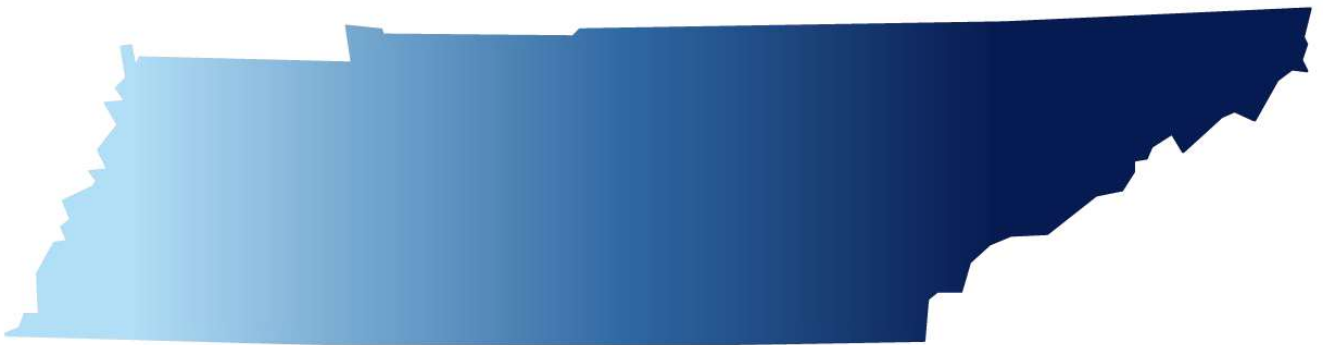


# WIOA Strategic Workforce Development Plan

# Regional Plan Template

PYs 2024-2027



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## Regional Area Information

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Date of Form Submission: 3/15/24



## Regional Labor Market Analysis:

- a. Utilizing the data provided by TDLWD, WIRRED Report, provide an analysis of regional economic conditions, including existing and emerging in-demand sectors and occupations, and the employment needs of businesses in those sectors and occupations.

From 2021 to 2022, employment in the Middle Region, excluding agriculture and self-employment, saw a significant increase to 1,461,565. This vast region includes three separate Local Workforce Development Areas: Northern Middle, Southern Middle, and Upper Cumberland, covering a combined total of 40 counties. Among these, 29 counties saw employment gains compared to the previous year, aligning with the recovery trend in the Tennessee economy. The average number of establishments increased to 97,982, and payroll surged by 11.4 percent to \$85.9 billion, outpacing the state's growth rate. The average unemployment rate dropped to 3.0 percent from 2021 to 2022, below the state average. However, youth unemployment, though lower than the state rate, increased slightly in 2021. The poverty rate remained stable at 13.4 percent, still below the state average but higher than last year.

Furthermore, the labor force expanded in the Middle Region, with a labor force participation rate of 58.73 percent in 2022, slightly lower than the previous year. Despite this, the state saw an increase in its participation rate. The Middle Region's participation rate reflects the state's trend. The Southern Middle LWDA experienced the largest decrease, attributed to negative population growth. Poverty rates declined slightly in 2021 due to targeted federal aid, yet the Upper Cumberland LWDA had the highest poverty rate in the region at 16.7 percent, surpassing the state average. Given the improving economy, efforts to reduce poverty and enhance educational attainment are crucial. Additionally, about a third of individuals not in the labor force have disabilities, with the Upper Cumberland LWDA having the highest rate.

The Northern Middle, Southern Middle, and Upper Cumberland LWDAs are forecasted to experience positive job growth in 2030, with growth rates of 29%, 24%, and 19% respectively. The dominant industries projected for 2030 in each LWDA are as follows: Healthcare and Social Assistance in Northern Middle (168,145 jobs), and Manufacturing in both Upper Cumberland (22,511 jobs) and Southern Middle (37,113 jobs). This trend is consistent with 2022, where these industries were the primary sectors in the Middle Region encompassing these three LWDAs.

In the Southern Middle LWDA, Information and Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services are anticipated to exhibit the most rapid growth in 2030. Although these industries are expected to grow across all LWDAs, Southern Middle stands out for its accelerated growth in the information sector, with Northern Middle following closely behind. The Upper Cumberland LWDA is the sole region projected to witness a decline in percent growth for certain industries, specifically retail trade and utilities.

As noted in the state plan, the top seven industries in the state spurring employment



- b. Describe the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to meet the employment needs of businesses in those sectors and occupations.

Apart from seeking qualified candidates for in-demand roles, employers also require individuals with certifications mandated by their workplaces. The Middle Region primarily seeks certifications such as CPR, commercial driver's license, CPA, and nursing leadership certifications. As of June 2023, the most sought-after tools and technologies include proficiency in Microsoft Office and PowerPoint, SQL, Python, operating cash registers and forklifts, and utilizing personal protective equipment. Among the top 10 employers posting jobs in the Middle Region on August 1, 2023, four were hospitals and other healthcare entities, alongside Kroger, Metro Nashville public schools, and fast-food establishments. Reflecting the prominent occupational groups and those contributing the newest positions, prominent job postings in the region encompass healthcare practitioners and technical roles, management, sales, and food-related occupations.

To meet the employment needs of various sectors and occupations such as manufacturing, healthcare, retail trade, accommodation and food service, and education services, individuals should possess a diverse set of knowledge, skills, and abilities tailored to each industry. An overview of the key attributes include:

#### Manufacturing

- \*Technical Skills - Proficiency in operating machinery, understanding production processes, and implementing quality control measures.
- \*Problem Solving Skills - Troubleshoot equipment issues and optimize production workflows.
- \*Safety Knowledge - Understanding workplace safety protocols and adherence to industry-specific regulations.
- \*Teamwork - Collaboration to achieve production targets and maintain efficiency.
- \*Adaptability - Be flexible to work in fast-paced environments and adapt to changing demands.

#### Healthcare

- \*Clinical Skills - Competency in patient care procedures, medical terminology, and administering treatments under supervision.
- \*Communication Skills - Effective communication with patients, families, and healthcare professionals to ensure quality care delivery.
- \*Empathy and Compassion - Ability to empathize with patients' concerns and provide compassionate support during difficult times.
- \*Attention to Detail - Precision in documenting patient information, administering medications, and following treatment plans.
- \*Critical Thinking - Skills to assess patient conditions, identify problems, and make informed decisions in emergency situations.

#### Retail Trade

- \*Customer Service - Skills to assist customers, address inquiries, and resolve complaints effectively.
- \*Sales Techniques - Knowledge of sales strategies, product features, and up-selling techniques to maximize revenue.
- \*Inventory Management - Ability to track inventory levels, restock shelves, and maintain organized store displays.



- c. Provide an analysis of the regional workforce, incorporating current labor employment and unemployment data, information on labor market trends, and educational and skill levels of the workforce, including individuals with barriers to employment.

The Middle Region is comprised of three Local Workforce Development Areas: Northern Middle, Southern Middle, and Upper Cumberland, spanning across 40 counties. Among these, 29 counties saw an increase in employment compared to the previous year, which aligns with the expected trend following a year of economic recovery for Tennessee. Throughout the year, the average number of establishments rose to 97,982, with payroll surging by 11.4% to \$85.9 billion, outpacing the state's growth rate.

In 2022, the average unemployment rate dropped to 3.0%, lower than the state's annual average, while youth unemployment in 2021 was also lower than the state rate of 11.4%. Although the poverty rate remained stable at 13.4% for the Middle Region, it was slightly higher than the previous year. The labor force participation rate in the Middle Region was 58.73% in 2022, slightly lower than the previous year, but in contrast, the state's participation rate increased to 58.6%. Notably, the Southern Middle LWDA experienced the largest decrease in labor force participation rate due to negative population growth, and a significant decrease was also observed in the Northern Middle area. Youth unemployment in the Middle Region increased slightly from 9.63 in 2020 to 9.89 in 2021.

Despite federal aid targeted towards individuals in need, poverty rates declined marginally from 13.9% in 2020 to 13.4% in 2021 for the Middle Region. However, the Upper Cumberland LWDA had the highest poverty rate in the region at 16.7%, surpassing the state average. Efforts to reduce poverty and enhance educational attainment should be prioritized in this region, considering the improving economy. Additionally, like the state, approximately a third of individuals not in the labor force have a disability, with the Upper Cumberland LWDA recording the highest rate

#### Labor Market Trends

The five largest industry sectors in the Middle Region for 2022 were:

- Healthcare and social assistance (178,447)
- Retail Trade (135,359)
- Manufacturing (139,351)
- Accommodation and Food Services (131,314)
- Educational Services (96,674)

In comparison to 2018, the sectors experiencing the most significant growth in employment included transportation and warehousing (with 20,657 new jobs), professional, scientific, and technical fields (with 13,049 new jobs), and construction (with 13,705 new jobs). Conversely, only one sector, manufacturing, witnessed a decline in employment from 2018 to 2022, with a loss of 1,009 jobs. Accommodation and food services saw a 3% growth since 2018, thereby bolstering post-pandemic employment figures. The information, construction, and transportation and warehousing sectors exhibited the most rapid growth. Industries boasting the highest earnings per worker included management of companies and enterprises, finance and insurance, professional, scientific, and technical fields, and information sectors, while the

- d. How will these analyses be shared with all partners and used to influence decisions regarding the regional workforce system?

Facilitating effective communication and collaboration with our partners to influence decisions regarding the regional workforce system is a priority. The Regional Planning Council (RPC), along with its workforce partners and providers, is committed to establishing clear and accessible communication channels. Our goal is to foster coordination and strategic planning within the region by bringing together all economic partners and stakeholders. To achieve this, the Middle RPC members took an active role in gathering information from labor market information databases, employers, and other stakeholders during public meetings. To ensure that the public had adequate opportunity to provide public comment on the regional plan and to promote community engagement during plan development, the RPC held additional meetings to gather input from regional employers, community colleges, TN Board of Regents (TBR) institutions, regional workforce partners and numerous other stakeholders.

To ensure labor market data is supported by current business needs, partners and employers will work through the RPC committees to convene and agree on supply and demand data. Utilizing the information received from these meetings and up-to-date labor market data, the Middle Region will develop sector-focused strategies for the following industry sectors: Manufacturing, Healthcare, Retail, Accommodation and Food Services, and Educational Services. That information will be shared in future RPC meetings and could be placed as upcoming goals on the regional tracker. The RPC will continue to target available employment and training resources to ensure that the workforce development needs of the priority sectors, industries, occupations, and skills are met.



## Support of State Initiatives:

- a. Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR)
  - i. Describe how the region will coordinate a collective approach to focused advocacy and engagement to special populations in effort to increase in the local LFPR.

The Middle Region has orchestrated a unified approach to address the needs of special populations, aiming to boost the local Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) through strategic planning, collaboration, and targeted initiatives. S

Considering the decreased foot traffic into the AJCs post-Covid, Middle TN has partnered with the community to enhance the marketing materials for offered services. Leveraging the increased use of technology in social media, deliberate efforts have been made to reach a wider audience, specifically targeting youth, justice-involved individuals, veterans, and other special populations. Listed below are strategies detailing the regional approach:

\*Needs Assessment - A needs assessment will be conducted to identify the specific barriers faced by special populations in accessing employment opportunities. This assessment will involve gathering data on factors such as educational attainment, skills gaps, transportation access, childcare needs, and other barriers to workforce participation. Gather input through surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews to identify barriers and opportunities.

\*Stakeholder Engagement - Stakeholders such as local government agencies, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, employers, and community leaders will be engaged in collaborative discussions to understand the unique needs and challenges of special populations.

\*Development of Customized Outreach Strategies - Based on the needs assessment, outreach strategies will be developed to address the identified barriers and promote workforce participation among special populations for our in-demand sectors. These strategies may include policy advocacy, community outreach campaigns, awareness-raising initiatives, and collaboration with advocacy organizations.

\*Organize Community Outreach Events - Create opportunities for community engagement events such as job fairs or workshops specifically designed for special populations and that center around our top in-demand industry sectors. Collaborate with local service providers and community centers to create accessible and welcoming environments.

\*Skill Development Programs - Execute skill enhancement programs and training initiatives tailored to meet the distinctive requirements of special populations. Collaborate with educational institutions and training providers to provide programs that bolster participants' readiness for employment. Champion the adoption of customized training, encompassing Incumbent Worker Training (IWT), On-the-Job Training (OJT), and Registered Apprenticeship Programs, designed to align with the needs of local businesses.



- ii. What initiatives will the region implement to positively impact LFRP efforts, and how will these initiatives be tracked and measured for success?

To positively impact the Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR), the region can implement several initiatives focused on increasing workforce participation and reducing barriers to employment. Here are some initiatives that the Middle RPC will focus on:

- \*Collaboratively assess the content of local Eligible Training Provider Lists (ETPLs) to align with in-demand industry training programs throughout the region. The RPC will promote the availability of training programs across the entire region, facilitating comprehensive access and resources.
- \*Promote Registered Apprenticeship Programs to provide hands-on training and pathways to skilled employment.
- \*Work with employers to possibly develop more work from home opportunities in rural areas which would help participants address barriers with childcare and transportation.
- \*Continuing to work with employers and community stakeholders such as faith based organizations to showcase the benefits of growing their childcare/daycare facilities to accommodate different work times and providing them with Dept. of Human Service resources to walk those agencies through that process.
- \*In partnership with VR and AE, implement tailored support services and programs, and align supportive service policies across the region.
- \*Working with AE to look at the counties with the highest rate of participants that do not have a HS diploma and targeting those first to increase classroom enrollments and address the need for wrap around services.
- \*Currently partnering with state and local probation and parole day reporting centers to expand access to employment opportunities, skills training, and wrap around supportive services. The AJC staff and BST members in multiple counties have been asked to be a part of Orientation Day for newly released individuals when they are reporting to the probation center for the first time since being released. This is where those participants can put a face and name together with someone from their local AJC for services. A needs assessment and registration into VOS is completed and referrals are made based upon the assessment.
- \*Build partnerships and leverage existing relationships with employers to facilitate job placement and alignment of workforce skills with industry needs.
- \*Develop clear career pathways and provide guidance to individuals exploring or transitioning into the workforce. Champion Coursera and Alison usage across the region to support career development.

## b. Business Engagement Plan

- i. How will the region ensure consistent implementation the TDLWD-WFS Business Engagement Plan to redefine “business engagement” pursuant to the state-wide framework and provide streamlined solutions to employer customers?

The Middle RPC recognizes and supports the State’s priority that strong relationships with businesses and a solid workforce pipeline are vital to support industry needs. This Business Engagement Plan (BEP) seeks to prioritize Tennessee employers as workforce system “customers” by building business consulting relationships, confidently projecting a value proposition, and customizing programs and benefits available. To better serve our employer customer, this infrastructure will create a Middle TN business services model for workforce partners to implement and provide a consistent approach of streamlined solutions.

In order to successfully deploy the BEP, the Middle RPC will apply the seven pillars of the plan by:

### Pillar #1 - Adopting a Sector-Based Service Delivery Approach:

- BWDs will help facilitate sector strategy implementation.
- As a region, structure the local board membership around sector strategies and sector representation.
- Advocate that the Business Service Teams outreach efforts align with sector strategies and the BEP.
- Ensure that decisions align with industry needs and are business driven.
- Partner with sector groups and taskforces to better understand employer needs and to develop solutions.
- Utilizing WIRED and Econovue data to stay current with in-demand sectors and industry trends.
- Performance measured by tracking LFPR, job placement rates, employer penetration and retention rates, employer satisfaction surveys or feedback assessments, etc.

### Pillar #2 - Utilizing a Business Cycle Framework:

- The Middle RPC will facilitate business life-cycle data (Econovue) training to align services with business needs in each LWDA.
- Support LWDA tailoring of services to support businesses in various phases of their life-cycles.

### Pillar #3 - Positioning LWDBs as Asset Mappers:

- The Middle RPC will facilitate regional partnerships, acting as intermediaries and conveners connecting businesses with local educational institutions, training providers, and other relevant stakeholders.
- The RPC will seek out non-WIOA related regional funding opportunities that will strengthen sector strategies and industry partnerships.

### Pillar #4 - Case Managing Employers:

- The Middle RPC will support each LWDA’s reliance on the state’s Zendesk CRM platform to 

- ii. How will the RPC facilitate the sector partnerships necessary to drive sector strategies addressing the needs of business and industry?

The RPC recognizes that sector strategies are crucial, regionally tailored, industry-focused approaches essential for cultivating a skilled workforce. These strategies involve aligning public and private resources to address the talent needs of employers. At the core of sector strategies lie sector partnerships, which are led by businesses and require collaborative efforts with LWDA's, education and training institutions, economic development entities, labor, and community organizations. The RPC is tasked with setting sector targets and overseeing progress towards alignment.

#### Action Steps:

- \*Identify and disseminate sector targets regionally among workforce partners to foster a shared industry goal. As outlined in the Regional Labor Market Analysis on page 5, the targets include Healthcare & Social Services, Retail Trade, Manufacturing, Accommodation & Food Services, and Educational Services. The objective is to enhance communication, align resources with identified sectors, and create a shared purpose.
- \*Maintain and expand our industry sector partnerships within each in-demand sector throughout the region, encompassing education, industry-based, and chamber-led initiatives.
- \*Establish and track goals for the number of individuals trained and placed in employment within targeted sectors on a quarterly basis. These metrics should encompass all partners, not solely WIOA-centered partners.
- \*Collaborate with educational institutions and training providers to develop customized training programs tailored to the specific needs of each sector. Ensure that these programs align with industry-recognized certifications and standards.
- \*Recognize that industry needs and dynamics can evolve rapidly. Build flexibility into sector strategies to adapt to changing economic conditions and technological advancements.

By adhering to these steps, the Middle TN RPC can facilitate and cultivate robust sector partnerships, driving effective sector strategies that contribute to the sustained growth and competitiveness of targeted industries.

- iii. Describe how the RPC will utilize TDLWD Regional Directors to facilitate the business engagement strategy and promote alignment with economic development within the region, including how the Regional Directors will report progress to the RPC.

Workforce in Middle Tennessee is truly regional. Workforce study after study has proven that workers travel far out of their county to match their skill sets to their employer of choice. Economic development agencies across the 40 county region consistently emphasize that future workforce needs will come not just from the closet town or within the county but easily within a one hour commute from the business or industry. Thus workforce is regional and is easily affirmed that the three LWDA's within middle TN work in conjunction and harmony of each other to meet the needs of business and industry. The three Business & Workforce Directors (BWDs), formerly known as Regional Directors, of these areas are the most qualified and have the greatest authority and reach to assume the mantle of lead facilitator to create the new Business Engagement Plan outlined by the state Department of Labor and Workforce Development. By their position, the BWDs have the knowledge skills and abilities of the capabilities strengths and shortcomings of the 16+ partners that encompass the AJC system. These same partners and the knowledge of their capabilities will be required to shift the mindset of the current Business Service Teams and fully shift to the plan, strategy and solutions to focus more on the employer as its primary customer. They will not stand alone but will equally rely on the One Stop Operators that have their fingers on the daily pulse of life and resources provided by the partners in the AJC system. The OSO value added will be in the deep dives of delivery of services to ensure the correct partner is speaking the correct language to the employer customer. The three BWDs and OSO's are already working on the framework of shaping the partners where they can best leverage their services and resources.

Since workforce is regional, the BWDs and OSOs will work together as they analyze the challenges of the region to ensure coordination exists among all three Business Engagement Teams. Coordination will also ensure a similar delivery and communication venue that will reduce business confusion as well as provide unity of delivery among partners separated by lengthy geography. A key focus for the BWDs will be to consistently deliver Customer Relationship Management similarly across the 40 county area. Such primary focus will quickly launch a connection with business sectors as well as produce a unified message to industry across the area. Best practices will be shared on a weekly and daily basis as well as Directors assisting LWDA's that may be having some difficulty in launching the new Business Engagement Plan due to lack of personnel at the partner level. The Directors and OSO can move assets to ensure delivery of planned strategies. This team approach and sector approach demonstrates the areas commitment to providing for the needs of business in their region and shift a focus of the AJC's from job seekers to employers.

The Regional Planning Council will ensure efforts are aligned through a constant assessment of status and goal attainment and will ensure the BWDs remain focused on an overall regional strategy of Business Engagement. A time table with goals, action steps, with measurable metrics and outcomes will be set this spring as the Business Engagement Plan is launched at the state, regional and local level. Local plans will align and parallel the regional launch of this new business mindset. An initial balance of effort will focus on 3-5 industry sectors that will be

- c. Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)
- i. What opportunities exist for a collective approach to SYEP implementation across the region?

The Middle RPC's main objective is to expand SYEP/TYEP programs, ensuring a broader range of work experience opportunities for individuals aged 14-16, while maintaining a focus on the 16-24 age group. The Middle RPC will initiate a targeted campaign and engage in outreach efforts to employers across the region to highlight the value and benefits of hiring youth from this particular age group, aiming to increase the hiring ratio of youth participants aged 14-16. By adopting a collaborative approach to the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) across the region, the RPC can generate numerous opportunities for collaboration and effectiveness. A regional strategy enables a wider outreach, ensuring that a diverse range of youth from various communities can access the program's benefits. Involving businesses and organizations from various sectors allows the SYEP to offer a more diverse array of job opportunities to participating youth. This facilitates a better alignment between individuals' skills and interests and the available employment options, while fostering collaboration across different industry sectors, including government, private industry, non-profits, and higher education. Regional collaboration aims to contribute to increasing the LFPR within the 40-county area, aligning local policies and regulations related to youth employment across the region. This alignment can establish a more consistent and supportive environment for both employers and youth participants. A collective approach to implementing a Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) across the region presents several opportunities:

\*Sharing Best Practices - Different areas within the region may have unique approaches or successful strategies for implementing SYEPs and by sharing best practices, lessons learned, and successful program models, all participating entities can enhance the effectiveness of their programs and improve youth outcomes.

\*Coordinating Outreach and Recruitment - The Middle region will utilize EconoVue to help identify specific employers within each in-demand sectors and then the BST's can work to schedule employer meetings to educate and inform them on the SYEP. Collaborating on outreach efforts helps ensure that the program reaches a diverse pool of eligible youth across the region. Partnering with schools, community organizations, and local businesses can enhance recruitment efforts and increase program accessibility.

\*Facilitating Mentorship and Networking - Creates opportunities for youth to connect with mentors and professionals in various industries fosters valuable learning experiences and networking opportunities.

\*Evaluation and Continuous Improvement - Collaborating on program evaluation allows for the identification of strengths, weaknesses, areas for improvement, and the sharing of successful programmatic elements. This ensures that the SYEP remains responsive to the needs of youth participants and the evolving labor market landscape.

\*Advocacy and Funding Opportunities - A collective approach to SYEP implementation strengthens the region's ability to advocate for additional funding and support from



- ii. How will RPC leverage partnerships to increase SYEP participation and job placement within the region?

The Middle TN RPC will persist in leveraging our partnerships to amplify SYEP participation and job placements throughout the region, employing collaborative planning and strategic approaches. We have identified essential stakeholders within the region, comprising county officials, businesses, educational institutions, non-profit organizations, government agencies, and community and faith-based groups. Success has often been correlated with securing the buy-in of elected officials, who perceive the program as integral to employing youth in government facilities. During this grant cycle, we have conscientiously engaged these stakeholders and partners at the earliest stages to secure their commitment and garner input for the SYEP's success. Emphasizing the advantages of hiring youth to employers, such as contributing to the development of the next workforce generation and accessing a pool of motivated young talent, has strengthened our collaboration with businesses. Consequently, we have intensified efforts to identify high-demand industries and align youth with relevant job and mentorship opportunities. Utilizing various channels, including social media, press releases, and community events, all three local areas within the Middle Region are implementing strategies to effectively market and promote the SYEP.

\*Working with our County Executives to gain their "buy-in" for the SYEP program from the beginning and showcasing it as one of their priorities for engaging and employing youth so that other local employers can see the benefit and ROI.

\*Continuing to partner with NHC Healthcare for youth placements in the Middle TN Region as all 3 LWDA's have a NHC presence.

\*Maintaining and growing our partnerships with our CTE Directors, Industrial Development Boards, Middle TN Industrial Development Association, and ECD Base Camps.

\*Distributing consistent marketing material for SYEP.

\*The Southern Middle LWDA has adopted a reimbursement model that is a best practice from the Northern Middle area that is being used with Nissan which is located in both NM and SM. Upper Cumberland is in discussions to adopt this model as well. We have received positive feedback from employers stating this is a model that makes it easier on their end along with it being liked among Career Advisors inputting information into VOS. This model leads to the youth participant being looked at like a regular employee of the business instead of a WIOA participant which promotes long term benefits for both the participant and the employer.

\*Business Service Teams are attending job fairs in the local area to promote SYEP to employers who are in attendance and looking for talent pipeline solutions.

By implementing these strategies, the regional planning council can leverage partnerships to create a more robust and inclusive SYEP, increasing both participation and job placement opportunities for youth within the region.

d. AJC Operations Improvement: AJC Assessment

- i. Provide an analysis of the KPMG assessment study results specific to the region, and contrast where results may differ across LWDAs.

The summary report from the KPMG assessment highlighted significant disparities in service utilization and employment outcomes among various groups, particularly individuals with disabilities and those with justice-involved backgrounds. The data revealed a marked underutilization of Title I and Title II programs by these individuals, underscoring the urgent need for more inclusive outreach and service provision strategies. Conversely, there was a notable portion of the homeless and unemployed populations not accessing services, indicating the necessity for increased outreach to these subgroups.

The research also identified substantial disparities in service access across different counties and regions, with residents of rural communities facing significant challenges in accessing services. Approximately half of Title I participants hail from rural counties, and the absence of American Job Centers (AJCs) or access points in some counties further exacerbates this issue, limiting service availability. These findings emphasize the critical need for targeted strategies to improve service delivery in less urbanized regions, such as establishing more access points through mobile service units or enhancing virtual service delivery options.

On the other hand, the study notes that most adult education centers are situated in transitional or competitive counties, with only one located in a distressed county. This raises concerns about access barriers in distressed regions. Also, the analysis of Title II data revealed that most customers achieved desirable program outcomes, including obtaining measurable skill gains (MSGs), attaining a secondary degree or equivalent, and becoming employed. This analysis also reveals that there are a higher percentage of African American customers in the system than in the broader population. The research suggests several strategies to enhance service efficiency, including outreach to under-served populations, transportation assistance, online courses, and expanding Internet and computer access. These findings underscore the necessity for targeted strategies to address demographic and geographic disparities in program participation and effectiveness. Opportunities that the Middle RPC can take to improve Title I and Title II services should include:

\*Increase training efficiency and effectiveness - Compare and contrast enrollment and exit times and further examine what would cause delayed time in exits.

\*Improve access and utilization of in-person and virtual services - Continue to examine ways to ease access to transportation and childcare by offering more robust virtual and hybrid services and through the Virtual AJC.

\*Measure service quality and intensity - Develop a meaningful way to track quality over quantity of services provided which is difficult to do now with the KPI and performance metrics.

\*Provide external supports to high-need clients - Reassess our service mix and training/education curriculum and increase efforts to make referrals based on the individual 



- ii. How will the RPC facilitate innovative service strategies across the region in response to the assessment findings?

The findings emphasize the importance of tailoring services to cater more precisely to the distinct needs of different demographic groups, including individuals with disabilities, justice involved individuals, homeless, or those residing in rural areas. While certain services achieve their goals, adopting a more individualized approach will enhance overall program efficacy and participant contentment. This underscores the significance of ongoing evaluation and adjustment of these services to adequately address the diverse needs of the State's populace. To improve Title I and Title II services, the Middle RPC will facilitate innovative service strategies across the region in response to the assessment findings by implementing the following:

- \*Minimize participant travel time to AJCs - Establish localized service points or deploy mobile service units to rural and remote areas.
- \*Improve registration - Evaluate and streamline the duration from program enrollment to completion, which includes simplifying registration and implementing effective tracking to expedite the training process and prepare participants for employment sooner.
- \*Alignment with employment opportunities - Use job posting data to comprehend the density of job postings across different industry sectors for updating the Eligible Training Providers List as this method will assist in customizing training programs to match areas of elevated job demand.
- \*Enhance digital resource accessibility and literacy - Improve and increase access to online or virtual services and resources which would enable broader participation especially for those who face transportation and geographical barriers.
- \*Expand partnerships - Working with community organizations, economic development agencies, educational institutions, and employers can aid in assisting job seekers, ensuring training programs are in sync with prevailing job market needs, and that the skills imparted are pertinent and readily applicable in the workforce.
- \*Strengthen support services - Improving career counseling, job placement assistance, and post-training follow-up services could greatly enhance program results and integrating these services into current workforce development efforts could provide a more comprehensive approach to preparing individuals for employment.

## Regional Service Strategies:

- a. Provide an analysis of workforce development activities, including education and training, in the region.
  - i. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the workforce development activities and the collective capacity to provide workforce development activities to address the education and skill needs of the workforce, including individual with barriers to employment.

The Middle TN RPC, comprised of the Workforce Boards of the Upper Cumberland, Southern Middle and Northern Middle region ensure that all resources are leveraged to ensure job seekers are successful in aligning their career pathways and skill sets resulting in self-sustaining jobs. With slightly over 45% of the state's workforce being within these 40 counties it is imperative for the Boards to ensure business and industry thrive in the state. As Middle TN goes, so goes the state of TN. The Executive Directors along with Regional Directors and the OSO's via a signed MOU with all partners ensure that there are no duplication of services and that resources are equitably distributed especially those marginalized individuals through a priority of service. After intake and pathway development, Career Service Providers leverage WIOA and partner funds to focus on eliminating barriers to employment and training. This is possible in Middle TN due to the Governors vision and focus on making TN the best place find a good paying jobs through the initiation of the Drive to 55. This statewide program as well as Pell, Hope, TN Promise and TN Reconnect allows LWDA's to use these funds first to assist in paying for tuition at Tennessee Centers for Applied Technology and Community Colleges throughout our 40 county region. The partners within the local areas then utilize their funding to assist in eliminating other barriers to schooling and employment such as child care, uniforms/equipment, and transportation to and from work or schooling. Using statewide funds allows the Boards and its partners to spread the wealth among job seekers thus increasing the number of in-demand skill sets throughout the region.

A key partner in this process are the CTE instructors at local High Schools who channel young high school students with aptitude and interest in specific career pathways but need additional assistance and skill development to achieve employment goals. With numerous High School, TCAT and CC's having dual enrollment agreements and articulation agreements between institutions, youth have a direct and supportive pathway to receive stackable credentials and seamless progress from HS to Higher education to work. The Boards deliver these services across the region through the American Job Center network.

The Boards are aligning partners with the demands of upskilling institutions to maintain a flow of qualified individuals to ensure middle TN remains competitive in the global market place. The in-demand growth rates and needed skill sets that are in the top growth industry sectors in Middle TN are seen below. The three Boards and their partners are focusing their efforts and resources to increase the labor pool skill sets in these industry sectors.

Most major indicators increased (based on place of residence) from 2021 to 2022, with the Middle Region leading the state with 2.9 percent in employment growth compared to the state's 1.7 percent. **◆**

- b. How will the RPC support alignment and integration of education, workforce and economic development across the region?
  - i. How will the RPC track and measure effectiveness of integrated workforce strategies?

The RPC will support alignment and integration of education, workforce, and economic development across the region through several key initiatives:

\*Foster collaboration among educational institutions, workforce development agencies, and economic development organizations to ensure alignment of their goals and activities. This includes regular meetings, joint planning sessions, and shared resources to promote a cohesive approach.

\*Facilitate the sharing of data among stakeholders to inform decision-making and track progress. This includes sharing labor market information, educational outcomes, and economic indicators to identify areas of need and measure effectiveness.

\*Lead the development of strategic plans that outline shared goals and strategies for education, workforce development, and economic growth. These plans will be developed collaboratively with input from stakeholders across the region.

\*Work to align education and training programs with the needs of employers and industries in the region. This includes identifying in-demand occupations, developing relevant curriculum, and providing opportunities for work-based learning experiences.

\*Continue to evaluate the effectiveness of integrated workforce strategies by tracking key performance indicators, conducting regular assessments, and soliciting feedback from stakeholders to identify areas for improvement.

In terms of tracking and measuring effectiveness, the RPC will employ various methods:

- \* Track outcome indicators such as employment rates, wages, educational attainment levels, and economic growth to assess the impact of integrated workforce strategies.
- \*Gather feedback from stakeholders through surveys, focus groups, and interviews to assess satisfaction levels and identify areas for continuous improvement.
- \* Analyze trends over time comparing outcomes across different groups and identifying areas of success and challenge.
- \* Continue to track performance metrics and benchmarks to measure progress toward goals and objectives. This includes setting targets for key indicators and monitoring progress on a regular basis.

Overall, the RPC will take a comprehensive approach to tracking and measuring effectiveness, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to assess the



- c. Describe the RPC's strategic vision in supporting state initiatives that foster regional economic growth.
- i. What innovative service strategies will be used to address regional educational and training needs?
  - ii. What cooperative procedures, either formal or informal, will the partners establish to best align regional services and coordinate regional delivery?

The Middle RPC's strategic vision for supporting state initiatives aimed at fostering regional economic growth encompasses several key goals:

#### Statewide Goal #1: Increase/Sustain Competitive Labor Force Participation Rate

RPC Strategy 1 - Expand SYEP/TYEP to include more work experience opportunities for the 14-16 year old age group

- Increase the ratio of hiring youth participants in the 14-16 year old age group.
- Design a targeted campaign and develop intentional outreach to employers to show the benefit and value of hiring participants from this age group.
- Partner with employers and CTE Directors to create clear career pathways and advancement opportunities within target sectors to attract and retain workers.
- Increase enrollments in the SYEP (will also be called TYEP). The three LWDA's have planned to assist around 1050 youth through the Summer Youth Employment Program. Presently, all LWDA's are on target and progressing well towards achieving their goals by the deadline of August 31, 2024. With the support of marketing materials provided by state staff, the Regional Planning Council (RPC) will launch a comprehensive campaign across the region to promote participation and ensure that the target enrollment is met or surpassed.

RPC Strategy 2 - Increase the regional LFPR by 0.5% each program year during 2024-2027

- All core WIOA partners must track job placements for their respective programs.
- Propose that Title I has access to the VOS 500 and 501 activity codes.
- Promote and grow apprenticeship opportunities across the region for the in-demand sectors such as NHC's CAN healthcare program.
- Enhance collaboration with VR, AE, Migrant Farm Worker & Seasonal Farm Worker Services, and TDOC in order to capture more job placements and direct hires.
- Develop targeted outreach strategies that resonate with the specific needs, interests, and concerns of special populations, including minorities, individuals with disabilities, justice-involved, veterans, older workers, and youth.
- Expand the availability of stackable and micro-credentials like the ongoing EMT program in Jackson, Macon, and Trousdale counties. These counties have collaborated to create a participant cohort, aiming to share costs and resources to address the critical shortage of emergency workers. Southern Middle has a similar type of EMT Program happening between Perry, Lewis, Lawrence, and Maury counties. Completion of the training guarantees employment opportunities.

RPC Strategy 3 - Increase co-enrollments

- The Middle Region will strive to increase the number and quality of partner referrals in effort

## Sector Initiatives for In-Demand Sectors or Occupations:

- a. Identify in-demand industry sectors and occupations for the region.

The five largest industry sectors in the Middle Region are:

- Healthcare and Social Assistance (178,447)
- Retail Trade (135,359)
- Manufacturing (139,351)
- Accommodation and Food Services (131,314)
- Educational Services (96,674)

In the information industry, software publishers are expected to have the highest growth. Within health care and social assistance, with additional funds for treatment being available, residential facilities for substance abuse, mental health, and intellectual disability are increasing. With an aging population, more assisted living facilities are being developed.

Manufacturing is forecasted to have the highest growth in the electric vehicle and battery manufacturing industries. Electric vehicle manufacturing is being done in the Northern Middle, Southern Middle, and Southeast LWDAs and is planned for the Southwest LWDA. From 2015 to 2023, investment and employment in electric vehicles, electric vehicle battery employment, and battery components have boomed nationally; Tennessee, one of the top 10 states, is the recipient of \$16.6 billion in announced investments, expected to create a total of 18,300 jobs. These and other clean tech investments will create jobs for electricians, mechanics, construction workers, technicians, support staff, engineers, chemists, and related jobs. The Inflation Reduction Act is making millions of dollars available in Tennessee across the state to train workers, primarily in the construction and utility sectors, to increase energy efficiency in the residential sector and expand renewable energy resources.

In the Northern Middle Region, a significant investment of \$2.1 billion is earmarked for the construction of a new Titans stadium and associated urban facilities. To support this project, a dedicated initiative called "Titan Town" is underway, aiming to recruit, train, and provide support to construction workers and other personnel involved in the project. Tennessee's workforce partners are actively engaged in this endeavor to ensure the creation of quality job opportunities accessible to employees and potential workers in the Middle Region.

\*Emerging/High Growth Industries 2020-2030 \*

Healthcare and Social Assistance

- Individual and Family Services
- Residential Intellectual & Developmental Disability, Mental Health, Substance Abuse Facilities
- Offices of Other Health Practitioners

Retail Trade

- E-commerce and Online Retail
- Health and Wellness Products
- Specialty Retail Stores
- Specialty Food and Artisan Products



- b. Describe the development and implementation of sector initiatives for in-demand industry sectors or occupations.

Middle Tennessee is committed to strategically investing its resources to tailor strategies that meet the unique needs of individual industry sectors, particularly those experiencing high growth. The Middle TN RPC has implemented robust local and regional planning components to ensure the development of high-quality career pathways and strategies. The region aims to align its resources with workforce training initiatives that cater to the demands of both existing and emerging industries, collaborating closely with the education system to develop relevant curriculum and skill sets.

**Key Strategies:**

- Showcase the capabilities of American Job Centers to employers, providing insights into the resources available for youth, adult, and dislocated workers.
- Optimize resource allocation by establishing regional priorities for utilizing Mobile AJCs and developing a comprehensive plan to promote their services.
- Strengthen the Business Engagement Plan by expanding business outreach activities and increasing participation in programs like OJT, IWT, and RAPs.
- Continuously expand and replicate successful operational models across the East Region to foster innovation and growth.
- Engage with local chambers and industry associations to encourage stakeholder participation in industry-specific task forces. Invite representatives from educational institutions, LWDB members and staff, regional businesses, and workforce directors to collaborate with employers in identifying opportunities and necessary skills training.
- Enhance understanding of employer needs through coordinated regional outreach efforts, including feedback sessions, individual consultations, involvement of local task forces, and effective communication of requirements to training providers.
- Support innovative training approaches, such as a regional sector-based training program, to bridge training gaps across the region and establish career pathways, leveraging methods like apprenticeships.
- Improve access to the workforce system by intensifying outreach efforts and maximizing the utilization of VAJCs.

c. How will these sector initiatives be tracked and measured for success?

The Middle TN RPC will see that sector initiatives be tracked and measured for success through dashboards/scorecards, KPIs, federal performance metrics in place from the TNDLWD and AJC partners, LFPR percentages, graduation rates from post-secondary partners, direct hire events, workforce funded customized training and micro credential attainments. Also, each sector strategy may its own data metrics requirements. The Middle RPC will review the state-led frameworks and utilize the RPC sub-committee to ensure appropriate collection and tracking.

As a region, Middle TN also utilizes Jobs4TN data to track the overall progress of most services within the AJCs. Having AJC staff enter service data into Jobs4TN allows the region to track progress towards the federal performance measures for employers, once implemented, for market penetration and repeat customers. Baseline data will be reviewed by the RPC for consideration of possible regional goals prior to state negotiated goals being implemented. While each area may be assigned a proportionate percentage of the regional goals, it is the responsibility of the region as a whole to monitor progress toward successful achievement and hold each local area accountable for measures. Progress is presented quarterly to the RPC as a matter of transparency for all partners and to validate data. If a corrective action plan is needed by any area to explain and to submit a strategy for improvement, those plans will also be presented during the quarterly meetings.

## Economic Development/Business Engagement:

- a. Describe how economic development and workforce investment activities will be coordinated in the region.

Economic Development is a key partner with all workforce activities in the region. Coordinating economic development and workforce investment activities is essential for fostering sustainable growth and prosperity in a region. Whether it be with partnering with a TVA grant with a county economic development agency such as Forward Sumner or leveraging resources in a 40 county area with a wage survey with the Middle Tennessee Industrial Development Agency, economic development is workforce development. All three workforce boards have at least one economic development agency on its Board. It is imperative for the Boards to coordinate economic events and measure metrics to guide success. BWDs will share events and data analytics to ensure the workforce pipeline has what is needed for business whether expanding or reconfiguring. The Business Service Teams from the three workforce areas will form an informal subcommittee to pull together resources during economic events both positively and negatively, that change industry and business structure that effects workforce across LWDA boundaries.

Wilson County recently landed a new distribution center hiring hundreds of people. With low unemployment rates and a high LFPR Wilson County Economic Development contacted the Northern Middle Workforce Board. The Business service team met with the employer and began to work with their HR department as to skill sets and time frames. Since the new center will be just off the I40 corridor the business team realized that many of the future employees could come from Smith, DeKalb or Cannon counties and contacted their peers from adjacent areas. Information fairs and hiring fairs were rolled out for approval of the HR manager and economic development. This team effect crosses borders but delivers the skilled workers for a new upstart corporation.

A subcommittee will be formed as a result of the Business Engagement Plan that is being rolled out by the state in the not too distant future. Such things as organizing Rapid Response for company downturns effecting employees from numerous areas as well as coordinating Adult Education options with businesses that have employees from different areas is being streamlined and linked for seamless delivery. Adult Education partners are entering businesses for employee instruction possibly in ESL or in civics. An example of this is AE training classes in Lee Company in Davidson, or McKeesen in Rutherford, Husky Truss in Rutherford, and Tyson in Shelbyville. These companies have employees participating in AE training who are living in other workforce areas. AE instructors share customer training plans with sister contractor partners. If the customer needs additional assistance, AE counselors can refer them to local training that should increase their skills gains faster helping them to self-sufficiency.

The RPC will continue to collaborate between economic development agencies, workforce development boards, educational institutions, industry associations, and community groups which opens the door for knowledge sharing, joint initiatives, and coordinated efforts. We will work closely with employers and workforce development agencies to align curriculum and training programs with industry needs. This ensures that students and workers acquire



- b. Describe how the RPC will collectively utilize the TDLWD-WFS Business Engagement Plan to provide consistent messaging and services to employers within the region.

In line with the Business Engagement Plan (BEP), the Middle RPC will synchronize the region's economic development goals with BEP priorities, ensuring that messaging and services provided to employers align with regional strategies for growth and prosperity. Integration of the BEP into existing or planned regional initiatives related to economic development and workforce investment will be a key focus. This integration may entail incorporating specific components of the plan into broader programs aimed at supporting employers and enhancing the region's workforce.

Furthermore, customization of messaging and services will be prioritized to address the unique needs and characteristics of employers within the region. This could involve tailoring communication strategies, training programs, or support services to cater to specific industry sectors, workforce challenges, or economic opportunities present within the region.

The RPC will leverage the upcoming CRM system to allow system partners to track all service efforts to employers in real-time. This will facilitate the establishment of a unified approach to managing employer relationships through a contact management platform, ultimately aiming to eliminate employer fatigue.

Through the integration of the TDLWD-WFS Business Engagement Plan into regional initiatives, the RPC will provide consistent and coordinated support to employers. By doing so, the RPC aims to contribute significantly to economic growth, workforce development, and prosperity within the region.

- c. What innovative initiatives, utilizing tools such as registered apprenticeships, incumbent worker training programs, on-the-job training programs, and customized training solutions, will the RPC coordinate to meet the training needs of employers across LWDA's?

Each of the Middle RPC local boards has devised policies and procedures to expand or enhance local workforce development through On-the-Job Training (OJT), Incumbent Worker Training (IWT), Work-Based Learning (WBL), Work Experience (WEX), career pathways, and sector strategies aimed at fortifying the regional workforce's skill sets, thereby fostering increased economic development. The RPC ensures alignment of local board policies from each LWDA with regional priorities.

Employer outreach for these initiatives encompasses engagement with local and regional employers, partners, stakeholders, industry associations, Economic and Community Development (ECD), Chambers of Commerce, community and faith-based organizations, as well as training and education providers.

The Middle Region continues to offer work-based learning opportunities through OJT, work experience, Registered Apprenticeships (RAP), and IWT programs. Support for RAP may involve both WIOA-funded OJT, IWT, and/or Individual Training Accounts (ITAs). These activities reinforce the work-based learning or work experience model with employers, leading to their increased adoption of the model for ongoing utilization in developing talent pipelines and meeting training and work-based learning needs.

Through needs assessment, data dissemination, and regional collaboration among partners and stakeholders, the Middle TN RPC will ensure the development of a skilled workforce tailored to the demands of current industries. This will be achieved through the implementation of the following strategies:

- Analyzing industry needs through data analysis
- Mapping geographic assets
- Establishing comprehensive, industry-driven training and work-based learning programs

Overall, by coordinating these innovative initiatives and leveraging tools such as registered apprenticeships, incumbent worker training programs, on-the-job training programs, and customized training solutions, the RPC can effectively meet the training needs of employers across each LWDA, support economic growth, and enhance the competitiveness of the region as a whole.

## Coordination of Supportive Services:

- a. Describe how supportive services will be coordinated throughout the region.

In the Middle TN Region, our labor pool is diverse, encompassing individuals facing significant barriers to employment such as low income, lack of transportation or childcare, absence of a high school diploma, or justice involvement. To address these barriers, it's imperative to provide supportive services. Supportive Service payments for WIOA enrolled participants play a crucial role in overcoming these barriers, enabling individuals to engage in training and workforce activities essential for securing employment. We prioritize leveraging and braiding funds from various regional partners and agencies to bolster these efforts.

Within the region, a variety of Supportive Services are offered, including Transportation, Child Care/Dependent Care, Safety and Job-Related Equipment, Housing, Needs-Related Payments, and more. These services are primarily coordinated through regional policy alignment, facilitated by the One Stop Operators, American Job Centers (AJCs), and Virtual AJC platforms accessible to participants.

The Regional Planning Council places significant emphasis on policy alignment to ensure consistency in service provision across local areas within the region and to mitigate any potential barriers between them. To achieve this, a thorough comparison and contrast of supportive services policies across the three Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDAs) have been conducted. This analysis has enabled us to identify areas of similarity, equitable differences, and areas needing improvement for better alignment.

Looking ahead to the years 2024-2027, our region remains committed to reviewing policies and enhancing alignment efforts to uphold best practices and further strengthen the coordination of services between regions. Through ongoing collaboration and strategic policy adjustments, we aim to optimize support for individuals facing barriers to employment and promote inclusive economic growth across the Middle Tennessee region.

- b. Explain where diverse demographics make regional coordination of supportive services a challenge and describe how the RPC will ensure barriers are equitably addressed.

Diverse demographics present a challenge to regional coordination of supportive services due to varying needs, barriers, and circumstances among different population groups. In a region with diverse demographics, such as the Middle TN Region, individuals may face unique challenges based on factors like income level, educational attainment, employment history, familial responsibilities, and cultural background. For example, individuals from marginalized communities may encounter barriers related to systemic inequalities, discrimination, or lack of access to resources. The most common barriers to address in the Middle Region are as follows:

**Poverty Rate –** Poverty rates declined from 13.9 percent in 2020 to 13.4 percent in the Middle Region in 2021, however, poverty still presents a formidable barrier to employment in the region. The RPC will continue to support up-skilling of workers through regional customized trainings and micro credentials, and through educating employers on accommodations for those with disabilities. Lastly, the RPC will also provide a forum for open discussion on the benefits cliff which is a significant factor in forcing some Middle TN workers in staying below the poverty level. The Upper Cumberland LWDA is the only LWDA in the Middle Region that had poverty rates higher than the state’s average. The UCLWDB is partnering with UCHRA on a TANF grant to raise 1600 families out of poverty. Contracting with Circles USA the Upper Cumberland EMPOWER consortium seeks to achieve a 30% increase in income after six months and a 76% increase in income after 18 months all the while navigating the pitfalls of the benefits cliff.

**Limited English Speakers-** The Middle Region of the State is home to more than 57% of the entire State population of limited English speakers with the overwhelming majority of those residing in the Northern Middle LWDA. Policy alignment and common application documents are key to serving this population. Both are currently under review as part of the RPC Policy alignment Committee.

**Lack of Childcare (especially 2nd and 3rd shift) –** Lack of childcare is a common barrier among all three LWDAs, however, this particular barrier to successful employment is fast becoming a crisis across the state. Tennesseans for Quality Early Education estimates that the adverse economic impact of inadequate child care on Tennessee parents, businesses, and tax payers to be \$2.6 billion annually. Further, more than 80 percent of working parents reported employment disruptions due to inadequate child care, citing affordability, quality and access as major challenges. Many reported recently quitting, being fired or turning down a job offer or promotion as a result of child care problems. One in five stopped seeking employment altogether. The Middle Region acknowledges that childcare is an issue beyond its ability to solve. Nonetheless, the RPC is committed to reviewing child care supportive services policy and working to achieve consistency whenever possible.

**Transportation –** Lack of public transportation in the rural areas such as Upper Cumberland and Southern Middle continues to be a significant barrier to employment in the rural counties where Northern Middle seems to have an abundance of transportation options such as a

## Performance Accountability:

- a. Describe strategies relating to the performance accountability measures based on performance indicators to include State and Local Measures (Key Performance Indicators), to include:
  - i. How the RPC will work with each LWDA to achieve the negotiated measures
  - ii. How the measures will be monitored and progress tracked.

Strategies related to performance accountability measures based on performance indicators, including State and Local Measures (Key Performance Indicators), involve several key steps:

- \*Identification of Performance Indicators - These indicators should be relevant, measurable, and aligned with the goals and objectives of the strategies.
- \*Setting Clear and Realistic Performance Targets - Establish clear and achievable targets for each performance indicator with targets being realistic and based on historical data, benchmarks, or best practices.
- \*Regular Monitoring and Reporting - Regularly monitor progress towards the established targets by tracking the performance indicators over time and communicate progress to RPC Council, stakeholders, and partners.
- \*Performance Review Meetings - Have regular performance review meetings through a sub-committee where partners and stakeholders can discuss the progress, identify areas for improvement, and make any necessary adjustments to strategies or interventions.
- \*Continuous Improvement - Use performance data to inform decision-making and drive continuous improvement efforts. Identify successful practices and strategies that can be scaled up or replicated, as well as areas that may require additional attention or resources.
- \*Alignment with State and Local Priorities - Ensure that performance indicators align with both state and local strategies and goals.
- \*Feedback and Engagement - Solicit feedback from stakeholders, including program participants, employers, partners, community organizations, and other key stakeholders, to inform the development and refinement of performance indicators and measurement strategies.

By implementing these strategies, organizations can effectively measure and evaluate their performance against established targets and goals, driving accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement in service delivery.

The Middle TN Region utilizes the Jobs4TN platform to track the progress of services offered within the American Job Center. Staff members input service codes and data into Jobs4TN, enabling the region to monitor progress against negotiated federal performance measures and Key Performance Indicator (KPI) metrics. The performance metrics primarily focus on employee

- b. What additional metrics, outside of KPIs, will the region measure to determine success of regional strategies and initiatives?

The RPC will assess the effectiveness of regional strategies and initiatives through various metrics:

\*Introduce a regional direct hire Key Performance Indicator (KPI) to track the number of individuals placed in employment within specific sectors. This metric reflects the region's success in facilitating direct employment opportunities and distinguishes between short and long term job placements to assess sustainability.

\*Increasing LFPR directly correlates with the addition of participants to the labor force through direct hires, post-secondary graduates, and professional licensure pass rates.

\*Continued collaboration with community stakeholders common to each area, including Chambers of Commerce, Post-Secondary institutions, United Way, TANF, Persevere, Public Housing, faith-based agencies, and Reentry. Additionally, individual LWDAs will collaborate with partners unique to their areas, such as Impact, Homeless Shelters, CRCs, DRCs, Men of Valor, and Genesis House.

Furthermore, the RPC will utilize employer and job seeker satisfaction surveys to evaluate the effectiveness of current services and overall customer experience. Feedback gathered from these surveys, including concerns and suggestions, will be brought back to the RPC for consideration. Best practices will be shared and implemented to ensure consistent high-quality service delivery and active engagement across the region. Ultimately, the RPC aims for a seamless service delivery experience across local areas.

## Coordination of Cost Arrangements:

- a. Describe the coordination of administrative cost arrangements, including the pooling of funds for administrative costs, as appropriate.

The Middle RPC continues to evaluate and review administrative cost pooling options. Coordination of administrative cost arrangements, including pooling of funds for administrative costs, are agreed upon through the IFA and MOU among AJC partners. MOU/IFAs are developed with on site partners in the AJCs in order to establish methods of cost sharing. IFAs are updated quarterly and reviewed by partner leadership for accuracy and monitoring of shared costs and expenditures. The fiscal staff for the local board invoices partners monthly to ensure timely payment of shared costs. Program funds are also braided with other Federal and State programs, such as Trade Adjustment Act (TAA), TN Promise, TN Reconnect, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Employment and Training (E&T), TANF, Senior Community Services Employment Program (SCSEP), Disabled Veterans Outreach Programs, and Re-Employment Services Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) in order to eliminate duplication and leverage dollars to maximize resources and services.

AJC partners also enter into MOUs in order to leverage resources, eliminate duplication of services, and improve effectiveness, thereby decreasing administrative and program costs. Current MOUs and IFAs reflect the sharing of infrastructure costs among partner programs, based on proportionate use of the AJCs and relative benefit received. Under the guidance of the regional planning council, the local areas in East TN will also consider utilizing cost sharing arrangements when appropriate, for administrative costs such as the development of a) regional plans, b) outreach materials, c) regional Annual Report, d) seeking regional technical assistance, and e) applying for regional grant funding.

Forthcoming discussions must address the difference between the three local areas represented as the Northern Middle LWDA is predominately urban and is appropriately awarded a large budget to serve the larger populations, while the Southern Middle and Upper Cumberland LWDA are entirely rural with much smaller budgets. Any regional arrangement is carefully considered due to the distinct needs and legal authority of each local LWDA. Despite the challenges, we remain optimistic about the feasibility of administrative arrangements. In previous years, there was discussion around how all three Middle TN Workforce Boards could procure and share a single One-Stop Operator provider and share the cost of those administrative funds. Even though that initiative never evolved to have all three local areas share the OSO, it did lead to the Northern Middle and Upper Cumberland regions partnering together and procuring a shared OSO. Currently, there are no imminent plans to acquire a regional CSP, but the region remains receptive to exploring potential options in the future.

Administrative arrangements, such as mutual training initiatives among the local areas, represent another best practice being shared to enhance regional alignment. Southern Middle, Upper Cumberland, and Northern Middle are dedicated to promoting regional alignment and advancing regional initiatives and strategies. The Middle Tennessee Region is enthusiastic about exploring various other innovative options for pooling funds.



- b. Identify any additional funding resources the region plans to collectively seek, including opportunities for LWDAs to partner towards application of non-WIOA grants.

The Middle RPC may seek to collaborate on the following non-WIOA grant opportunities:

Federal:

- ARC Grants
- Good Jobs Challenge Grants
- Pathway Home Grants
- EDA Grants

State:

- Youth Employment Program Grant
- Apprenticeship Funding
- Office of Reentry Funding

We can research private foundations and nonprofit organizations that focus on education, workforce development, or community improvement. Additionally, the RPC will utilize online resources like the Foundation Center or Grant Station to identify potential funding sources and explore partnerships with local businesses and corporations. Many companies have corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs that support workforce development initiatives, and the Middle RPC will seek collaboration with industry associations and business chambers to identify potential corporate sponsors. The Middle RPC will seek any additional funding opportunities that align and support the needs of in-demand sectors and workforce development initiatives in the region.



- c. Identify opportunities for the RPC to collaborate with industry groups or sector partnerships to coordinate cost-sharing arrangements, or to partner towards application of sector-based grant funds.

Collaborating with industry groups or sector partnerships offers numerous opportunities for the Regional Planning Commission (RPC) to coordinate cost-sharing arrangements and work together to secure sector-based grant funds. Below are possible opportunities for collaboration in the Middle Region:

**Sector Task Forces** - The Middle RPC is actively engaging with industry groups TN Hospitality & Tourism Association, TN Builders Alliance, Association of Builders and Contractors, TN Homebuilders Association, South Central TN Tourism Association, TN Hospital Association, and the Greater Nashville Hospitality Association across the region. This collaborative effort aims to identify common workforce development needs within specific industries or sectors. By gaining insights into their requirements, we can devise targeted strategies and initiatives that address priority areas, including skills gaps, training needs, and workforce retention challenges. These partnerships bring valuable resources, expertise, and networks that enhance the RPC's capabilities. By pooling resources and leveraging each other's strengths, the RPC and industry partners can maximize the impact of grant funds and cost-sharing arrangements. This may involve sharing funding for training programs, providing in-kind services, or jointly supporting outreach and recruitment efforts.

**Regional Training** - The Middle RPC collaborates with industry groups or sector partnerships to coordinate training programs that cater to the needs of multiple employers within a particular industry or sector. Through consolidated training efforts and shared costs, the RPC and industry partners can deliver high-quality training experiences that are more cost-effective than individual employer-sponsored programs.

**Regional Apprenticeship Programs** - Pool resources to create apprenticeship opportunities that address common skill requirements within the region. All three local boards are promoting and growing apprenticeship opportunities across the region for NHC's CAN healthcare program.

**Sector Partnership Grants:** Collaborate with industry groups to apply for sector-specific grant funds. Leverage the collective expertise and insights of industry partners to strengthen grant applications.

Moreover, the RPC actively seeks opportunities to participate in pilot projects across the region, particularly with industry partners. These projects allow us to test innovative approaches to workforce development and training. By partnering with industry stakeholders, we ensure that these projects are tailored to the specific needs and realities of the industries they serve. Ultimately, through collaborative efforts, the Middle RPC and industry partners can drive meaningful change, strengthen the region's workforce, and support economic growth.

## Public Comment:

- a. Describe the process used by the region to provide a period of no more than 30 days for public comment.

The process used by the Middle RPC to provide a period of minimum of fifteen (15) and no more than a thirty (30) day period for public comment includes several steps to guarantee transparency, engagement, and feedback from our stakeholders and community partners. The Middle Regions process is listed below:

\*Notification has been shared with all relevant regional/local stakeholders, WIOA Core Partners, and the general public to ensure opportunities to participate in and to provide feedback on local/regional plan by way of social media platforms, AJC lobby and community bulletin boards, local workforce development board websites, and emails to board members.

\*All plan documents are made available with copies made available at all AJC locations, workforce board offices, and online platforms.

\*Starting and ending dates of the public comment period are clearly communicated in the public notice and the Middle Region provides multiple ways for submitting feedback such as email, in-person submission, and postal mail which are clearly communicated to the partners, stakeholders, and the general public.

\*The Middle RPC will hold one (1) listening session or planning meeting outside of regular business hours on March 19, 2024 beginning at 5:00 PM CST (regular business hours are presumed to be 8am-5pm Monday through Friday) and this meeting will be public and made available to participants in the geographic area where the boards have jurisdiction.

\*The Middle RPC will then submit any comments that express disagreement with the plan as an attachment.

## Stakeholder Involvement:

- a) Describe how stakeholder requirements were met for the regional plan, pursuant to the TDLWD Regional and Local Plan policy.

The Regional Planning Council (RPC) is comprised of its core WIOA partners:

- Title I- Workforce Development Activities
- Title II- Adult Education and Literacy
- Title III- Amendments to the Wagner-Peyser Act
- Title IV- Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

The RPC also engages with various WIOA partners, including Career and Technical Education, representatives from post-secondary institutions, the Department of Human Services, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Economic and Community Development, the Department of Corrections, as well as community and faith-based organizations. These partnerships are essential for fulfilling the State Vision, Goals, and Objectives outlined in the plan.

Stakeholders are actively encouraged to participate and become active partners in both the quarterly RPC meetings and monthly discussions. Their input is highly valued in ensuring that plans are developed comprehensively from a collective perspective, streamlining the regional workforce system, and fostering a culture of achievement within the region.

Once the plans are finalized, notification is shared with all relevant regional and local stakeholders, partners, and the general public. This ensures that opportunities to participate and provide feedback on the regional plan are accessible to all interested parties. Additionally, stakeholders and partners are invited to attend and actively participate in an after-hours virtual listening session scheduled by the RPC for March 19, 2024, starting at 5:00 PM CST.

- b) Describe outreach efforts to all required planning partners and provide relevant information on all planning meetings, listening sessions, or other public meetings related to the planning process.

The Middle TN RPC holds quarterly virtual meetings (February 2) and all partners and stakeholders were invited to attend and participate. During the creation and completion of the Regional Plan, the Middle RPC provides information on regional initiatives, programs, and strategies. Stakeholders have been invited to participate and be an active partner in the quarterly RPC meetings and also invited to the monthly meetings during which the plan has been discussed and emphasize the importance of their input so the plans can be completed from an all partner prospective, to streamline our regional workforce system and to foster a culture of achievement within the region. At this time input, feedback, and information is solicited from all regional partners and stakeholders. Additionally, once the plans have been completed, notification is shared with all relevant regional/local stakeholders, partners, and the general public to ensure opportunities to participate in and to provide feedback on the regional plan was given. Stakeholders and partners are invited to attend and participate in the after hours virtual listening session scheduled by the RPC on March 19, 2024 starting at 5:00 PM CST.

**Attachments:**

- a. Documentation of CLEO approval (sample provided)