Colorado Department of Labor & Employment

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Regional Plan

Planning Region: Western

Local Areas and Sub-Areas Included in this Planning Region: Mesa, Western, Southwestern (Delta, Gunnison, Montrose, San Miguel, Ouray, Hinsdale, Dolores, San Juan, Montezuma, La Plata, Archuleta)

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**

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 speciality 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 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. 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. There are growing efforts in Natural Energy - geothermal activity in Pagosa is a newer focus. Capturing the skills of these employees that may be looking to change industries could be utilized by the Manufacturing industry. Alternative energy, including geothermal, is emerging in regions like Pagosa. Alternative energy as a whole. 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.

Many skills are transferable between Energy and Manufacturing - with training and support, these employees can be migrated into Manufacturing jobs. 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.

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. Speciality 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 Laplata 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.

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

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.

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.**

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 great, that the company started offering classes and support services to help people - they feel it is crucial to meet employees where they are.

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 be needing 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 is 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.

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.

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.

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;**

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. 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, individuals with disabilities, individuals with mental health needs, transportation, affordable housing, child care, and spousal employment. Youth migration is also an area of concern in the Western region. Individuals with disabilities have much higher barriers to employment than others - 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 region but 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.

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.**

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 from throughout the Western region of existing sector partnerships. 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.

There are several strategies for the future in this area. First, the workforce center will work to formalize many of the existing informal partnerships with many sectors including Healthcare, Alternative Energy, and other emerging industries. Second, workforce will reach out to school boards and superintendents to increase partnerships with school districts. Schools utilize a tool called ICAP where students build their career plan and pathway - if partnerships were strengthened, this tool could be shared with workforce centers and employers to help match job seekers to hiring needs. Third, the workforce center will work to engage more small businesses by working with Small Business Development Councils. Fourth, with a shift in agriculture to focus more on specialty crops, it will be important for workforce to increase sector partnerships. This 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.

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

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 Bachelor's 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.

- 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; for example, 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.

Opportunities other than formal post-secondary training in the region for development of less formal career pathway advancement for individual workers is through movement between employers within one industry sector, 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 strategies for the next four years will:

- 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.

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.**

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 helps 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 about 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.

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;**

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 have 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.

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

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, Workforce and adult education and literacy have a solid partnership in the region. The Durango Adult Education Center is hoping to increase efforts to reach out to individuals who are underemployed or undereducation to provide help "on the job" while they are earning an income. 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 simply no resources to expand to fill this need at this time.

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

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 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 which 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.

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.**

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 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.

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);**

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, who contact local workforce centers to coordinate services.

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;**

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.

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 provide 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.

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.**

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.

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.**

There are several existing administrative cost arrangements throughout the region. There is a partnership with Health and 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.

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.

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.**

The Western and Southwest workforce centers are utilizing the "Connecting Colorado" data management system which 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.

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 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, this Western region was identified to be the third of the four to host an event and begin detailed planning. The review and discussions were to take a five week process which 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 workshop on February 24th and February 25th. 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 WIB 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.