

*Colorado Department of Labor & Employment*  
**Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Regional Plan**

**Planning Region: Rural Colorado**

**Local Areas Included in this Planning Region: Colorado Rural Workforce Consortium, Mesa County**

**A. As a Planning Region, complete the following questions:**

- 1. Provide an analysis of the regional economic conditions, including:
  - a. Existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations; and****

Rural Colorado is large and highly diverse area. There are several trends in emerging in-demand industries that all rural regions share. There is a rise in STEM-related industries and occupations, including software development, programming, and advanced manufacturing. Energy has a historically important presence throughout rural Colorado, but the recent economic downturn of oil & gas prices as impacted this industry significantly. Oil & Gas is a highly cyclical market, so many feel that these jobs will return, though there is significant short-term impact and the need to help these workers enter other industries. Many skills are transferable between Energy and Manufacturing - with training and support, these employees can be migrated into manufacturing jobs, which are in high demand right now and will continue to be over the next several years. Healthcare is also a high-demand industry throughout Colorado and the emergence of new health care systems and hospitals throughout the rural areas will continue the need for employees in all areas of health care and health care management.

**Northwest**

The Northwestern region has a long history of a strong Agriculture, Energy and Natural Resources and Tourism and Recreation – Tourism and Recreation is expected to grow over the next four years in addition to Manufacturing, Retail, and Healthcare.

While other areas of Colorado experienced economic challenges over the last year, this region is likely to continue to see more momentum in economic growth and development although it is variable with some communities experiencing strong growth and some communities in decline. One example is in Summit County – spring season (April to June) has been shorter than in years past, which allows for more hotels to be built and for Tourism and Recreation development in the spring and summer, which could also allow employers to retain employees for longer and eliminate “seasonal” positions. These seasonal positions will always be

a challenge for this region - there is so much increased activity in the winter that will continue to require this type of work and these positions are often lower-wage positions, which make it difficult to retain employees. Encouraging tourists and visitors outside of the winter ski season is always more challenging, but many communities are focusing on this balance by adding outdoor activities, trails, bike paths, and other resources to encourage year-round tourism throughout the region.

Healthcare is also a local growth area, in alignment with statewide trends. Both Kaiser Permanente and Centura have recently become active in the area and there is an increasing need for healthcare services overall in addition to medical tourism. More and more individuals who live part-time or travel regularly to the region are choosing to come to the Northwest region for medical procedures (ACL repair, ankle surgery, etc.). In addition, whole sports teams are choosing to visit clinics throughout the region, such as when the Miami Dolphins visited The Steadman Clinic. While this is an area of growth for the Healthcare industry in this region, this can also raise healthcare costs for locals because of the disproportionately higher costs for these procedures. Also, medical providers choose this region for conferences and continuing education opportunities for providers throughout the state and country. Finally, in November 2015, Lake County passed two mill levies to keep hospital ambulance services available.

An emerging industry is in Manufacturing, specifically for rare earths manufacturing. The Northwest region has rare earths deposits (including silica), which are required for cell phones, laptops, solar panels, and many other products and materials. There currently is no manufacturing and mining support system in place to grow this industry and the push to go solar is causing people to import materials instead of using local materials. This rise in sustainable energy naturally ties to this kind of manufacturing, so these industries can work in tandem to help develop an appropriate workforce. This will be a focus for the region over the next four years, especially when looking to shift employees from declining industries that could be trained in manufacturing. This is a small net quantity of workers compared to other industries.

One area of decline is in the Energy industry - primarily in mining and coal operations. Many large energy employers indicate that increasing regulations are causing a decline in profitability, leading to an overall industry decline and subsequent job loss. The coal industry in the Northwest supports several of the economies of whole counties - meaning that the impact of this declining industry will be felt across the whole region.

One related example was when Delta County lost the contract with Coors to provide hops - it took eight years for the Agriculture industry in the region to recover. Changes like this are felt throughout rural communities, so it is crucial to work now to try and stay ahead of the decline in coal, mining, and oil & gas.

Another area of decline over the last five to seven years has been in the construction industry. Though the region was still experiencing steady rates of tourists, the construction industry was not engaged in building new developments. This is starting to change, but many of those skilled workers left the area during the recession as well as the loss of trade and craft

workers with the aging of the baby boom workforce it will be important to create strategies to bring these workers back to the area or grow new employees from the current workforce.

## **West**

The Western, Southwest and Mesa areas are located in southwest Colorado and consist of 12 rural counties. The region covers approximately 19,500 square miles and borders Utah, Arizona and New Mexico.

Historically, the Western region has had strong industry presence in Energy, Agriculture, and Hospitality and Tourism. Within Energy, coal mining and oil & gas have been major employers in the region. Similarly, Agriculture has been very important and probably will continue to be for both food production and specialty crops. This has also tied to Tourism - there are many tourists that visit the region for peaches, wine, and other agricultural products.

In the Western region, there are several industries that will be emerging, including Health and Wellness, Hospitality and Tourism, Energy, Agriculture, and Manufacturing. Health and Wellness is one of the top industries not just in the region, but also across Colorado. The population across the region is aging and more older individuals are retiring to the region - this requires an increase in health and elder care services including primary care, home health care, nursing, occupational therapy, and physical therapy.

Hospitality and Tourism has always been an important sector throughout the Western region - there is much in terms of outdoor recreation and tourism that attracts visitors from all over the country. Ski resorts are a major focus for the region, especially in Telluride, Crested Butte, Durango, and Mesa County. With the high demand for outdoor recreation activities, there is also an increase in recreational manufacturing - this is an area of focus for Mesa County. The ski industry in Telluride, Crested Butte, Powderhorn and Durango areas are major employers in the region and are struggling to find workers. In addition, Cortez is increasing hotel development, which in turn increases retail businesses. There is also an increased need for recreation activities for seniors and the aging population.

Energy has a historically important presence in the region, but the recent economic downturn of oil & gas prices as impacted this industry significantly. In Delta County, coal has also experienced difficulties and slowdowns that may not bounce back.

There are growing efforts in Natural Energy - geothermal activity in Pagosa is a newer focus. Alternative energy, including geothermal, is emerging in regions like Pagosa. In Montezuma County, there are efforts underway to recruit solar companies and increase solar energy development. There are also efforts to begin biochar research and development.

There are many manufacturing businesses throughout the region, including the world headquarters of Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory. There are also opportunities within advanced manufacturing, outdoor manufacturing, engineering, robotics, and programming. All of these manufacturing businesses require transportation and logistics to move products, but there are many transportation challenges in the region. Rio Blanco County, a much more rural county

within the region, is seeing some progress in the high technology industries, including manufacturing and computer programming.

Historically, there have been a high number of government jobs in the region, which are generally higher-paying positions. However, this industry is on the decline, so it will be important to focus on ways to integrate these workers into other industries. Specialty Crops and Construction are also areas of expansion, though not as rapidly as some of the aforementioned.

This region is home to the only two sovereign tribal nations in Colorado - the Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute tribes. These communities are looking to expand into connections with the Energy industry through mining contracts, gas well development, and wind energy development on tribal land. The Ute Mountain Ute and The Southern Ute tribes are one of the top employer in Montezuma and La Plata Counties, primarily in the Tourism and Hospitality industry, so the tribe's economic focus will be an important driver of in-demand industries in the region.

There are many occupations that will be needed in these emerging industries including Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs), nurses, home care workers for the elderly, hospice workers, transportation workers, automotive technicians, skilled maintenance, computer programmers, and other STEM-related positions. The local community colleges are responding to this increased statewide demand for STEM-related employees by offering programs such as computer programming, 3D printing, and robotics.

## **South**

In the Southern region, changing economic conditions have created new areas of growth and opportunity in a variety of sectors and occupations. Currently, the region is dependent on exports in Manufacturing, Crop & Animal Production, and Government Services as major drivers of the workforce. This region faces many of the same challenges as other rural workforce regions in Colorado that have impacted regional economic conditions such as a downturn in the Oil & Gas market and a decline in the Agriculture industry overall.

The top industries for jobs growth in the Southern region in from 2013 - 2015 were Electronics (37% increase), Bioscience (14% increase), and Technology & Information (8% increase). Several of these industries employ relatively low job numbers compared to other expanding industries such as Health & Wellness (5% increase) and Advanced Manufacturing (8% increase).

In these more specialized industries, employers can offer higher wages but these jobs generally require higher levels of education; in the Southern region, only 7.2% of the population has a graduate degree or higher, making these more specialized positions difficult to fill locally.

The Southern regional planning group's perspective is that most of these trends will continue over the next four years, with the addition of several new industries that will shift the workforce needs. The top in-demand industries and sectors in the Southern region are projected

to be Health & Wellness, Hospitality & Tourism, Agriculture (including specialty crops), Energy & Natural Resources, Manufacturing, Construction, and Technology-associated industries.

Within Health & Wellness, the Southern region is experiencing an increase in its aging population, which is tied to the increase in this sector. As this population group grows, there will be an increased need for healthcare services including home care and in-office services provided by low- and mid-level providers such as CNAs, MAs, LPNs, and RNs. In addition, there is a high need for physical and occupational therapists, addiction counselors, social workers, and case managers to assist individuals with navigating healthcare and behavioral health systems. There are difficulties with feasibility around private practices in this region due to increased regulations and administrative requirements, thus practitioners are shifting to employment by a hospital or health care system. This system infrastructure is dependent on more low-level providers such as nurses, case managers, and medical assistants.

Hospitality and tourism is currently 3rd in the Southern region for the number of establishments in the region and this is expected to continue to grow. There is a high need for entry-level positions such as housekeeping, laundry, and mechanics - many hospitality partners have struggled to fill these positions for a variety of reasons including language barriers, lack of high school equivalency, or difficulties with employee reliability. The Royal Gorge Bridge is a major attraction and there are several more throughout the region and attract tourists year-round.

Agriculture has been a key industry in this region for many years and will continue to be an area of opportunity for workforce development. Through the rise in specialty crops, including marijuana and hemp, the region expects a revitalization of this industry. Local regional economic development professionals have identified hemp as a key industry and job provider over the next several years - efforts are currently focused around attracting these businesses to the region to provide jobs not just in agriculture, but also the manufacturing associated with product development such as personal care products, food products, rope, textiles, and home accessories. However, marijuana is still illegal at the Federal level and therefore, local workforce centers are limited or prohibited on the services that they are able to provide, such as job postings.

Energy & Natural Resources has also been a key industry in the region, but with the recent downturn in the Oil & Gas markets, there is a cyclical impact that affects other industries such as Transportation & Logistics. Despite this recent downturn, the Southern region still expects this to be a major economic driver over the next four years, including expansion into natural energy sectors such as wind energy.

Manufacturing, including Advanced Manufacturing, is an important industry focus for the Southern region. Specialized positions such as industrial maintenance and machining are in high need across this industry and within a variety of sectors including agricultural product development and energy. Construction has experienced difficulties in the last several years due to the economic downturn, but this industry is poised for growth again due to the increased demand for housing across Colorado.

Programmers, developers, and informational technology - all of these occupations are on the rise throughout the Southern region. Broadband infrastructure is an important component of the growth of these industries and is also tied to many other industries listed here such as Hospitality, Energy, and Manufacturing. Chaffee County and Pueblo have had successes in this area over the last few years, but several more remote areas in the Southern region still struggle with this infrastructure component. A La Junta communications company offers fiber to the business and home throughout most of southeast Colorado and they have expanded to Canon City and Pueblo - they offer speeds ranging from 30 Mbps to 200 Mbps. They also offer wireless at 15 Mbps for more remote areas. There are several areas that also have underutilized infrastructure investments, so communities are exploring ways to utilize these existing resources for technology expansion purposes.

Other occupations that will be in high demand across multiple industries and sectors include finance and accounting professionals, engineers, supply chain, inventory management, transportation, and procurement positions at both entry- and professional-levels.

## **East**

In the Eastern region, changing economic conditions have created new areas of growth and opportunity in a variety of sectors and occupations. A small number of jobs can have a large impact on this region. For example, a recent hiring at Goodwill added 32 jobs to the Eastern region, which is equivalent to 5,340 jobs in Denver when factoring the population size different. The Colorado Workforce Development Council identified three exploring or emerging industries in the Eastern region for Sector Partnerships - Energy & Natural Resources, Health & Wellness, and Transportation & Logistics. This region has typically maintained a strong presence in Energy & Natural Resources, however with the recent economic downturn in this area and the forecast of low per barrel oil prices, the Eastern region has seen an increase in layoffs or underemployment in this field. The impact is felt at the frontline, from tool pushers to fracking crews, as well as at the executive level with companies cutting from both the top and bottom. Much of the work in this industry is cyclical, so this industry will always be a focus for Eastern Sub-Local Area Workforce Centers.

Despite this downturn, there is still a focus on Energy & Natural Resources because of emerging technology in these industries and an increasing presence of natural energy sources in the region.

There is also a crossover between this industry and Transportation & Logistics - an increase in oil prices or a change in energy technology can have a large impact on transportation as a whole.

The members of the Eastern Regional Planning Group identified three top growth areas for their region: Health & Wellness, Manufacturing, and Food & Agriculture. Healthcare continues to expand in the Eastern region with a focus on nursing and other mid-level providers to meet the needs of the growing and aging population - Banner Health, Colorado Plains Medical

Center, Melissa Memorial, Plains Medical Center, Kit Carson County Memorial Hospital, Salud Clinic System, and Centennial Mental Health all have a presence in the Eastern region and are all experiencing growth in patient numbers, especially as the area's population ages. Residents 60 years and older rose from 23,355 to 26,004, according to EMSI data. While just over a 1% increase, the strain on rural health systems as this population ages (hospice, longer term care/nursing homes, home based care) creates a demand for Certified Nursing Assistants as well as higher level care providers and specialists.

For Manufacturing and Food & Agriculture, the focus for the Eastern region will be on technological changes in these industries and an increased need for industrial maintenance and technologically certified occupations. Local community colleges are also responding to this need - for example, creating Associates of Wind Technology at Northeastern Junior College.

**b. The employment needs of employers in those industry sectors and occupations;**

Employers continue to stress the importance of “soft skills” in addition to educational skills such as science and technology. The need for individuals, both young and mid-level, who have solid interviewing skills, a dependable work ethic, and the ability to interact successfully with a customer is always a need for employers throughout the region. In addition, with marijuana legalization, employers continue to share struggles in attracting and retaining employees that can successfully pass a drug screens or meet on the job expectations. For occupations where individuals are required to drive vehicles, operate equipment or maintain a safe construction site, this is a crucial component for insurance and liability management. Rural regions struggle with this issue for a variety of substances, not just marijuana, but with legalization, most employers are experiencing an increase in individuals who are unable to pass a pre-employment drug screen.

**Northwest**

Employers in the Northwest region have similar needs as other rural regions throughout Colorado. This includes affordable housing for employees, transportation systems, bilingual Spanish staff, seasonality of resort economies, and technical skills such as mechanics, CDL drivers, and healthcare providers. In some resort areas the need for housing has reached a critical point.

In Garfield County, human services provide vouchers for rental assistance for those working, but the list is currently at 430 individuals receiving assistance with an additional 600 on waiting list. This is simply not sustainable. Affordable housing is an important component to attracting and retaining employees. Throughout the regions many area first responders (firefighters, EMS, protective services) are living in other counties and communities – often over 60-90 minutes away. They are unable to locate due to the high cost of housing and lack of

employment opportunities for spouses. Frequently these employers have to provide local housing and develop shift schedules to allow those employees to stay during the work week in the community they serve. Many school districts and government employers are working on public/private partnerships to address affordable housing options for school district and other public service employees.

Employers also have a need for skilled technical positions. There is a need for CDL drivers for various industries throughout the region and this need will continue to grow as Manufacturing and Logistics companies expand their operations. Mechanics for diesel and heavy equipment are also important for Manufacturing, Transportation and Logistics and Energy industries - it's important for employees to have access to these skills through education and work experiences.

Many employers in healthcare, manufacturing, and tourism need bilingual Spanish skills among their employees. Many community colleges are working to create training programs for individuals who are already bilingual, but the numbers are different throughout the region. In some area there has been high demand and participation in ESL programs and in others the demand is too sporadic or low to allow for classes to be offered successfully. Employers need ways to recruit and incentivize Spanish-speaking individuals to the in-demand occupations. Health and mental health services are in high need of these language skills - bilingual case managers and nurses can help people with care navigation and understanding complex systems of care. When local community colleges, like Colorado Mountain College, provides classes targeted for native Spanish speakers however, there are sometimes not enough enrollees to even hold the class. Individuals may not know about the classes, or the costs are too high for them to enroll - this will be an area of exploration over the next four years.

In many locations the local community colleges have made every effort to find innovative and collaborative ways to provide higher education training and degreed programs in a large, geographically and climate challenged area. For example there are several four-year colleges and universities that work with CMC/CNCC to provide articulation programs, collaborative bachelors and master's degree programs, etc. Heavy use of multiple campuses and service centers and extraordinary use of virtual learning tools and technology have extended the breadth and variety of training programs available locally. Colorado Northwestern Community College and Colorado Mountain College also have strong local programs for healthcare and technical skills. But there are challenges with recruiting or educating young people to these kinds of jobs, especially welders, HVAC maintenance, and mechanics.

## **West**

Employers in the Western region have needs consistent with other rural areas throughout Colorado: employees with basic professional and soft skills, employees with the ability to pass drug tests, and employees with five or more years of work experience. There is also a shift among younger employees, primarily Millennials, who are demanding higher wages and more

flexible work environments. This is difficult for employers who are using local wage data to price their job openings, but may not be able to recruit younger individuals who think they should earn more. It's important for employers to continue to work on ways to retain their employees so that the investment they make in training stays as long as possible.

Employers need individuals with basic skills as well as higher education, such as a Bachelor's degree. It can be difficult to recruit these individuals to the region, because housing and living expenses tend to be significantly more expensive. With the downturn in the Oil & Gas industry, more applicants from New Mexico are looking for jobs and relocation to Southwestern Colorado. Affordable housing throughout the Western region is a high need for employers. Housing is also an important need - there are many secondary and vacation homes in the region that sit empty for most of the year while there isn't enough available housing for local residents.

As previously mentioned, there is a demand for individuals with science, technology, engineering, and math skills and experience in variety of industries. Employers will be hiring for mechanics, computer programmers, journeymen, and other skilled trades.

It's important to note that the economies of this part of the state are highly interconnected - counties share employees and jobs amongst one another. For example, San Juan and Farmington, New Mexico counties are intertwined with the economy of Cortez, so having infrastructure that allows employees to travel easily within the region is hugely important. Local economies are often not delineated by state or county boundaries.

Another major need of employers is a functional broadband Internet infrastructure. Both La Plaza and Montezuma counties have many workers who work from home, but broadband Internet access is limited or challenging. Delta and Grand Junction have worked hard in this area to build up the infrastructure and network links.

## **South**

Employers in the Southern region have needs consistent with other rural areas throughout Colorado: employees with basic professional and soft skills, employees with the ability to pass drug tests, and affordable housing to ensure they can attract and retain individuals.

Finally, housing and transportation continues to be a challenge, with many employers sharing difficulty in hiring and retaining employees. In most areas throughout the Southern region, like the Upper Sub-Arkansas area, affordable housing is in short supply. In the Southeast sub-area, there is also the challenge that the available housing in the area is often seen as sub-standard for individuals and families looking to move to the area. Lack of transportation in South Central and South East Regions is an issue for employers to hire individuals outside their residences.

## **East**

Employers will be faced with a variety of needs as the top industries in the Eastern region shift. There will need to be educational programs to provide necessary skills in nursing,

agricultural technology, engineering, informational technology, and other emerging occupations. For the occupations identified in Colorado's "Top Jobs" list, a majority require high levels of one or more STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) fields. This perspective is in alignment with the Colorado Talent Pipeline Report who found that 62 percent of the occupations for the future pipeline are STEM-related.

The Eastern region has a high rate of youth migration, similar to many areas throughout Colorado, which means that employers may have a more difficult time finding enough employees in one area that can impact their ability to grow. This, combined with relatively stagnant growth in the Construction sector, makes it difficult for employers to find enough local employees with the right skills to serve their needs. Colorado overall, primarily in the Front Range, is seeing a population increase that will contribute to economic growth, but that is not being reflected in the Eastern region, where housing development is limited.

Employers also need to reflect the changing needs of employees, primarily millennials. Remote technology, work-life balance, and flexible management are all examples of evolving needs that employers have to confront to attract a stable and dedicated workforce.

**2. Provide an analysis of the knowledge and skills needed to meet the employment needs of the employers in the region, including employment needs in in-demand industry sectors and occupations.**

Employees will be required to gain skills in digital literacy, technology, healthcare, skilled trades, STEM subjects, adult basic skills and professional skills in order to meet the needs of employers. Many employers shared that there is a gap between employees with basic computer skills (online navigation, filling out applications and benefits forms online, using Microsoft Office, etc.) and their needs. Since many employers have their application process online, this can be an initial barrier for many job seekers who don't have access to a computer or don't have a basic level of mastery in digital literacy. There is a misnomer that with the increase and accessibility of smartphones that people have expanded their computer skills, but many employers shared that this continues to be a struggle.

There is a high need for basic professional skills such as customer service, dependability, problem solving, and work ethic that employers identified as a high need. In addition, with a rise in STEM-related occupations, math, science, and digital literacy skills will be needed to meet employer needs. This is important at all levels - not just postsecondary, but at the high school level: several manufacturing companies shared struggles with employees lacking math, science, and reading skills at the 8th grade level. Computer skills will also be important at all levels - basic digital literacy will be a key component as the majority of employers have job applications, benefits management systems, and time clocking systems that are all online. For entry-level positions with employers, there is a struggle with ensuring individuals have appropriate levels of digital literacy. For technology-related careers, expanding basic digital literacy into software programming and development will be crucial. Business acumen, including accounting, finance, and management skills are also applicable across multiple sectors and employers.

In addition to basic digital literacy needs, there is the next level of computer skills – for example, learning proprietary software quickly or proficiency using Microsoft Office programs like Word and Excel, mobile device use, etc. This is related to a need for employees to have basic math, science, and writing skills at least the 8th grade level.

**Northwest:**

Along with the need for digital literacy comes the infrastructure required to support it - broadband is still very limited in many Northwest rural areas or it is only available at a high cost and at capacity that well below national averages. In addition to employers needed individuals to have these skills, they are also important for individuals to access adult or continuing education. Tele-commuting is an important outreach strategy for the community colleges in the region, but without the broadband infrastructure to support it, there will still be gaps in providing these opportunities.

As previously mentioned, there is a high need for basic math skills among all employees. TriState works with their apprentices to assess math literacy skills - in general, 40% of the apprentices are unable to pass an 8th grade math placement test. This is reflected in employers who are seeking applicants who can write letters to clients appropriately, make basic spreadsheets or budgets in Excel, and collect data for a project.

A niche need is for culinary skills, primarily in the Tourism and Hospitality industries. These jobs are currently in high demand but require culinary training and experience. For employers who require individuals with a CDL license, having access to local training and testing facilities is also important. Right now, many of these individuals have to travel to Denver or Grand Junction to train and test for their CDL, so employers have a difficult time recruiting for these positions.

For employers in the Energy industry, there are different needs depending on the type of work. Coal mining is currently facing a decline, along with Oil & Gas, but the needs for employers are very different. Oil & Gas has more migratory jobs and employees in contrast with mining where employees are local and the jobs are different.

## **West**

Similar to other rural regions in Colorado, the Western planning group shared the importance of basic computer knowledge and digital literacy as skills that will be crucial to meet the need of growing industries. One Human Resources director shared that nearly 40% of her time is spent helping employees use the computers for filling out applications, submitting time entries, and filling out benefit forms.

The need for basic soft skills, including financial management skills, is also important. For example, at Western Excelsior Corporation, the need for basic financial training was so high that the company started offering classes and support services to help people - they feel it is crucial to meet employees where they are. Montrose School District and Montrose CMU are collaborating to encourage STEM skills in science, technology, engineering and math but the focus is in building skills and competencies in areas such as critical thinking.

Manufacturing is growing in the region, and the need for employees with technical skills will continue to grow in turn. Ska Brewing and Stone Age Water Blasting Tools, two manufacturing companies in the region, are in a growth period right now and will need jobs in skilled areas like machinists and engineers. Colleges, community and technical colleges are focusing on growing these educational opportunities to meet that need.

Delta Montrose Technical College is focusing on the increasing need for healthcare-related education and skills. As this industry continues to expand, there will be demand for skills in nursing, medical assistance, medical technicians, home care workers, and other personal health care services. Stackable credentials are also a key strategy to developing skills for employees - when education can tie directly to available jobs in the community and there is a career pathway, students are more invested.

The Western region will also be in need of 200+ installers for the new Broadband that is being added to the area. We currently don't have the training in place to provide this instruction, but the Delta Montrose Technical College is currently working with DMEA, the electric co-op to link up the educational needs. Part of the local strategy is to train locally rather than to import workers from outside the state, and to get the unemployed workers back to work.

There is also a demand for skills related to agriculture, though it's routinely a challenge to fill these positions with locals. Many agricultural companies in the region utilize H2A visa workers because of the difficulty in attracting and retaining locals. This work is hard and many people aren't as interested in developing hard labor skills, but there is a need throughout the region.

It's important for organizations and service agencies to collaborate to provide the necessary knowledge and skills to succeed. One example is the coordination between workforce centers and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation - using the resources that are already in place allows for increased opportunities for job seekers and employers to build knowledge and skills. Western Region has always had a good collaboration of efforts between the various agencies- Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Health and Human Services, Adult Basic Education, Center for Mental Health, Alternative High Schools that have flexible schedules allow students to work and go to school, and daycare on campus for pregnant and parenting students.

Finally, it's not just about job-related education and skill building - it's also crucial for job seekers and employers to develop cultural competency and the skills to appropriately communicate with individuals from diverse cultures. As previously mentioned, this region has the only two sovereign tribal nations in Colorado and there are distinct cultural differences in communication, interaction with employers and customers, and benefits offered to employees.

## **South**

Healthcare-related knowledge and skills will also be an important focus for the Southern region, especially skills and credentials related to nursing, medical technicians, case management, and behavioral health. With this need comes the challenge of ensuring there are sufficient educational programs to support this growth as well as the job shadowing hours that accompany many of these positions. For example, Certified Addiction Counselors are in high demand in the Southern region, but the requirements of 1000-3000 job shadowing hours for a CAC I - CAC II are nearly impossible when there is a dearth of these providers within the region to provide that oversight. This presents a major challenge for employers looking to grow their own staff regionally instead of recruiting from outside areas. One strategy for the Southern region will be to advocate at the state level for changes to these requirements to make them more accommodating to employer and employee needs.

There is an increased need for vocational and career technical education skills in areas such as welding, machining, manufacturing, and other skilled trades. Though K-12 education has moved away from programs like this over the last ten years, the demand for these occupations continues to grow. Employers in manufacturing, transportation, logistics, healthcare, and agriculture all have a need for employees with these skills and are currently struggling to fill these positions. This will be a large focus of the Southern region's strategy - create partnerships between industry and education to provide these skills to individuals and keep them successfully employed in the region.

Employers in the agriculture sector will have a need for knowledge and skills related to regulations, especially as it pertains to marijuana and hemp, as well as business acumen and management skills. This sector also intersects with the need for manufacturing-related skills when specialty crops such as hemp can be used for product development. The efforts by workforce however, are very restrictive when it comes to the emergence of marijuana and hemp production - there are federal funding restrictions tied to these areas of development. As a result, workforce will not be able to support growth in this industry even if it is a regional focus.

In addition, there will be some industries that are lacking employees - the prediction for tourism is a shortfall of 100 employees within the next four years. Workforce centers will be creating more work at the local level to strategize ways to stay ahead of the demand curve for in-demand industries.

## **East**

In Morgan County, ¼ of the county does not have a GED or high school equivalency. Many second language learners. Employers need systems to bring and teach these skills - program where potential employees can get technical skills such as plumbing or mechanics alongside a GED or equivalency program, such as the one that exists at Morgan Community College. Or the "Jump Start to Nursing" program at Northeastern Junior College to help nursing students successfully complete their CNA exams through support services. This helps ensure that employers ensure their future workforce learning the technical and soft skills they need to be successful.

It's not just emerging technology jobs where skills are needed - most of the emerging industries in the Eastern region still require basic skill experience such as maintenance staff, plumbers, and electricians for hospitals, manufacturing facilities, or agricultural production. These skilled maintenance positions are a critical gap at this time - career technical education is going to be crucial over the next four years. One example of the Eastern response to this growing need is at Morgan Community College. Morgan Community College (MCC) recently formed a new advisory board for a proposed Associate of Science Degree in Industrial Maintenance Electrical/Mechanical.

The push for a new degree came on the heels of the successful launch of a new course last spring, Basic Industrial Electricity (EIC 104), which ran with two filled sections. The EIC course offering was in partnership with Cargill, who was looking to advance the electrical skills of some of their employees and help them to be promotable within the organization.

Employers need to communicate directly with colleges and high schools that there is a high need in this area and the benefits for youth and other individuals as a career option. The Eastern Youth Council is moving towards offering more connection points to youth and traditional technical education employers through an apprenticeship career fair. The Youth Council (through partnerships with entities such as the School to Work Alliance program, K-12 and community college representation, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and additional youth advocacy representatives) plan to offer this format annually from 2016 forward. This is just one method being implemented to capture those high school students who aren't necessarily college-degree bound.

Finally, adult education is an important component of ensuring a successful workforce, and Colorado continues to face challenges in this area. There are very limited funding for these programs. The staff and teachers don't receive high wages for these jobs, making it difficult to retain staff. In addition, many staff are part-time which provides no benefits or higher wages.

- 3. Provide an analysis of the workforce in the region, including current labor force employment and unemployment data, and information on labor market trends, and the educational and skill levels of the workforce in the region, including individuals with barriers to employment;**

All of the rural regions of Colorado have individual workforce analyses, so they will be addressed by region here.

#### **Northwest:**

In 2015, the top three industries for job growth in the Northwest region were Aerospace, Electronics, and Tourism and Recreation. The industry with the highest number of jobs in the region was Tourism and Hospitality with 27, 285 jobs. This industry experienced a 10% increase in number of jobs since 2013, demonstrating its sustainability and projected growth over the next several years. This was followed by Health and Wellness, with a 5% increase in number of jobs since 2013, and Energy and Natural Resources with a drop in the number of jobs provided and a flat growth rate since 2013.

The two industries with the highest percent change in job numbers were Aerospace with a 42% increase and Electronics with a 39% increase. Though both industries were relatively small employers when compared to Hospitality, this growth is predictive of continued change in these areas and the need for individuals with STEM backgrounds and skills.

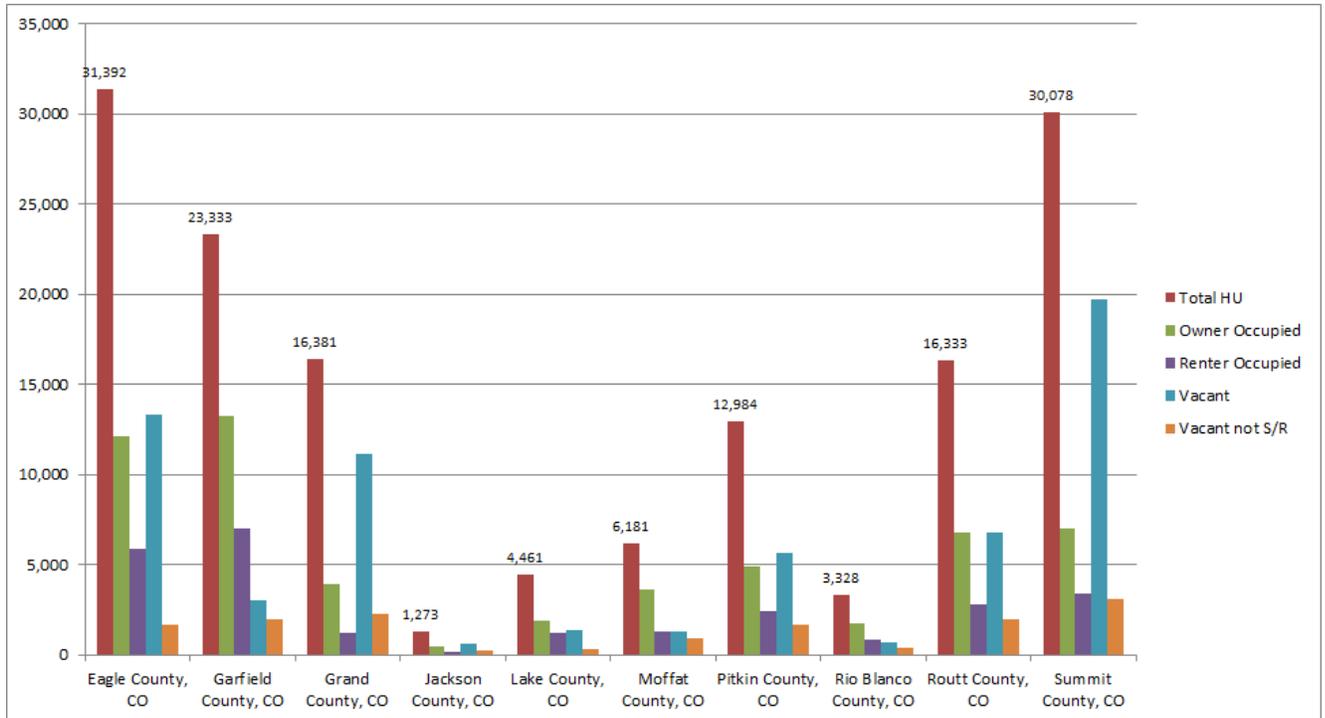
For the future, the Northwestern region is expecting Healthcare, Tourism, Retail, Infrastructure, and Construction as top industries for in-demand jobs. This future focus has many similarities with the existing trends in the region and with industry growth trends throughout Colorado.

There is always a desire from employees for higher wages and this presents a challenge for Tourism and Hospitality, especially as it pertains to seasonal work. The average wages in 2015 in that industry were \$31,288 compared to \$51,521 in Health and Wellness. When employees struggle with affordable housing, they often work more than one low-paying job to try and make ends meet. The self-sufficiency standard in the Rural Resort region is higher than many other areas in Colorado - people need to earn higher wages to stay in the region and afford to live.

The unemployment rate is relatively low: a low of 1.6% in Summit County and a high of 4.3% in Moffat County in 2015. The educational attainment level is also higher than other areas in Colorado: only 8.5% of the Northwest and 10.7% in the Rural Resort had less than a high school education while 65.3% of the Northwest and 68.6% in the Rural Resort had some college education or higher.

Financial Services, Technology and Information, Infrastructure Engineering, and Energy & Natural Resources were the areas with the biggest percentage drop in job numbers from 2013 to 2015.

Private land availability is an important metric for the region, especially when exploring affordable housing options. Much of the land in the Northwest region is not privately owned - Routt County has the highest amount of private land at 51.3% while Pitkin has the lowest at 15.8%. In addition, even when there is private land available for development, many people own secondary or vacation homes in the region, which are not available for full-time housing for the local population. The following graph shows the relatively low numbers of homes available for rent or purchase that are not Secondary or Vacation / Rental homes.



The biggest barriers to employment in the region are a lack of affordable housing, transportation, childcare and labor needs in jobs that do not meet sustainable living thresholds. Additionally there are skills gaps between workforce labor pool and open jobs. Skills gaps exist in every industry and level of job but some more general gaps exist in areas of computer skills, ESL attainment, customer service skills, and many more. Housing, computer skills, and ESL attainment were mentioned previously, but childcare is also a substantial barrier to employment for many parents. For example, there were no childcare centers in Rifle for two years - all had closed due to an inability to sustain because of high costs and regulations. In Steamboat, the city recently started providing small grants to home providers to assist them with the costs of regulations and support in running a business. Many other areas in the Northwest region felt this was a good solution and plan to work with their local officials to explore similar programs.

Overall, like many regions of the US with growing economies, the availability and affordability of childcare is a significant challenge to workforce participation.

## **West**

The Western region has a population of 344, 563, which is 6.3% of the state population. While the state experienced an overall growth rate of 7.5%, this region experienced only a 1.9% increase. According to the Colorado Department of Labor & Employment, as of February 2016, the Western region has a slightly higher unemployment rate than the state (4.0% compared to 3.3%), with the highest rates located in Montezuma (5.7%), Mesa and San Juan (5.4% respectively) counties. The Western region has a slightly higher unemployment rate than the state (4.0% compared to 3.3%) and Mesa was even higher at 5.3%. The industries with the highest number of jobs in 2015 were Health & Wellness (19, 242 jobs), Tourism (11, 964 jobs), Energy (10, 095 jobs), Advanced Manufacturing (6, 823 jobs), and Agriculture (5, 942 jobs). These trends are expected to continue over the next four years, with the exception of Energy, which is expected to decline.

The industries experiencing the most decline in 2015 were Hospitals, Oil & Gas, and Government. Though Healthcare in general is on the rise, there are many barriers and difficulties with sustaining a hospital system, so many healthcare practitioners may be moving to individual practices or smaller organizations. The average wages within the Healthcare sector are higher than the self-sufficiency standard for most of the region, which is good for individuals and families. Employment in the coal industry continues to decline especially in Delta and Gunnison counties where significant job losses have occurred because of coal mine closures. Jobs within the Energy sector are typically higher paid than jobs in other industries - the average wage for Energy jobs was \$97, 253 in 2015. This is a challenge for individuals that are seeking to transition into a new sector as Energy declines - they are used to higher wages than many other industries are able to pay.

There are also individuals with significant barriers to employment including youth migration, disabilities, mental health needs, transportation, affordable housing, childcare, and spousal employment. Many individuals with disabilities have much higher barriers to employment than individuals without - employers are often reluctant to hire individuals with disabilities because there is a perception that it is difficult to accommodate these workers.

Mental health services are insufficient to meet the demand, not just in the Western Planning Region but also throughout Colorado and the nation. As the Healthcare industry expands, there will also be an increase in mental health services, but the barriers to training individuals make it difficult to recruit enough people to fill these jobs, including family and individual counseling and addiction counseling.

As previously mentioned, affordable housing throughout the Western region is a high need for employers. Employers can't retain individuals to the region for work if there is no available affordable housing. In Montrose, the HUD waiting list is over two years long.

In many areas like San Miguel and Gunnison counties, county governments have a difficult time hiring county and government officials because of the cost of housing and living. In addition to having affordable housing, there also needs to be jobs for spouses. If a spouse is unable to find work in his/her field in the region, it limits the ability of the region to attract people in a variety of industries.

## **South**

In 2015, the population of the 19 counties in the Southern region was 361,355, which is 6.7% of the state. While the state experienced a 7.5% growth rate, the Southern region experienced a 0.3% loss. Healthcare, Retail Trade, and Government were the top employers in the region. The unemployment rate was relatively low at 2.4%, but retail and healthcare experienced higher rates of unemployment with 13% and 10%, respectively.

With respect to education, the top program completions in 2014 were in healthcare, liberal arts, and business management. In addition, 14.6% had a 12th grade or lower level of education, 30.7% of the population had a high school diploma, 25.9% had some college experience, 8.9% had an Associate's Degree, 12.7% had a Bachelor's degree, and 7.2% had a graduate degree or higher.

As previously mentioned, the top industries for jobs growth in the Southern region in from 2013 - 2015 were Electronics (37% increase), Bioscience (14% increase), and Technology & Information (8% increase). Several of these industries employ relatively low job numbers compared to other expanding industries such as Health & Wellness (5% increase) and Advanced Manufacturing (8% increase). The average earnings across all industries was \$42,223, which is 70% of the national average.

There is also a large corrections presence in the region. Fremont County alone is home to 13 State and Federal prisons. ADX Supermax, the only federal Supermax prison in the United States, is in an unincorporated area in Fremont County, south of Florence. As of March 2015, Fremont County leads the nation among all counties as the one with the largest proportion of its population incarcerated, with 16% of people residing in one of the county's prisons. In addition, Chaffee, Crowley, Pueblo, and Las Animas Counties together have five state and two private prisons.

Despite a relatively low unemployment rate, the Southern region has several individual and systemic barriers to employment for individuals including a lack of affordable housing, a lack of child care centers or providers, transportation challenges (which will be addressed more in Question 9), homelessness, and substance abuse.

In Chaffee County for example, the average cost of a home is more than three times the average family income. The 2015 median income in Chaffee County was \$61,200. The 2015 Median Home Sales Price was \$289,000. The 2015 median income in Fremont County was \$52,000 and the 2015 Median Home Sales Price was \$157,576. In addition, a rent survey conducted in Custer County on 3/27/14 showed no units were available to rent.

A follow-up study in January of 2016 showed two units available. This also impacts the construction industry in the region for their workforce development. There are also zoning restrictions throughout the Southern region that have prevented constructions companies and developers from starting new projects - the regional planning group discussed approaching local elected officials to impact these current regulations as a strategy over the next four years.

Child care is a consistent concern throughout Colorado's rural regions. The regulations and requirements for licensed child care centers and staff are high and the number of centers has dropped in the region because of this. Local human services agencies can provide limited assistance to families that qualify, but this does not go far enough to meet the need. If a parent is unable to secure affordable child care, they will not enter the workforce. In Pueblo, for example, the region could meet only 5% of the capacity for care for children under 2 years old. The increasing regulations on licensed child care facilities has caused many to close their doors, and these same regulations make the barriers to entry extremely high.

The region is faced with a high population of homeless youth, both local youth as well as transplants from other regions and states. In addition, the region has a high teen pregnancy rate and high levels of substance abuse among youth and adults compared to Colorado averages. From 2008—2010, live birth rates for women between the ages of 15-17 was 21/1,000 in Fremont County, compared to 16/1,000 in HSR 13 and 19/1,000 for the State of Colorado. All of these barriers create systemic challenges for employers who are unable to overcome these barriers for potential employees.

## **East**

In 2015, the Eastern region had a population of 112,397 individuals and 44,779 jobs - this resulted in a lower unemployment rate than other regions. The data are slightly skewed for unemployment here as agriculture is not fully factored in, which is important in such a large agricultural region. The state of Colorado experienced 7.5% population growth, while the Eastern region saw only a 1% growth increase. As previously mentioned, this slower pace of growth in comparison to overall state growth makes it difficult for employers to find enough local employees with the right skills to serve their needs. The low unemployment rate may be seen as a note of success, but actually serves to highlight the struggle facing employers over the next several years to recruit individuals to this region to work. Currently, the low unemployment rate means that employers are simply not able to find enough individuals, qualified or otherwise, to meet their employment needs. The average earnings of an individual from the Eastern region in 2015 were \$41,435, yet this average does not reflect the relatively high earnings of individuals from the Oil & Gas industry. When these individuals experience job fluctuation due to changing market conditions and oil prices, their average wage becomes a challenge for case managers and workforce center staff in providing support [Source: EMSI Q3 2015 Data Set].

The top program completions were Health Professions and Related Programs (283), Liberal Arts and Sciences (237), and Agriculture (114). In 2015, 47.2% of the population had a high school diploma or lower in terms of their educational attainment. This speaks to a high need to increase access to programs like concurrent enrollment or vocational trade educational to support this population in securing meaningful employment. The top industries for employment in 2015 were Government (10,222 jobs), Crop & Animal Production (5,122 jobs), Retail Trade (4,144 jobs), and Manufacturing (3,884 jobs).

The members of the Eastern Regional Planning Group identified three top growth areas for their region in 2016: Health & Wellness, Manufacturing, and Food & Agriculture (including Transportation and Logistics). Despite the projected growth in these areas, there are still barriers to employment for individuals throughout the Eastern region. As previously mentioned, many local employers that participated in our regional planning event shared struggles in finding individuals who could successfully pass a pre-employment drug screen.

Another major barrier is in the ability to speak and write in English. The Eastern region has a high refugee population with a wide range of spoken languages including Spanish, Somali, Eritrean, French, Swahili, Arabic, and Guatemalan, amongst others. In 2005, the city of Fort Morgan became a secondary migration area for the resettlement of Somali refugees to work at Cargill's Meat Solutions processing plant. By the end of 2013, over 1,000 Somali refugees had resettled to Fort Morgan, joined by refugees from other east African countries. According to U.S. Census 2013 estimates, Morgan County, with a population of about 28,400, ranks 6th highest among the state's 64 counties for the number of foreign born, at 12.6%. Further, approximately 26.5% of the population speaks a primary language other than English.

Obtaining the necessary soft skills to function successfully at work is another barrier identified by employers. Employees need skills in areas such as job readiness and preparation, interviewing skills, interpersonal relationship management, and other key areas. The Eastern region has several success stories in this area - for example, the Career Pathways and Adult Education program at Morgan Community College. Students and adult learners receive access to training and support in soft skills and in partnership with employers, are eligible to earn promotions as they progress in their learning. At Northeastern Junior College, there is a program called "Get Your Game On" where students and adult learners are tasked with the management and oversight of a school store. They learn in real time the needs and struggles of managers, the experience of managing employees that don't arrive to work on time, and other crucial components of running a business successfully. In addition, non-English speaking individuals who learn English, gain additional educational successes, and secure gainful employment serve as mentors and role models for others in their community or new immigrants who may be coming to the region.

Transportation has been and continues to be a challenge and barrier for many individuals seeking employment in the Eastern region. There are limited public transportation options: County Express and small city bus routes can provide some support, but there is no comprehensive transportation system that addresses the full range of barriers faced by individuals. Some employers are trying to tackle this barrier head-on by providing shuttle services for employees, but the cost and liability risk are often too large for employers. Finally, child care is another significant barrier faced by individuals. There is a lack of child care facilities in the Eastern region, which limits the ability of parents to seek employment. The regulations and requirements for licensed child care centers and staff are high and the number of centers has dropped in the region because of this. There are currently only four licensed centers for the entire 10 county region - this is extremely insufficient for the 17,000 square foot miles with a population of 6,374 children under five years and under. Despite this being a significant barrier, members of the Eastern Regional Planning Group identified this as a potential area for growth, especially if focusing on family and home care providers and growing services to provide them with training and experience to care for children safely and appropriately in their homes.

- 4. Describe the development and implementation of sector initiatives for in-demand industry sectors or occupations for the planning region, and explain how sector partnerships will be utilized to facilitate the engagement of employers, including small employers and employers in in-demand industry sectors and occupations, in workforce development programs.**

Sector partnerships are a key driver for success in the rural regions of Colorado – the rural nature of these communities requires collaboration and partnership for the success of the community and this has been a major area of strength for rural Colorado. Though there are many examples of successful formal sector partnerships, there are also a great deal of informal partnerships. One strategy of all rural regions will be to formalizing the partnerships through MOUs and other formal agreements when appropriate, but it's also important to recognize that the informal sector partnerships play a large role in workforce development in rural areas.

### **Northwest**

The workforce centers have been working on an effort to map out sector partnerships and plan for emerging in-demand industries to focus on. One focus in 2015 was the Health and Wellness industry. There is a focus on health in the region as a priority. Over the last couple of years, there have been meetings and efforts to bring sector partners together, but it was hard to bring industry to the table and finding a private sector champion. This will be a continued focus - for workforce to document current and targeted sector partnerships over the next four years.

Another successful industry partnership that workforce and economic development has been collaboratively involved in included the development of an economic impact study that provided data on the very significant economic impact of the coal fired power industry, which provides over 1000 high-wage primary jobs in the region.

On a related note, the Colorado Mining Association and others are connected through sector partnerships with workforce. There is more to mining that coal - primarily at the soda mine in Rio Blanco. There is overlap with the Associated Governments of Northwest Colorado (AGNC), which is has made the Energy Industry and Jobs an important focus.

The Tourism industry has created many strong sector partnerships - Lake County, working with the other members of the Upper Arkansas Area Council of Government, launched an outdoor recreation sector group that has been meeting for several months. Rural Resort also has several sector groups (HR, marketing, etc.) that meet regularly where workforce center staff are invited to participate. These are not formal sector partnerships, but they are crucial to workforce success in the Northwest region.

There are strong partnerships with the mining industry employers and local workforce centers - For example, workforce, CMC and a private employer worked together to provide a computer bank in employee break areas for employees to upgrade skills such as computer literacy during breaks and after work. This has also led to apprenticeship training programs being offered online at the employer site in conjunction with CMC.

There are also strong partnerships with local human services staff and their programs. One new program is called Employment First, where workforce center staff have been hugely valuable in getting program recipients ready for work. In this program, recipients of food stamps without children are required to do some kind of work-related activities to continue to receive food assistance. Workforce center staff already have expertise in this area, so enhancing this relationship has been highly beneficial.

Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG) has a Health and Wellness sector partnership. This partnership started when the regions were encouraged through participation in conferences and summits - they assembled a core team to respond and evaluated data from 14 key industries throughout the Northwest. This overlapped with efforts by the Small Business Development Council to focus on Health and Wellness to increase more higher-paying jobs to the region. NWCCOG is also working on the idea of having the Mining industry serve as a catalyst for increased sector partnerships with similar types of businesses.

Finally, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and workforce centers have always worked closely in this region - their partnership allows staff to work together on career fairs and to help recruit participants jointly.

## **West**

Like most rural regions of Colorado, sector partnerships have been a major component of successful service delivery and regional strategy development. There are several successful examples throughout the Western region of existing informal sector partnerships, those who have not had an official launch as described on Colorado Sector's website ([www.sectorsummit.com](http://www.sectorsummit.com)). Western Excelsior Corporation partners with the workforce centers in Durango and Cortez to conduct assessments and pre-tests on math and reading skills for potential employees. They also refer applicants and current employees to the workforce center to get other services. Durango Adult Education has a strong partnership with Training Advantage where a career counselor presents to incoming students on supports and services. A local Hilton hotel was seeking support for helping their employees get GEDs, so they partnered with workforce centers and adult education centers to provide the training and testing instead of a private sector business - saving them money and allowing them to incentivize employees directly for completion.

Other strong partnerships with the workforce center exist with the local Chambers of Commerce and libraries throughout the region. These both provide great linkages to help gauge business and community needs.

Several of the libraries also provide virtual workforce centers, like in Pagosa Springs and Paonia, Cedaredge and Hotchkiss in Delta County, which allows increased access to services for job seekers. In Durango, the adult education provider is co-located with the local community college. The Ute Mountain higher education providers work closely with local colleges and adult learning centers; they are also trying to increase partnerships with hospitals and other healthcare organizations. Most of these are informal partnerships - most sector relationships are strong but informal. Advanced manufacturing is one of the biggest areas of focus for sector partnerships - businesses like Osprey, Rocky Mountain Chocolate, Ska Brewing, and Stone Age all have regional presences.

In terms of formal sector partnerships, the Southwest sub-area launched an energy sector partnership however, with the decline in this field, the partnership is stagnant. There are also several efforts around healthcare - the Community Health Action Coalition and the Area Health Education Center have formal partnerships in the Southwest sub-area. Advanced manufacturing is also planning a launch in 2016.

In the Western sub-area, the Health and Wellness and Advanced Manufacturing sector partnerships have been launched successfully. The Health and Wellness sector partnership has stalled and is currently reorganizing. The Advanced Manufacturing sector partnership is looking to merge with Mesa County's manufacturing partnership in the immediate future.

WIOA provides opportunities for more sector partnerships with the K-12 school system since there is a stronger focus on youth. The workforce center staff knows that talking to students during senior year is important - one staff member works with the Cortez schools and she provides presentations for juniors and seniors in the classroom. Though the relationships with schools are important for teaching about career pathways and possibilities, schools are limited in the time they can offer to outside presenters. With alternative schools, workforce is able to provide assessments and testing for many students.

LAUNCH West CO is an example of a new, successful sector partnership - there is a monthly meetup for developers and other technology related professionals and workforce center staff attend meetings, post open jobs, and build increased connections with emerging technology throughout the region.

The workforce planning region will work to formalize many of the existing informal partnerships with many sectors including Healthcare, Alternative Energy, and other emerging industries. The area is seeing a shift in agriculture to focus more on specialty crops, it is limited however, especially with the emergence of marijuana and hemp production and federal funding restrictions tied to these areas of development. Finally, there needs to be an increase in marketing and promotion for the services offered by the workforce center. If funding and support can be increased at the state or federal level, workforce centers could do more to reach out to local businesses of all size.

## **South**

Sector partnerships, both formal and informal, have always been a focus for rural areas of Colorado. The Southern region has several successful sector partnerships. One is the Arkansas Valley Manufacturing Group where manufacturing employers meet monthly to discuss trends, challenges, and opportunities and partner with the local workforce center to talk about ways to recruit and engage new employees. They also connected with the local school systems to create a career pathway program for manufacturing. One new strategy for this plan will be to connect with some of those manufacturing champions from Pueblo and have them travel to other, more rural areas in the region to support growth of similar efforts.

The Colorado Workforce Development Council has a new industry liaison to help increase coordination for efforts like this in other industries and will be helping to support this strategy.

One highly successful partnership to highlight was in the collaboration with WIOA Program Staff, Department of Corrections, Department of Human Services, Colorado Department of Transportation, and CDL driving test centers to support a recently released offender who had a job offer with CDOT, but needed to re-instate his CDL license. Within one week, the partners were able to work together to help the man take his test and then start a position with CDOT as a temporary worker. Within one month, he was promoted to a full-time employee. The CDOT supervisor was so pleased with the experience and the work ethic of the employee; they requested that workforce and DOC continue to refer individuals for hire.

Another successful sector partnership is between Pueblo Community College and the local hospital systems and palliative care centers. Recently, the CEOs met to begin discussing in-demand jobs and skill sets needed and how to encourage more partnerships with workforce to support this need. This partnership is also working to create a survey of all organizations in the region to understand emerging workforce needs and to explore creating a labor pool to share employees among each other.

Educational institutions are important sector partners, and Trinidad State Junior College has strong sector partnerships with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, workforce centers, and the judicial system. This allows TSJC staff to provide streamlined services and to connect their students to the resources they need to be successful. They have also partnered with several local franchises, including Taco Bell and Wal-Mart, where those employers contribute financial resources to TSJC to support more employees in studying for and earning a GED.

Though facilitating the engagement of employers is crucial for the workforce centers, there continues to be challenges around having capacity to connect with employers as well as a perception of what a workforce center can provide to a business. For rural workforce centers with limited staff, it is often difficult to have staff out in the community talking to businesses because it would require closing the workforce office, primarily with offices with only one staff member.

In addition, many employers have a mistaken perception that the workforce centers are solely for unemployment benefits, so marketing and outreach opportunities are needed to continue to engage employers.

One future strategy will be for the Southern region to engage the Small Business Development Corporations in each area. There are many small businesses throughout the region, as is consistent with national data on the presence of small businesses, so workforce center staff will be exploring new ways to increase outreach, marketing, and direct connections with small businesses over the next four years. This effort is also a focus of local Human Services staff, primarily for TANF recipients, so there are additional opportunities to utilize existing partnerships to increase connections with small businesses.

An additional strategy will be to coordinate the updating of Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) plans through the sector partnerships represented in the regional planning group. This effort is an opportunity for partners to connect, collectively describe their individual community strategy, share drafts, and give feedback before submitting to identify areas for collaboration or joint funding.

## **East**

Sector partnerships are an area of key importance for the Eastern region due to the geographic layout of the region and limited access to transportation systems. One example of the development and implementation of such a partnership is in the wind technology and nursing programs at Northeastern Junior College. The Eastern Sub-Local Area Workforce Center and Northeastern Junior College created a close partnership to assist with development of this program to meet growing industry needs as well as support with tuition payments for students in the region. In 2015, the students in the wind technology program achieved a 100% placement rate for school-to-work. Their last LPN to ADN nursing class had 100% of graduates working in the field within six months of graduation.

This successful partnership also ensures that most graduates are being placed here regionally - not moving on to other regions for employment. Grants and other forms of support help keep programs like this successful, but there is always the challenge of securing more funds to ensure the vitality of the program.

Future strategies will include a focus on increasing the presence of industries that are currently underrepresented in established sector partnerships. One area of opportunity is in apprenticeship programs - there is a lack of presence for these programs in the Eastern region, so one component of this plan will be to engage programs from the region or other major regions nearby (e.g. the Denver metro area) to recruit these programs to the Eastern region. Another important partner for the future will be in healthcare services, including mental health.

If an individual seeks education and certifications in mental health occupations (e.g. certified addiction counselors, family therapists, etc.), there are significant requirements for observation and supervision hours that can only be completed by an individual who already holds those certifications. The Eastern region workforce will be exploring partnerships over the next year to help meet this need for supervision hours, as well as exploring ways to increase the number of jobs available in these industries throughout the region.

Small businesses can be more difficult to connect with throughout the Eastern region due to workforce center staff sizes and constraints. For example, if a workforce center staff member takes the day to travel to small business sites to educate them on opportunities for partnership, that can mean the workforce center office would need to be shut down if there is only one staff member in the rural area. When these partnerships exist however, they are quite successful. There is an increased focus on entrepreneurship and often an increased willingness to hire or train youth in their small business operations.

One success story is in a partnership between the Eastern Sub-Area Workforce Center and several regional small businesses - they were able to pay the wages for a few youth to get positions started, which was a huge incentive for small businesses to engage.

Marketing and branding for the workforce centers has always been a challenge, and this echoes in relationships with small businesses. Many small businesses simply don't know what the workforce centers do and how a mutually beneficial partnership can be created. With support at the statewide level, the Eastern region can continue to increase its marketing and branding efforts to create additional name recognition and drive demand from employers to engage in partnerships. It will be important to connect workforce trends in this area directly to businesses so they can respond appropriately. One proposed new partner from the Eastern Regional Planning Group was the Early Childhood Council, which can provide training for individuals to serve as in-home child care providers.

**5. Describe how career pathways will be used to meet the needs of employers and support work-based learning opportunities.**

Career pathways are an important component of developing a successful workforce, though not without its challenges. When individuals are focused on getting a job because they've been unemployed or underemployed, they are less interested and motivated in developing a personal career pathway. If workforce is able to focus more on marketing and outreach to communicate the importance of career pathways, it would be easier to work with individuals to develop them.

Local community colleges are a crucial regional partner for all rural regions – the communication between workforce centers and community colleges helps direct efforts towards real-time market demands and create educational opportunities locally for individuals to continue to grow in their sector of employment.

**Northwest**

Career pathways are especially challenging in the Tourism industry, where many positions are still seasonal and tends to attract individuals with a short-term mindset about their career development. One focus for the Northwest will be to work with Tourism and Hospitality sector partners to share the importance of a career pathway for all employees. In addition, when workers are underemployed, as many are in the Northwest, they are required to work multiple jobs to make ends meet - this creates a difficulty where people don't have the time or energy to seek out additional skills or education to develop a career pathway.

Despite this challenge, the Northwest region is thinking strategically about how to focus on creating a comprehensive system for career pathways. The primary strategy will be to increase and enhance sector partnerships to educate employers about the importance of developing career pathways, share the opportunities that workforce center has available to support this development, and create a systemic flow of information between businesses, workforce centers, and higher education institutions.

The Energy and Manufacturing sectors have a strong history of developing career pathways and understanding their importance for employees. At Tri-State Craig Station, for example, the focus is usually on building career pathways to promote employees from within, thus opening up a lower-level position for someone new. Generally, the requirement for a higher position is having worked in a lower position, so the system for creating career pathways is already in place.

Through the efforts of WIOA, workforce center staff will be focusing more on work-based and on-the-job trainings: these opportunities help to ensure a good culture fit and strong relationship between the employer and the employee. This promotion, along with increased marketing and outreach, will assist employers and service providers in focusing on developing a career pathway for all employees.

The local community colleges offer a wide variety of career and technical training with multiple stackable credentials such as single day certifications, one- and two-year certificates and degrees and even four-year degrees and partnerships with other higher education for Master's-level programs.

## **West**

The career pathways model is emerging as an ever more important strategic focus for the Western region, both within its post-secondary educational institutions and secondary schools and at the employer level. The primary industry sector in which career pathways is currently highly visible in the region is Healthcare, and within that, specifically the nursing occupations.

Regional training options allow employers to start job seekers in entry level Certified Nurse Aid (CNA) positions, and support their progress through Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) and Associate Registered Nurse training, with the possibility of advancement to the Bachelors Registered Nurse (BSN) level. Through the combination of post-secondary educational institutions in the region, this pathway is well established and relatively accessible for regional residents. The prevalence of training in the area, as noted below, also highlights the high demand for participants in this career pathway, based on employer demand for this skill set continuum.

There are three post-secondary options within the Western planning region, each with several career and technical education programs. All of them have nursing programs that support the healthcare career pathway. The post-secondary institutions, including one just outside the Western planning region, are listed below along with the current training programs available.

- Southwest Colorado Community College (SCCC) – CNA, AAS RN
- Delta-Montrose Technical College (DMTC) - CNA, LPN
- Colorado Mesa University (CMU) – LPN, AAS RN, BSN, MSN, DNP
- San Juan College (SJC), Farmington, NM – CNA, AAS RN, BSN

Regional secondary schools are beginning to adopt this framework in their advisement role for students, e.g., the Delta County School District's preliminary work on developing a career pathway for healthcare, including nursing, and information technology. Some area school districts have explored the career cluster model use within the state's Career & Technical Education (CTE), wherein students enter one of the seven career clusters and engage with a career pathway within that cluster, which may or may not be supported by "career academies" within a high school. Another existing success story is at Colorado Mesa University – they provide career pathways that can build on the programs being proposed at the high school level, like at Delta High School. There is also a Montrose campus with nursing programs built on a career pathway ladder – one can start with an RN and continue education through the doctoral level.

Opportunities other than formal post-secondary training in the region for development of career pathway advancement is through movement between employers within industry sectors, which occurs frequently in all sectors the Western region, and all rural areas. Two impacts of this phenomenon are that, 1) it allows residents to remain in the area rather than relocating for career advancement and, 2) it puts pressure on employers to create internal career pathways to retain their best workers. The latter is most difficult for small employers who, by the nature of their businesses and size, are unable to provide internal upward mobility. The use of work-based learning options such as on-the-job training (which can be subsidized through the workforce system) can give these employers an opportunity to enlarge their workforce, while also increasing both opportunities and demand for workers within a given career pathway.

The Western region will undertake the following strategies for the next four years:

- Support educational institutions in maintaining and adding to existing career pathway access in multiple sectors through formal training, credentialing and licensing.
- Support sector partnerships where employers/businesses can share growth opportunities and develop collaborative efforts to meet workforce needs, e.g., those in Hospitality & Tourism exploring ways to share employees for high level positions rather than competing for them.
- Support the “employment along the way” strategy, working with employers and training providers to increase the feasibility for a worker to maintain a livelihood at a livable wage while pursuing skill set development to enable advancement within the chosen career pathway, and to encourage employers to utilize their own “on the job” work-based learning processes to advance incumbent workers.

## **South**

Career pathways and stackable credentials are important components of the Southern regional plan. As previously mentioned, there is an increased need for vocational and career technical education skills in areas such as welding, machining, manufacturing, and other skilled trades. Though K-12 education has moved away from programs like this over the last ten years, the demand for these occupations continues to grow. Employers in manufacturing, transportation, logistics, healthcare, and agriculture all have a need for employees with these skills and are currently struggling to fill these positions. The Arkansas Valley Manufacturing Group recently began a program through a partnership with schools in the region to provide hands-on education and site tours for 6th - 8th grade students to introduce them to manufacturing as a career option and to help develop career pathways for these students.

They raised \$50,000 in donations from community members and grant support to establish a physics curriculum using See The Change USA for all of these students. Las Animas, Swink, Rocky Ford, Cheraw, Wiley, and La Junta Schools participated in site tours.

In addition, at Trinidad State Junior College, there are several programs including but not limited to, College in Colorado and Find Your Passion where a Career Navigator assists students with developing career pathways. The Adult Education program is also working with the Colorado Workforce Center and the Youth to Work program where students who are seeking their High School Equivalency are paired with a Labor and Employment Specialist who help them with job readiness skills, resume help, and informational interviews both on campus and in the community.

The Chaffee County Department of Human Services utilizes programs called Choices and My Next Move to help clients assess their interests, skills, and values and match them with possible job options. They explore many areas and possibilities, learning what different jobs entail, the education required, the wages associated with those jobs, and the future trajectory and career pathways for various positions and industries.

South Central BOCES (Board of Cooperative Education Services) offers many of the same opportunities as others throughout the region. They spend approximately 30% of their time meeting clients personal needs so that they may then address the academic and career needs that encompasses the other 70% of time spent.

They work in tandem with Department of Social Services, Pueblo Workforce Center, Catholic Charities, Pueblo Community College, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Health Solutions in providing basic personal needs from childcare, transportation, financial assistance opportunities, tutoring, academic counseling, mental health needs, Youth Works, and other agencies. They also help clients navigate [mynextmove.org](http://mynextmove.org) and [collegeincolorado.org](http://collegeincolorado.org). SC BOCES also has a career notebook that lists various available careers to help clients see a bigger picture of what is available. They are now in the process of helping fill out FAFSA/College Entrance information to help students. Adult Education does not work in isolation - they heavily rely on community partners to support the mission, improve the quality of life in the surrounding area, and to build a stronger workforce.

At Pueblo Community College, the faculty advising model allows staff to build relationships with students to help them explore and discuss multiple career options. The faculty come primarily from a business environment and can provide real information to students about jobs and career pathways. At Otero Junior College, all students are exposed through a three day orientation/discovery process where they are taken to all the departments to meet with faculty and staff to learn about different career paths. Advisors meet with every student four times each semester to review their academic progress and if there are any changes to their career pathways. Within their nursing program, senior student mentor incoming students to help them understand career pathways (e.g. CNA to RN) and demonstrate crossover skills between departments and fields within the healthcare system.

The Pueblo Workforce Center is focusing on developing a talent pipeline to get information to the customer in the timeliest way for the process to move quickly for them. This starts with a job ready review form, which the job seeker completes during registration and meets with a counselor to help them. Workforce staff also create a high-demand list of jobs in the area, which is used with the job seeker to identify if they can be placed in a high-demand area. There are Employment Solutions seminars, Career Exploration workshops, and many other resources to build resumes, practice job skills, or get tutoring to pass a test or secure a promotion. Workforce staff are also looking to expand into a programs like Career Cruising and Inspire, which integrate employers, workforce centers, and local schools to create demand pipelines and support career pathways for all individuals.

Workforce center staff have been a crucial component in developing career pathways for older workers and for workers dislocated by the recent oil & gas downturn. Several of these workers have had difficulty in passing entrance exams into other companies, either due to a lack of continuing education or from entering a new sector. Workforce center staff have been supporting these workers with tutoring and other services to not only help them pass exams, but to grow their skills so they can continue to grow within their new companies.

Career pathways are important in all fields, but local manufacturing companies are making this an increased focus for the next four years. Oliver Manufacturing, based in La Junta, employs around 60 individuals; their senior staff is thinking about ways to create career advancement opportunities to support promoting from within and helping existing employees navigate into other areas of the company. This is not only a career pathway for that individual, but it opens up a lower-level position for someone new in the community.

A primary need, and not just in the manufacturing industry, is math skills, both basic and advanced. Local workforce centers, postsecondary educational institutions, and employers, will be partnering over the next four years to explore strategies to increase math skills through tutoring, providing access to workforce center programs in the workplace, and adult educational opportunities.

## **East**

Career pathways are a crucial focus for the Eastern region. The Eastern Regional Planning Group outline career pathways for the three top emerging industries: Health & Wellness, Manufacturing, and Food & Agriculture (including Transportation and Logistics).

In Health & Wellness, there is an increased focus on developing sustainable educational programs for nursing, certified nurse assistants, and other mid-level providers and support occupations. Morgan Community College is a regional model for success, especially as it pertains to their nursing program. Northeastern Junior College is also focusing on this area by working to expand their nursing education program.

There are many areas of opportunity with changes from the Affordable Care Act still trickling down in rural areas, and these community colleges are well-positioned to respond to those changes to help create and enhance career pathways for future employees. Within the region, there are currently informal relationships with the Banner Health system - this is an area of opportunity to solidify into a formal sector partnership to enhance career pathways within that system. In addition to formal healthcare occupations, there are many opportunities for industrial maintenance and operational technology positions that need to be supported through career pathways. Partnerships between health systems and industrial maintenance programs, such as the new program at Morgan Community College, will be an important component of training new future employees.

Some programs, such as certified nurse assistant programs, are not eligible for Pell Grants, which can be a barrier for individuals who need access to financial aid. Programs such as the aforementioned Jump Start Into Nursing can help fill that gap, but are dependent on funding sources.

In Manufacturing, there is a focus on natural resources, including wind technology, mechanical engineering, diesel, and industrial maintenance. The Eastern region sees this as an area of opportunity, especially as it pertains to diversifying individuals who may have left the Oil & Gas sector because of the economic downturn.

The industrial maintenance program at Morgan Community College provides this career pathway, and they often have students placed into internships or directly hired after only one semester by an employer, who can support their continued education. There are barriers for individuals without a GED or high school equivalency, but there are existing resources that can provide support while earning that certification. Morgan Community College offers a program where individuals can complete their GED while doing a certificate for welding, electrical, or industrial maintenance. As previously mentioned, the students in the wind technology program at NJC in 2015 achieved a 100% placement rate for school-to-work - another example of a successful career pathway.

In Food & Agriculture and Transportation & Logistics, there are several efforts underway both in technological advancement as well as certified testing for trucking and other forms of transport. This region is a natural area of expansion for Transportation & Logistics due to the I-70 corridor presence. Yuma is working to get a certified testing site for a Commercial Driver's License, while Sage Trucking School provides classes in Yuma County for potential drivers, thanks to a relationship with Yuma County Department of Human Services. There are several local and national companies with a presence in the Eastern region with a need for transport and logistics occupations including ethanol production, pork production, feed lots, dairy production, and many other areas of agriculture that all require certified drivers. In addition, there are two new Loves truck stops - one that began recruitment in January in Burlington to add 90 jobs, and another being planning in Brush that is estimated to add 65 jobs.

**6. Describe other strategies and services that will be used in the planning region to support a local workforce development system that meets the needs of businesses in the planning region.**

**Northwest**

It's important for workforce centers to serve as information leaders for local businesses to easily direct them to information and opportunities. Right now, there are gaps in this vision, but it is still the strategic focus over the next four years. Businesses shared that it is difficult to keep track of multiple government agencies and service programs - that, combined with confusion about the role and services provided by workforce centers, means that there is opportunity to enhance collaboration to meet business needs.

There are also concerns from businesses in the region about federal regulations, which can also lead to a feeling of distrust for workforce and other government services. If the workforce centers had additional time or resources to invest in increased outreach and marketing, there could be substantial gains in this area by building trust directly with businesses and other workforce development groups such as Chambers of Commerce, regional Council of Governments, community colleges, and other partners. In addition, one strategy will be to develop stronger partnerships with LEOs to mitigate and understand federal regulations that are impacting local businesses.

Many businesses simply don't know what workforce can offer them and don't see the value for them in creating a relationship. Several businesses shared that even when they have tried to use Connecting Colorado to post for jobs, they have had zero applications compared to Craigslist or other means of posting open positions. If workforce center staff had increased capacity for marketing and outreach, they could spend more time hearing from employers about their needs on a regular basis. The regional planning group created a "quick win" solution by discussing the creation of a one-page document that lists a menu of services in a simple, accessible way targeted at employers and job-seekers.

For the future, marketing and outreach to local businesses will be a major strategic focus, as well as better promotion of tools and services available for businesses and individuals. Increasing sector partnerships will also be a key strategy - collaboration with Economic Development, local Chambers of Commerce, and Industry Associations will assist with both marketing of workforce services and with attracting individuals and businesses to become involved with the local workforce center. The many strong existing relationships will continue to be nurtured, as well as the focus of serving as a resource and referral leader for industry or business advocate groups throughout the region.

## **West**

Many businesses that participated in the regional planning effort shared ideas and strategies to ensure a system design that would meet their needs throughout the Western region. Having workforce center staff available to facilitate sector partnership events and meetings, provide more wage analysis by region, and improved marketing and outreach efforts were all ideas submitted by businesses as ways to continue to meet their needs.

There were several strategies and ideas for the future. First, if the workforce center can conduct semi-regular focus groups of various industry groups (HR executives in tourism and hospitality, manufacturing businesses, etc.), they could share more information and trust with the workforce center staff and also help with promotion of the workforce center activities and services. This would be best served by having a business liaison at each workforce center, though that would require an increase in funding.

On a related note, the workforce centers would like to focus on ways to improve marketing and outreach services and to combat a common misunderstanding about workforce centers - that they are the unemployment office.

One idea was to create a brochure or flyer that represents the services available and educates local businesses on what their local workforce center really does. Improved marketing tools and strategies could be local or regional efforts to serve many audiences. A third strategy will be to strengthen the relationship between workforce centers and human services: there is a significant overlap in population served so enhancing the relationship with more cross-training and sharing of work and services would benefit everyone involved. Businesses also requested the opportunity to do short-term and long-term planning with workforce center staff on a regular basis - they may not be hiring right now, but there could be coordination for hiring efforts 6-12 months later.

A final effort will be to connect more with the local public schools to share student information from the ICAP to assist workforce center staff with connecting them to work and training opportunities. This should include working with students who are engaged in STEM programs in the middle and high school grade levels.

## **South**

Meeting the needs of businesses is necessary for building a successful workforce development system. As previously mentioned, for rural workforce centers with limited staff, it is often difficult to have staff out in the community talking to businesses because it would require closing the workforce office, primarily with offices with only one staff member. One strategy to increase the workforce center's ability to meet the needs of businesses will be to design new educational and marketing options and designing workforce center staff time to be more flexible to meet with businesses and hear about their needs on a regular basis to encourage continuous improvement in this area.

Many local businesses focused on the need for ongoing and increased partnerships between all of the organizations in the Regional Planning Group. It's often difficult for businesses to be approached by several different government agencies for similar needs (job shadowing, internships, hiring, etc.). One strategy for this group will be to make business services within workforce centers more responsive and with easier access. One example requested by businesses was a structured account management strategy between all government agencies where the agencies coordinated their efforts to target businesses more strategically and make the communications more streamlined. This was echoed by the government agencies in the room that are interested in having state client management tracking systems more closely integrated with one another to create more of a one-stop shop mindset.

Another strategy to meet the needs of businesses is to create regional coordinated response/resource systems where businesses are more aware of how and where to refer employees for services to keep them employed (programs to help with child care, affordable housing, etc.). Employers shared that when employees face these social barriers to work, it's extremely difficult to keep them employed, but they also don't have the capacity to connect with and understand every governmental or non-profit service option that can provide support to individuals.

Employers also discussed an increased need for education around hiring individuals with higher barriers to employment - such as individuals with a disability, someone working to earn their GED, offenders, and individuals receiving social service benefits such as TANF or food stamps. There are many misperceptions about individuals that have these higher barriers to employment and workforce center staff can provide education and support for businesses to expand their hiring practices. In addition, there are also state and federal regulations that set maximum earning amounts for individuals receiving benefits. There is often a gap between working an entry-level or part-time position that allows someone to keep their benefits, but taking the next step up a career pathway would force them to lose benefits and the wages for that higher position do not fill the gap that benefits provided. If there were statewide strategies that supported an individual keeping their benefits for a short time in order to build up capital to support their needs, businesses could do more to create more career pathways for employees.

Most of these strategies require workforce center staff to have more time to connect with businesses however, which is a challenge mentioned previously for small, rural centers.

## **East**

One strategy generated by the Eastern Regional Planning Group was to expand the sector partnerships with local dairy producers to understand more about the occupations in demand and create career pathways in response. As mentioned, there is a need for both technologically advanced occupations as well as maintenance and frontline staff positions for agricultural production, so this could be a strong area of growth in developing a responsive workforce system.

There will also be an increased focus on connections and partnerships with small businesses. Though these businesses require more time and outreach, the benefits can be quite impactful to workforce development. This area of focus requires more investment in supporting future employees with developing soft skills that make them attractive to potential employers.

As formal sector partnerships increase, the Eastern Regional Planning Group also feels there are opportunities for workforce staff and business staff to work together on aligning career-specific language (e.g. manufacturing vs. aerospace production). Individuals may be more interested in careers that have more appropriate job titles or descriptions, and workforce staff can assist with that education and alignment between supply and demand of occupations.

7. **Describe efforts that have taken place or anticipated efforts to assess the need for and establish regional service strategies, including the use of cooperative service delivery agreements. In addition:**
  - a. **Describe the strategies and services that will be used in the planning region to better coordinate workforce development programs and services with regional economic development services and providers;**

### **Northwest**

Regional Economic Development and workforce have maintained strong partnerships in the Northwest region. One major need of economic development staff is for the perspective of the workforce center to be shared more with local businesses - again, the need for increased marketing and outreach is a major focus. Economic development staff regularly need support with providing assistance to small businesses in developing their employee pipeline and career pathways.

Workforce centers are also able to provide economic development with data and information on emerging industry resources. Additionally, there are efforts to continue the cross-pollination of workforce and economic development boards.

### **West**

In the Western Planning Region there is a history of strong relationships between workforce centers and economic development agencies. Each sub-area and area in the region has strong representation on the workforce development board from economic development. As a result, economic development provides important insight into the needs of prospective businesses, area employers and economic partners. Additionally Montrose Economic Development Corp, Delta Economic Development and Region 10 Planning have worked closely with the workforce centers in promoting a strong business environment and in promoting both economic development and workforce center services to business wanting to come to the region. These strong relationships have assisted businesses relocating to the area as well as helping prospective businesses obtain labor market information to evaluate the area.

There are local programs like the Rural Jump Start Program where businesses new to Colorado can receive tax incentives for relocating - workforce centers can provide support and services to new job seekers in the community and can be given information to help prepare efforts for new arrivals or in high-need areas. It will also be important in the future to continue to stay connected to the two local tribal nations - one new effort will be connecting with the economic development staff at the Ute Mountain Ute and Southern Ute Mountain tribes. Another new strategy will be exploring the opportunities to utilize Colorado's Enterprise Zone program to increase opportunities for job seekers in the region.

In addition, workforce center services can be used more as an incentive for businesses during the economic development process - Colorado provides a great deal of support and coordination for workforce efforts compared to other states and this can be shared as a selling point.

## **South**

Regional economic development has a strong presence in the Southern region with many strategies and plans that are a natural area of partnership for workforce development programs. In Fremont County, there is an economic development focus on developing highways, tourism, and infrastructure plans for the region. Local businesses are sorting into “profit clusters” - one industry champion develops a cluster of businesses in that industry and they work with economic development staff execute plans to enhance that industry. This is a new effort being piloted this year, but this will create regional strategic efforts around industries and can partner with workforce to train workers in these industries and promote growth overall. In Custer County, the economic development focus is on securing stable, year-round employment with a focus on increasing tourism and hospitality industries with events such as Ride the Rockies. In Pueblo, there is a focus on the hemp industry, with a focus in product manufacturing such as car parts, fabrics, and building materials, although workforce center is limited in working with this industry. In the San Luis Valley, a \$25 million dollar facility is being built now for barley production - value-added agriculture is an important focus.

All of these areas have strong relationships with workforce centers. To further enhance the coordination of services between workforce and regional economic development, the agencies must continue to collaborate, especially when it comes to developing new economic development strategies and feeding that down to workforce to create pipelines for future employees. Another important area of coordination will be to bridge the gaps in expectations between employers and employees. For example, workforce could assist emerging agricultural businesses with identifying the right kinds of employees who will a good fit for the type of labor that is required. Economic development can support communication with employers about major barriers to employment in the region (e.g. transportation challenges) to promote a more flexible workplace or attitude towards employees.

The economic development partners in the region receive great value from the data provided by the workforce centers as it pertains to regional wage analysis, job trends, unemployment data, and other sources of information that impacts businesses and economic development. In addition, the regional planning group felt that there is a natural three-way partnership between regional economic development, workforce centers, and local human services departments and strengthening the coordination and relationships between these agencies will be a key strategy for the Southern region.

## **East**

The coordination between workforce development programs and services with regional economic development services and providers has always been a focus for the Eastern region due to the rural geographic nature of the region. One major area of opportunity would be to have standardized forms between DHS and workforce to ensure that staff are documenting metrics and client information in the same way - this will be one of the goals of this action plan. Several of the community colleges in the region have cooperative service agreements with other schools as well as for concurrent enrollment. Changes in the teaching credential requirements by the Higher Learning Commission may actually decrease the region's ability to provide more concurrent opportunities for high school students. With healthcare being a major focus of industry expansion for the Eastern region, increase attention to these programs and services will be crucial over the next four years.

Sector partnerships and cooperative service agreements are important and the Eastern Regional Planning Group plans to spend the first year of this plan assessing the current state of partnerships and agreements - total numbers, status of formal agreements, and planning for formalizing existing informal relationships. From there, the agreements will be evaluated on their merits, which will then allow workforce staff to commit over the next two years to manage and grow agreements in the most appropriate areas. One major challenge to address will be the difficulty in providing coordinated regional services across such a large and rural geographic region. To address this, the Eastern region will focus on strategies that reflect remote engagement and virtual job fairs.

### **b. Describe how the planning region will strategically coordinate workforce investment activities with the provision of adult education and literacy activities under title II.**

## **Northwest**

Similar to other rural regions in Colorado, adult education and literacy activities are underfunded and insufficient to meet the needs of the population. However, Colorado Northwestern Community College (CNCC) and Colorado Mountain College have shown some interest in increasing Adult Education & Literacy efforts. In the more rural areas, workforce centers and other programs regularly partner with GED programs to support their program participants. These programs all collaborate well currently, but there are limits to increased efforts without an increase in funding for adult education programs.

## **West**

The adult education service providers in the region are Unlimited Learning Center, Pine River Community Learning Center, Durango Adult Education Center, Montrose Adult Education Program and Delta County Public Libraries Literacy Program. The workforce centers and adult

education providers have a solid partnership in the region. The Durango Adult Education Center is increasing efforts to serve individuals who are underemployed or undereducated by providing “on the job” training and income while completing their education. Reaching more individuals who are already employed will also help to create a system of career pathways.

Colorado still faces significant challenges in adult education and literacy because of the low levels of funding allocated. Colorado currently funds \$960,000 for adult education and literacy compared to other states with \$40 million in this area. As previously mentioned, one area of high need throughout the region is in digital literacy. There are many individuals that would benefit from increased adult education services in basic computer and financial literacy, but there are very few resources to fill this need at this time.

## **South**

Workforce investment activities are a natural partner for adult education and literacy in the Southern region. This also connects strongly to career pathways - if students earn a GED, they are a natural audience for climbing the educational ladder, and so it is important to communicate the availability of adult education and literacy programs in the region. One new strategy will be at Colorado Mountain College - they are looking to increase digital literacy and computers skills in their GED program to assist in developing career pathways and student interest in continuing education.

A significant challenge with adult education and its coordination with workforce activities is the systems infrastructure, including broadband Internet access and IT systems, that is needed to ensure everyone across the region can access services. The Southern region for this planning effort consists of 19 counties and the rural nature of many of these communities makes transportation a challenge for individuals accessing services in-person.

Several areas throughout the Southern region continue to struggle with Internet access or systems literacy, so enhancing technological and digital capacity of adult education and workforce will require the infrastructure to support job seekers.

There is strong, existing coordination between adult education providers, workforce center staff, and Department of Human Services (DHS) staff. This coordination can continue to improve, and one such opportunity is in exploring combining work-based training while individuals are in adult education to improve outcomes for participants. The workforce center also has provided, and will continue to provide, career fairs and other services to adult education students. DHS staff has also been trained to provide direct referrals to the South Central Board of Cooperative Educational Services for GED testing.

## **East**

There are several strategic areas for coordinating workforce investment activities with adult education and family literacy. One identified goal is to partner more closely with community colleges and workforce centers to make sure their adult students are signed up with workforce. Morgan Community College and the workforce centers use the same assessments, resulting in clear opportunities to share data. Having workforce center staff present at community colleges to enroll students in workforce initiatives would provide great opportunities for students, but there are still challenges to overcome as previously mentioned, especially as it pertains to small workforce center staff numbers and struggles to increase outreach and maintain operations.

Community colleges also work with the Bridges Out of Poverty program to help adults break out of poverty cycles, provide ESL classes, and connect students to job pipelines across various industries. An important gap is among adult students who may never be able to receive a GED or high school equivalency due to literacy or learning disability struggles, but who could still be employable. There are opportunities for workforce staff to connect with local businesses to share how these individuals can be great employees, even if they don't have a GED, with the right support.

For offenders exiting out of the Department of Corrections, there are programs to help individuals register with workforce before their release so they can prepare to work right away. One business member of the Eastern Regional Planning Group shared about an experience with meeting and interviewing offenders before their release and how positive the experience was for him and his staff.

The best way for potential employees to connect with adult education in the Eastern region is through the community colleges and other educational institutions. Certification classes in a community setting struggle to break even because of small numbers of participants and challenges around getting certified teachers in those community settings. The most important component is to have direct connections to an employment pipeline - the adult education on its own does not provide sufficient incentive for individuals to participate.

These strategies need to happen concurrently with building relationships and service agreements with employers to increase position numbers throughout the Eastern region.

- c. Describe how the planning region will strategically coordinate workforce investment activities with the provision of vocational rehabilitation services under title IV.**

## **Northwest**

Workforce investment activities and vocational rehabilitation services have maintained a strong partnership in the Northwest region for many years. This relationship will be enhanced when the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation relocates to the Colorado Division of Labor and Employment in summer 2016. In addition, there is a Lean event, co-sponsored by both agencies,

to create new processes for workforce and vocational rehabilitation staff to interface client systems, share data, and create dual-use forms. There will also be a focus on creating more outreach and educational opportunities for businesses to learn about hiring individuals with disabilities; there is often a misperception that these individuals require a great deal of accommodation in the workplace, which is generally not true.

WIOA also increases the opportunities to connect with youth with disabilities. Previously, the primary focus for Vocational Rehabilitation had focused on graduates, but now there are chances to connect more with in-school youth for training, work experiences, and summer job hunts.

### **West**

The relationship between workforce and vocational rehabilitation is also solid here with a strong history of partnership. There are always increased opportunities to ensure both staff know how to refer to the other agency through cross training and sharing promotional materials. One specific future strategy is to develop a desk aid for both agencies as well as adult education to lay out the programs, target populations, and overview of services provided by each agency for easy reference by all employees. Vocational rehabilitation is also able to provide more services to youth with disabilities through SWAP, so there are additional opportunities to collaborate on services and coordination between both agencies. Efforts are being implemented to house DVR in local workforce centers that provides for more direct collaboration and interaction.

One new strategy will be to allow DVR counselors to require all DVR clients to register through the workforce center to allow them to become familiar with Connecting Colorado, as this will add to the benefits of the collaborative working relationship and allow clients additional resources and more interaction with the workforce center staff.

### **South**

Workforce investment activities and vocational rehabilitation services have maintained a strong partnership in the Southern region for many years. This relationship will be enhanced when the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation relocates to the Colorado Division of Labor and Employment in 2016.

In addition, there is a Lean event taking place this year, co-sponsored by both agencies, to create new processes for workforce and vocational rehabilitation staff to interface client systems, share data, and create dual-use forms. There will also be a focus on creating more outreach and educational opportunities for businesses to learn about hiring individuals with disabilities; there is often a misperception that these individuals require a great deal of accommodation in the workplace, which is generally not true.

## **East**

There are existing resource sharing agreements between Division of Vocational Rehabilitation services and the Fort Morgan workforce center where staff share the physical location. This relationship will be enhanced by the transition of DVR to CDLE management on 1 July 2016. The planning region will be focusing on increasing the interconnection between DVR programs and workforce center efforts. One example is that DVR staff will be working with NJC staff to present at adult education classes to recruit more clients. Increasing DVR's presence alongside the workforce presence, especially as more work is done to improve marketing and branding efforts, will be an important strategy for coordinating activities. In addition, the Fort Morgan workforce center engaged in discussions with Morgan County DHS to utilize their forms as a part of the employability plan with the workforce center to try to reduce duplication of forms and paperwork.

- d. Describe the strategies and services that will be used in the planning region to strengthen linkages between the one-stop delivery system and unemployment insurance programs.**

## **Northwest**

One-Stop Partners such as Health and Human Services or Vocational Rehabilitation always relied on local workforce center staff to assist in coordination with unemployment insurance, so this has been an existing and strong relationship. The needs of the customer are crucial between these agencies: one strategy proposed was to work with multiple one-stop partners to increase the number of unemployment insurance recipients signing up for Connecting Colorado and other relevant services (e.g. food assistance) when they are filing for benefits.

This is also an area where increased marketing and outreach can be beneficial - the more unemployed individuals that are connected with workforce centers, the more those individuals can be helped with getting back to work, which can decrease the amount of time they are on unemployment insurance.

## **West**

In Delta, workforce recently launched a pilot project to implement a chat option for an individual with an unemployment question or inquiry. Additionally workforce center customers can access the UI hotline and chat online to connect directly with Unemployment Insurance staff to get help. The UI hotline puts workforce center callers on top of the caller queue. The chat will help cut down even more on wait times and provide instant access to UI representatives because they can talk to multiple people at once. As previously mentioned, there is still a common misconception that workforce centers are unemployment offices, so improved local or regional marketing to help both entities provide services will be important over the next four years.

## **South**

Currently, there is an effort underway to integrate the computer systems between unemployment insurance and workforce - when it rolls out in April 2016, workforce center staff will be able to see the occupation the worker was dislocated from so as to allow them to look for better matched opportunities. There was a request from adult education to develop a similar coordination between them and workforce. Again, an increased focus on marketing and outreach both at the state and local levels will allow workforce to educate employers about the difference between workforce and unemployment insurance programs. This is often an area of confusion for businesses and job seekers.

Individuals that require assistance with an unemployment application are assisted through use of computers and staff assistance at the Workforce Centers. Additionally, the customers are provided information on how to apply for assistance on their own.

Unemployment division has a designated “red” phone that is set up at the Workforce Centers and there are specific times during the week where a designated unemployment specialist staff member can speak with the unemployed customer if they have an issue that requires one to one interaction. Phones and computers are also available during the Workforce Centers business hours, Monday through Friday, for job seekers to use to call unemployment. Links to reemployment and future use of the RESEA has allowed staff to interact in a timely manner with individuals receiving unemployment and connecting them with the Workforce Center services.

It has been discussed and is being planned through efforts of the State job seeker Lean event that training and educating unemployment representatives would be conducted to help those representatives, working with individuals applying for unemployment, be able to better explain how working with the local Workforce Centers adds value to the individual in their job search efforts.

## **East**

As previously mentioned, the coordination between workforce development programs and services with regional economic development services and providers has always been a focus for the Eastern region due to the rural geographic nature of the region. Currently, all UI recipients are required to register with workforce center and workforce center staff focus on engaging with these individuals early on in their UI process. One goal for this regional plan is to enroll more individuals into the dislocated worker program. Like many other areas in Colorado, there are workforce placement spots for UI recipients that go unfilled. Along with an increase in marketing and branding for workforce centers overall, it will be important to include increase UI engagement and messages that target the difference between UI and workforce center programs. There is a joint strategic planning process taking place through CDLE that emphasized the growth towards a more coordinated hand-off between workforce and unemployment that is also expected to support the Eastern region.

- e. Provide a description of how the local board will coordinate workforce investment activities carried out in the local area with statewide rapid response activities, as described in section 134(a)(2)(A);**

### **Northwest**

The local board will be increasing relationships and partnerships with small businesses so that those organizations connect with workforce in anticipation of a major layoff or dislocation event. Over the last year, there has only been six (6) rapid response activities and no (0) trade adjustment enrollments. While the WARN Act specifies that Rapid Response is formalized once the dislocation impacts 25 employees, much smaller dislocation events can have a significant level of negative impact in a smaller, rural community. Workforce center staff make every attempt to be part of any lay-off process, despite the numbers impacted, in an effort to transition the dislocated worker in the fastest and most sustainable manner possible. Many employers provide extensive assistance to impacted workers and do not always see additional specialized rapid response services as necessary or desired. In many cases the services available to impacted workers through regular workforce services is adequate in the rural areas. Board support and a change in marketing message should better position the region to be more proactive in response to smaller layoffs.

For hospitality and tourism, the coordination of response activities could increase over the next four years. In some cases, employers don't want to "lose" their employees during the times of the year where they aren't operating, generally four to six weeks twice a year. Workforce can come in to help with filing for unemployment insurance or job attached status - this is an important function in the region.

### **West**

The Western region has had few rapid response events in the last year. Though these are not common events, workforce center staff often hears about a business in need of services through community and local news or are notified by the State Rapid Response office when a Warn Notice is filed with the State of Colorado so they are able to reach out the employer to offer services.

Rapid response services are still not well known, as many businesses do not seek these services until they are facing a layoff or closure but workforce center staff reaches out to employers to notify them of available services whenever they are able to. There is also good coordination with the state rapid response staff, which contact local workforce centers to coordinate services.

## **South**

There have been many efforts around rapid investment over the last several years that will continue in the future. There is currently an exciting model of what a rapid response workshop will cover but they can be customized to the specific needs of the business and the affected workers. Workforce center staff has conducted several three-day bootcamps and on-site workshops for rapid response events, both in English and Spanish. Most recently, in January 2016, Haven Behavioral Health in Pueblo closed: 81 workers were affected. The state rapid response team contacted the local workforce center and the coordination helped to benefit the employees. The staff held workshops, went over unemployment benefits, had WIOA staff there to triage and enroll individuals in the program, brought consumer credit counseling partners, and shared Affordable Care Act and COBRA information. Workforce Center staff report to the local board during their Board meetings on rapid response efforts and results.

Healthcare organizations in the region also worked with workforce center staff to coordinate efforts to share resumes to each other and to partners and colleagues throughout the region to assist placing individuals in a rapid response situation.

## **East**

The local board will be increasing relationships and partnerships with small businesses so that those organizations connect with workforce in anticipation of a major layoff or dislocation event. Over the last year, there has only been one rapid response activity and one trade adjustment enrollment. While the WARN Act specifies that Rapid Response is formalized once the dislocation impacts 25 employees, much smaller dislocation events can have a significant level of negative impact in a smaller, rural community. Workforce center staff make every attempt to be part of any lay-off process, despite the numbers impacted, in an effort to transition the dislocated worker in the fastest and most sustainable manner possible. Board support and a change in marketing message should better position the region to be more proactive in response to smaller layoffs.

8. **Provide a description of the replicated cooperative agreements (as defined in section 107(d) (11)) between the local board or other local entities described in section 101(a) (11) (B) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 721(a) (11) (B)) and the local office of a designated State agency or designated State unit administering programs carried out under title I of such Act (29 U.S.C. 720 et seq.) (other than section 112 or part C of that title (29 U.S.C. 732, 741) and subject to section 121(f)) in accordance with section 101(a)(11) of such Act (29 U.S.C. 721(a)(11)) with respect to efforts that will enhance the provision of services to individuals with disabilities and to other individuals, such as cross training of staff, technical assistance, use and sharing of information, cooperative efforts with employers, and other efforts at cooperation, collaboration, and coordination;**

### **Northwest**

As previously mentioned, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation relocates to the Colorado Division of Labor and Employment in summer 2016 which will increase efforts to provide services to individuals with disabilities through cross-training of staff and information sharing. Having opportunities for students with disabilities to experience the daily life of a business is important not just for that student, but for the employer as well to learn about hiring and managing individuals with disabilities. WIOA allows for expansion of these opportunities, including apprenticeships, internships, on-the-job training, and other work-based training experiences.

Previously, there had been a disability program navigator position based in the workforce center throughout the planning region to help increase this area of service and the regional planning group discussed the possibility of bringing a similar position back. A position like this, in addition to the co-location of both organizations, helps people with disabilities navigate the system and get the services and support they need. This could also be integrated with other administrative cost-sharing efforts, like having that navigator help clients with social security or other benefits. If both organizations are able to share data or data collection systems for clients, this could greatly increase the coordination, though this would have to be a statewide effort.

The Independent Living Centers are a part of DVR. They are vital partners with DVR in the Northwest Region in helping clients to find success in their Individualized Plans for Employment. Also, many workforce centers house the County Veteran Service Officer who helps veterans with disabilities with a variety of services. Building on these established partnerships and connections would further enhance services to individuals with disabilities and barriers to employment.

It is difficult for disabled workers to spend two to four years training or re-training to gain skills through educational programs - they don't always have the resources or support systems to go back to school so programs where workers can learn on the job will continue to be crucial. This will be a future strategy - increasing on-the-job opportunities for individuals to gain additional skills or training.

## **West**

Currently, DVR is co-located in Delta WFC; in Mesa County there is no co-location at this time. In Mesa County, there is exchange of referrals between agency programs, however, physical presence of DVR staff at the Mesa County workforce center will be discussed and figured out between the two agencies. In Montrose County, one DVR counselor is located at the workforce center one day per week

As previously mentioned, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) moves under the Colorado Division of Labor and Employment July 1, 2016 which will increase efforts to provide services to individuals with disabilities, especially students, through cross-training of staff and information sharing. Several DVR offices are co-located in the workforce centers in Delta and Mesa Counties with several other sites exploring colocation. In addition, DVR will rely on already occurring efforts of CDLE to educate staff and clients on labor market information and utilize the resources that they have acquired in their resource rooms in regards to employment. In addition, DVR will cross train CDLE staff on ADA requirements and increase referrals of people with disabilities to the workforce center programs.

There is currently cross-training between staff, and this initial work has laid a strong foundation for when the agencies are co-located later this year. In general, each community has their own distinctions and provides services in various locations to try and meet the needs of a population spread across a large geographic area. It will be important to stay flexible and create local agreements to continue to share costs, services, and other efforts focused on serving people in need.

The Delta Workforce Center has an assistive technology resource computer that enables individuals with disabilities to use the latest technology to access employment opportunities and resources.

## **South**

As previously mentioned, the relationship between the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Colorado Division of Labor and Employment will be enhanced by the agencies moving under the same system in 2016. In addition, the local process action teams are focusing on cross-training staff and planning for future needs by eliminating duplication and connecting staff to integrated systems and customer databases and will result in coordinated efforts and knowledge of ways to better serve individuals with barriers.

DVR staff will develop a training for the business services workforce center staff to assist with cross-promotion of services. This will enable those staff members to speak about vocational rehabilitation services when meeting businesses to market both programs simultaneously.

The unemployment rate was 4.9% in Pueblo but for individuals with disabilities, it was closer to 13%. This illustrates the significant challenges in the region in providing services to individuals with disabilities and helping them enter the workforce. Employer attitude is a major barrier to increase hiring for these individuals, but the increased coordination with workforce can help this by being able to communicate with more businesses about the benefits of this program.

However, in this region, there are eight counties without a workforce presence, so this cross-training becomes harder and requires more creativity. There needs to be intentional strategic ability of workforce centers to respond, but these counties have significant challenges.

## **East**

Sector partnerships and cooperative service agreements are important and the Eastern Regional Planning Group plans to spend the first year of this plan assessing the current state of partnerships and agreements - total numbers, status of formal agreements, and planning for formalizing existing informal relationships. From there, the agreements will be evaluated on their merits, which will then allow workforce staff to commit over the next two years to manage and grow agreements in the most appropriate areas. In addition, individual counties throughout the Eastern region will be developing individual plans to integrate Division of Vocational Rehabilitation with workforce center efforts.

In Cheyenne County, workforce center staff will begin to schedule one day per month at the DHS office starting in February 2016. In Elbert County, workforce center staff will begin cross-training staff to increase understanding of workflow and program requirements for DHS programs including TANF and child support. Staff will also be able to utilize DHS office space for dual client meetings when available. In Kit Carson County, workforce center staff will begin outreach to Division of Vocational Rehabilitation staff in Limon to plan for coordinating services on a weekly basis. In Lincoln County, DHS and workforce center staff report successful referral system implementation between the two systems and plans to maintain this strong relationship over the next four years. In Morgan County, workforce center staff bridged a relationship between the local Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the local Goodwill staff to streamline a Job Club initiative. In Phillips County, the local DHS office is working to create a coordinated referral form to be used alongside workforce center staff in 2016. In Sedgwick County, there is a virtual workforce center at the local library - that successful partnership will be continued throughout the future of this action plan. These discussions are planned to be ongoing and will eventually include all county human services partners in the area.

DVR and WIOA has some mutual clients and are working towards being able to provide unique services from each program to build more potential for client success. DVR is closely working with Labor and Employment Specialists to promote having mutual clients and providing unique services from both sides to help accomplish the goals the clients have.

**9. If determined appropriate by the planning region, describe the coordination of transportation and other supportive services or discuss why these are not appropriate for the planning region at this time.**

**Northwest**

There are several bright spots where workforce public transportation needs are being successfully addressed through local efforts. Transportation has many challenges in the Northwest, much like other rural areas of Colorado. There are limited services that meet some of the need. There are four major transportation providers in the region: Summit Stage (Lake and Summit counties), Roaring Fork Transportation Authority (RFTA), Garfield and Pitkin counties), Steamboat Springs Transit (SST; Routt and Moffat counties), and Eagle County Transportation (ECT; Eagle and Lake Counties).

In Lake County, the Summit Stage is increasing its services to five times a day, which is important for a community where a majority of the population commutes out. There are also efforts to explore a transportation network between Lake County and Chafee. Eagle County provides two busses that run into Lake County. RFTA provides limited or no services to more rural areas outside of Rifle, which is a major challenge. In some communities, public transportation to a large portion of the economic and community cores are accessible. However, there are cases where community amenities (e.g. college campus or hospital campus) are outside of downtown corridors and/or may not be serviced by public transportation or in a walkable location. For example, the Colorado Mountain College is outside of the Rifle city limits, so busses do not run to the campus. In addition, most affordable housing options tend to be outside of city limits, which greatly impacts those individuals when trying to get to work. There needs to be coordinated regional efforts between transportation services and affordable housing locations.

In Steamboat Springs, the SST is free while in town, but that service area is limited, especially to areas outside of town where there is more affordable housing. In Grand and Rio Blanco Counties, there is no transportation provider, which puts a major strain on employees.

In Summit County, the Summit Stage is the primary provider of bus service in the county, with additional bus service provided by the Town of Breckenridge and Keystone Resort. They provide this service for free, with the exception of the inter-county/ inter-city service to Leadville. The Summit Stage (hereinafter referred to as the Stage) provides free scheduled bus service to most populated areas in Summit County. This includes all of the major towns of Breckenridge, Dillon, Frisco and Silverthorne, as well as the ski resorts of Copper Mountain and Keystone, plus to the communities of Blue River, and Wildernest. As mentioned previously, the Stage has also partnered with Lake County to provide limited service between Leadville and Frisco. The workforce, tourists, students and others who don't drive use these bus services extensively.

These services are a great asset and benefit to not only the workforce, but also the businesses and other organizations to get customers and the workforce to their establishments

Many hospitality, healthcare and mining employers in the region have their own transportation services to assist employees. Other employers, such as construction or transportation services, allow employees to utilize company vehicles to commute because of the system infrastructure challenges. Northwest Transportation Planning Region (TPR) has a regional transportation coordinating district that has been discussing ways to increase medical-related transportation, but the council is hoping to explore other transportation needs. In most areas, there are military veteran medical transportation services and senior transportation services even when workforce public transportation options are not available.

## **West**

Transportation is always an issue in rural Colorado - there is a lack of infrastructure and availability of regional public transportation. Even in higher population areas, such as Durango, where there are city buses, the hours and geographic coverage area is limited. Affordable housing developments are generally outside of city limits, thus there is no public transportation to many of these areas. This is important especially for night shift or swing shift workers who rely on public transit as their only option. There is also a significant shortage in the area of CDL drivers, including school bus drivers. There is also a need for services to assist individuals with medical transportation, including access to hospitals and mental health treatment centers.

Transportation is also a challenge for some of the local community region's colleges. While in La Plata County, the Durango Lift provides adequate student transportation to Fort Lewis College (FLC) and Southwest Colorado Community College (SCCC) campuses located in Durango, CO, there is no public transportation to the SCCC campus located between Mancos and Cortez (may want to check with Tomas or someone on whether there's a cab service from Cortez that goes there), and no public transportation at all from Pagosa Springs in Archuleta County to La Plata County, making access to higher education a major barrier for that community. For the Delta Montrose Technical College (DMTC) located between Montrose and Delta, students can't bus over from Montrose because there is no public transportation to connect the city to the campus. No public transportation is available to students from either community, or any of the small communities in the further outlying areas.

There are many efforts to try and address this important barrier. In Cortez, AAA Area on Aging provides transportation to medical appointments and services for all ages. In Delta and Montrose, All Points delivers VOA meals on Wheels to west end residents while picking up/dropping off people in that area, so there is coordination of services. The SUCAP bus line provides transportation all the way from points in the Southwest Region to Grand Junction, and the service is very reliable.

The Galloping Goose links Norwood Valley to Telluride. In Mesa County, Grand Valley Transit provides public transportation. This system is supported by a municipalities funding agreement worked through funding from TANF to contribute bus passes and discounts for recipients with a focus and priority of accessing work, childcare and medical services. Despite a fairly robust public transit system across the Grand Valley, Mesa County still struggles to meet the needs of the residents accessing medical care as well as the shift work schedules mentioned above. All Points Transit in Montrose provides services between Montrose and Telluride but there is often more demand than supply.

There are no significant plans in this area because of the many difficulties that rural areas must face and the significant resources required for infrastructure investment.

## **South**

Transportation is a significant challenge for the workforce in the Southern region. There are several local efforts, but there are many barriers to a coordinated regional solution. This is also a focus for expansion of the Tourism and Hospitality sectors - having public transportation options for visitors is a key factor for increasing tourism. This is also important for offenders - when offenders are released back into the community, they rarely have transportation of their own and thus rely on public transportation options when looking for work.

Pueblo is one of the larger areas in the region and has several local bus lines throughout the city, though several areas are still disconnected from those services. The airport industrial park in Pueblo, for example, is not located within the city limits so there are no bus lines that run there to transport workers. The local economic development staff are hoping to work with workforce and other programs to collect data about expanding this bus route to support workers that need that transportation option.

Chaffee County now has its own internal local community bus (the Chaffee shuttle) funded by federal general public transit funds and community matching funds. The bus has a daily schedule - workers can call ahead and schedule rides in advance. The county is working on a plan to develop this into a full-time flexible schedule to be responsive to the small community and allow flexibility for routes when needed. The economic development staff also recently hired a student intern in Chaffee County that is working on a plan to improve intercity systems. There is also a bus line out of Gunnison that runs through Chaffee County to Denver daily, which allows for more commuters to the Front Range. The Chaffee Shuttle also provides daily intercity service to Pueblo passing through Canon City. Canon City provides a regional on-demand, shuttle service powered by donations and Federal general public transit funds. In Custer County, the Upper Arkansas Area Council of Governments provided a bus to the local rotary, which staffs the bus with volunteer drivers. This service is also funded through Federal general public transit funds and local contributions. Though these systems are beneficial to the region, they are impossible to maintain without subsidies and volunteer drivers.

Due to a lack of funding and transportation investment in the region, it is difficult to image a coordinated regional solution.

Though there are significant barriers, the regional planning group is exploring several ideas to expand transportation services including partnerships with school districts to utilize school buses, working with local rafting and outdoor recreation providers to share busses and shuttles, and expanding local ride-sharing services. There is also discussion of leveraging the buying strength of a larger region by combining resources to move towards a coordinated regional solution.

### **East**

The Eastern Regional Planning Group will assess and describe the existing transportation systems and make recommendations by documenting existing plans and services throughout the region. This region is very rural and decentralized, so there are significant economic and strategic challenges to creating a comprehensive regional solution. NECALG funds and manages the County Express that provides transit services to six counties, as well as circulator services within communities. It is a public transportation service funded by a local sales tax. La Junta also has a circulator service that is open to the public. Prowers County has a county-wide service that is open to the public. Six of the Eastern counties utilize one transportation system while four of the Southeastern counties utilize a different system - thus there are many areas that would require increased coordination and integration.

**10. If determined appropriate by the planning region, describe how administrative cost arrangements have been coordinated, including the pooling of funds for administrative costs or discuss why these are not appropriate for the planning region at this time.**

Data sharing will be an important future strategy - one example is in exploring data sharing opportunities between the workforce center and human services staff to streamline services and communications. If outcomes from Employment First, for example, could be shared back to workforce center staff, they could help with preparing and securing trainings and opportunities for these individuals. The future plan will be to share assessments, evaluations, and testing results between human services, workforce, and community colleges so that all systems are operating with the same information about an individual - this provides one centralized information point about a client. There will need to be support through statewide efforts to make this a complete reality, but this will be a strategy for the region over the next four years.

**Northwest**

Similar to other rural regions of Colorado, the Northwest has had great successes in administrative cost arrangements and resource sharing. It is difficult for the group to envision significant expansion in this area, because the geographic scope of the region is too broad for multiple agencies to only exist in one physical location.

In Glenwood, Vocational Rehabilitation staff are moving into the workforce center and will utilize a cost-sharing arrangement for rent and utilities. There are additional agreements with human services staff to share costs through Employment First and other programs where multiple agencies collaborate.

In Rifle, the Garfield County Housing Authority provides office space to the Center for Independence, a local nonprofit that provides services and support to individuals with disabilities and seniors, because a number of housing clients are eligible or utilize the Center's services. They are also located across the street from the Department of Human Services, which makes referrals easier.

In Rangely, the workforce center is co-located with the Colorado Northern Community College. In Meeker, the workforce center is co-located with Meeker city staff. In Steamboat, the workforce center is located in the same strip mall as the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

There are also agreements in place with Human Services through some areas under Employment First - there are some costs that can be reimbursed by HHS to Workforce if extended services are being provided. These agreements are on a county-by-county basis. Many partners in the planning group also discussed future possibilities for shared services with community colleges.

The workforce center provides Virtual Workshops once a week for 10 counties - any job seeker can come to the workforce center locations on Tuesday mornings and participate in the training. There is also a great coordination with the libraries in the region. For example, Hayden library staff was trained on how to use the virtual workforce center and can provide assistance to job seekers that come in. Workforce center staff in Meeker are able to provide adult and dislocated worker services in Craig by sharing space in other local service offices.

## **West**

There are several existing administrative cost arrangements throughout the region. There is a partnership with Department of Human Services in Cortez where workforce center staff collaborates on providing programs like Employment First and Colorado Works jointly. The Department of Corrections shares the Cortez workforce center twice a week, the Division of Vocational Rehab shared one day a week. In Montrose County, a local library in Naturita hosts a virtual workforce center.

In Archuleta County, the Department of Human Services has been working toward an integrated location that would house an EF coordinator/ SNAP worker, TANF case manager, and a Medicaid Outreach and enrollment technician. The arrangement is somewhat unique due to the relationship with Southern Ute Community Action Programs and it's relationship with Workforce. There are also discussions in place to work towards establishing a stronger Workforce presence in Archuleta County, as currently it is fairly weak. It is important for Workforce to have a stronger presence and improved reputation in Archuleta, which partners believe can be accomplished through further collaboration and distribution of resources throughout the region (use of technology, scheduled options for consumers to access Workforce resources, and increased inclusion of Archuleta County businesses in meeting local demands).

Because of the rural nature of the region, it is difficult to make further plans for cost sharing because of the need for various offices that are accessible to all.

## **South**

In Trinidad the workforce center, Trinidad State Junior College and vocational rehabilitation are co-located through a formal agreement. The Pueblo workforce center also coordinates with unemployment insurance to provide hotline access to individuals receiving benefits several days a week. The Pueblo County Department of Social Services also participates in a cost-sharing agreement with the workforce center to share workspace and provides cross-training of staff to increase coordination of services.

One new strategy will be for workforce and other partners such as adult education and human services to pool funds to share testing and assessment licenses. One additional step would be for the state to coordinate assessments between agencies to move towards a system where agencies all share the same testing and assessment tools.

An additional strategy is to coordinate TANF assessment forms with workforce comprehensive assessments - if the agencies could combine their forms, this could reduce duplication. Finally, if data systems and client databases can be integrated or shared between government agencies on a state level, this could increase coordination and administrative cost arrangements since staff would have access to the same information about a client.

Currently there is no mandate to pool administrative funds as this is being postponed for at least one year. Planning will continue this year with mandated partners and as the value and synergy of working together is better realized there will be new initiatives where agencies will begin to share in those costs. Building a collaborative workforce system will result in the willingness to support the value of working together and identifying ways to improve the system for job seeking and business customers.

### **East**

As previously mentioned, there are significant challenges to co-location and resource sharing for rural areas, but the Eastern region has worked hard over the years to coordinate and share administrative costs among multiple agencies. The workforce center is exploring potential for a DHS co-location and will work towards that in Elbert County but in the rural areas, existing offices (not just workforce centers) are already extremely full with existing staff. Where possible, workforce and other service offices utilize as much technology to bridge the location gap, including offering system access to DHS staff, virtual meetings/case management coordination, and a robust outreach schedule to counties that do not already have a workforce center. There are existing resource sharing agreements between Division of Vocational Rehabilitation services and the Fort Morgan workforce center where staff share the physical location, but it often not appropriate to pool funds or administrative costs for the other small, rural efforts.

- 11. The establishment of an agreement concerning how the planning region will collectively negotiate and reach agreement with the Governor on local levels of performance for, and report on, the performance accountability measures described in WIOA sec. 116(c) for local areas or the planning region.**

CDLE and regional workforce leadership are currently working to develop the accountability measures, but they have not been finalized at this time.

**12. Provide a description of how one-stop centers are implementing and transitioning to an integrated, technology-enabled intake and case management information system for programs carried out under this Act and programs carried out by one-stop partners.**

**Northwest**

The Northwest region has a long history of sharing administrative costs and co-locating when appropriate. The regional planning group does not envision significant expansion in this area because of the strength of the existing efforts. A true one-stop shop is not appropriate conducive for the region because of the burden it would put on residents who would be restricted in getting to that office - the rural nature of many communities presents transportation and time challenges for individuals that would have to travel a significant distance. In addition, most locations would require a significant redesign and increased infrastructure costs to combine to literal one-stop shop. However, addressing the needs of customers with barriers to employment should be a focus considering WIOA mandated partners, and especially considering the significant expansions in the world of Assistive Technology in the last few years.

However, the Northwest region has taken steps in many areas, including workforce centers and human services offices, to provide virtual services. Currently, Workforce staff often provide web-based sessions with participants or to conduct trainings. As the broadband and technological infrastructure continues to develop throughout the region, the workforce center staff will also be able to expand offerings in this way. In addition, workforce center staff may be able to obtain basic training navigating PEAK, so that they can assist clients in applying for programs when they access the computers at the workforce center.

**West**

The Western and Southwest workforce centers are utilizing the “Connecting Colorado” data management system that integrates a technology based intake and case management system for all workforce centers in Colorado. The system allows workforce centers to share information including customer profiles, job orders and performance data statewide.

As discussed in earlier questions, additional resources are required to expand capacity in technological and logistical capacities for workforce centers. The Western region worked on a prior effort to catalog resources online for individuals to have easy access to contact information and enabling workers to easily connect clients to additional resources, but there was no sustainable funding source to continue the effort.

Despite these challenges, the regional planning group identified several future ideas and strategies to move closer to an integrated system with partner agencies. One future strategy will be to increase the practice of sharing case notes with other workforce centers to coordinate increased data sharing.

In addition, the group would like to explore HHS initiatives to share data and information on job training programs with workforce center staff. It's also helpful to increase the availability of hotlines, chats, and video conference calls with clients between offices (e.g. workforce center to human services), especially for individuals that need the digital literacy support. Having state and national agencies work towards sharing systems and data would also benefit local rural regions throughout Colorado.

## **South**

One-stop centers, literally speaking, have been discussed locally for several years, and while the idea would benefit customers, it is difficult logistically challenging for rural agencies to create this system because of the broad geographic nature of the region and the burden that places on individuals looking to access the system. Although there isn't a complete one-stop center in the Southern region, there are several steps being taken to create a coordinated system through data sharing and technological enhancements.

Currently DHS and workforce has our own databases; DHS utilizes CBMS and workforce utilizes Connecting Colorado. Both departments have been working together so that they are able to share certain information pertaining to their customers via the databases. CBMS and Connecting Colorado will pull information from each other Monday – Friday and the file will contain both Colorado Works and SNAP participants. Data that will interface into Connecting Colorado will be; Demographic information, Address and Email information, Employer information and Barrier information. When a CBMS client is enrolled in one of the Connecting Colorado programs, the program and enrollment date will be added to the CBMS case automatically and when the CBMS client is terminated from the Connecting Colorado program, the date the client exited the program will be added to the CBMS case automatically.

As mentioned in the previous question, there will be an increased focus on creating a coordinated triage system between workforce and vocational rehabilitation. The lessons learned from using a hotline and chat option for unemployment insurance recipients at the workforce center can be applied to other system partnerships. One strategy will be to increase virtual presence of agencies in partnership - sharing costs for teleconferencing and video technology between agencies will increase customer satisfaction. This would also help with providing services, workshops, and case management to clients when weather becomes a barrier to travel.

## **East**

As previously mentioned, there are significant challenges to co-location and resource sharing for rural areas, though the coordination between workforce development programs and services with other services and providers has always been a focus for the Eastern region due to the geographic nature of the region. The move to integrate DVR into CDLE offices is a positive change that will occur on 1 July 2016 as well as agencies working to try and promote each other's' services and resources.

Governmental service agencies in the Eastern region want to enhance and build on their current lines of communication, offer seamless service regardless of location, and hope to see an evolution in state systems that integrate more seamlessly to allow for future agency sharing and integration.

Fort Morgan is the first place in the state that is going to have a videoconference in their location to Weld County for social security connection. This will provide easier access for clients and individuals seeking services from both agencies. Another strategy will be to work with DHS partners to review their enrollment forms to assess if an individual may qualify for workforce services.

### **13. Briefly describe the activities and steps taken to develop this regional plan.**

This regional plan is the result of a variety of outreach and planning efforts, beginning in January 2016 and continuing through May. The focus of the effort has been to improve our understanding of the changing regional economic conditions, particularly identifying those that have created new areas of growth and opportunity in a variety of sectors and occupations.

We kicked off the regional planning effort with a statewide Colorado Rural Workforce Consortium planning meeting on January 19, 2016 with all of the regions and many of the local boards and officials present. Additionally, our consultants were invited to meet all the key players and begin to set expectations for the breadth and depth of the regional plans. We reviewed and determined a new interlocal agreement should be executed for the area that would be consistent with WIOA and the consortium structure. We agreed the four Consortium plans would be launched in a staggered sequence, allowing us to ensure staff and consultant continuity, apply lessons learned from each workshop & fully exploit the statewide opportunity to secure specific feedback from the key impacted stakeholders and agencies. Specifically, the Eastern region was identified to be the first to host an event and begin detailed planning (followed by the Southern region, the Northwestern region, and the Western region). The review and discussions were to take a five-week process that leveraged a variety of engagement methods, including one-on-one interviews, telephone calls and other efforts to develop a rough plan that would accommodate the regional differences across the consortium. Our regional leadership then invited and convened over 25 core partners to begin developing a robust local strategic plan.

We facilitated a discussion of distinguished and influential local leaders representing significant cross-sections of our WIOA stakeholders. This includes a variety of regional Community Colleges, mandatory One-Stop partners, including State Human Services, Adult Education, Corrections, Veterans, Vocational Rehabilitation, as well as key Private Sector employers. A variety of other key leaders including Local Elected Officials from the region were invited to attend the planning workshops for each region. Feedback on the facilitated session was extremely positive.

In the workshop, we developed a vision of how the system will ideally function in our local area to best meet WIOA goals and the needs of your employers and jobseekers. We confirmed with our LWDB to ensure an actionable plan with a shared vision and delivery of services.

Taking advantage of several sets of detailed notes & responses to some initial follow up questions, we then assembled a first draft response to each of the 14 sections highlighted in this document. This document has since been posted to a shared Google Folder with the appropriate permissions to easily track comments, and changes over a five-week review and editing process.

This timeline essentially reflected a schedule of one week for document prep, securing Regional Director approval of the first draft, then opening (for two weeks) this draft to a variety of participants who had agreed in the workshop to help draft and comment on the successive versions of the plan. In particular, we tried to identify the right skillset and experience to comment on each section. To that end, we collaborated with one-stop partners to ensure they had editorial control over the document for those two weeks, ensuring we had ample time to integrate additional commentary before releasing for public comment. For example, we sought to have specific details around Vocational Rehabilitation reviewed by the state leads for these programs in the area. This ensures our plan and supporting strategies are aligned with the local needs and preferences.

**14. Describe the process used by the local boards in this planning region to provide an opportunity for public comment, including comment by representatives of businesses and comment by representatives of labor organizations, and input into the development of the plan prior to its submission.**

As previously mentioned, the process includes a two-week period of public comment, which includes representatives of businesses and labor organizations. The process began by including the individuals and agencies that were present at the regional planning meeting. At the meeting, workforce center staff also collected contact information for other key business and labor representatives to connect with to review the plan. In addition, all Workforce Development Board members and Local Elected Officials from the region will be invited to review and provide feedback to this plan.