WIOA Strategic Workforce Development Plan

Local Plan Template

PYs 2024-2027

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Local Area Information

TN Local Area: Southern Middle
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Date of Submission: 3/15/24
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Local Plan Tracker (Sample)

Local Plan Tracker- PY 2024-2027

Click the link above to use the tracker.

		Local Plan Guidance Tracker- SAMPLE								
		LOCAL AREA:								
					Milestone		Milestone		Milestone	
Priority Initiative	What State initiative or regional priority does this support?	Goal Description- what is success?	Targeted Success Date	Action Items	Targeted Success Date	Action Items	Targeted Success Date	Action Items	Targeted Success Date

Regional and Local Analysis:

    a. Provide an analysis of regional economic conditions, including:
        i. Existing and emerging in-demand sectors and occupations,
        ii. The employment needs of businesses in those sectors and occupations; and
        iii. How the LWDA compares to the region and any unique contributors to the regional economic conditions and business needs.

As of 2024, based on statistical reporting from EconoVue database and WIRED Data, the top five existing in-demand employment sectors for Southern Middle, reflecting the State and Middle TN Regional Plan, are Manufacturing, Healthcare and Social Assistance, Retail Trade, Accommodation and Food Service, and Educational Services. These five business sectors collectively accounted for over 70 percent of all in-demand employment sectors listed in this report. Manufacturing experienced the most significant increase in demand for workers over the past year, with nearly 900 workers hired in the SMTN area. Of these 900 Manufacturing placements, over 600 were related to the manufacturing of Computer, Electrical Equipment, and Components.

According to the latest projections provided by the State of Tennessee for In-Demand Occupations through 2026, the following occupations are expected to see significant increases in demand for workers in the next two years:

1. Forging Machine Setters, Operators, Tenders, Metal and Plastic: Projections indicate approximately 190 job openings.
2. Elementary School Teachers: Anticipated to have around 170 job openings.
3. First-Line Supervisors of Office and Administrative Support Workers: Expected to see about 160 job openings.
4. First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers: Projected to have approximately 160 job openings.
5. Registered Nurses: Anticipated to see around 150 job openings.
6. Licensed Practical Nurses: Expected to have approximately 145 job openings.

The future workforce needs in these sectors warrant high school-educated individuals to fulfill many of the manufacturing jobs and supervisory roles within manufacturing. According to the latest projections from the State of Tennessee for In-Demand Occupations through 2026, over 1000 jobs listed in this report are expected to be directly linked to manufacturing, encompassing various roles such as warehouse workers, administrative assistants, supervisors, engineers, and production managers. Additionally, healthcare continues to have a high demand for licensed practical nurses (LPNs) and registered nurses (RNs), while the education sector consistently projects needs for elementary and secondary school teachers and administrators.

The Southern Middle Region is forecasted to experience positive job growth of 24% by 2030, with manufacturing projected to be the largest industry, a trend that has persisted since 2022. Average employment in this Local Workforce Development Area (LWDA) has increased from 142,945 in 2021 to 149,742 in 2022, accompanied by a rise in average

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

Apart from seeking qualified candidates for high-demand roles, employers also require individuals with certifications mandated by their workplaces. As detailed in the WIRED Data, the Southern Middle area primarily seeks certifications such as American Heart Association (AHA) CPR & First Aid Certifications, American Institute of CPAs (AICPA) Certifications, American Red Cross - First Aid Certifications, Association of Nutrition & Foodservice Professionals (ANFP) Certifications, Commercial Driver's License (CDL), Competency & Credentialing Institute (CCI), National Board for Respiratory Care (NBRC), National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians (NREMT), Nursing Credentials and Certifications, and Social Worker Credentials & Certifications.

To effectively address the employment needs of businesses, it is crucial that all American Job Center (AJC) staff and partners including Adult Education(AE) and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) utilize the new Business Engagement Plan being implemented by the Department of Labor. As part of this plan, AJC partners and the Southern Middle Local Workforce Development Board are dedicated to collaborating with the State's TOSS Unit to provide necessary trainings to staff for better engagement with employers in our area.

To meet the skills and abilities required by local businesses, it is imperative that the Board and One-Stop Operator (OSO) ensure all AJC staff and partners are knowledgeable about the In-Demand Sectors and Occupations specific to our area, as well as the employers within these top industry sectors. Equipping AJC staff and partners with this specific information will enable them to make strategic decisions alongside the Business Service Team during outreach with employers and in career planning steps developed with workers by Career Specialists, Advisors, and Business Engagement Counselors (VR BECs).

Training sessions on these topics, utilizing data provided by the WIRED Unit and EconoVue, will be incorporated into at least one Quarterly Partner Meeting in the calendar year 2024. Additionally, alongside identifying in-demand industry sectors and occupations, Business Engagement Services training will include clear career steps outlined in Individual Employment Plans to establish specific goals related to technical skills, occupational trainings, and programs offering up-skilling services to meet the demands of local businesses.

c. Provide an analysis of the regional and local workforce, including:
  i. Current labor force employment and unemployment numbers;
  ii. Information on any trends in the labor market; and
  iii. Educational and skill levels of the workforce in the region, including individuals with barriers to employment.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics and WIRED TN Economic Data, as of December 2023, Tennessee's unemployment rate stands at 3.5%, which is below the national average, similar to rates observed in 2022. In the Southern Middle TN area, the overall average unemployment rate is 3.42%, with Perry County being an outlier at 5.3%.

Childcare issues have disproportionately affected women across the local area, pushing them out of the workforce at a higher rate than men, a trend exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges stem from shortages in childcare facilities and labor, as well as a lack of family-friendly businesses in the area, influenced by cultural norms.

Industries such as retail and waste management are projected to experience negative annual growth in 2024, likely due to the impact of e-commerce on traditional retail stores. Conversely, the healthcare and social service sectors are expected to see significant employment growth over the next year. Other rapidly growing industries in the region include entertainment, food services, information, finance, insurance, and real estate. Office and administrative support, along with food preparation services, are anticipated to have the most job openings in 2024, followed by manufacturing, transportation, and computer-related occupations.

Commuting trends reveal that only 3.5% of working Tennessee residents commute outside the state, while 24.8% commute outside their county. Additionally, 8% of the Tennessee workforce now work from home, nearly doubling since 2019. Counties near Alabama, such as Lincoln County, have the highest percentage of out-of-state workers. Despite being the 15th most populous state in the country, Tennessee has seen a natural decrease in population due to deaths outnumbering births. Furthermore, in 2022, foreign workers were nearly 6% more likely than native workers to be employed in production, transportation, and material moving occupations nationwide.

Tennessee county incomes in 2021 increased by 8% compared to 2020. The average per capita personal income for the state was $56,560, with only counties within Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), such as Williamson, Davidson, and Fayette County, exceeding this average. While all counties saw an increase in per capita income since 2021, many counties, including Wayne County, hovered around an average per capita income of $35,000 per year.

Despite high school graduation rates reaching a record high of 90.6% for the area, workers would benefit from obtaining short-term certifications to fill positions in manufacturing and transportation industries, such as commercial driving positions. Given the increased demand for medical workers, the state could benefit from providing incentives and affordability for occupations like nursing, respiratory therapists, MRI techs, medical doctors, social workers, and therapists. Major barriers to employment continue to include transportation, particularly in rural areas like the SMTN region, childcare shortages, and the benefits cliff.

d. Provide an analysis of workforce development activities, including education and training, in the region.
   i. Identify strengths and weaknesses of these workforce development activities, and;
   ii. Discuss the LWDB's capacity to provide workforce development activities to address the education and skill needs of the local workforce, including individuals with barriers to employment, and the employment needs of businesses.

The Technical College of Applied Technologies (TCATs) in the Southern Middle (SMTN) area are highly efficient and well-organized. The connections established by TCAT institutions with secondary schools and businesses are exemplary practices. Integrating AJC programs into these TCAT networks is essential for effective outreach to both clients and businesses across the region. Moreover, given the rural landscape of the SMTN area, personal relationships with clients, businesses, and institutions are notably strong and genuine. These robust connections enable us to respond swiftly and accurately to emerging trends and overcome barriers faced by workers in the area.

While the rural setting fosters genuine interpersonal connections, it also presents challenges for workers commuting to work due to lower wages and inadequate public transportation. To address this issue, the SMTN has collaborated with the South Central Area Transit Service (SCATS) program in the area, aiming to mitigate travel barriers for AJC customers. The SMTN LWDB is actively seeking additional grants and programs to provide funding to support the initiatives developed in partnership with SCATS.

Another significant barrier, prevalent statewide and nationwide, is the lack of affordable childcare. Despite initiatives like Title 1, Headstart, and Smart Steps programs offered by SCHRA to alleviate childcare costs, low wages for childcare workers contribute to a shortage of childcare facilities. Efforts to address childcare worker shortages through programs like Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP/TYEP) and National Dislocated Worker Grant (NDWG) may only marginally impact the labor shortage in childcare facilities. To address this issue comprehensively, substantial changes are needed at both state and federal levels to increase government funding for wage increases in the childcare workforce or encourage more family-friendly businesses to offer flexible schedules and company-funded daycare centers which will in-turn help to raise the local areas labor force participation rate (LFPR).

To meet the diverse needs of the area, in addition to leveraging statistical analysis from the WIRED Unit and Econovue, the LWDB maintains regular engagement with community stakeholders at local board meetings, Chambers of Commerce gatherings, TNECD meetings, Industrial Development Board Meetings, and local hiring events across all 13 SMTN counties. Insights gathered from these interactions inform our approach to identifying immediate and long-term needs of local businesses. Subsequently, we leverage this data to establish strategic partnerships with schools, community colleges, civic leaders, churches, and other community stakeholders to connect clients with educational programs, federal/state initiatives, and employment opportunities, thereby addressing barriers related

Support of State Initiatives:
   a. Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR)
       i. Describe how the LWDB will provide focused advocacy and engagement to special populations in effort to increase in the local LFPR.
       ii. What regional or local initiatives will the LWDB support or implement to positively impact LFRP efforts?

The SMLWDB has coordinated a collaborative approach to address the needs of special populations, with the aim of bolstering the local Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) through strategic planning, in partnership with the Middle TN Regional Planning Council, and through targeted initiatives. Since Spring 2021 and moving forward, Governor Lee has championed a statewide goal of increasing the LFPR by 2%. In response to this initiative, the Southern Middle Workforce area has mobilized alongside partners, employers, and stakeholders to actively pursue this objective.

The SMLWDB, along with AJC staff and partners, has undertaken deliberate efforts to intentionally outreach towards specific groups, including individuals aged 14-24, those with disabilities, homeless, underemployed, unemployed, and individuals re-entering the workforce after incarceration. These groups have been targeted due to the extended periods they have been out of the workforce, or in many cases, their lack of prior workforce experience. Additionally, outreach efforts extend to individuals with lower levels of education, lower income levels, and dislocated workers, with the aim of assisting short-term unemployed individuals in promptly rejoining the labor force. Notable initiatives contributing to the positive impact on the LFPR in the Southern Middle area include:

*Collaborate with the community to enhance marketing materials for available services. Utilizing the growing prevalence of technology in social media, deliberate efforts have been undertaken to expand outreach to a broader audience, with a specific focus on reaching youth, justice-involved individuals, veterans, and other special populations.

*Engaged with all high schools across the 13 SMTN counties through the SYEP program, aiming to empower youth to kick-start their career paths and develop resumes at an early age to mitigate barriers to employment. Additionally, close partnerships with youth populations in these schools support career exploration, short-term training, and paid work experiences with local employers.

*Currently forging partnerships with JAG TN in local high schools to capitalize on the job readiness training already integrated into their programs.

*Collaborating with Youth Villages, a foster youth agency in Marshall County, to establish enrollment pipelines and explore potential partnership opportunities for services and SYEP initiatives. Similar discussions are underway with the Rainbow Housing Assistance Corporation to establish enrollment pipelines and explore partnership opportunities.

*Secured several OOR grants to facilitate upskilling initiatives for inmates at Perry, Franklin,

b. Business Engagement Plan
   i. How will the local area implement the TDLWD-WFS Business Engagement Plan to redefine "business engagement" pursuant to the state-wide framework and provide streamlined solutions to employer customers?
   ii. How will the local area apply the seven pillars of the TDLWD-WFS Business Engagement Plan to the work of the Business Services Team?

The SMLWDB acknowledges and aligns with the State's and Middle TN RPCs' emphasis on fostering strong ties with businesses and establishing a robust workforce pipeline to meet industry demands. The implementation of the Business Engagement Plan (BEP) aims to prioritize Tennessee employers as pivotal "customers" of the workforce system. This involves forging consultative relationships with businesses, articulating a compelling value proposition, and tailoring programs and incentives to suit their needs. By establishing a Middle TN business services model as mentioned in the Middle TN Regional Plan, our goal is to standardize and streamline solutions across all workforce partners, ensuring a cohesive and effective approach to serving our business clientele.

In the realm of workforce development planning, the Business Engagement component presents significant potential for growth in the Southern Middle area. Often, our focus on individual clients may lead to a disconnect from the entities that enable their self-sufficiency. To address this, we are keen to adopt the insights and case management techniques provided by the state TOSS Unit, aiming to foster deeper, more authentic connections with businesses and cultivate exemplary practices. To effectively implement the BEP, Southern Middle will implement the seven foundational pillars of the plan by:

Pillar #1 - Adopting a Sector-Based Service Delivery Approach:
-BWD will help facilitate sector strategy implementation.
-Southern Middle will structure the local board membership around sector strategies and sector representation.
-Advocate that the Southern Middle Business Service Team outreach efforts align with sector strategies and the BEP.
-The SMLWDB ensures 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 SMLWDB will facilitate business life-cycle data (Econovue) training to align services with business needs in the local area.
- Support the tailoring of services to support businesses in various phases of their life-cycles.

c. Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)
  i. Describe how the LWDB will implement SYEP in the local area.
  ii. How will the LWDB leverage partnerships and current connections with both in-school and out-of-school youth, as well as employers, to increase SYEP participation and job placement?
  iii. Describe how the LWDB will conduct outreach to employers, as well as youth participants, to ensure Youth work experience is utilized year-round.

The Southern Middle Local Workforce Development Board (SMLWDB) will implement the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) in the local area through a comprehensive approach that involves several key steps:

1. Conducting a thorough assessment of the needs and priorities of local youth, employers, and community stakeholders to identify the most pressing workforce challenges and opportunities.

2. Establishing partnerships with local businesses, educational institutions, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and community groups to support the SYEP initiative. These partnerships will provide opportunities for work placements, mentorship, training, and support services for participating in-school and out-of-school youth.

3. Continuing targeted outreach campaigns to reach youth in the community and encourage their participation in the SYEP. This may involve collaboration with schools, youth organizations, social service agencies, CBOs, FBOs, and other community partners to identify and recruit eligible candidates.

4. Matching youth with suitable work placements based on their interests, skills, and career goals. Providing pre-employment training, orientation, and ongoing support to ensure that participants are prepared for their roles and have a positive experience in the workplace.

5. Continuing to monitor the progress of SYEP participants throughout the entirety of the program to ensure that they are meeting expectations and addressing any challenges or barriers they may encounter. Providing ongoing support, mentorship, and guidance to help participants succeed in their work placements.

6. Conducting regular evaluations and assessments to measure the impact and effectiveness of the SYEP. Gathering feedback from participants, employers, and other stakeholders to identify areas for improvement and make adjustments to the program as needed.

By implementing these steps, the SMLWDB can effectively administer the SYEP in the local area, providing valuable opportunities for youth to gain work experience, develop skills, and build connections within the community.

The SMLWDB will persist in leveraging our partnerships to amplify SYEP participation and job placements throughout the local area, employing collaborative planning and strategic approaches to increase in-school and out-of-school youth job placements. We have identified ■

   d. AJC Operations Improvement: AJC Assessment
      i.   Provide an analysis of the KPMG assessment study results specific to the local area.
      ii.   How does the LWDB plan to incorporate the recommendations and adjust the local service strategy if necessary?

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 SMLWDB can take to improve Title I and Title II services include:

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

*Improving 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.

*Measuring 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.

e. Infrastructure
  i. Describe how the LWDB plans to implement an innovative and effective funding structure to incorporate the blending and braiding of resources.
  ii. What additional funding sources, beyond WIOA formula dollars, does the LWDB plan to seek?
  iii. How does the LWDB plan to staff and administer any programs funded through non-WIOA sources?

The Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB) and the One-Stop Operator (OSO) meticulously monitor each referral exchanged among program staff and actively promote the benefits of integrating their programs by facilitating as many co-enrollments as feasible (involving Title 1, Adult Education (AE), Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), SNAP Employment and Training (E&T), Office of Reentry, Tennessee Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), etc.). The SMLWDB aims to implement an innovative and effective funding structure by strategically incorporating the blending and braiding of resources. This involves:

1. Assessment of available funding sources, including federal, state, and local grants.

2. Identifying opportunities for blending and braiding resources across different programs and initiatives. This plan will outline specific objectives, target areas, and potential synergies among various funding streams.

3. Developing partnerships with other organizations, agencies, and stakeholders involved in workforce development. This includes coordinating efforts with educational institutions, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and businesses to maximize resources and leverage expertise.

4. Exploring flexible funding mechanisms that allow for the blending and braiding of resources to address the diverse needs of job seekers and employers.

5. Continuing to prioritize outcomes and performance metrics to ensure that funding is allocated effectively and efficiently. By focusing on measurable results, such as job placement rates, skills attainment, and wage increases, the LWDB can demonstrate the impact of blended and braided resources on the local workforce.

6. Continuously monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the funding structure and make adjustments as needed to optimize resource allocation and achieve desired outcomes. This may involve regular reviews of funding sources, monitoring of program performance, and soliciting feedback from stakeholders to inform future decisions.

Apart from the annual SYEP (TYEP) and the NDWG funding, the SMLWDB is open to exploring additional funding avenues to support initiatives focused on our target populations and those hardest to serve. This includes seeking funding opportunities from various sources

Strategic Planning Elements:

    a. Describe the LWDB's strategic vision and goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce, including youth and individuals with barriers to employment.

        i. How do the local area's workforce development programs, including programs provided by partner agencies, support this strategic vision?

        ii. How will the local area, working with the entities that carry out the core programs, align available resources to achieve the strategic vision and goals?

The SMLWDB embodies the same vision that is cast in the TN State Plan, which is to have the nation's premier workforce system. Our local board continues to leverage our existing assets to help our existing businesses expand and remain competitive. The services we provide have allowed our participants to successfully enter the workforce despite numerous barriers to employment. Our strategic vision revolves around preparing an educated and skilled workforce, catering to both youth and individuals facing barriers to employment and this encompasses several overarching goals:

* Implementing initiatives focused on youth development to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge for future success. This includes programs like the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) and Tennessee Youth Employment Program (TYEP) aimed at providing valuable work experience and career exploration opportunities.

* Facilitating access to skills training programs tailored to meet the demands of the local job market. This involves collaborating with educational institutions, vocational training centers, and industry partners to offer relevant training courses and certifications.

*Addressing barriers to employment faced by individuals, such as lack of education, limited work experience, those with disabilities, Homeless, unemployed, underemployed, or justice-involved individuals. The SMLWDB seeks to provide support services, mentorship programs, and resources to help overcome these obstacles and facilitate workforce participation.

*Strengthening partnerships with employers to ensure alignment between workforce development efforts and industry needs. This includes engaging employers in the design of training programs, facilitating work-based learning opportunities, and promoting the hiring of individuals from diverse backgrounds.

The enrollment objectives established by the state for the SYEP grant enable us to engage with students as young as 14 years old, introducing them to the SYEP grant and other Title I programs designed for individuals facing barriers to employment. We have established strong partnerships with organizations such as JAG TN, Special Education, AE, VR, and CTE programs across our 13 county area. Leveraging these connections, we aim to extend our reach to all Work-Based Learning programs within the local area. Additionally, ongoing meetings with Youth Villages will facilitate the establishment of a Title I Referral Pipeline for

b. Describe the LWDB's goals relating to performance accountabilities measures. How do these measures support regional economic growth and self-sufficiency?

The SMLWDB strategically aligns its performance goals with state and federal measures to ensure the effectiveness of its workforce development initiatives. These measures are tailored to strengthen regional economic growth and self-sufficiency by aligning workforce efforts with business demands, enhancing workforce skills, and facilitating sustainable employment. To achieve these objectives, the SMLWDB supports the following initiatives:

*Prioritizing the placement of individuals into employment and improving job retention rates.

*Elevating earnings and wage growth for participants in our workforce development programs.

*Increasing the attainment of relevant skills and industry-recognized credentials which ensures that individuals are better equipped to meet the demands of local industries, thereby enhancing their employability and contributing to economic growth.

*Enhancing placement rates in high-demand occupations and sectors within the Middle TN Region as well as in the local area.

*Improving satisfaction levels among businesses engaged in workforce development by providing employers with skilled qualified workers thus meeting the needs of our local and sometimes regional (we share several businesses regionally such as Nissan, Tyson, and NHC Healthcare) businesses.

*Contributing to reductions in local unemployment rates.

*Increasing the overall LFPR within the LWDA.

*Ensuring alignment of workforce programs with the present and future needs of local industries.

*Access to customized training and education programs for skill enhancement.

*Promoting equitable access to workforce development opportunities and prioritizing the inclusion of diverse demographic groups and priority populations.

By diligently pursuing and achieving these performance objectives, the SMLWDB plays a pivotal role in cultivating a resilient and proficient workforce, fostering an environment conducive to business expansion, and ultimately supporting regional economic growth and self-sufficiency. These goals underscore a comprehensive approach to workforce development that addresses individual and community requirements while nurturing a vibrant and competitive regional economy.

c. Provide a description of how the LWDB will support the strategy identified in the State Plan and work with the entities carrying out core programs and other workforce development programs, including those authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act to support service alignment.

The SMLWDB will actively support the strategy outlined in the State Plan by collaborating with entities responsible for core programs and other workforce development initiatives, including those sanctioned by the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, to ensure alignment of services. Beyond the performance goals required under WIOA, the State Plan has identified five strategic goals that the SMLWDB will focus on as we strive to provide meaningful and safe employment to all Tennesseans and a skilled and qualified workforce for our employees. The SMLWDB supports the strategic and operational goals the department has identified for the purpose of achieving the vision based on the workforce and the State's economic conditions, workforce, and workforce development activities by:

Goal 1: Increase/Sustain Competitive Labor Force Participation Rate
-Support for those identified as having the most significant barriers to employment or "those hardest to serve".
-Implementing uniform service strategies that support the Middle RPC as they continue to review the supportive service policies of each LWDA to ensure alignment and consistency in service provision wherever feasible.
-Expanding apprenticeship opportunities in the top industry sectors.
-Increasing enrollments in the SYEP (will also be called TYEP).

Goal 2: Expand Data Research and Analytics
-Utilizing the WIRED Unit to gather and analyze labor market data, demographic trends, and other relevant information to identify emerging opportunities and challenges within the region's economy.

Goal 3: Implement an Agency-Wide Business Engagement Plan
-Working with the BWD to help facilitate sector strategy implementation.
-Refocusing the efforts of the Business Service Team and partner with sector groups and taskforces to better understand employer needs and to develop solutions.
-Monitoring performance measures by tracking LFPR, job placement rates of parters like AE and VR, employer penetration and retention rates, employer satisfaction surveys or feedback assessments, etc.
-Utilizing the business cycle framework components to provide a comprehensive approach to supporting business engagement across various stages and tailor services to match the cycle.
-Facilitating partnerships, acting as intermediaries and conveners connecting businesses with local educational institutions, training providers, and other relevant stakeholders.
-Developing training opportunities for WIOA Core Partners that address Business Engagement strategies and objectives.
-Reorganizing Business Engagement Teams that includes representation of all WIOA partners and define all partners roles and responsibilities to form a more cohesive and consistent model.
-Revitalizing and promoting the Virtual AJC to service job seekers anywhere.

Local One-Stop System:

    a. Describe the LWDA's progressive service strategy, incorporating updates resulting from the AJC Assessment, and how the annual Partner's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will support the implementation of this strategy.

The progressive service strategy for the SMLWDB is to empower employers, individuals, and communities to prosper and grow the region's economy through a workforce development system that is inherently business driven, customer focused, seamless, efficient, transparent, and financially accountable. Education continues to be a top priority in Tennessee. The focus on workforce development makes it clear that the SMLWDB along with the State of Tennessee is supporting the development of a better-educated and highly trained workforce on a long-term basis. This strategy incorporates updates resulting from the AJC Assessment, which involves a comprehensive evaluation of the American Job Center's (AJC) performance, strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. Key components of the progressive service strategy include:

*Jobs and Economic Development
-Identify, assess, and certify skills for successful careers.
-Promote economic development by connecting workforce development with job creation and growth.
-Increase business engagements with the workforce development system.
-Expand programs of study that bring together a sequence of career-focused courses that start in high school and extend through college.
-Increase work-based learning and work experience opportunities.

*Education & Workforce Development
-Leverage resources, including WIOA statewide and local funding and other non-WIOA funds, and partnerships across agencies and programs to aid in developing more seamless paths from training into the workplace.
-Increase the number of credentials and certificates.
-The SMLWDB, in collaboration with American Job Centers, Adult Education, and Vocational Rehabilitation will be providing a process for virtual access for all participants to access services start-to-finish via virtual platforms.

*Integration of Technology
-Leverage technology to enhance service delivery and efficiency within the AJC
-Implementing digital platforms for job search assistance, skills assessments, and virtual training programs.
-Utilizes data analytics to track performance metrics and identify areas for improvement.

*Continuous Improvement
-Eliminating duplication and leveraging dollars to provide more opportunities to existing job seekers and the emerging workforce.
-Improve job search and placement services for target populations and those with barriers to

b. Identify programs that are part of the local area's one-stop system, and describe the role and resource contribution of each, including:
   i. Core programs;
   ii. Additional partner programs, including those that support alignment under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006; and
   iii. Other workforce development programs, if applicable.

Title I, AE, Wagner-Peyser, VR, and SCSEP programs under WIOA collaborate daily to deliver comprehensive AJC services to eligible customers. Title I programs encompass a wide array of supportive services such as travel assistance, childcare, dental and medical aid, car repair assistance, as well as financial support linked to training or employment, including tuition assistance and work experience hours through initiatives like NDWG, SYEP, and the Title I Youth Program.

Adult Education offers Hi-SET preparation, basic education support, and English language learning courses, along with assistance in educational test preparation (TABE, CASAS, post-secondary entrance exams), and digital literacy training.

Wagner-Peyser staff specialize in resume preparation, job search assistance, interview coaching, and soft skills development. With the implementation of the new Business Engagement Plan, Wagner-Peyser staff will also serve as Business Case Managers alongside board associated Business Services Team members.

Vocational Rehabilitation provides services similar to Title I, focusing on skill enhancement through education and on-site guided work experiences for those individuals with disabilities. Additionally, VR assists individuals with disabilities by connecting them with medical professionals and financial resources to overcome limitations such as medical treatments or housing expenses, ensuring stability throughout training and employment opportunities.

SCSEP offers support to customers aged 55 and above by providing paid work experiences tailored to their needs and supplemental income to complement government benefits. Apart from WIOA Title programs, AJCs also host SNAP E&T, RESEA, and TAA programs. SNAP E&T offers services akin to Title I but specifically targets customers receiving SNAP benefits, while RESEA provides guidance to unemployment recipients, and TAA offers comprehensive support to workers displaced due to business relocations overseas.

Furthermore, unofficial partner programs include High School JAG TN, Career and Technical Education (CTE), Work-Based Learning (WBL), and Special Education (SPED) programs across most of the 13 counties in the SMTN area. Close collaboration with our four TCATs, Columbia State Community College, Motlow State Community College, UT Southern, and the Southern Middle Higher Education Center facilitates the integration of WIOA funding resources with various short-term training grants and scholarships offered by the colleges. Other workforce initiatives include state-based programs like OOR, NDWG, and SYEP.

c. Describe how the LWDB will support state plan strategies and work with the entities carrying out programs in the one-stop system to coordinate and support service alignment.

The SMLWDB is committed to supporting the strategies outlined in the state plan and collaborating with entities responsible for implementing programs within the one-stop system to ensure coordinated and aligned services. The SMLWDB will achieve this by:

*Actively engaging with key stakeholders involved in the implementation of workforce development programs within the one-stop system. This includes collaborating with our core partners, state agencies, local governments, economic development agencies, educational institutions, community and faith-based organizations, and employers to align services with the goals outlined in the state plan.

*Continuing to keep open communication channels which will be used to facilitate information sharing among entities carrying out core programs in the one-stop system. This includes organizing meetings, workshops, and round-tables where stakeholders can exchange updates, best practices, and challenges encountered in service delivery.

*Integrating services across different programs within the one-stop system to provide seamless support to job seekers and employers. This may involve streamlining referral processes, sharing resources, and coordinating service delivery with our core programs to ensure individuals receive comprehensive assistance tailored to their needs.

*Investing in training and capacity building initiatives for core partner staff involved in delivering workforce development services. This includes providing training on program requirements, best practices in service delivery, and emerging trends in the labor market to enhance the effectiveness of service provision.

*Utilizing performance metrics and feedback from stakeholders to assess the impact of programs and make data-driven decisions and adjustments as needed.

*Conducting regular evaluations of core programs and services within the one-stop system to measure their effectiveness and identify opportunities for continuous improvement. This may involve soliciting feedback from participants, conducting surveys, and analyzing outcome data to ensure services are meeting the needs of job seekers and employers.

By actively supporting state plan strategies and fostering collaboration among entities within the one-stop system, the SMLWDB aims to enhance service alignment, improve outcomes for job seekers and employers, and contribute to the overall success of the workforce development system.

Workforce Development and Career Pathways

    a. Describe how the LWDB will work with providers to facilitate the development of career pathways, including co-enrollment in core programs and academic training programs when appropriate.

The partners within the Southern LWDA encompass various WIOA Core entities such as Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs, along with Adult Education, Wagner-Peyser, and Vocational Rehabilitation. Through their respective programs, these partners offer a wide range of educational and training activities aimed at engaging individuals facing barriers to employment. Co-located and coordinated services are provided across the 13-county region, facilitated by established partnerships with local school districts and Career and Technical Education Directors to develop and implement in-demand career pathways.

The Career Service Provider, South Central TN Human Resource Agency (SCHRA), incentivizes youth earning their High School Equivalency Diploma through the Adult Education program, serving as a motivational tool for achieving self-sufficiency and exploring further education and training opportunities. Vocational Rehabilitation, housed within the AJC, and the Ticket to Work Representative collaborate to leverage funding and options, addressing barriers to employment and education, particularly for youth with disabilities.

All Southern Middle school districts offer Career and Technical Education (CTE) or Career Pathway courses, with AJCs providing support as needed. Dual enrollment courses enable students to earn high school and college credit simultaneously, while the TN Pathway program enhances opportunities and guidance for transitioning from secondary schooling to post-secondary education or job training. Paid work experience opportunities are also available for at-risk in-school youth to develop soft skills.

The Department of Education maintains an industry certification policy for high school students, promoting certifications endorsed by Tennessee industries. These stackable certifications are integrated into program pathways to ensure seamless learning progression. The SMLWDB prioritizes access to postsecondary credentials by promoting high school diplomas or equivalency attainment and referring participants lacking diplomas to Adult Education services. Moreover, a demand-driven system identifies training programs leading to credentials essential for business needs, enhancing alignment between workforce training and industry demands.

b. Describe how the LWDB will work with providers to improve access to activities leading to recognized postsecondary credentials.
   i. Explain how the LWDB will ensure these credentials are transferable to other occupations or industries ("portable").
   ii. Explain how the LWDB will ensure these credentials are part of a sequence of credentials that can be accumulated over time ("stackable")? If yes, please explain.

The SMLWDB will work closely with education and training providers to enhance access to activities leading to recognized postsecondary credentials through several strategies:

*Establishing and maintaining partnerships with our post-secondary institutions, technical schools, and training centers to expand access to credentialing programs. By working together, we can identify gaps in available credentials and partner together to develop new programs to meet the needs of local businesses.

*Utilizing labor market information to identify high-demand industries and occupations to ensure that individuals are obtaining credentials that are relevant and in demand by employers.

*Exploring funding opportunities with partners to support individuals in accessing credentialing programs which could include scholarships, grants, or other financial assistance to help cover costs with obtaining credentials.

*Providing intensive career counseling and guidance to individuals to help them navigate the credentialing process. This includes identifying appropriate credentialing programs based on their career goals, skill level, and interests, as well as providing information on the potential pathways for advancement and further education.

*Collaborating with training providers to ensure that their programs meet high standards of quality and accreditation which includes verifying that programs are recognized by industry stakeholders and accrediting bodies, ensuring that individuals are receiving credentials that are valued, respected and in-demand in the local workforce system.

The SMLWDB will work with training providers and post-secondary institutes to ensure that the obtained credentials are transferable to other occupations or industries. This involves aligning credentialing programs with industry standards and best practices to enhance their recognition and portability across various sectors. The SMLWDB will advocate for credentialing programs that emphasize core competencies and skills applicable across multiple industries, thereby increasing their transferability.

To ensure that credentials are part of a sequence that can be accumulated over time, the SMLWDB promotes stackable credentialing pathways. This involves coordinating with education and training providers to develop clear pathways that allow individuals to progress from entry-level credentials to more advanced certifications or degrees. The SMLWDB will identify and support programs that offer stackable credentials, ensuring that each credential

Access to Employment and Services:

a. Describe how the LWDB and its partners will expand access to employment, training, education, and supportive services for eligible individuals, particularly individuals with barriers to employment.

The SMLWDB supports the strategies under the Governor's Drive to 55 Initiative. Activities will align education and training with the needs of business and industry by assisting individuals in accessing training opportunities. The SMLWDB is working towards achieving the initiative's goal of 55% of Tennesseans earning a postsecondary credential by 2025. Strategies to improve access to activities leading to a recognized postsecondary credential, academic or industry recognized, thereby prepare workers for in-demand industry sectors and occupations include:

*Approving in-demand training opportunities to be included on the statewide Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) as WIOA fundable programs.
*Encouraging all job seekers to consider these programs as career options by offering assessments, opportunities, and materials noting local employment opportunities.
*Partnering with employers and high schools on career pathway opportunities in employer driven training programs.
*Considering options to partner with training providers and neighboring local workforce development areas to "buy" classes offered by training providers so that dislocated workers, adults, and disadvantaged youth have an opportunity to train in the high-demand occupation without a delay due to a waiting list.
*Leveraging assets such as TN Promise, Pathways, and ReConnect in order to increase capacity and provide integrated services to increase skill development and educational attainment of area residents.

Education and training services offered include:
*Needs-based scholarships for post-secondary training
*Transportation stipends for postsecondary training and work experience
*On-the-Job Training and Incumbent Worker Training grants
*Apprenticeship programs

Needs-based scholarships issued through Individual Training Account (ITA) for postsecondary training, are managed in the AJCs by members of the Career Development Services Team. A thorough assessment and verification is completed to ensure the training plan will lead to employability in an in-demand occupation. Staff then obligates funds which is documented in Jobs4TN to allow fiscal staff and the SMLWDB to have a clearer picture of funds available and projected expenditures for the program year. A priority of service policy is in place to ensure the most in need receive services first.

While brick-and-mortar AJCs are valued for cost effectiveness, availability of resources to customers, and visibility in the community, Southern Middle also recognizes the need to bring the services to the customers who may not be able to visit the established AJC given the large service area and transportation barriers. In order to bring the services to the people, the TDLWD's Mobile AJC is utilized to serve remote areas and individuals who are unable to

b. Provide a description of how the LWDB will provide services to priority populations as outlined in the State Plan, including:

    i. Directions given to the One-Stop System Operator to ensure priority for adult career and training services is given to recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient.

    ii. How the LWDB will determine priority populations and how to best serve them, along with any other state requirements.

WIOA is designed to help job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. In the absence of additional state or federal instructions, the SMLWDB's Adult Eligibility and Priority Policy establishes a priority system that gives priority to these groups while maintaining an opportunity for Career Services to other eligible adults. This policy establishes guidelines to ensure recipients of public assistance, other low income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient are given priority to receive services under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Such guidelines will be consistent with WIOA Section 134(c)(3)(E) and shall allow for services to other unemployed or underemployed individuals who have at least one (1) barrier to employment. Veterans and eligible spouses receive priority of service under WIOA programs. However, WIOA statutorily requires that recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient are given priority to receive services. Therefore, the SMLWDB requires that priority must be provided in the following order:

-First, to veterans and eligible spouses who are also recipients of public assistance, other low income individuals, or individuals who are basic skills deficient.
-Second, to non-veterans and eligible spouses who are recipients of public assistance, other low- income individuals, or individuals who are basic skills deficient.
-Third, to veterans and eligible spouses who are unemployed or underemployed and have at least one barrier to employment.
-Last, to non-veterans and eligible spouses who are unemployed or underemployed and have at least one barrier to employment.

The Title I Team and the OSO rigorously uphold Title I Federal Compliance regulations under the guidance of the board. Adherence to all eligibility criteria ensures that Title I enrollments prioritize Veterans as the foremost category, followed by individuals identified as low-income and/or basic skills deficient, and finally, individuals facing standalone barriers such as justice involvement, single or young parents, high school dropouts, and the unemployed. Given the inherent overlap among these barriers, a combination of co-enrollments, outreach efforts at job fairs and schools, and word-of-mouth referrals naturally directs priority populations to our AJC, reflecting the SMLWDBs enforced policies.

To optimize services for priority populations, the SMLWDB regularly monitors enrollments an

c. Describe how the local area will facilitate access to services though the One-Stop delivery system, including remote areas, though the use of technology.

By leveraging technology, the SMLWDB can provide access to a comprehensive array of services provided by the One-Stop delivery system, even for those residents residing in remote areas.

The local area will utilize the following technological platforms:

*The Mobile AJC has been an excellent One-Stop Delivery system to local high schools, post-secondary schools, job fairs and at local employer worksites. The Mobile AJC is crucial since it is able to bring the Internet to rural communities that often struggle with this barrier.

*Working with our CSP to use QR codes in order to allow customers throughout the local area to sign up for services directly. Using the QR codes also allow staff to share workloads and insure that customers are contacted in a timely manner to enroll for services.

*The Virtual AJC offers access to services and programs round-the-clock and from any place. Individuals can tap into employment support and other offerings provided by AJC collaborators. It furnishes identical information found at a physical AJC and is accessible via desktop or mobile devices, guiding users through the necessary steps to engage in AJC initiatives.

*AJC staff are ready and available to assist clients over the phone (either via call or text) or via Zoom/MS Teams in order to guide clients remotely through the enrollment process, applications, job search software, resume construction, interview prep, post-secondary exploration and career planning. When it comes to submitting paperwork, several WIOA programs also use DocuSign and/or encrypted emailing tools to complete paperwork remotely and securely.

*Utilize social media platforms to share information regarding AJC services, as well as career and training prospects. These platforms are leveraged to promote resource fairs, job fairs, and other events in the local area and regionally. The websites of our CSP allows remote communities to inquire about services and provide feedback.

By employing these technological solutions, the local area aims to ensure equitable access to services through the One-Stop delivery system, regardless of geographical location.

d. Describe how AJCs are implementing and transitioning to an integrated technology enabled intake care management information system.

The SMLWDB strength lies in partnerships, yet managing business referrals and relationships across programs poses challenges. With multiple entry points and disparate platforms, tracking services to employers in real-time proves difficult, leading to confusion and fatigue among employers. To address this, efforts will concentrate on establishing a unified approach to managing business relationships through a contact management platform, namely the Zendesk CRM system.

Services to employers will leverage existing business platforms alongside the CRM, aligning with occupational demands and generating leads for sector strategy employers. Case managing employers as customers involves several crucial steps, including creating personalized solutions aligned with each employer's objectives.

Regular engagement with employers will gather feedback and promptly address concerns. Close collaboration with various staff ad partners will ensure seamless delivery of solutions and timely issue resolution. Continual assessment of strategies will drive necessary adjustments to enhance the overall experience and strengthen business relationships.

Utilization of current business services platforms, coupled with the CRM, will be instrumental in acquiring leads for sector strategy employers while aligning with occupational demands and providing them with qualified job seekers.

e. Provide a description and assessment of the type and availability of programs and services provided to adults and dislocated workers in the local area.

WIOA programs and services provided to adults and dislocated workers in local workforce areas vary in type and availability, aiming to address barriers to employment and individual needs and circumstances. These programs are designed to enhance employability, provide training opportunities, and facilitate reemployment for individuals facing barriers to workforce entry or those who have lost their jobs due to economic shifts or unforeseen circumstances. Our local area offers a wide range of services to eligible customers that can include items listed below:

*One of the primary services offered under WIOA is job search assistance, providing individuals with resources, tools, and guidance to effectively search for employment opportunities. This may include resume writing workshops, interview preparation, soft skills development, and job matching services.

*WIOA programs offer access to various training and education opportunities tailored to the needs of adults and dislocated workers. This can include vocational training, apprenticeships, on-the-job training, and access to adult education and literacy programs to enhance skills and qualifications.

*Career counseling and guidance services help individuals assess their skills, interests, and career goals, guiding them towards suitable career pathways. This may involve career assessments, individualized career planning, and exploration of available job opportunities.

*Supportive services to assist individuals in overcoming barriers to employment. This may include access to transportation assistance, childcare support, financial literacy programs, and assistance with obtaining work-related tools or clothing.

*Dislocated workers receive specialized reemployment services (RESEA) aimed at helping them transition back into the workforce. These services may include job search workshops, skills assessments, and targeted job placement assistance.

*WIOA funds various workforce development programs implemented by our local workforce board and partner agencies. These programs can focus on building industry-specific skills, addressing skill gaps, and preparing individuals for employment in high-demand sectors.

The availability of these programs and services may vary depending on factors such as funding allocation, regional priorities, and partnerships with local employers and educational institutions. Additionally, access to WIOA programs may be subject to eligibility criteria, such as income levels, employment status, and specific barriers to workforce entry.

Overall, WIOA programs and services play a critical role in supporting adults and dislocated workers in local workforce areas by providing them with the necessary resources, training, and support to secure meaningful employment and advance their careers.

f. Describe how workforce activities will be coordinated with the provision of transportation, including public transportation, and appropriate supportive services in the local area.

In the Southern Middle area, lack of transportation and public transportation continues to be a significant barrier to employment for our rural county customers. The coordination of workforce activities with transportation provision and supportive services is essential to ensure accessibility and effectiveness for job seekers. Outlined below are several approaches to achieve this coordination:

*Partnering with local government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and employers to establish transportation assistance programs. These programs may include subsidized transportation vouchers and shuttle services to job fairs or training sites.

*The SMLWDB created a policy that allows eligible participants access to paid SCATS transportation services for activities directly related to school, training, or employment. The local board continues to look for other funding sources that will broaden SCATS transportation availability to a wider range of customers.

*In addition to transportation, supportive services such as childcare, relocation services, dental and optical assistance, books, health physical, tutoring, counseling services, drug and background checks, GE/HISET testing fees, and certain licensing fees should be coordinated with workforce activities. This holistic approach addresses multiple barriers to employment and enhances the overall well-being of job seekers.

g. Provide a description of services available to veterans and eligible spouses, to include priority of service and the use of available Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) staff.

The Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) program provides federal funding to hire dedicated staff to provide individualized career- and training-related services to eligible veterans and eligible spouses with significant barriers to employment as well as other authorized populations, and help employers fill their workforce needs with job-seeking veterans. Veterans and eligible persons have access to a range of specialized services tailored to their needs within the workforce system. Priority of service is accorded to veterans, ensuring they receive precedence in accessing the available resources and assistance. These services are often facilitated by dedicated Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) staff, who specialize in providing employment-related support to veterans. The services offered to veterans and eligible spouses may include:

Employment Counseling: Veterans receive personalized counseling to explore career options, develop job search strategies, and enhance their employability skills.

Job Search Assistance: Assistance is provided to veterans in searching for suitable employment opportunities, including help with resume writing, interview preparation, and job matching.

Training and Education: Veterans may access various training programs and educational opportunities to acquire new skills or upgrade existing ones, with the aim of enhancing their career prospects.

Referral to Supportive Services: Veterans are connected to supportive services such as transportation aid, healthcare resources, and counseling services to address any barriers to employment they may face.

Priority Access to Employment Opportunities: Veterans receive priority access to job openings and recruitment events, ensuring they have enhanced opportunities to secure employment.

The JVSG funding supports the Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist position, Local Veterans' Employment Representative (LVER) staff, and Consolidated Position staff in the AJC network. DVOP specialists provide individualized career services to eligible veterans and eligible spouses experiencing significant barriers to employment, as well as other additional populations authorized by the Secretary, with an emphasis on assisting veterans who are economically or educationally disadvantaged. Veterans facing these barriers include veterans experiencing homelessness and vocational rehabilitation clients. LVER staff conducts outreach to employers to advocate for the hiring of veterans. They also work with businesses, contractors, and employer organizations to develop career opportunities for veterans. Consolidated Position staff serve in a dual role as a DVOP specialist and an LVER.

h. What initiatives will the LWDB implement to best serve individuals who have been justice involved?

Southern Middle is continually working to improve the local re-entry program by utilizing funding streams that assist in returning justice involved individuals into the workforce by reducing barriers to successful re-entry. This will reduce recidivism by helping individuals return to productive lives and compete for workforce opportunities. To best serve individuals who have been justice-involved, the local workforce board has implemented several initiatives tailored to address our unique needs and challenges.

*Partnering with two of our local TCATs to provide Certified Production Tech training to participants while incarcerated and partnering with local area employers to hire those participants who have completed the training once released or in a work release program.

*AJC staff are partnering with Day Reporting Centers to come in on orientation day and meet with new participants and enroll into services.

*Engaging with employers to raise awareness and promote the benefits of hiring justice involved individuals and encourage them to provide second chance opportunities. Also, work with employers to create felon friendly hiring events and job fairs.

*Partnering with South Central TN Workforce Alliance as a Second Chance Partner to offer Serve Safe certifications in multiple county jails funded with Office of Reentry grants.

*Providing assistance with expungement clinics to help justice-involved individuals overcome barriers to employment and education. We partner with legal aid organizations to offer free or low-cost legal services to eligible individuals.

*Offering wrap around supportive services to address barriers to employment such as transportation assistance, childcare subsidies, tools, uniforms, etc.

*Continuing to provide access to Adult Education services to help justice involved individuals improve their basic skills, obtain a high school equivalency diploma (GED), or pursue further education and training opportunities.

By implementing these initiatives, we can effectively serve justice-involved individuals, reduce recidivism, and promote successful reintegration into the workforce. These efforts contribute to building safer, stronger, and more inclusive communities for all residents.

i. Describe any MOU agreements in place to enhance the quality and availability of services to people with disabilities, such as cross training to staff, technical assistance, or methods of sharing information.

The SMLWDB has established a MOU with the WIOA Core Partners and other various partner organizations and agencies to improve the quality and availability of services for individuals with disabilities. This MOU facilitates collaboration, coordination, and the sharing of resources to ensure that people with disabilities receive comprehensive support tailored to their needs. Some key components of this MOUs include:

*Outlines provisions for cross-training initiatives, wherein staff members from different organizations receive training on disability-related issues, best practices, and service delivery techniques. This cross-training ensures that all personnel involved in serving individuals with disabilities possess the necessary knowledge and skills to provide effective assistance.

*Technical assistance and consultation services provided by experts in the field of disability services. This assistance may cover areas such as accessibility assessments, accommodation strategies, and compliance with disability-related regulations and guidelines.

*Establishes protocols for the sharing of information between partner organizations to facilitate seamless service delivery. This includes sharing data on client needs, service utilization, and outcomes to ensure coordinated support and avoid duplication of efforts.

*Clear referral instructions are established within the MOUs to facilitate the seamless transition of individuals with disabilities between different service providers. This ensures that individuals receive uninterrupted support as they move through various stages of their employment or training journey.

*Outlines the process for coordinated service delivery, wherein partner organizations work together to develop individualized service plans that address the unique needs and goals of individuals with disabilities. This collaborative approach ensures that services are integrated and responsive to the diverse needs of the individual.

Overall, the MOU plays a critical role in enhancing the effectiveness and accessibility of services for people with disabilities by fostering collaboration, sharing knowledge, and promoting coordinated services across multiple agencies and organizations within the local workforce development system.

j. Describe how One-Stop System Operators and One-Stop partners will comply with the nondiscrimination requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) (section188), and applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.) regarding:

  i. The physical and programmatic accessibility of facilities, programs, and services;

  ii. Technology and materials for individuals with disabilities; and

  iii. Providing staff training and support for addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities.

  iv. Describe the roles and resource contributions of the One-Stop partners related to the nondiscrimination requirements of WIOA (section 188), and applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.).

One Stop Operators (OSOs) and partners remain in compliance with ADA through regulary scheduled audits. OSO and partners ensure that their facilities, programs, and services are physically and programmatically accessible to individuals with disabilities. This includes providing wheelchair ramps, accessible parking spaces, and signage, as well as ensuring that staff are trained to assist individuals with disabilities and that all program materials are available in accessible formats such as braille or large print. OSOs and partners also ensure that their technology platforms and materials are accessible to individuals with disabilities. This may involve using assistive technologies such as screen readers, captioning for videos, and accessible website design to ensure that online resources and materials are usable by all individuals, regardless of disability. Assistive technology training is required on an annual basis to all staff members to insure that all resource rooms are prepared to serve these special populations. AJC staff and partners receive training on disability awareness, communication techniques, and reasonable accommodations so that they are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide respectful and effective services to individuals with disabilities. The OSO works with experts in the field and with our VR partners to create collaborative trainings related to customers with disabilities and these training are being conducted at the Southern Middle Quarterly Partner Meetings where operations are suspended and all AJC staff and partners attend.

Through the local MOU, all partners agree that they will comply fully with the non-discrimination and equal opportunity provisions of: (1) Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Section 188, (2) Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq), (3) Nontraditional Employment for Women Act of 1991, (4) Civil Rights of 1964 Title VI (as amended), (5) Rehabilitation Act of 1973 Section 504 (as amended), (6) Age Discrimination Act of 1967 (as amended), and (7) Education Amendments of 1972 Title IX (as amended). Reasonable accommodations, made according to the individual's need, are provided for all aspects of a customer's experience in the AJCs, such as during application/registration for, and provision of aid, benefits, services, and training to ensure that participants receive equal benefits from the program or activity, will be able to compete fairly in educational work settings, and in general, to

Business Engagement:

    a. Describe how the LWDB will utilize the Business Engagement Plan to provide consistent messaging and services to local area business and industry.

The SMLWDB is committed to aligning our local objectives and priorities with the Business Engagement Plan (BEP), ensuring seamless alignment between the messaging and services offered to businesses and our region's strategies for growth and prosperity. We will seamlessly integrate the BEP into existing or planned initiatives pertaining to economic development and workforce investment. This may entail incorporating specific elements of the plan into broader programs or initiatives aimed at bolstering employers and enriching the local workforce, while supporting the priorities and goals outlined in the regional plan for Middle Tennessee's workforce and the strategic elements in the State Plan.

Moreover, we will customize our messaging and services to cater to the unique needs and characteristics of employers within our area. This could involve tailoring communication strategies, designing specialized training programs, or offering support services tailored to address specific industry sectors, workforce challenges, or economic opportunities.

Utilizing the upcoming CRM Zendesk system, the SMLWDB will enable the local board, the BWD, and AJC staff to track all service efforts directed towards employers in real-time. Our primary focus will be on establishing a unified approach to managing employer relationships through this contact management platform, thereby streamlining processes and minimizing employer fatigue.

By harnessing the power of the Business Engagement Plan and integrating it seamlessly into our local initiatives, the SMLWDB will deliver consistent and coordinated support to employers, ultimately fostering economic growth, advancing workforce development, and promoting prosperity within the region.

b. What local area initiatives (such as registered apprenticeships, incumbent worker training programs, on-the-job training programs, and customized training solutions) will be used to facilitate engagement of businesses, including small businesses and businesses in in-demand sectors and occupations?

The SMLWDB continues to strengthen our partnerships to foster an environment that can create more awareness for career pathway development. To meet the training needs of employers across the area the local board has coordinated initiatives that leverage various training tools and programs. We will continue to partner with employers both large and small, educational institutions, and workforce development agencies to build registered apprenticeship programs that combine on-the-job learning with classroom instruction. These programs are tailored to specific industries or occupations within the area, providing individuals with hands-on experience while earning wages and gaining valuable skills.

As stated the Middle TN Regional Plan, all 3 Middle TN LWDAs have registered apprenticeship programs with NHC Healthcare which supports one of our leading industry sectors. In partnership with the TN Office of Apprenticeship, Southern Middle is currently working with the Manchester Coffee County Conference Center (MCCCC) to establish a Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) for their Culinary occupation and then with the Hotel and Front of House occupations to follow. MCCCC partners with local the local high schools and VR program to supply the talent pipeline for their conference and events center. The SMLWDB is working with them to enroll their workers into the youth/adult program (SYEP included) and provide any support services that are needed as they are already taking advantage of Work Experience and Work Based Learning opportunities with local area students. We will also be working with them to provide OJT or IWT opportunities that support the upcoming Culinary RAP. This program supports the Food Service industry which is a new in-demand sector for the Southern Middle area.

The SMLWDB also collaborates with employers to design customized training solutions that address specific workforce needs locally and regionally. This is done in partnership with our local TCATS, CTE Directors, Adult Education, and post-secondary institutions and involves in-person training modules, workshops, or online classes that are tailored to the skills for in-demand jobs within the area. By doing this we can ensure that our participants are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the labor market whether it be locally or across the Middle TN Region as we share several regional employers such as Nissan, NHC Healthcare, and Tyson. Currently, the SMLWDB is working with a company located in Lawrenceburg called Modine Mfg. in partnership with TCAT Pulaski to develop a customized training plan for their Maintenance, Welders, Instrument Electricians, and CMM Operator positions. They will begin tapping into the dual enrollment pipeline that is already established in several local area high schools where Industrial Maintenance and Welding classes are being taught and we will also work with Modine Mfg. to establish OJT/IWT opportunities.

The SMLWBD also promotes and facilitates both On-the-Job (OJT) and Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) throughout the local area. The OJT program provides individuals with

c. Describe how the LWDB drives the partnerships necessary for effective business engagement, including the use of business intermediaries and economic development groups.

The SMLWDB plays a critical role in driving partnerships necessary for effective business engagement. Collaborative efforts with business intermediaries and economic development groups are essential to align workforce development strategies with the needs of local businesses. Our local area works continuously to identify stakeholders, including local business associations, educational and training institutions like our four TCATs, Columbia State CC, Motlow State CC, UT Southern, and the Southern Middle Higher Education Center, economic development agencies, chambers of commerce, and business intermediaries. The SMLWDB employs several strategies to cultivate the partnerships necessary for effective business engagement, leveraging the use of business intermediaries and economic development groups:

*Actively working to establish and maintain relationships with local businesses, economic development agencies, industry associations, chambers of commerce, and other key stakeholders. Regular communication and employer events provide opportunities for connections with business leaders and to understand their workforce needs.

*Continuing to partner and engage with business intermediaries such as industry associations, industrial development boards, or business advocacy organizations to facilitate connections with businesses. These intermediaries have established connections with businesses and can act as channels for workforce development initiatives and partnerships.

*Working closely with economic development groups at the local, regional, and state level to align workforce development efforts. This collaboration may involve joint planning, resource sharing, and coordinated strategies to recruit employees, attract and retain businesses in the area.

*Focusing on understanding the specific workforce challenges and opportunities faced by local businesses and customizing services and programs to meet their needs which could include offering customized training solutions, recruitment assistance, workforce assessments, or other support services designed to enhance the competitiveness of businesses.

*Involving employers in the design and development of workforce development programs and initiatives. Employers may participate in our local board committees, Middle TN RPC committees, focus groups, or industry partnerships to provide input on curriculum development, training delivery, and other programmatic aspects.

By driving these partnerships and engaging with business intermediaries and economic development groups, the SMLWDB strengthens its ability to effectively engage with local businesses, address workforce challenges, and promote economic growth and prosperity in the area.

d. Describe how the local area's workforce development programs and strategies will be coordinated with economic development activities.
   i. Describe how these programs will promote entrepreneurial skills training and microenterprise services.

The coordination between local workforce development programs and economic development activities involves ensuring that initiatives are aligned to maximize their impact on the community's economic growth and prosperity. The SMLWDB can promote entrepreneurial skills training and microenterprise services by:

*Entrepreneurial Skills Training:
-Offer training courses, workshops, and seminars specifically designed to equip individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to start and manage their own businesses. These training programs may cover various aspects of entrepreneurship, including business planning, financial management, marketing strategies, legal considerations, and customer service.

-Collaborating with local business associations, chambers of commerce, economic development agencies, SBDCs, and industry experts, workforce development programs can provide access to mentorship, coaching, and networking opportunities for aspiring entrepreneurs.

-Partnerships with educational institutions and community organizations can facilitate the delivery of specialized training programs tailored to the needs of specific industries or target populations.

-Support the development of entrepreneurship incubators, co-working spaces, and innovation hubs that provide infrastructure, mentorship, and networking opportunities for start-up businesses. Encourage collaboration between these spaces and workforce development programs to create pathways for individuals interested in entrepreneurship to access training, mentorship, and support services.

*Microenterprise Services:
-Support the development and growth of microenterprises by providing referrals to resources and support services. This may include assistance with business registration and licensing, information to access small business loans or microloans, guidance on navigating regulatory requirements, and access to affordable workspace or shared office facilities.

-Collaborate with financial institutions, community development organizations, and government agencies to connect aspiring entrepreneurs with funding opportunities, technical assistance, and business development resources.

-Fostering an ecosystem that supports microenterprise development, workforce development programs can create pathways to economic self-sufficiency for individuals and contribute to the overall vitality of the local economy.

By integrating entrepreneurial skills training and microenterprise services into workforce

e. Describe how the LWDB will coordinate its workforce investment activities with statewide rapid response activities.

The SMLWDB will ensure coordination with statewide rapid response activities by closely liaising with relevant state agencies responsible for rapid response initiatives. This will involve timely communication and information sharing regarding potential layoffs or business closures within the local area. The SMLWDB aligns its rapid response activities with state protocols, commencing with the receipt of layoff or business closure notifications via a WARN Notice.

Upon the WARN notification, our local Rapid Response Coordinator contacts the employer to arrange a meeting where rapid response services are outlined and extended to both the employer and affected employees. Subsequently, meetings are organized for impacted employees, convening various partners such as AJC Business Services Team, AE, VR, Title I, TAA, Unemployment Insurance, Dept. of Human Services, and post-secondary institutions, to provide comprehensive information on available services and benefits during the layoff period. Moreover, the SMLWDB actively engages in statewide planning sessions and training exercises to bolster readiness for rapid response scenarios. By harmonizing its efforts with statewide rapid response initiatives, the SMLWDB can adeptly address workforce challenges and furnish timely assistance to impacted workers and businesses in the local area.

Training Services

   a. Describe how the local area will provide adult and dislocated worker employment and training activities. This may include incumbent worker, on-the-job, and customized training programs.

Individualized career services will be provided for adults and dislocated workers who are determined eligible for WIOA and are registered in the program. Individualized services include, but were not limited to, the following:

*A comprehensive and specialized assessment of skills levels, aptitudes, abilities and needs
*Development of an Individual Employment Plan (IEP/ISS)
*Case Management activities
*Individual career counseling
*Referral to training services
*Out-of-area job search assistance

Southern Middle area provides a range of employment and training activities tailored to adults and dislocated workers that encompasses various initiatives such as incumbent worker training (IWT) programs, on-the-job training (OJT), and customized training programs. The OJT program partners with employers to develop OJT opportunities, where new hired employees receive hands-on training while earning a wage. This approach facilitates the transition of individuals into new occupations or industries by combining practical experience with formal instruction. The IWT program focuses on upgrading the skills of existing employees within a company. The SMLWDB collaborates with employers to identify skill gaps and design training programs to enhance the capabilities of their workforce. This could involve providing funding or resources for employees to attend workshops, training seminars, or courses relevant to their job roles. Customized training programs are tailored to meet the specific needs of employers and industries. We work with businesses to design training that align with industry standards and workforce demands. These programs could cover technical skills, soft skills, or specialized knowledge required for particular occupations. By customizing training to match business needs, the local area ensures that participants are equipped with the relevant competencies sought by employers.

The local area offers comprehensive career counseling and guidance services to adult and dislocated workers to help them identify career goals, assess their skills and interests, and develop personalized employment plans. These services may include skills assessments, resume writing workshops, interview preparation, and job search assistance. To facilitate participation in employment and training activities, the local area also provides supportive services such as transportation assistance, childcare subsidies, and assistance with work-related expenses. These services aim to remove barriers to employment and ensure that individuals have the resources they need to succeed in training and job placement efforts.

The Southern Middle Adult Title I programs, including NDWG, Adult and Dislocated Worker offer up to $5000 in training support through tuition assistance for ETPL approved training providers plus supportive services that includes up to two years of travel and childcare

b. Describe how contracts will be coordinated with the use of Individual Training Accounts (ITAs).

Individual Training Accounts will be allocated to participants prioritized based on their readiness for employment. These accounts, funded through ITA funding, will enable individuals to secure self-sustaining employment by obtaining various credentials, including stackable credentials, industry-recognized certifications, occupational skills licenses, or state-recognized diplomas. Eligible training programs funded by ITAs must be listed on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) and align with in-demand occupations or the top five industry sectors identified by the SMLWDB.

ITAs will be granted per training provider term, contingent upon the participant maintaining good academic standing. The SMLWDB has established a maximum ITA amount of $5,000 per enrollment; however, participants must first utilize all other available financial resources, such as Pell grants, TN Reconnect, TN Promise, Wilder/Naifeh, Lottery, TSAC, and other scholarships, towards tuition, fees, and books before WIOA dollars are utilized.

c. Describe how the LWDB will ensure informed customer choice in the selection of training programs regardless of how training services are provided.

To ensure that customers make informed career pathway decisions tailored to their individual needs, thorough assessments and consultations are conducted at the time of enrollment. These assessments include evaluating career interests, work history, and physical or mental capabilities, all of which are discussed in depth with the client to inform their career plans and establish realistic timelines. While assessments are administered by AJC staff, clients are encouraged to actively engage in discussions about their aspirations, challenges, and goals using motivational interviewing techniques. Additionally, clients are directed to explore training provider options listed on the ETPL (Eligible Training Provider List) available on the Jobs4TN website. Based on their interests, needs, and identified barriers discussed with their career advisor, clients have the opportunity to select from multiple training providers, considering factors such as location, course schedules, and available budget after considering all available grant funding options.

d. Describe how the LWDB will ensure continuous improvement of eligible training providers of services and that the providers will meet the needs of local employers and jobseekers.

The SMLWDB will ensure the continuous improvement of eligible training providers by implementing several strategies aimed at meeting the needs of local employers and jobseekers:

*Conduct periodic evaluations of eligible training providers to assess the quality and effectiveness of their services. These evaluations will include feedback from both employers and jobseekers regarding the relevance, adequacy, and outcomes of the training programs.

*Continuous monitoring of training provider performance metrics will be conducted to ensure that they are meeting established benchmarks and goals. This may involve tracking completion rates, employment outcomes, job placement rates, and employer satisfaction surveys.

*Actively engage stakeholders, including employers, industry associations, educational institutions, and community organizations, to gather input on the training needs of the local workforce. This collaborative approach will help identify areas for improvement and inform the selection of training programs that align with current labor market trends and demands.

*Solicit feedback which allow jobseekers and employers to provide ongoing input and suggestions for improving training programs. This could involve surveys, local board committees, or direct communication channels to gather feedback and address any concerns in a timely manner.

By implementing these strategies, the SMLWDB will ensure that eligible training providers continuously improve their services to meet the needs of local employers and jobseekers, ultimately enhancing the overall effectiveness of the workforce development system in the local area.

Program Coordination:

    a. Describe how education and workforce investment activities will be coordinated in the local area. This must include:

        ii.   Coordination of relevant secondary and postsecondary education programs;

        iii.   Activities with education and workforce investment activities to coordinate strategies and enhance services; and

        iv.   A description of how the LWDB will avoid duplication of services.

Coordination between education and workforce investment activities will be a priority in the Southern Middle Area to ensure seamless transitions and optimal outcomes for individuals. This coordination will be achieved by:

*Building Strong Partnerships - Establishing strong partnerships with local educational institutions, including secondary schools, community colleges, technical schools, and universities. These partnerships will involve regular communication and collaboration to align education and training programs with workforce needs.

*Joint Planning Meetings - Convening regular meetings and planning sessions to include representatives from both education and workforce development sectors to focus on identifying current and emerging skill demands in the local labor market and developing strategies to address them through education and training programs.

*Career Pathway Development - Collaborative efforts will be made to develop clear career pathways that span secondary and postsecondary education. This involves mapping out educational programs and training opportunities that lead to specific career outcomes, ensuring that individuals have clear routes to gainful employment.

*Integrated Service Delivery - Integrate education and workforce services to provide seamless support for individuals which may include co-location of services, joint case management, and cross-referrals between education and workforce agencies to ensure individuals receive comprehensive assistance and supportive services.

*Data Sharing - The sharing of data between education and workforce agencies to inform decision-making and program improvement and analyzing labor market trends, student outcomes, and employment data will help identify areas for collaboration and improvement.

*Leveraging Resources - Education and Workforce agencies pooling resources to maximize impact and could involve jointly applying for grants, sharing funding for programs and in-kind services, and coordinating efforts to secure resources from public and private sources.

ii. Coordination of Relevant Secondary and Postsecondary Education Programs:

*The SMLWDB maintains relationships with local secondary schools, postsecondary institutions, and training providers to coordinate relevant education programs.

b. Describe plans, strategies, and assurances concerning the coordination of services provided by the State employment service under the Wagner-Peyser Act (29 U.S.C. 49 et seq.), to improve service delivery and avoid duplication of services.

The coordination of services provided by the State employment service under the Wagner-Peyser Act is critical for improving service delivery and avoiding duplication of services. The following plans, strategies, and assurances will be implemented to ensure effective coordination:

Partnership and Collaboration: Actively collaborates with our AE and VR partners, other workforce development partners, including other Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs), educational institutions, community organizations, economic development agencies, and employers. By fostering strong partnerships, the service can leverage partner resources, share best practices, and coordinate efforts to address the needs of jobseekers and employers.

Integrated Service Delivery: Efforts will be made to integrate services provided by the State employment service with those offered by other state partners or agencies such as AE, VR, and DHS offices. This may involve co-location of services, joint case management, and seamless referral processes to ensure individuals receive comprehensive support.

Data Sharing and Analysis: The State employment service will engage in regular data sharing and analysis with other partners like AE and VR to inform decision-making and improve service delivery. Sharing information on job openings, labor market trends, and employer needs will help identify opportunities for collaboration and enhance job matching services.

Avoidance of Duplication: The State employment service will work closely with other agencies to avoid duplication of services and ensure efficient use of resources for the customers. This may involve clarifying roles and responsibilities, streamlining processes, and establishing clear referral pathways to minimize overlap and confusion for jobseekers and employers.

Continuous Improvement: The State employment service will regularly assess and evaluate its services to identify areas for improvement. This includes gathering feedback from stakeholders with surveys, conducting performance evaluations, and implementing quality assurance measures to enhance service delivery and customer satisfaction.

Training and Professional Development: The State employment service will invest in training and professional development opportunities for staff to ensure they have the skills and knowledge needed to effectively serve jobseekers and employers. This may include training on new technologies, customer service best practices, BEP implementation training, business cycle training, and labor market trends.

By implementing these plans, strategies, and assurances, the State employment service can

c. How will the LWDB coordinate WIOA Title I workforce investment activities with adult education and literacy activities under WIOA Title II?
    i. Include information on expanding access to employment, training, education, and supportive services provided through the local one-stop system for Title II participants with barriers to employment.
    ii. Include how the LWDB will carry out the review of local applications submitted under Title II consistent with WIOA Sec. 107(d)(11)(A) and (B)(i) and WIOA Sec. 232.

The SMLWDB will coordinate WIOA Title I workforce investment activities with adult education and literacy activities under WIOA Title II through several strategic measures:

1. Flexible learning opportunities for students and computer or paper based materials: Each student will meet with faculty and staff to design their own learning plan. Classes will be offered in the morning, evening, and weekends each week. Curriculum products will be both computer and paper-based.

2. Neutral classroom locations with appropriate accommodations: Classes will take place in neutral meeting places such as public libraries or community colleges as well as local AJCs to ensure that all students may attend classes at places they feel welcomed and safe. Classroom locations will be ADA compliant.

3. Foster a sense of community and hire staff representative of community: Students will be taught to help each other accomplish their goals, regardless of circumstance or need. South Central Tennessee Workforce Alliance (SCTWA) will seek out and recruit staff who are representative of the community served.

4. Reduce language barriers: To reduce language barriers, printed materials will be available in both English, Spanish and other languages as needed. Partners will be utilized to interpret as needed. A welcoming atmosphere will exist within all classes. ESL teachers will be specifically trained in knowledge of cultural differences and unique challenges faced by students without English language skills.

5. Facilitating seamless access to One-Stop system services: Title II participants facing barriers to employment will be provided enhanced access to employment, training, education, and supportive services available through the local One-Stop system. This will involve ensuring that Title II participants are fully informed about the range of services offered by the One-Stop system and are supported in navigating and accessing these services.

6. Tailoring services to address barriers: The SMLWDB will work to identify and address barriers faced by Title II participants in accessing employment, training, and education opportunities. This may involve providing specialized supportive services such as transportation assistance, childcare support, language assistance, and disability

d. Describe any executed cooperative agreements that define how all local service providers, including additional providers, will carry out the requirements for integration of and access to the entire set of services available in the local one-stop system.

Cooperative agreements have been established to delineate the manner in which all local service providers, including additional providers, will fulfill the obligations for integrating and accessing the complete range of services offered within the local one-stop system. The scope of services outlined in the SMTN MOU follows Workforce Services Division Policy regarding Service Integration and functional alignment wherein Tennessee's One-Stop system shall strive to streamline workforce services functions, prevent the duplication of services, and eliminate inefficient practices. To this end, Partners agree:

1) To endorse a single customer flow model based on customer need, not program requirements.

2) To refer customers between Partners by methods listed in the MOU Agreement.

3) Authorize sharing of customer data and information in order to facilitate co-enrollment and case management across programs and funding streams.

4) To participate in joint planning of the MOU, plan development, and modification of activities to accomplish the following:

-Accessibility of the Partners' applicable services to customers through the One-Stop Service Delivery system.

-Participation in the operation of the One-Stop Service Delivery system, consistent with the terms of the MOU and requirements of authorized laws.

-All Partners and staff are adequately cross-trained as a result of their participation in capacity building and staff development activities.

-Continuous partnership building by requiring inclusion of all Partners involved in the One-Stop System.

-Continuous adaption to state and federal guidelines.

-Responsiveness to local and economic conditions, including employer needs.

-Meet common data collection and reporting needs via Jobs4TNInvolvement in special grant and/or pilot projects that impact a Partner's shared staffing resources.

-Co-branding through inclusion of "AJC identified" or "American Job Center" on any joint products, programs, activities, services, facilities, and materials used by the combined Partnership of the System. Purchase of advertising and marketing supplies/materials allowable under TEGL 03-23 are required to be approved by the WIOA Executive Director.

e. How do the LWDA's programs and strategies strengthen the linkages between the One-Stop delivery system and unemployment insurance programs?

The Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Programs collaborate closely with the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) initiative to maximize co-enrollments of RESEA referrals into Title I programs. This collaborative effort aims to empower unemployment insurance (UI) recipients to achieve self-sufficiency and reduce reliance on UI benefits, which are often limited in duration. Additionally, the OSO conducts monthly monitoring through reports to track referrals from RESEA. Each referral made from the RESEA program over to Title I undergoes a thorough analysis by the OSO, examining factors such as referral timing, communication, data entry, and reasons for non-co-enrollment. Through this analysis, trends are identified to evaluate and potentially modify outreach and referral practices for optimization. We also utilize the state's Jobs4TN website that makes it possible for applicants to file for UI benefits, search job opportunities, and explore career and training options within the same system either virtually or when visiting a local AJC. Additionally, individuals seeking UI benefits at the AJCs receive information about other partner programs like AE, VR, and TANF and are encouraged to enroll in placement programs while awaiting processing of their UI claims.

Youth Activities

a. Provide an assessment of the type and availability of youth workforce investment activities in the local area.

In the Southern Middle area, there is a diverse array of youth workforce investment activities available to support the career development and employment needs of young individuals. These activities encompass various programs and initiatives aimed at equipping youth with the skills, knowledge, and experiences necessary to succeed in the workforce. Some key components of youth workforce investment activities in the area include:

*SYEP (TYEP) - State initiative that provides opportunities for youth aged 14-24 to gain valuable work experience. This program offers paid employment opportunities in various industries, allowing youth to develop essential skills while earning income.

*CTE Programs - The CTE programs located in our local high schools provide students with hands-on training and coursework in specific career pathways, such as healthcare, manufacturing, food service, and more. These programs aim to prepare youth for future careers by aligning education with local workforce needs.

*Work-Based Learning (WBL)/Work Experience (WEX) - A program that offer students opportunities to engage in real-world work experiences, such as internships, apprenticeships, and job shadowing. These experiences enable youth to apply classroom learning in practical settings and explore different career paths.

*Special Education Programs (SPED) - A program that caters to the needs of students with disabilities, providing tailored support and services to help them transition successfully from school to employment or further education. These programs focus on building both academic and vocational skills to enhance students' employability.

*Career Development Services: Youth-focused career development services are available through local workforce centers and organizations. These services may include career counseling, job readiness workshops, resume writing assistance, and interview preparation to help youth navigate the job market effectively.

The SMLWDB is dedicated to extending SYEP services across all 13 counties within our local jurisdiction. Collaboratively, the CSP, BST, and OSO have orchestrated outreach initiatives targeting secondary and post-secondary educational programs, including CTE, WBL, and Special Education programs. The aim is to advocate for SYEP placements catering to individuals aged 14-24, facilitating valuable work experiences through this initiative. Furthermore, close partnerships are maintained with all post-secondary ETPL providers to establish streamlined referral channels, enabling students to access Title I Tuition Assistance and additional support services conducive to their career advancement. Through these concerted efforts in outreach, encompassing both work experience and educational pursuits, we have successfully engaged a wide range of youth workers spanning various demographics.

b. Explain how providers and LWDB staff ensure the WIOA elements:
   i. Connect back to the WIOA Youth Program Design Framework, particularly the Objective Assessments and ISS; and
   ii. Are made available to youth with disabilities by describing specific program practices, tools, and services that are tailored to serve youth with disabilities.

Objective Assessments and Individual Employment Plans (IEPs) are mandatory for each Title I participant prior to receiving any other services. Examples of objective assessments may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- O'Net Interest Profiler
- Career One-Stop Skills Matcher
- Career Scope
- TABE
- Objective Assessment Summary

The Individual Employment Plan is completed by the Career Advisor for each applicant, alongside the client. Most of the input given around these plans comes from the client directly and can include training, employment and education goals. All AJC staff have been trained on the SMART goals model, which encourages staff to use Motivational Interviewing techniques in order to create an IEP/ISS that is specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-based. Using these methods Career Advisors and customers work together to create concrete plans that lead them to successful goal attainment.

To serve youth who have disabilities, Title I Career Advisers are quick to refer clients to co-enroll in Vocational Rehab. In order to ensure that the client's are seen by disability experts, Title I Career Advisors are usually encouraged to wait to enroll youth with disabilities until after the Vocational Rehab staff can work closely with them to assess basic needs. After basic needs are seen to by Vocational Rehab staff and other entities like SPED programs in local high schools, VR and Title I staff work close together to create plans that lead Youth with disabilities to long-term placement through training assistance and paid work experience services. Monthly meetings between VR and Title I are also vital and conducted at Career Development Team meetings and other case load staffing meetings, as directed by program leads and supervisors.

c. Describe successful models for youth services from your local area, including but not limited to virtual work experiences, OSY recruitment. and engagement strategies.

Effective youth service models are characterized by robust partnerships among co-enrollment programs such as AE and VR, as well as collaborations between Title I and local high school programs and post-secondary institutions. These partnerships ensure comprehensive support for youth, providing them with access to guidance and resources at every step of their career pathway.

One of our successful models involves the WEX Reimbursement Model, initially implemented for the SYEP program. This model fosters strong ties with employers, increasing the likelihood of retaining youth workers as permanent employees beyond the WEX services period.

To recruit out-of-school youth, emphasis is placed on senior students in high school programs across all 13 Southern Middle counties, including WBL, SPED, and CTE programs. Targeting graduating seniors transitioning into the workforce yields a significant number of OSY enrollments, as they seek career guidance following graduation.

Additionally, leveraging technology, such as texting, QR codes, and virtual platforms, enhances engagement and outreach to youth. These technological tools streamline paperwork processes and facilitate immediate communication with staff, minimizing barriers like travel restrictions and social anxiety.

d. Explain how the LWDB has defined the criterion of "requires additional assistance to complete an educational program, or to secure and hold employment" for OSY and ISY, including:
   i. Evidence supporting the established criteria, to include current labor market information, statistical evidence and other data deemed supportive;
   ii. A description of how the LWDB ensures regional alignment in this criteria; and
   iii. List any documentation required from the participant to support established criteria and any additional case management parameters the LWDB has deemed necessary.

The following criteria are used to determine requiring additional assistance:

For ISY:

I. Youth is In-School and:

A. Has a poor attendance pattern in an educational program during the last 12 months;
B. Has been expelled from school within the last 12 calendar months;
C. Has been suspended from school at least within the last 12 calendar months;
D. Has below average grades;
E. Has been previously placed in out-of-home care (foster care, group home or kinship care) for more than 6 months and is between the ages of 14-2l;or
F. Has currently incarcerated parent(s) or guardian

For OSY:

Youth is Out-of-School and:

A. Has dropped out of a post-secondary educational program during the past 12 calendar months;
B. Has a poor work history, to include no work history, or has been fired from a job in the last 6 calendar months;
C. Has previously been placed in out-of-home care (foster care), been suspended from school at least within the last 12 calendar months;
D. Has below average grades;
E. Has been previously placed in out-of-home care (foster care, a group home, or kinship-care) for more than 6 months and is between the ages of 14-21; or
F. Currently has incarcerated parent(s) or guardian.

According to a meta-analysis research study done by the non-profit "Children Now" in Oakland, CA, "Employment is foundational to youth's successful transition into adulthood, yet many youth with lived experience in the foster care system struggle to obtain employment that provides a living wage." This same study goes into detail around the demographic

Administration

    a. Identify the entity responsible for the disbursal of grant funds as determined by the Chief Local Elected Official(CLEO) or the Governor under WIOA sec. 107(d)(12)(B)(i).

The SMLWDB, under the leadership of Lincoln County Mayor Bill Newman, has appointed the South Central Tennessee Development District, located at 101 Sam Watkins Blvd, Mount Pleasant, TN 38474, to serve as the Fiscal Agent and Administrative Entity.

b. Describe the competitive process to be used to award subgrants and contracts for WIOA Title I activities in the local area.

The competitive process of services will adhere to the procurement guidance section 200.320 to include a stringent modification to micro and small purchases. Federal Uniform Guidance 2 CFR Part 200.113 – 200.326.   State guidelines for procurement and bid opening should resourced for updated information and/or revisions prior to each large procurement to ensure compliance above and beyond this policy.

Cost analysis may be used where it is a cost-reimbursement purchase or where there is only one prospective bidder and no comparable goods are services are available to be compared.
*Price analysis involves a comparison of marketplace prices.
*Cost analysis involves an examination of all the elements used in calculating a contract's total estimated cost. It requires the review and evaluation of each element of cost to determine whether it is reasonable, allocable to that grant program, and an allowable cost for that grant program.

Process of Purchase

1. Initiation of Purchase: Any staff member may initiate a purchase. When a purchase is initiated, a standard requisition describing the type of item and quantity desired is prepared and signed by the staff member initiating the purchase. Applicable price quotation, bids or competitive bid documents should be attached to the requisition.

2. Authorization of Purchase: The Department Director must give approval and sign the requisition.

3. Qualification of and Selection of Vendors: All vendors providing supplies, equipment, or services shall be reputable firms having demonstrated capacity to produce or provide supplies, equipment, services, and other items within a reasonable time or within specific time limits established by the purchaser. Vendors shall be subject to disqualification if they misrepresent quality, quantity, or price of what is being purchased. Vendors that exceed reasonable time limits shall also be disqualified. The South Central Tennessee Development District certifies to the best of its knowledge and belief, that it and its principals: In any transaction with a contractor that exceeds $25,000, SCTDD's procurement personnel should access the System for Award Management ("SAM"), which may be found at https://www.sam.gov/portal/public/SAM/#1, to determine whether the contractor has been debarred or suspended from entering into contracts that utilize federal funds.

A. A screen print of the URL Search should be printed on the day of search and added to the procurement documentation. The search will signify that selected vendors are not presently debarred, suspended, proposed for debarment, declared ineligible, or voluntarily excluded from covered transactions by any Federal department or agency.

B. Have not within a three-year period preceding this proposal been convicted of or had a civil judgment rendered against them for commission of fraud or a criminal offense in connection with obtaining, attempting to obtain, or performing a public (Federal, State or Local)

c. Provide the local levels of performance negotiated with the Governor and CLEO to be used to measure the performance of the local area and to be used by the LWDB for measuring the performance of the fiscal agent, eligible providers, and the One-Stop delivery system, in the local area.

PY23 WIOA Core Performance Measures	Targets	47155 Southern Middle			
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Adult Measures					
Exiters		115	116		
Participants Served		266	291		
Employment Rate 2nd Quarter after exit	83.5%	87.8%	88.9%		
Employment Rate 4th Quarter after exit	83.5%	87.6%	87.0%		
Median Earnings 2nd Quarter after exit	$ 7,025	$ 8,276	$ 8,407		
Credential Attainment w/in 4 Quarters after exit	69.5%	79.1%	81.7%		
Measurable Skills Gains	63.5%	63.0%	54.3%		
Dislocated Worker					
Exiters		100	117		
Participants Served		190	187		
Employment Rate 2nd Quarter after exit	81.5%	80.7%	80.5%		
Employment Rate 4th Quarter after exit	83.5%	81.4%	80.5%		
Median Earnings 2nd Quarter after exit	$ 7,944	$ 7,539	$ 8,444		
Credential Attainment w/in 4 Quarters after exit	70.6%	71.8%	71.1%		
Measurable Skills Gains	61.2%	66.7%	59.4%		
Youth					
Exiters		84	87		
Participants Served		274	282		
Employment Rate 2nd Quarter after exit	78.0%	75.9%	81.4%		
Employment Rate 4th Quarter after exit	77.5%	77.8%	72.8%		
Median Earnings 2nd Quarter after exit	$ 3,440	$ 5,995	$ 6,240		
Credential Attainment w/in 4 Quarters after exit	71.0%	78.8%	72.2%		
Measurable Skills Gains	55.0%	46.2%	47.2%		

Southern Middle PY 2023 KPI Targets:
Adult and Dislocated Worker - 71
Apprenticeship (Peek Enrollment) - 77
Apprenticeship (State Certified Pre-App Programs) - 10
JVSG - 10
Justice Involved Individuals - 140

d. Describe the actions taken toward becoming or remaining a high-performing LWDB, consistent with factors developed by the State Workforce Board (SWB).

To achieve and maintain high performance as a LWDB, the SMLWDB has implemented various strategic actions aligned with factors outlined by the State Workforce Board (SWB). These actions include:

*Establishes clear and measurable goals in line with the priorities and objectives outlined by the SWB. These goals are regularly reviewed and updated to ensure alignment with state-level strategies.

*Collaborates with various stakeholders, including state agencies, educational institutions, employers, community organizations, economic development agencies, and other LWDBs. This collaboration fosters synergy and maximizes resources to address workforce challenges effectively.

*A strong emphasis is placed on performance measurement and accountability. The Board regularly monitors key performance indicators, such as job placement rates, training completion rates, and customer satisfaction levels.

*Embraces innovation and adopts best practices to enhance its programs and services continually. The Board remains aware of emerging trends in workforce development, implements innovative strategies, and shares successful practices with other local boards in the Middle TN Region.

*Commits to a culture of continuous improvement by conducting regular evaluations and assessments of programs and solicits feedback from board members to help identify areas for enhancement.

*Effectively manages resources to maximize impact and efficiency. The Board allocates funding strategically, prioritizing investments in high-impact programs and initiatives while ensuring fiscal responsibility and transparency.

*Invests in the training and capacity building of staff, partners, and board members by providing professional development opportunities, technical assistance, and resources to enhance the skills and knowledge of workforce professionals and stakeholders.

Through the implementation of these strategic measures and adherence to the criteria set forth by the SWB, the SMLWDB strives to attain and uphold excellence in its workforce development endeavors, thereby fostering economic vitality and prosperity in the Southern Middle Tennessee area

Public Comment:

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

The process used by the SMLWDB 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 plan will post for public comment on March 15th - 31st, 2024. The local area process is listed below:

*Notification has been shared with all relevant local stakeholders, WIOA Core Partners, and the general public to ensure opportunities to participate in and to provide feedback on local 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 Southern Middle area 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 SMLWDB will hold one (1) listening session or planning meeting outside of regular business hours on March 19, 2024 beginning at 6:15 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 SMLWDB will then submit any comments that express disagreement with the plan as an attachment.

b. Include any comments submitted during the public comment period that represent disagreement with the plan.

No comments were submitted

Stakeholder Involvement:

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

The SMLWDB 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 local board also engaged 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 by either emails, phone calls, or in-person meetings. The SMLWDB also hosted a local work session after the January 25, 2024 Southern Middle Local Workforce Board Meeting. 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 the local workforce board meetings and board committees. Their input is highly valued in ensuring that plans are developed comprehensively from a collective perspective, streamlining the local workforce system, and fostering a culture of achievement within the local area.

Once the plans are finalized, notification is shared with all relevant 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 SMLWDB for March 19, 2024, starting at 6:15 PM CST.

Attachments

Attachment A- Required Policies

In the space below, please provide a link to the LWDB policy page, which must include the following required local policies:

- Property Management Policy
- Supportive Services Policy
- Youth Program Design Policy
- Priority of Service Policy
- Local Governance Policy
- Co-Enrollment Policy
- Electronic Case Files Policy
- Grievance and Complaint Resolution Policy
- Minimum Participant Cost Rate Policy
- Monitoring Policy
- Youth Eligibility Policy

https://www.schra.us/services/employment-services#policy-forms

Attachment B- CLEO Signature page

Attachment B can be submitted one of two ways. If the LWDA has capacity for electronic signatures, it can be linked in the space below. In the alternative, the LWDA can provide via email. Please designate which option is selected.

☐ Attachment B is linked in the space below:

☑ Attachment B has been sent via email to Workforce.Board@tn.gov

Attachment C- Partners MOU & IFA

Please affirm the LWDA has previously submitted a Partner's MOU and Infrastructure Funding Agreement pursuant to TDLWD-WFS Guidance-WIOA Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)/One-Stop Service Delivery and Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA). In the space below, provide the date on which these documents were most recently submitted:

May 31, 2023

Attachment D- Additional Cooperative Agreements

Please provide any executed cooperative agreements, other than the Partner's MOU, to which the LWDA is a party. Any additional cooperative agreements can be provided as "Attachment D to Local Plan" via email to Workforce.Board@tn.gov. In the space below, please list the name of any additional cooperative agreement that will be included. If none exist, please state "none."

None at this time

Attachment E- Budget Information and Supporting Materials
Please provide the following fiscal materials via email to Workforce.Board@tn.gov using the subject line "Local Plan Attachment E."

- Detailed budget listing the sources and uses of TDLWD pass-through funds and all non-Federal matching funds
- Supporting budget narrative explaining expenditures by line items listed on Standard Form 424A
  (Include purpose of travel and supply/equipment lists and describe expenses in the 'other' line item, if applicable. If the budget includes personnel or contractual expenses, cash or in-kind, estimate the number of hours/days and hourly rate, or portion of FTE and salary, for the time that is expected to be spent on the proposed project by key personnel, contractors, or consultants. If the budget includes land or buildings, provide an MAI appraisal or comparable appraisal. Include a description of all leveraged funds, including any fee based and/or revenue generated. Include description of any in-kind resources, including the methods used to determine their value).
- Letters of Commitment from each non-TDLWD funding source (federal state, local, or private) that specifies the amount and type of funds committed (grant, loan, cash, or in-kind)
- Any additional pertinent supporting materials, as applicable.

In the text box below, provide the date Attachment E was submitted and name of individual submitting:

Submitted by Lisa Moore, WIOA Fiscal Manager, March 12, 2024