLUDE EXTENDED SERVICES, AS APPLICABLE, TO INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THE PROVISION OF EXTENDED SERVICES TO YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH 34 C.F.R. § 363.4(A) AND 34 C.F.R. § 361.5(C)(19)(V).

The VRA issues an annual public announcement for the contracting of CRPs that provide supported employment services to consumers with the most significant disabilities. The VRA currently maintains contractual agreements with CRPs across the island.

In accordance with WIOA, the VRA will make resources available for extended services to youth with more significant disabilities, for a period not to exceed four (4) years. These services will be provided through contracting of CRPs. The Support and Employment Modalities Centers' (SEMC) Analysts will receive the request for extended support services from employers and will negotiate with the CRP the service to be provided and the number of interventions needed to stabilize individual in employment. An authorization for services document will be created on the case management system.

At present, extended services for adults age 25 and older are provided through family supports. The Vocational Rehabilitation Administration (VRA) is currently in the process of developing a policy governing the provision of extended services for adults age 25 and older.

The following issues have been identified and will be addressed during the development of the VRA's policy:

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) funds under Title I of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) may not be used to provide extended services on a direct and ongoing basis. The policy must ensure that extended services are funded through other sources once a supported employment case has been successfully closed. Examples include:

- Identification of external resources prior to case closure, such as:

State or municipal programs;
Medicaid-funded supported employment services;
Nonprofit organizations; and
Community or family support networks.

- Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE): The IPE must clearly document the entity or organization that will provide extended services after the case is closed. This is a key requirement for validating the successful closure of a supported employment case.
- Interagency agreements: The VRA will evaluate opportunities to establish agreements with other entities to help ensure continuity of extended services.
- Braided funding: The use of multiple funding sources to sustain long-term supports for individuals receiving supported employment services.

F. ANNUAL ESTIMATES

Sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act require all VR agencies to annually conduct a full assessment of their resources and ability to serve all eligible individuals before the start of the Federal fiscal year. In accordance with 34 C.F.R. § 361.29(b), annual estimates must include the following projections:

1. ESTIMATES FOR NEXT FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR—

A. VR PROGRAM; AND

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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)
Not applicable	38,000	38,000	28,320,000.00	0

B. SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM.

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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)
Not applicable	170	170	2,720,000.00	0

G. ORDER OF SELECTION

1. PURSUANT TO SECTION 101(A)(5) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, THIS DESCRIPTION MUST BE AMENDED WHEN THE VR AGENCY DETERMINES, BASED ON THE ANNUAL ESTIMATES DESCRIBED IN DESCRIPTION (F), THAT VR SERVICES CANNOT BE PROVIDED TO ALL ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE STATE WHO APPLY FOR AND ARE DETERMINED ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES.

* VR agencies may maintain an order of selection policy and priority of eligible individuals without implementing or continuing to implement an order of selection.

The VR agency is not implementing an order of selection and all eligible individuals will be served.

2. FOR VR AGENCIES THAT HAVE DEFINED PRIORITY CATEGORIES DESCRIBE—

A. THE JUSTIFICATION FOR THE ORDER

Not applicable.

B. THE ORDER (PRIORITY CATEGORIES) TO BE FOLLOWED IN SELECTING ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS TO BE PROVIDED VR SERVICES ENSURING THAT INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES ARE SELECTED FOR SERVICES BEFORE ALL OTHER INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES; AND

Not applicable.

C. THE VR AGENCY'S GOALS FOR SERVING INDIVIDUALS IN EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY, INCLUDING HOW THE AGENCY WILL ASSIST ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS ASSIGNED TO CLOSED PRIORITY CATEGORIES WITH INFORMATION AND REFERRAL, THE METHOD IN WHICH THE VR AGENCY WILL MANAGE WAITING LISTS, AND THE PROJECTED TIMELINES FOR OPENING PRIORITY CATEGORIES. NOTE: PRIORITY CATEGORIES ARE CONSIDERED OPEN WHEN ALL INDIVIDUALS IN THE PRIORITY CATEGORY MAY BE SERVED.

Not applicable.

3. HAS THE VR AGENCY ELECTED TO SERVE ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS OUTSIDE OF THE ORDER OF SELECTION WHO REQUIRE SPECIFIC SERVICES OR EQUIPMENT TO MAINTAIN EMPLOYMENT?

Not applicable.

H. WAIVER OF STATEWIDENESS.

The State plan shall be in effect in all political subdivisions of the State, however, the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (Commissioner) may waive compliance with this requirement in accordance with Section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act and the implementing regulations in 34 C.F.R. § 361.26. If the VR agency is requesting a waiver of statewideness or has a previously approved waiver of statewideness, describe the types of services and the local entities providing such services under the waiver of statewideness and how the agency has complied with the requirements in 34 C.F.R. § 361.26. If the VR agency is not requesting or does not have an approved waiver of statewideness, please indicate "not applicable."

Not applicable.

I. COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT.

In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act, the VR agency must develop and maintain annually a description (consistent with the purposes of the Rehabilitation Act) of the VR agency's comprehensive system of personnel development, which shall include a description of the procedures and activities the State VR agency will undertake to ensure it has an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professionals and paraprofessionals that provides the following:

1. ANALYSIS OF CURRENT PERSONNEL AND PROJECTED PERSONNEL NEEDS INCLUDING—

A. THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL CURRENTLY NEEDED BY THE VR AGENCY TO PROVIDE VR SERVICES, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY; AND

B. THE NUMBER AND TYPE OF PERSONNEL THAT ARE EMPLOYED BY THE VR AGENCY IN THE PROVISION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES, INCLUDING RATIOS OF QUALIFIED VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNSELORS TO CLIENTS;

C. PROJECTIONS OF THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY, WHO WILL BE NEEDED BY THE VR AGENCY TO PROVIDE VR SERVICES IN 5 YEARS BASED ON PROJECTIONS OF THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS TO BE SERVED, INCLUDING INDIVIDUALS WITH SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL EXPECTED TO RETIRE OR LEAVE THE FIELD, AND OTHER RELEVANT FACTORS.

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Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed	No. of Personnel Currently Needed	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years
Counseling staff	114	158	160
Support staff	245	320	320
Administrative	250	310	310

Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed	No. of Personnel Currently Needed	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years
Other staff	1	1	1

D. RATIO OF QUALIFIED VR COUNSELORS TO CLIENTS:

The current ratio is approximately 348 clients per VR counselor (39,745 active cases/114 VRC).

E. PROJECTED NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS TO BE SERVED IN 5 YEARS:

To articulate the Agency's functioning to address the needs of the population it serves, the VRA requires professional personnel related to the rehabilitation field, occupying various positions, as well as other support and administrative professionals. Support professionals also provide direct service to applicants/consumers, while the administrative staff contributes to the continuity of other necessary processes for the operation of the agency and the achievement of programmatic goals. As of September 30, 2025, the VRA has a payroll of 610 employees, of which 114 are VR Counselors managing caseloads, and the projection is to attend and serve an estimate of 38,000 people with disabilities each year from Program Year 2026 through Program Year 2031.

2. DATA AND INFORMATION ON PERSONNEL PREPARATION AND DEVELOPMENT, RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION, AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING:

A. A LIST OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE STATE THAT ARE PREPARING VR PROFESSIONALS, BY TYPE OF PROGRAM; THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED AT EACH OF THOSE INSTITUTIONS, BROKEN DOWN BY TYPE OF PROGRAM; AND THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO GRADUATED DURING THE PRIOR YEAR FROM EACH OF THOSE INSTITUTIONS WITH CERTIFICATION OR LICENSURE, OR WITH THE CREDENTIALS FOR CERTIFICATION OR LICENSURE, BROKEN DOWN BY THE PERSONNEL CATEGORY FOR WHICH THEY HAVE RECEIVED, OR HAVE THE CREDENTIALS TO RECEIVE, CERTIFICATION OR LICENSURE.

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Institute of Higher Education	Type of Program	No. of Students Enrolled	No. of Prior Year Graduates
University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus	Rehabilitation Counseling Graduate Program	42	19
Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico, Ponce Campus	Rehabilitation Counseling Graduate Program	18	6
Central University of Bayamón	Rehabilitation Counseling Graduate Program	0	2
Central University of Bayamón	Bachelor of Psychology	41	2
Central University of Bayamón	Bachelor of Social Work	25	10
University of Puerto Rico, Medical Sciences Campus	Occupational Therapy	64	16
University of Puerto Rico, Medical Sciences Campus	Physical Therapy	78	20
University of Puerto Rico, Medical Sciences Campus	Master of Speech Pathology	34	14
University of Puerto Rico, Medical Sciences Campus	Nursing	213	85

B. THE VR AGENCY'S PLAN FOR RECRUITMENT, PREPARATION AND RETENTION OF QUALIFIED PERSONNEL, WHICH ADDRESSES THE CURRENT AND PROJECTED NEEDS FOR QUALIFIED PERSONNEL; AND THE COORDINATION AND FACILITATION OF EFFORTS BETWEEN THE VR AGENCY AND INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS TO RECRUIT, PREPARE, AND RETAIN PERSONNEL WHO ARE QUALIFIED, INCLUDING PERSONNEL FROM MINORITY BACKGROUNDS AND PERSONNEL WHO ARE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

The VRA's institutional mission is to provide vocational rehabilitation services aimed at the successful integration of people with disabilities into the workforce and the enjoyment of a more independent life. For this purpose, the VRA has professionals committed to public service, duly qualified to attend, in an agile and responsive manner, the vocational rehabilitation and independent living needs of people with disabilities, with priority given to those with the most significant disabilities.

To guarantee that we have the best qualified and fully trained personnel to provide services to people with disabilities, we offer professional development opportunities to our human resources. Also, we take into consideration their needs and recommendations for the best functioning of the agency.

Puerto Rico has various institutions of higher education that are preparing professionals in the rehabilitation field. The VRA has agreements with two (2) universities that prepare professionals in the rehabilitation counseling field. The purpose of such agreements is to provide the students the opportunity to carry out their practicum in facilities of our agency. In addition, the VRA recruits graduates from these institutions and others:

- University of Puerto Rico (UPR)- is the only public institution of higher education in Puerto Rico. It has its main campus in Río Piedras with 10 off-campus sites throughout the Island. The Graduate Program in Rehabilitation Counseling is at their Río Piedras Campus.
- UPR, Medical Sciences Campus, has the following programs: Occupational Therapy; Physical Therapy; Master's Degree in Speech Pathology; and Nursing.
- Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico (Ponce) has Rehabilitation Counseling programs.

The VRA, through the Office of Labor Affairs and Human Resources and its divisions, is responsible for developing, updating, and implementing a plan for

recruiting, preparing, and retaining qualified personnel to meet current and projected personnel needs. To comply with such requirement, the VRA will continue to carry out the following procedures and activities:

- Analysis and development of strategies based on the need for recruitment, reclassification, training, or any other requirement related to human resources.
- Provide advice and support on matters concerning the management of the agency's human resources, maintaining close coordination with the program area.
- Maintenance of a human resources inventory involving job classification, existing vacancies, identification of candidates for retirement, and succession planning. This information is analyzed annually to determine employment patterns, positions that are difficult to recruit, and the number of employees with 25 or more years of service.
- Projections of future needs for human resources (in a term of 1 to 5 years), by number and type of employee, emphasizing the staff that offers direct service to people with disabilities.
- Provide training and promote employee development.
- Establish objectives and types of training activities that will be offered to employees, to meet the programmatic and administrative commitments of the agency.
- Coordinate the training of VRA personnel with universities and other institutions that prepare professionals related to the field of rehabilitation.
- Maintenance of efforts to continue recruiting qualified personnel with disabilities. The VRA has rehabilitation counselors with diverse disabilities. We continue to emphasize compliance with Law 81, as amended, known as the Equal Employment Opportunity Law for Persons with Disabilities. As part of the evaluation of exam applications, an additional 5 points are awarded to anyone who shows evidence of having some type of disabling condition.

The VRA recruits without distinction of age, race, color, gender, social or national origin, social condition, political or religious ideas. Our agency recruits based on the applicant's qualifications. The VRA Puerto Rico is the

only Designated State Unit in the nation with more than 99% of its population being a minority (Hispanics and/or Spanish-speakers).

C. DESCRIPTION OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND ACTIVITIES THAT ENSURE ALL PERSONNEL EMPLOYED BY THE VR AGENCY RECEIVE APPROPRIATE AND ADEQUATE TRAINING AND CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS:

I. PARTICULARLY WITH RESPECT TO ASSESSMENT, VOCATIONAL COUNSELING, JOB PLACEMENT, AND REHABILITATION TECHNOLOGY, INCLUDING TRAINING IMPLEMENTED IN COORDINATION WITH ENTITIES CARRYING OUT STATE PROGRAMS UNDER SECTION 4 OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998; AND

II. PROCEDURES FOR THE ACQUISITION AND DISSEMINATION OF SIGNIFICANT KNOWLEDGE FROM RESEARCH AND OTHER SOURCES TO VR AGENCY PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS AND FOR PROVIDING TRAINING REGARDING THE AMENDMENTS TO THE REHABILITATION ACT MADE BY THE WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT.

As established in the Procedures Manual for the Training of All Staff of the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration, the VRA promotes and emphasizes the continuing education of its employees. Therefore, it carries out the following activities to ensure having qualified staff:

- Identification and communication of training needs.
- Analysis and development of strategies based on training needs.
- Design of training activities to address topics concerning administrative/programmatic issues relevant to the VR program.
- Planning of training activities as a result of the needs identified in the needs assessment study, monitoring reports and performance evaluations.

Trainings to the newly recruited VR counselors cover topics such as: services delivery process, performance indicators and the State Plan, among others.

i. Particularly with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology, including training implemented in coordination with entities carrying out State programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998

The Program established under Act 264 of 2000, known as the Puerto Rico Assistive Technology Program Act (PRATP), as amended, is responsible for

promoting changes in the public and private systems for the inclusion, independence and self-sufficiency of people with disabilities through the use of assistive technology. To do this, it maintains collaborative agreements with government agencies. The VRA maintains an agreement with the PRATP, which is under the University of PR's Medical Science Campus, for the exchange of resources, knowledge, and experience in matters of assistive technology.

The VRA offers assistive technology services in its six regions under the following categories: visual, auditory, mobility, communication, independent living, cognitive area, and access to computers. Services are provided by Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, Audiologists, Certified Teachers, Speech-Language Pathologists, Specialists in Services for the Blind and Visual Rehabilitation. These professionals have the required credentials and stay current in the field of AT. To this end, the Agency benefits from the collaboration with the PRATP, since its specialists offer training to VRA personnel on topics such as:

- Low, medium and high technology AT equipment
- AT legislation
- AT integration to assessment and adjustment processes
- AT alternatives for employment and independent living
- AT for specific populations (blind, learning disabilities, mobility impairments)
- New equipment on the market and free equipment alternatives
- Low cost or homemade AT equipment alternatives, among others

These and other training provided to VRA personnel have contributed to keeping their knowledge and skills updated, in turn influencing the provision of services to applicants/consumers, facilitating employment and independent living outcomes.

ii. Procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to VR agency professionals and paraprofessionals and for providing training regarding the amendments to the Rehabilitation Act made by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

For the purpose of acquiring and disseminating significant knowledge of research and other sources to professional and paraprofessional staff of the

agency, and also regarding the amendments to the Rehabilitation Act made by WIOA, the VRA has established the following procedure:

1. Presentation of the Comprehensive Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs results to staff.
2. Sending, through internal email, links to articles or information resources related to the rehabilitation field.
3. Collaboration with the Graduate School in Rehabilitation Counseling of UPR so that they share with the agency findings of research studies related to the rehabilitation field.
4. Allowing staff participation in continuing education courses, many of which contain information about research and evidence-based practices and strategies.
5. Trainings, technical assistance and normative communications related to the amendments to the Rehabilitation Act made by WIOA.

3. DESCRIPTION OF VR AGENCY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF PERSONNEL STANDARDS CONSISTENT WITH SECTION 101(A)(7)(B) TO ENSURE THAT VR AGENCY PROFESSIONAL AND PARAPROFESSIONAL PERSONNEL ARE ADEQUATELY TRAINED AND PREPARED, INCLUDING—

A. STANDARDS THAT ARE CONSISTENT WITH ANY NATIONAL OR STATE-APPROVED OR -RECOGNIZED CERTIFICATION, LICENSING, REGISTRATION, OR OTHER COMPARABLE REQUIREMENTS THAT APPLY TO THE PROFESSION OR DISCIPLINE IN WHICH SUCH PERSONNEL ARE PROVIDING VR SERVICES; AND

B. THE ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENTS, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 101(A)(7)(B)(II) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, TO ENSURE THAT THE PERSONNEL HAVE A 21ST CENTURY UNDERSTANDING OF THE EVOLVING LABOR FORCE AND THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

A. Standards that are consistent with any national or State-approved or -recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the profession or discipline in which such personnel are providing VR services:

In Puerto Rico, the rehabilitation counseling profession is regulated by Law 58 of May 7 of 1976, as amended, known as the Regulatory Law of the Rehabilitation Counseling Profession in Puerto Rico. This legislation establishes that in order to practice as a rehabilitation counselor, the person must have a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and a current state license issued by the appropriate Board of Examiners. It is also required that the professional maintains active his credentials and licenses in the Professional Registry of the Office of Regulation and Certification of Health Professionals, be a member of the College of Rehabilitation Counseling Professionals of Puerto Rico and comply with hours of continuing education. The VRA recruits personnel who meet these requirements in order to ensure the highest standards of the rehabilitation counseling profession.

Similarly, certification or license is required as a condition for employment, benefits and wages for: teachers, physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech/language pathologists, social workers, and psychologists, among others.

B. The establishment and maintenance of education and experience requirements, in accordance with section 101(a)(7)(B)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act, to ensure that the personnel have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities.

Currently, the VRA staff receive continuing education to keep them updated regarding issues related to people with disabilities. The Agency has developed the following strategies to maintain personnel standards consistent with the highest requirements of the state and applicable to the profession or discipline in particular:

- Annual review of certifications, licenses and continuing education of professions or disciplines
- Continue providing the staff with the necessary education and training for the optimal performance of their duties.
- Maintain an updated record of training, workshops, training, among others, offered to staff.
- Identify staff retraining needs to strengthen the performance of their duties.
- Annual evaluation of staff performance
- Reinforce working relationships with the local DOL to provide updated information regarding the labor market through formal trainings.

The agency's staff also benefits from the training provided by resources such as:

- College of Rehabilitation Counseling Professionals of Puerto Rico (CPCR): Rehabilitation Counselors
- University of Puerto Rico
- VRTAC
- Others

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.

Describe how the designated State unit has personnel or obtains the services of other individuals who 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.

The agency, in its vision of being the leading agency in providing services to people with disabilities; provides staff with the necessary training and workshops to meet the communication needs of deaf, blind, and deaf/blind applicants/consumers. For this reason, agency staff participate in related training activities. In turn, the VRA has four (4) interpreters for the deaf who can be used when necessary to serve applicants or eligible individuals.

Since Puerto Rico is a Spanish-speaking country (English is used as a second language), we can communicate in the native language (Spanish) of our applicants/consumers. However, if an applicant/consumer only speaks English, we can also communicate in that language. In addition, the VRA can provide clients with alternative formats such as Braille and large print, among others.

The VRA installed a video interpretation system through the VRA facilities, which facilitates communication with the deaf population, regardless of whether the interpreter is physically in the place where the applicant/consumer requires the service.

5. AS APPROPRIATE, DESCRIBE THE PROCEDURES AND ACTIVITIES TO COORDINATE THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT WITH PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT UNDER THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT.

As appropriate, describe the procedures and activities to coordinate the designated State unit's comprehensive system of personnel development with personnel development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

In Puerto Rico, the Associate Secretary for Special Education and the VRA are in two different state departments (PRDE and PRDOLHR). The first one is responsible for the implementation of Public Law 108-446, as amended, known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA); the second one is responsible for the implementation of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and State Law 97-2000, as amended, known as the Vocational Rehabilitation Law of Puerto Rico. In addition to the aforementioned legislation, the State Law 51-1996, as amended, known as the Integral Educational Services for Persons with Disabilities, provides for the coordination to be achieved between various local agencies to ensure an effective transition of young people with disabilities coming from the Department of Education. Both agencies maintain cooperative ties related to the development of their respective human resources and as such, have been planning, developing, offering and/or participating in training activities since 1987. Some of the topics covered in such training include: transition from school to work; vocational evaluation; supported employment; IDEIA; Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Public Law No. 101-336, as amended; Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (Public Law 113-128 of July 22 of 2014); among others. In addition, both agencies are members of an advisory committee, which meets periodically to plan and join efforts in the development and implementation of transition services from school to work.

The efforts and alliances carried out under collaborative agreements with the PRDE, as well as with the PRDOLHR and its components, are conducive to the development of strategies and activities to comply with federal regulations. The VRA is responsible for monitoring the cooperative agreement with the DE. As part of this commitment, the agency participated in meetings with the Special Education Advisory Committee.

J. COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS.

In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(11)(D) of the Rehabilitation Act—

1. DESCRIBE PLANS, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES FOR COORDINATION BETWEEN THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND EDUCATION OFFICIALS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PUBLIC EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, THAT ARE DESIGNED TO FACILITATE THE TRANSITION OF THE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM THE RECEIPT OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES IN SCHOOL TO THE RECEIPT OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES.

VRA has the responsibility to comply with the requirements of Chapter 34 of the Federal Regulations Code (34CFR), Section 361.22, which states that the State Plan must contain plans, policies and procedures for coordination between the Designated State Unit (VRA in Puerto Rico) and the Department of Education (DE) to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities, ages 14-21, from school to vocational rehabilitation services.

Similarly, the VRA has an interagency agreement as a result of the implementation of Law 51, known as the Law on Integrated Educational Services for Persons with Disabilities, of June 7, 1996. This Law assigns responsibilities to various government agencies for the purpose to provide services in a coordinated manner to people with disabilities.

The responsibilities assigned to the VRA by Law 51 are the following:

1. Evaluate, throughout the vocational rehabilitation counselor, the cases referred, in order to determine their eligibility for services, as established by state and federal guidelines.
2. Implement and provide independent living and vocational rehabilitation services to people with disabilities with the capacity to perform in some type of work, based on state and federal legislation.
3. Design an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), according to the needs of the person with disabilities and in accordance with current regulations. This plan includes:

- Application of guides and programmatic procedures for the provision of services
- Beginning and ending date of services
- Employment outcomes (regular employment, supported employment, self-employment or any other innovative option)
- Projected date for the achievement of the employment outcome

- Analysis to evidence the functional limitations of the consumer in relation to the employment outcome, outcomes of informed choice and the programmed services
- Recommended VR services which are necessary to achieve the selected employment outcomes
- Comparable services and benefits
- Costs of services
- Evidence of the financial participation negotiated between the VR counselor with the consumer/family, as applicable
- Evaluative criteria
- Specific responsibilities of the VRA
- Responsibilities of the consumer/representative
- Coordination with educational agencies
- Signatures of the parties and dates when plan is developed and approved
- Evidence in the IPE of the participation of the consumer (his own words) regarding the informed choice process and other actions taken during his VR process

4. Collaborate and participate in the drafting and implementation of the transition plan to adult life, whenever appropriate.
5. Provide Pre-Employment Transition services to students with eligible or potentially eligible disabilities.

The VRA recognizes the importance of the transition process in the youth with disabilities and will maintain its commitment in that it is carried out in accordance with federal and state regulations. The Agency is developing with the PRDE joint activities in order to strengthen the provision of transition services in general, and especially the pre-employment services to those youth with the most significant disabilities.

The VRA has a formal agreement with the SEA and the local DOL regarding Transition Services, which also includes responsibilities of both agencies related to the procedures for exchanging documentation regarding WIOA Section 511, as follows:

-VRA's Transition Analysts will provide orientation to the local Department of Education staff regarding their responsibilities for compliance with Section 511

requirements and completion of an Orientation from VRA to DE Certification Form.

-Local DE has the following responsibilities:

1. During the next 30 days after completion of each Transition activity or service, DE will send to VRA a Certification of Transition Service, as established in Section 397.30 of the CFR and WIOA's Section 511.

2. Provide to the youth with disabilities evidence of transition services completion, among others, within the next 30 days after each activity or service completion, in accordance with CFR 397.20 and WIOA Section 511.

2. **DESCRIBE THE CURRENT STATUS AND SCOPE OF THE FORMAL INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE VR AGENCY AND THE STATE EDUCATIONAL AGENCY. CONSISTENT WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE FORMAL INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT PURSUANT TO 34 C.F.R. § 361.22(B), PROVIDE, AT A MINIMUM, THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION ABOUT THE AGREEMENT:**

A. CONSULTATION AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, WHICH MAY BE PROVIDED USING ALTERNATIVE MEANS FOR MEETING PARTICIPATION (SUCH AS VIDEO CONFERENCES AND CONFERENCE CALLS), TO ASSIST EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES IN PLANNING FOR THE TRANSITION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM SCHOOL TO POST-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES AND OTHER VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES;

B. TRANSITION PLANNING BY PERSONNEL OF THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND EDUCATIONAL AGENCY PERSONNEL FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES THAT FACILITATES THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THEIR INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS (IEPS) UNDER SECTION 614(D) OF THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT;

C. THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES, INCLUDING FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES, OF EACH AGENCY, INCLUDING PROVISIONS FOR DETERMINING STATE LEAD AGENCIES AND QUALIFIED PERSONNEL RESPONSIBLE FOR TRANSITION SERVICES AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES;

D. PROCEDURES FOR OUTREACH TO AND IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WHO NEED TRANSITION SERVICES AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES. OUTREACH TO THESE STUDENTS SHOULD OCCUR AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE DURING THE TRANSITION PLANNING PROCESS AND MUST INCLUDE, AT A MINIMUM, A DESCRIPTION OF THE PURPOSE OF THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM, ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS, APPLICATION PROCEDURES, AND SCOPE OF SERVICES THAT MAY BE PROVIDED TO ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS;

E. **COORDINATION NECESSARY TO SATISFY DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS SET FORTH IN 34 C.F.R. PART 397 REGARDING STUDENTS AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES WHO ARE SEEKING SUBMINIMUM WAGE EMPLOYMENT; AND**

F. ASSURANCE THAT, IN ACCORDANCE WITH 34 C.F.R. § 397.31, NEITHER THE SEA NOR THE LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCY WILL ENTER INTO A CONTRACT OR OTHER ARRANGEMENT WITH AN ENTITY, AS DEFINED IN 34 C.F.R. § 397.5(D), FOR THE PURPOSE OF OPERATING A PROGRAM UNDER WHICH YOUTH WITH A DISABILITY IS ENGAGED IN WORK COMPENSATED AT A SUBMINIMUM WAGE.

A. Consultation and technical assistance, which may be provided using alternative means for meeting participation (such as video conferences and conference calls), to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including pre-employment transition services and other vocational rehabilitation services:

As mentioned in the previous section, in Puerto Rico Law 51 of June 7, 1996, as amended, the VRA through its operational components and the Department of Education through its Associate Secretariat of Special Education develop and implement a Transition program for young people with disabilities from school to the world of work for students with disabilities. Consultation and technical assistance may be provided using alternative means for meeting participation.

B. Transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency personnel for students with disabilities that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs (IEPs) under Section 614(d) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act:

The VRA and the Department of Education maintain constant communication and collaboration with the purpose of developing new strategies for students with disabilities. Some of the responsibilities of both agencies are the following:

A. Vocational Rehabilitation Administration:

1. The Vocational Rehabilitation Administration, in coordination with the Department of Education, will provide Pre-employment Transition Services (PRE-ETS) to potentially eligible students with disabilities. Pre-employment services for students in the transition process are the following:

- Job Exploration Counseling

- Work Based Learning Experiences
- Counseling on Enrollment Opportunities
- Workplace Readiness Training
- Instruction in Self Advocacy

2. The Vocational Rehabilitation Administration staff (Transition Counseling Services Analysts who work Transition or Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors) may provide technical assistance to Education Department personnel by sharing, in orientations or meetings, information that contributes to such personnel have a better understanding about:

- Medical and other aspects related to impediments.
- Requirements to request services and eligibility criteria of the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration.
- How school personnel can assist the student in preparing to receive the services of the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration.
- Identification of transition needs, such as assistive technology, orientation training and mobility; in other aspects.
- The scope of pre-employment transition services and the requirements to benefit from them under WIOA.
- The responsibilities of the Educational Agency compliance with Section 511 of WIOA in order to complete the Personnel Orientation Certification form of the Department of Education by the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration.

3. Offer guidance to parents and to students with disabilities, coordinated with the contact person identified in each school, about the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration, application process and scope of services to be provided to people with eligible disabilities, in addition to transition services of pre-employment and the criteria to receive them. These orientations may be offered in general orientation activities coordinated by the school, and in the meetings of the Programming and Location Committee (COMPU), among others.

4. Evaluate through the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, the referred students to determine their eligibility for services, as established by applicable federal and state laws and regulations.

5. Inform in writing, to the official of the agency that refers the case, the criteria used to determine that the student is or are not eligible to receive services from the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration and the basis on which that determination has been made.

6. Collaborate and participate in the drafting and implementation of the transition services established in the Individualized Educational Program (PEI) of the school to adulthood, every time the person is cited or convened for that purpose. Such participation may be face-to-face, by telephone (teleconference), virtual or any other permissible means.

7. Design an Individualized Plan for Employment (PIPE), according to the needs of the person with disabilities eligible for the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration, on or before the student leaves school.

8. Provide vocational rehabilitation services and other transition services necessary, identified, and recommended in the Individualized Plan for Employment, for vocational rehabilitation of the eligible student in the context of their employment goal.

9. Design and implement mechanisms for the collection of statistical data.

B. Responsibilities of the Department of Education:

1. Identify the population to be referred for evaluation of the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration, according to the eligibility criteria established by the applicable laws and regulations, through the procedure agreed by the agencies.

2. Any referral to the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration must include the following:

- Student's Social Security Number
- Updated Psychological Medical Evidence
- Academic History and Report Cards
- Psychosocial History
- Vocational Evaluation based on Law No. 263-2006
- Copy of the Certification of Functional and Pre-Employment Academic Skills based on Law 53-2016
- Copy of the Individualized Educational Program (PEI)
- Services Plan. Section 504 or others that apply

- Any other document that applies

In the case of pre-employment transition services, the Department of Education will offer and certify the following information:

- Student's Social Security Number
- Date of birth
- Age
- Race
- Ethnicity
- School of origin and town
- Town of residence of the student
- Grade enlisted
- If the student receives special education or Section 504 services
- Any others that may apply

3. Coordinate and offer the provision of services considering the Transition Services developed in the Individualized Educational Programs to ensure an effective transition of young people with disabilities to post-school life.

4. Coordinate with the officials of the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration orientations directed to parents, students and school staff related to the services available to students in the process of transition to adult life.

5. Provide academic and vocational services to the population with disabilities, according to applicable federal and state laws and regulations.

6. Collaborate with the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration in the objective of providing placement and follow-up services to students with disabilities until they graduate from high school, turn twenty-one (21) years of age or complete education services special.

7. Provide through their schools, the human resources for the development of the necessary basic academic and occupational skills, according to the needs identified in the results of the vocational evaluations and according to what is established in the Individualized Educational Program (PEI).

8. Provide those related services, support and technological assistance required to achieve the educational objectives of the student in the school environment or context.

9. Evaluate, together with the staff of the Administration of Vocational Rehabilitation, the achievements in its implementation.

10. Notify the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration, fifteen (15) calendar days in advance, when the participation of its officials in a COMPU meeting is required, for the development of transition services in the PEI.

11. Identify alternative means of participation in COMPU meetings, such as teleconferences, virtual and/or any other means that are permissible.

C. The roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services and pre-employment transition services:

The Vocational Rehabilitation Administration, will use funds to provide Pre-employment Transition Services (PRE-ETS) to potentially eligible students with disabilities and vocational rehabilitation services to eligible individuals. Also, the VRA's Transition Counseling Services Analysts and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors are highly qualified staff. The Department of Education will provide the educational and transition services established by law.

D. Procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services and pre-employment transition services. Outreach to these students should occur as early as possible during the transition planning process and must include, at a minimum, a description of the purpose of the vocational rehabilitation program, eligibility requirements, application procedures, and scope of services that may be provided to eligible individuals:

1. Transition process for students with disabilities begins at schools through orientation provided by the Transition Counselor (TC) of the VRA, to teachers, students with disabilities and/or parents. As a result, meetings of the Placement and Programming Committee (PPC) take place, and decisions are made about IPE recommendations. A plan of action is developed, and the TC may accept the referral of the student with disabilities.

2. The PPC compiles medical information related to the student's disability and functional level at the time of the referral.

3. The TC sends those referrals to the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC) at the corresponding VRA regional office and coordinates VRC participation in PPC meetings of eligible students with disabilities.

4. When existing information doesn't describe the current functional level of the student, the VRC will perform a preliminary evaluation and consult with the TC as to which evaluations may be available through the Department of Education to complete the evaluation process.
5. The VRC requests medical consultant's opinion under the following situations:

- When advice is needed about functional limitations caused by the student's physical or mental disability
- When clarification about medical aspects of disability is needed to facilitate VRC decision making process and service planning. Eligibility determination is made by the VRC.

6. Eligibility criteria will be applied considering physical and mental functional limitations, functional capacity, vocational interests, skills, abilities, life experiences and others, identified through the evaluation stages for eligibility determination.

E. Coordination necessary to satisfy documentation requirements set forth in 34 C.F.R. part 397 regarding students and youth with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment:

The VRA has a formal agreement with the SEA and the local DOL regarding Transition Services, which includes responsibilities of both agencies related to the procedures for exchanging documentation regarding WIOA Section 511, as follows:

-VRA's Transition Analysts will provide orientation to the local Department of Education staff regarding their responsibilities for compliance with Section 511 and completion of an Orientation Certification Form.

-Local DE has the following responsibilities:

1. During the next following 30 days after completion of each Transition activity or service, DE will send to VRA a Certification of Transition Service, as established in Section 397.30 of the CFR and WIOA's Section 511.

2. Provide to the youth with disabilities evidence of transition services completion, among others, within the next 30 days after each activity or service completion, in accordance with CFR 397.20 and WIOA Section 511.

F. Assurance that, in accordance with 34 C.F.R. § 397.31, neither the SEA nor the local educational agency will enter into a contract or other arrangement with an entity, as defined in 34 C.F.R. § 397.5(d), for the purpose of operating

a program under which youth with a disability is engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage:

The SEA and LEAs will not enter into a contract or other arrangement with an entity, as defined in 34 C.F.R. § 397.5(d), for the purpose of operating a program under which youth with a disability is engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage.

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.

The designated State unit will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of:

1. VR Service:

The VRA continues to work with employers to identify opportunities for integrated competitive employment and career exploration. For this purpose, it has Support and Employment Modalities Centers (SEMC or CAME, by its acronym in Spanish), whose staff is responsible for working with employers. They contact new potential employers, as well as those who employ people with disabilities for the purpose of promoting employment opportunities and making their facilities available for career evaluation and exploration activities.

CAME also organize training activities for employers, through which their knowledge is increased regarding the population with disabilities and the benefits of using them, among other topics. Also, participate in job fairs, where information is provided on the services of the VRA and qualified candidates are marketed.

2. Transition services for youth and students with disabilities, including pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities:

In compliance with WIOA, the VRA has been carrying out activities aimed at offering pre-employment transition and transition services aimed at helping students with disabilities to a successful transition to post-secondary life, as

well as individuals with disabilities that we serve. See the Progress Report section for details of activities carried out (achievements).

Consistent with the mandate to provide pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities, the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration developed a Cooperative Agreement for interagency coordination with government agencies, municipalities or private employers so that they participate in a Work Based Learning Experience, performing the tasks identified and agreed to, in compliance with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). For these purposes, the pre-employment services area, when offering said activity, guides employers who will offer employment opportunities to students with disabilities who qualify, according to WIOA. This guidance has the purpose of establishing the responsibilities of the VRA and the employer. Likewise, at this time information about the services offered by the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration is provided.

L. INTERAGENCY COOPERATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES

In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(11)(C) and (K), describe interagency cooperation with and utilization of the services and facilities of agencies and programs that are not carrying out activities through the statewide workforce development system to develop opportunities for community-based employment in integrated settings, to the greatest extent practicable for the following:

1. STATE PROGRAMS (DESIGNATE LEAD AGENCY(IES) AND IMPLEMENTING ENTITY(IES)) CARRIED OUT UNDER SECTION 4 OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998;

The VRA has representation in the Assistive Technology Advisory Council of Puerto Rico in order to exchange professional knowledge and to continue referring consumers who could benefit from services such as building and adaptation of equipment, among others. The Council is composed by members representing government agencies and people with disabilities representing the public interest, and VRA's participation is mandatory. The main function of the Council is to respond and represent people with disabilities for the establishment, implementation and evaluation of the Puerto Rico Assistive Technology Program, which is under the University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences Campus, in order to facilitate information, availability and access to assistive technology (AT). The Director of the VRA's Evaluation and Adjustment Office is the agency's representative at the Council. VRA's participation consists in attending meetings to:

- Provide information to facilitate changes or current processes improvement for AT service delivery to people with disabilities.
- Facilitate coordination of VRA consumers in the AT Annual Needs Assessment
- Offer recommendations for plan development in order to address AT needs, plans implementation and results evaluation.
- Share with members of the Council information about training opportunities on AT topics (forums, symposiums, conferences, etc.).
- Share information about local and federal legislation regarding AT services.

2. PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT BY THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE;

At the moment, the VRA is not using services, facilities or a program carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the US Department of Agriculture.

3. NON-EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES SERVING OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH;

WIOA promotes that vocational rehabilitation agencies reach groups and entities that provide services to young people, including young people with disabilities, and makes direct reference to programs such as Job Corps. For this purpose, the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration (VRA) developed public policy to establish the referral process for the Job Corps Program (JC).

This is a free education and vocational training program administered by the federal Department of Labor, which provides services to at-risk youth between the ages of 16 and 24, with the purpose of preparing them for employment. This is a process that facilitates the exchange of referrals, orientations between programs, and the provision of services for those young people who are eligible to VRA.

- VRA will refer to Job Corps out-of-school youth who might benefit from their services (including training), and Job Corps will also refer individuals to VRA.
- VRA will send to JC reports about eligibility determination on those referrals.
- JC may provide information/training to VRA staff regarding services available at JC and any other topic identified or beneficial to both parties.

- VRA and JC will provide services island wide, according to their resources.

4. STATE USE CONTRACTING PROGRAMS;

VRA does not utilize services and facilities of agencies and programs with respect to 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 Medicaid staff can provide VRA staff with information about the program and also orientations to help them identify individuals with disabilities not receiving services from Medicaid that may be potential beneficiaries. Receiving needed services from Medicaid is a way to provide adequate conditions to benefit from the vocational rehabilitation process to achieve competitive integrated employment. Although Medicaid participants can receive VR services with or without a formal agreement between agencies, and are currently receiving services from the VRA, the agency will coordinate a meeting with Medicaid representatives to discuss topics related to the scope and preparation of a formal collaborative agreement.

VR staff is attending interagency meetings with the local Department of Health and the extended services topic will be addressed. Other agencies' models will be evaluated.

6. STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING SERVICES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES;

The VRA participates actively in the meetings of the State Council on Developmental Disabilities (SCDD), providing input on topics discussed, as well as in other activities, such as discussion forums, that promote employment opportunities for this population. It also shared its employers' list with the SCDD and VRA staff is available to support their efforts in order to develop competitive integrated employment opportunities.

7. STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES; AND

This Advisory Council of Substance Abuse and Mental Health of Puerto Rico is composed of government agencies, mental health patients and family members. It is supported by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services

Administration (ASSMCA, by its Spanish acronym). This is the organization selected by the Health Insurance Administration of Puerto Rico to carry out operational functions of the Health Plan and offer treatment for mental health conditions, alcohol and drug abuse in the San Juan and Western regions. The VRA is a mandatory member of this council and participates in the planning for the provision of these services.

VRA participates as a member of the Advisory Council of Substance Abuse and Mental Health of Puerto Rico. The Council's mission is to promote compliance with federal public law and the public policy of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, in order to offer adequate mental health and substance abuse services and promote a better quality of life for people and their families. The Council's objectives are to:

1. Participate in the writing and implementation of the Block Grant, in accordance with Section 1915 (a) of the federal law.
2. Participate in the development of the State Plan for the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Administration.
3. Review and evaluate adequacy and distribution of mental health and substance abuse services in PR to identify service needs.
4. Advocate for people with mental health and substance abuse disabilities in PR, in order to guarantee establishment of a high-quality integrated service system.

Functions of each member, including VRA, are:

1. Attend meetings

2. Active participation in deliberation and vote processes

3. Staying informed and updated about matters of interest for mental health and substance abuse services improvements

4. Participate in activities and perform assigned tasks

5. Participate in the Council's working groups.

Every situation regarding an applicant/consumer is managed with the corresponding member. Annually, the VRA submits to the Council a report of mental health impairments attended in the Agency. On the other hand, cases with mental health conditions may request VRA services as self-applicants or through "Atención Primaria de Salud" (APS, by its acronym in Spanish), which are companies contracted by the Health Insurance

Administration to offer mental health and substance abuse services to beneficiaries of the Government Health Care Insurance.

The VR Counselor maintains contact with the APS social workers or case manager in order to offer integrated services, including public health actions such as: diagnostic, prevention, and occupational services by the VRA.

8. OTHER FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS OUTSIDE THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM.

The VRA has collaborative agreements with the following agencies, corporations and programs not carrying out activities under the Statewide Workforce Development System:

University of Puerto Rico

The VRA coordinates the placement in its own agency of internship as well as practicum students of the master's degree program in Rehabilitation Counseling. These students are a potential human resource to be recruited once their professional credentials are completed. Also, the Graduate School of Rehabilitation Counseling carried out the *Comprehensive Assessment of Vocational Rehabilitation Needs* during 2016-2017.

The VRA has VR counselors placed in the facilities of the Río Piedras and Mayagüez campuses of the UPR for the provision of services to eligible students. The VRA also maintains a collaborative agreement with the Humacao Campus and the Medical Sciences Campus of the UPR so that Occupational Therapy students will carry out practices in the VRA.

State Insurance Fund Corporation

The VRA maintains a *Contractual Agreement of Comprehensive Action for the Rehabilitation of Injured Workers* under the SIFC. Act 182-1951, as amended, authorizes the SIFC to invest in the vocational rehabilitation of its beneficiaries who have disabilities for work. The VRA receives an annual allocation of funds of $600,000, which is used to match federal funds.

Institute of Developmental Disabilities

The VRA maintains collaboration with and representation in the IDD in order to meet the service needs of the population with developmental disabilities. It has participated in activities aimed at the population with autism, which were coordinated by the IDD.

Caribbean Planning and Work Incentive Assistance Program

The VRA contains a public policy that those consumers who receive SSDI will be referred to this program. The purpose of the referral is that these beneficiaries who are interested in getting a job will be oriented as the impact that the salary will have on the disability benefits they receive, the counseling service needed for benefits planning.

Department of Veterans Affairs

The VRA participates in activities and meetings coordinated by this agency, in order to offer referred eligible veterans with disabilities access to the various services available to achieve competitive employment.

State Independent Living Council (SILC)

The VRA, SILC and independent living centers promote collaborative actions with other public or private organizations that offer services to the population with significant disabilities. They also join efforts to increase the opportunities for community support services for such population. The Normative Communication No. 2011-19 establishes the referral procedure to the independent living centers of those disabled persons who are not eligible for services under Title I, but who could benefit from services provided in such centers. The VRA allocates funds to the SILC for its operations under the Innovation and Expansion Section.

Department of Health - Division of Services for People with Intellectual Disability (DSPID)

The DSPID is based on a *Community-Based Service Plan*, whose main focus is the deinstitutionalization of people with intellectual disabilities. The VRA offers orientation to the staff of the DSPID and provides services to referred individuals who are eligible.

State Council on Developmental Disabilities

VRA supports and participates in activities related to services for people with developmental disabilities. Also attends assigned work committees.

Private IHE and Non-Profits

Carlos Albizu University. The VRA maintains a collaborative agreement with this university for the practicum of psychology students in our facilities.

The VRA maintains a collaborative agreement with Catholic University of Puerto Rico for the placement in our facilities of practicum and internship students of the Rehabilitation Counseling Department.

9. OTHER PRIVATE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS.

Approval of Proposals:

In 2023, the VRA reviewed the guidelines for formalizing contractual agreements with private non-profit organizations. These guides are intended to guide the proponent regarding the principles and procedures for generating a service proposal. They offer an outline of how the proposals will be presented and the order that will govern them. Likewise, they include the documents that must be attached as part of the proposals submitted.

Currently, the VRA has the following guides:

- Guide for the preparation of proposals to offer services to VRA consumers under the Supported Employment Modality
- Guide for the preparation of proposals to offer Pre-Employment Transition Services
- Request for Proposal for the Comprehensive Statewide VR Services Needs Assessment

This contracting process begins with a Public Notice in written press, which establishes the deadlines for the collection of the Proposal Guide in reference and the deadline for the delivery of the proposal. Once both processes have passed, a Proposal Review Committee analyzes them according to the guidelines, and based on the results, they make recommendations to the Administrator, then beginning the hiring process.

In compliance with the established federal regulations, the VRA assigns responsibility to the programmatic areas of the agency to carry out monitoring activities to those organizations contracted for the purpose of verifying compliance, project development, services offered, difficulties encountered, use of resources, beneficiary participation, among other matters.

The VRA is willing to establish collaborative agreements with other nonprofit organizations that provide services to people with disabilities, with the purpose of receiving referrals and offering training.

ASSURANCES

The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate and identified in the State certifications included with this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, through signature of

the authorized individual, assures the Commissioner, that it will comply with all of the requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, as set forth in sections 101(a) and 606 of the Rehabilitation Act. The individual authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement makes the following assurances:

The VR agency must select the "Edit" button to review and agree to the VR State plan 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).

The State Plan must include
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.

The State Plan must include
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).

The State Plan must include
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:

The State Plan must include
7.a. The designated State agency assures that it will provide supported employment services as defined in section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act.
7.b. The designated State agency assures that the comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act an individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(7)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act.

Do you attest that these assurances will be met?
Yes

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (COMBINED OR GENERAL) CERTIFICATIONS

States must provide written and signed certifications that:

1. THE (ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPROPRIATE,) IS AUTHORIZED TO SUBMIT THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973 (REHABILITATION ACT), AS AMENDED BY TITLE IV OF WIOA[1], AND ITS STATE PLAN SUPPLEMENT UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT;

[1] Public Law 113-128.

ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPROPRIATE

Vocational Rehabilitation Administration

2**. IN THE EVENT THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY IS NOT PRIMARILY CONCERNED WITH VOCATIONAL AND OTHER REHABILITATION OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES, THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY MUST INCLUDE A DESIGNATED STATE UNIT FOR THE VR PROGRAM (SECTION 101(A)(2)(B)(II) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT). AS A CONDITION FOR THE RECEIPT OF FEDERAL FUNDS UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES, THE (DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WHEN THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY HAS A DESIGNATED STATE UNIT)[2]AGREES TO OPERATE AND IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF**

THE STATE VR SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN[3], THE REHABILITATION ACT, 34 CFR 361.13(B) AND (C), AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[4], POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED BY THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION. FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE TO STATES UNDER SECTION 111(A) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT ARE USED SOLELY FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN;

[2] All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

[3] No funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

[4] Applicable regulations, in part, include the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 76, 77, 79, 81, and 82; 2 CFR part 200 as adopted by 2 CFR part 3474; and the State VR Services program regulations at 34 C.F.R. part 361.

ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY

Department of Labor and Human Resources

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**;

[5] No funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved supported employment supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

[6] Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in footnote 4, as well as Supported Employment program regulations at 34 C.F.R. part 363.

4. **THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT OR, IF NOT APPLICABLE, THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY HAS THE AUTHORITY UNDER STATE LAW TO PERFORM THE FUNCTIONS OF THE STATE REGARDING THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT AND IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE VR PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH 34 CFR 361.13(B) AND (C);**

5. THE STATE LEGALLY MAY CARRY OUT EACH PROVISION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT.

6. ALL PROVISIONS OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT ARE CONSISTENT WITH STATE LAW.

7. THE (ENTER THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW) HAS THE AUTHORITY UNDER STATE LAW TO RECEIVE, HOLD, AND DISBURSE FEDERAL FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT;

ENTER THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW

Dr. Rosa H. Lugo-Cabán

8. **THE (ENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW) HAS THE AUTHORITY TO SUBMIT THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND THE SUPPLEMENT FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;**

ENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW

Administrator

9**. THE AGENCY THAT SUBMITS THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT HAS ADOPTED OR OTHERWISE FORMALLY APPROVED THE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT.**

FOOTNOTES

[1] Public Law 113-128.

[2] All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

[3] No funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

[4] Applicable regulations, in part, include the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 76, 77, 79, 81, and 82; 2 CFR part 200 as adopted by 2 CFR part 3474; and the State VR Services program regulations at 34 C.F.R. part 361.

[5] No funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved supported employment supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

[6] Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in footnote 4, as well as Supported Employment program regulations at 34 C.F.R. part 363.

CERTIFICATION SIGNATURE

To review and complete the Certification section of the VR portion of the State plan, please select the "Edit" button.

Note, please do not edit the table header or formatting. Only edit the table contents.

If you accidentally edit the table headers and structure, open this link to the blank table. You can copy and paste the table into the narrative field, and start over if needed.

Signatory information	Enter Signatory information in this column
Name of Signatory	Rosa H. Lugo-Cabán
Title of Signatory	Administrator
Date Signed	03/25/2026

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Each State VR program must submit expected levels of performance in its Unified or Combined State Plan and in the two-year modification of that plan. Expected levels of performance for the first two years of a state plan must be submitted in the initial submission of the Unified or Combined State Plan and in the initial submission of the two-year modification of that Plan, for years three and four, as described in 34 CFR § 361.170(a). Expected levels of performance must be stated to the nearest tenth of a percent (XX.X %) or to the nearest whole dollar for median earnings. State VR programs are reminded that the expected levels of performance must be published for public comment prior to plan submission in accordance with state law, regulation, and policy.

The submission of expected levels is the first step in the negotiations process. Once the expected levels of performance have been submitted, State VR programs may begin negotiations with RSA's State Monitoring and Program Improvement Division. Each State VR program must reach agreement with RSA on the negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the Unified or Combined State Plan (or for the third and fourth years of the Unified or Combined State Plan during the required two-year modification process) in accordance with 116(b)(3)(A)(iv).

RSA will use its statistical adjustment model to derive pre-program year estimated levels of performance for each indicator. Each State VR program and RSA will consider the negotiation factors outlined in WIOA section 116(b)(3)(A)(v) during the negotiation process. Once negotiated levels of performance are agreed upon, each State VR program must incorporate the negotiated levels of performance into the Unified or Combined State Plan and the two-year modification of that plan prior to the plan's approval (section 116(b)(3)(A)(iv) of WIOA).

Effectiveness in Serving Employers (ESE)

The ESE indicator has been defined in the ESE final rule and PY 2024 was the first year of data for the newly defined performance indicator. However, a minimum of at least two baseline years of data must be collected to support a statistical adjustment model that could produce sufficiently reliable estimates for the purposes of performance negotiations and state performance assessments. The Departments, in accordance with 20 CFR § 677.190(c)(4) and 34 CFR §§ 361.190(c)(4) and 463.190(c)(4), will collect and monitor state ESE performance results for at least PY 2024 and PY 2025 to establish a credible baseline and provide technical assistance. After PY 2025

data are collected the Departments will develop a statistical adjustment model for ESE in accordance with section 116(b)(3)(A)(viii) of WIOA. Since the ESE indicator is a statewide measure that reflects a combined result across WIOA titles I, II, III, and IV programs, the Departments will jointly engage in negotiations with state representatives from all core programs when feasible. While states are not required to submit expected levels of performance for Effectiveness in Serving Employers for PY 2026 and PY 2027 all of core programs are expected to collect data and report as a shared indicator (as directed in guidance) for these years.

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	30.0	43.0	30.5	43.5
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	35.0	43.3	35.5	45.0
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	4500.0	4,825.0	4501.0	4,850.0
Credential Attainment Rate	25.0	33.1	25.5	35.1
Measurable Skill Gains	50.0	50.0	50.5	50.5
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 2026 and 2027.

GENERAL EDUCATION PROVISION ACT SECTION 427 ASSURANCE - VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to applicants for grant awards under this program. All applicants for new grant awards must include the following information in their applications to address this provision in order to receive funding under this program. (OMB Control Number 1894-0005)

The State Plan must include	Include
I assure that the proposed project complies with the requirements in section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (20 U.S.C. 1228a).	Yes

Compliance can be found on the following page(s) of the application:

Descriptions (c) - Goals, Priorities, and Strategies; and (b) - Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment.

GENERAL EDUCATION PROVISION ACT SECTION 427 ASSURANCE - SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to applicants for grant awards under this program. All applicants for new grant awards must include the following information in their applications to address this provision in order to receive funding under this program. (OMB Control Number 1894-0005)

The State Plan must include	Include
I assure that the proposed project complies with the requirements in section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (20 U.S.C. 1228a).	Yes

Compliance can be found on the following page(s) of the application:

Descriptions (c) - Goals, Priorities, and Strategies; and (b) - Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment.

VII. PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR COMBINED STATE PLAN PARTNER PROGRAMS

States choosing to submit a Combined State Plan must provide information concerning the six core programs—the Adult program, Dislocated Worker program, Youth program, Wagner-Peyser Act program, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act program, and the Vocational Rehabilitation program—and also submit relevant information for any of the eleven partner programs it elects to include in its Combined State Plan. When a State includes a Combined State Plan partner program in its Combined State Plan, it need not submit a separate plan or application for that particular program. 24 If included, Combined State Plan partner programs are subject to the "common planning elements" in Sections II-IV of this document, where specified, as well as the program-specific requirements for that program.

[24] States that elect to include employment and training activities carried out under the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Act (42 U.S.C. 9901 et seq.) under a Combined State Plan would submit all other required elements of a complete CSBG State Plan directly to the Federal agency that administers the program. Similarly, States that elect to include employment and training activities carried by the Department of Housing and Urban Development would submit all other required elements of a complete State Plan for those programs directly to the Federal agency that administers the program.

PERFORMANCE INDICATOR APPENDIX

ALL WIOA CORE PROGRAMS

The Departments determined that the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator will be measured as a shared outcome across all six core programs within each state to ensure a holistic approach to serving employers. The Departments will continue piloting approaches for measuring this indicator for the first two years of PY 2020-2023 plans. Therefore, states are not required to submit an expected level of performance for the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021. However, core programs are expected to collect data and report on this indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021 as they did for PYs 2016-2019 plans.

ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES - ADULT PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

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 two years covered by the plan modification. 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 two years of the plan modification.

While states are not required to submit expected levels of performance for Effectiveness in Serving Employers for PY 2026 and PY 2027 all of core programs are expected to collect data and report as a shared indicator (as directed in guidance) for these years.

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	56.0%	59.0	56.5%	59.5
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	51.6%	62.0	52.1%	62.5

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$3,500.00	$3,900.00	$3,800.00	$4,000.00
Credential Attainment Rate	54.0%	64.5	54.5%	65.0
Measurable Skill Gains	55.5%	70.5	56.0%	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 2026 and 2027.

ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES - DISLOCATED PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

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 two years covered by the plan modification. 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 two years of the plan modification.

While states are not required to submit expected levels of performance for Effectiveness in Serving Employers for PY 2026 and PY 2027 all of core programs are expected to collect data and report as a shared indicator (as directed in guidance) for these years.

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	60.0%	60.0	60.5%	60.5
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	60.0%	62.0	60.5%	62.5
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$3,600.00	$3,900.00	$3,900.00	$4,000.00
Credential Attainment Rate	64.0%	70.5	66.0%	71.0
Measurable Skill Gains	46.0%	71.0	47.0%	71.5
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 2026 and 2027.

ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES - YOUTH PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

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 two years covered by the plan modification. 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 two years of the plan modification.

While states are not required to submit expected levels of performance for Effectiveness in Serving Employers for PY 2026 and PY 2027 all of core programs are expected to collect data and report as a shared indicator (as directed in guidance) for these years.

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	52.0%	60.0	52.5%	60.5
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	52.2%	58.0	52.7%	58.5
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$2,500.00	$2,800.00	$2,600.00	$2,900.00
Credential Attainment Rate	35.5%	40.0	39.5%	40.5
Measurable Skill Gains	42.0%	70.0	44.0%	71.5
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 2026 and 2027.

WAGNER-PEYSER ACT - WAGNER PEYSER PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

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 two years covered by the plan modification. 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 two years of the plan modification.

While states are not required to submit expected levels of performance for Effectiveness in Serving Employers for PY 2026 and PY 2027 all of core programs are expected to collect data and report as a shared indicator (as directed in guidance) for these years.

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	48.0		48.5	
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	58.0		50.5	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	3,900		3,950	
Credential Attainment Rate	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Measurable Skill Gains	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
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 2026 and 2027.

ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAM - ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

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 two years covered by the plan modification. 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 two years of the plan modification.

While states are not required to submit expected levels of performance for Effectiveness in Serving Employers for PY 2026 and PY 2027 all of core programs are expected to collect data and report as a shared indicator (as directed in guidance) for these years.

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	35.7%	35.7%	35.8%	35.8%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	34.0%	40.0%	34.5%	40.3%

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	3,625	3,625	3,630	3,626
Credential Attainment Rate	35.0%	42.0%	36.0%	42.3%
Measurable Skill Gains	45.8%	60.0%	46.9%	60.3%
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 2026 and 2027.*

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM (COMBINED OR GENERAL) - VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Each State VR program must submit expected levels of performance in its Unified or Combined State Plan and in the two-year modification of that plan. Expected levels of performance for the first two years of a state plan must be submitted in the initial submission of the Unified or Combined State Plan and in the initial submission of the two-year modification of that Plan, for years three and four, as described in 34 CFR § 361.170(a). Expected levels of performance must be stated to the nearest tenth of a percent (XX.X %) or to the nearest whole dollar for median earnings. State VR programs are reminded that the expected levels of performance must be published for public comment prior to plan submission in accordance with state law, regulation, and policy.

The submission of expected levels is the first step in the negotiations process. Once the expected levels of performance have been submitted, State VR

programs may begin negotiations with RSA's State Monitoring and Program Improvement Division. Each State VR program must reach agreement with RSA on the negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the Unified or Combined State Plan (or for the third and fourth years of the Unified or Combined State Plan during the required two-year modification process) in accordance with 116(b)(3)(A)(iv).

RSA will use its statistical adjustment model to derive pre-program year estimated levels of performance for each indicator. Each State VR program and RSA will consider the negotiation factors outlined in WIOA section 116(b)(3)(A)(v) during the negotiation process. Once negotiated levels of performance are agreed upon, each State VR program must incorporate the negotiated levels of performance into the Unified or Combined State Plan and the two-year modification of that plan prior to the plan's approval (section 116(b)(3)(A)(iv) of WIOA).

Effectiveness in Serving Employers (ESE)

The ESE indicator has been defined in the ESE final rule and PY 2024 was the first year of data for the newly defined performance indicator. However, a minimum of at least two baseline years of data must be collected to support a statistical adjustment model that could produce sufficiently reliable estimates for the purposes of performance negotiations and state performance assessments. The Departments, in accordance with 20 CFR § 677.190(c)(4) and 34 CFR §§ 361.190(c)(4) and 463.190(c)(4), will collect and monitor state ESE performance results for at least PY 2024 and PY 2025 to establish a credible baseline and provide technical assistance. After PY 2025 data are collected the Departments will develop a statistical adjustment model for ESE in accordance with section 116(b)(3)(A)(viii) of WIOA. Since the ESE indicator is a statewide measure that reflects a combined result across WIOA titles I, II, III, and IV programs, the Departments will jointly engage in negotiations with state representatives from all core programs when feasible. While states are not required to submit expected levels of performance for Effectiveness in Serving Employers for PY 2026 and PY 2027 all of core programs are expected to collect data and report as a shared indicator (as directed in guidance) for these years.

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	30.0	43.0	30.5	43.5
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	35.0	43.3	35.5	45.0
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	4500.0	4,825.0	4501.0	4,850.0
Credential Attainment Rate	25.0	33.1	25.5	35.1
Measurable Skill Gains	50.0	50.0	50.5	50.5
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 2026 and 2027.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM (BLIND) - VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Each State VR program must submit expected levels of performance in its Unified or Combined State Plan and in the two-year modification of that plan. Expected levels of performance for the first two years of a state plan must be submitted in the initial submission of the Unified or Combined State Plan and in the initial submission of the two-year modification of that Plan, for

years three and four, as described in 34 CFR § 361.170(a). Expected levels of performance must be stated to the nearest tenth of a percent (XX.X %) or to the nearest whole dollar for median earnings. State VR programs are reminded that the expected levels of performance must be published for public comment prior to plan submission in accordance with state law, regulation, and policy.

The submission of expected levels is the first step in the negotiations process. Once the expected levels of performance have been submitted, State VR programs may begin negotiations with RSA's State Monitoring and Program Improvement Division. Each State VR program must reach agreement with RSA on the negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the Unified or Combined State Plan (or for the third and fourth years of the Unified or Combined State Plan during the required two-year modification process) in accordance with 116(b)(3)(A)(iv).

RSA will use its statistical adjustment model to derive pre-program year estimated levels of performance for each indicator. Each State VR program and RSA will consider the negotiation factors outlined in WIOA section 116(b)(3)(A)(v) during the negotiation process. Once negotiated levels of performance are agreed upon, each State VR program must incorporate the negotiated levels of performance into the Unified or Combined State Plan and the two-year modification of that plan prior to the plan's approval (section 116(b)(3)(A)(iv) of WIOA).

Effectiveness in Serving Employers (ESE)

The ESE indicator has been defined in the ESE final rule and PY 2024 was the first year of data for the newly defined performance indicator. However, a minimum of at least two baseline years of data must be collected to support a statistical adjustment model that could produce sufficiently reliable estimates for the purposes of performance negotiations and state performance assessments. The Departments, in accordance with 20 CFR § 677.190(c)(4) and 34 CFR §§ 361.190(c)(4) and 463.190(c)(4), will collect and monitor state ESE performance results for at least PY 2024 and PY 2025 to establish a credible baseline and provide technical assistance. After PY 2025 data are collected the Departments will develop a statistical adjustment model for ESE in accordance with section 116(b)(3)(A)(viii) of WIOA. Since the ESE indicator is a statewide measure that reflects a combined result across WIOA titles I, II, III, and IV programs, the Departments will jointly engage in negotiations with state representatives from all core programs when feasible. While states are not required to submit expected levels of performance for

Effectiveness in Serving Employers for PY 2026 and PY 2027 all of core programs are expected to collect data and report as a shared indicator (as directed in guidance) for these years.

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)				
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)				
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)				
Credential Attainment Rate				
Measurable Skill Gains				
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 2026 and 2027.

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.

Not additional indicators are developed.

OTHER APPENDICES