

2024

PUERTO RICO UNIFIED STATE PLAN WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT (WIOA)

DRAFT



CNEXIÓN
LABORAL



DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT AND COMMERCE

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAC	Assessment and Adjustment Centers
AAO	Assessment and Adjustment Office
AARP	American Association of Retired Persons
AAU	Assessment and Adjustment Units
ABAWADS	Able-bodied Adults Without Dependents
ACAA	Administration of Compensation for Automobile Accidents
ACLC	Air Cargo Logistics Community
ACS	American Community Survey of the US Census Bureau
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
ADSEF	ADSEF is a Spanish Acronym for Administration of Socioeconomic Development of the Family
AEFLA	Adult Education and Family Literacy Act
AEFLA P	Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program
AEMEAD	AEMEAD is a Spanish Acronym for Puerto Rico State Agency for Emergency and Disaster Management
AEP	Alternative Education-Adult Education Program
AEWR	Adverse Effect Wage Rate
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIS	Adult Information System
AJC	American Job Centers
AOP	Agricultural Outreach Plan
APH	American Printing House for the Blind
APS	APS is a Spanish Acronym for Primary Health Care
APSE	Association for Persons in Supported Employment
ARCI	Aguilar Resto Career Indicator
ARS	Agricultural Recruitment System
ASLS VRI APP	App is used by individuals to access professional interpretation services via video or voice
ASPM	Assistant Secretary of Permit Management
ASSMCA	ASSMCA is a Spanish Acronym for Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
AT	Assistive Technology
ATAA	Alternative Trade Adjustment Assistance
BD	Big Data
BDE	Economic Development Bank for Puerto Rico

BDO	Business Development Office
BDS	Business Dynamics Statistics
BIL	Bipartisan Infrastructure Law
BIS	Budget Information Summaries
CAME	CAME is a Spanish for Support and Employment Modalities Centers
CAMP	College Assistance Program for Migrants
CAP	Cost Allocation Plan
CCAT	College of Cinematography, Arts and Television
CCPR	Consular Corps of Puerto Rico
CCR	College and Career Readiness
CCR Standards	College and Career Readiness Standards
CE	Cloud Engineer
CER	CER is a Spanish Acronym for State Rehabilitation Council
CEPR	CEPR is a Spanish Acronym for State Rehabilitation Council of Puerto Rico
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CHIPS	Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors
CIL	Centers for Independent Living
CICIM	CICIM is a Spanish Acronym for Molecular Science Research Center
CJYDP	Club JOVEM (Youth Development Program)
CM	Community Manager
CMIS	CMIS is a Spanish Acronym for New Case Management System
CNPC	Chicago National Processing Center
COFINA	COFINA is a Spanish Acronym for Puerto Sales Tax Financing Corporation
COMPU	COMPU is a Spanish Acronym for Special Education Scheduling and Placement Committee
CPR	Community Rehabilitation Programs
CPCR	CPCR is a Spanish Acronym for College of Rehabilitation Counseling Professionals of Puerto Rico
CPTOPR	CPTOPR is a Spanish Acronym for College of Occupational Therapy Professionals of Puerto Rico
CPTSPR	CPTSPR is a Spanish Acronym College for Social Work Professionals of Puerto Rico
CRCR	CRPR is a Spanish Acronym for College of Rehabilitation Counseling Professionals of Puerto Rico
CRIS	Consumer Rehabilitation Information System
CRP	Community Rehabilitation Programs
CS	Cybersecurity Specialist
CSEM	Center of Support and Employment Modes

CSNA	Comprehensive Statewide Assessment of Rehabilitation Services
CSV	Comma-Separated Values File
CTE	Career and Technical Education
CUS	Unique Service Center
CWIPA	Center of Work Incentive Planning Assistance
DA	Data Analyst
DDEC	DDEC is a Spanish Acronym for Department of Economic Development and Commerce
DEDC	Department of Economic Development and Commerce of Puerto Rico
DE	Department of Education
DEP-AEP	Department of Education-Adult Education Program
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DOL	Department of Labor
DOLETA	Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration
DS	Data Scientist
DSPID	Department of Health - Division of Services for People with Intellectual Disability
DTRH	DTRH is a Spanish Acronym for Department of Labor Human Resources
DVA	Department of Veterans Administration
DVET	Disable Veterans
DVOP	Disabled Veterans Outreach Program
DW	Dislocated Workers
EAI	Economic Activity Index
EDA	Economic Development Administration
EDGAR	Education Department General Administrative Regulations
EDO	Equal Opportunity Officer
EDT	Expert in Digital Transformation
EE	Expert in Edtech
EEL/CE	Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education
EEOC	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
EFL	Educational Functioning Levels
EIF-ICA 60-2019	Economic Incentives Fund of the Incentives Code Act 60- 2019
ELLs	English Language Learners
EPPLPR	Energy Public Policy Law of Puerto Rico
ERI	Equity Ratio Indicator
ERP	Eligibility Review Program
ES	Employment Services

ESE	Employer Service Effectiveness
ETA	Employment and Training Administration
ETFE/EE	Experiences for Evaluation/Extended Evaluation
ETPL	Eligible Training Provider List
EvalPLC	Peer Learning Cohort on Evaluation
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FERPA	Family Educational Rights and Privacy
FLSA	Fair Labor Standard Act
FNS	Food and Nutrition Services
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GED	General Educational Development Test
GEPA	General Educations Provisions Act
GLM	Generalized Liner Model
GNP	Gross National Product
GUS	Geographic Unemployment System
H-2A	H-2A Program allows employers who meet specific requirements to bring foreign nationals to the US to fill temporary agricultural jobs
HEP	High School Equivalency Program
HR	Human Resources
HUD	US Department of Housing and Urban Development
I-BEST	Integrated Basic Education Skills and Training
ICT	Information Technology and Telecommunications
IDD	Institute of Developmental Disabilities
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IDEIA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act
IDP	Individual Development Plan
IELCE	Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education
IEP	Individual Employment Plan
IET	Integrated Education and Training
IFA	Infrastructure Funding Agreements
IHE	Institute of Higher Education
IIJA	Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
ILC	Independent Living Centers
ION	Innovation and Opportunity Network
IPE	Individualized Plan for Employment
IRA	Inflation Reduction Act
IRAP	Industry Recognized Apprenticeship Programs
IRS	Internal Revenue Service

ISO	Information System Office
ISS	Individual Service Strategy
ISY	In school Youth
ITA	Individual Training Accounts
ITE	Integrated education and training
ITPR	ITPR is a Spanish Acronym for Puerto Rico Technological Institute
IWT	Incumbent Worker Training
JC	Job Corps Program
JJF	Jobs for the Future
J-PAL	About Latiff Jameel Poverty Action Lab
J-PAL NA	About Latiff Jameel Poverty Action Lab, North America
JVSG	State Jobs for Veterans Grants
JVSGC	Veteran Program Coordinator
L135-2014/L60-ICIFL-YE	Law 135-2014 (Now Law 60 Incentives Code Incentives and Financing Law for Young Entrepreneurs)
LA	Local Area
LDB	Local Workforce Development Board
LE	Logistics Expert
LED	Longitudinal Employer Household
LEHD	Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics
LEWIS	Local Employment and Wages Information System
LFM	Local Financing Mechanisms
LMI	Labor Market Intelligence
LVER	Local Veterans' Employment Representative
LWDA	Local Workforce Development Area
LWDB	Local Workforce Development Boards
MD-2	Two (2) years Medical School Program
MIP	MIP is an Acronym for the Financial Management System
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSFW	Migrant and Seasonal Farm Workers
MSG	Measurable Skill Gains
MSPA	Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers Protection Act
NAAL	National Assessment of Adult Literacy
NAP	Nutrition Assistant Program
NASWA	National Association of State Workforce Agencies
NCIL	National Council on Independent Living
NCRE	National Council on Rehabilitation Education

NDWG	National Dislocated Worker Grants
NECA	National Employment Counselor Association
NFJP	National Farmworkers Jobs Program
NGWD	National Dislocated Workers Grant
NRS	National Reporting System
O*NET	Ocupational Network
OA	Office of Apprenticeship
OAA	Office of Assessment and Adjustment
OCTAE	Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education
ODEP	Office of Disability Employment Policy's
OESM	Office of Employment Support and Modalities
OGP	Is a Spanish Acronym for Budget and Management Office
OJT	On the Job Training
OLRHR	Office of Labor Relations and Human Resources
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
OPEVE	OPAVE is a Spanish Acronym for Planning, Validation and Statistics Office in DEDC
OPTS	Office of Pre-Employment Transition Services
OQCPM	Office of Quality Control and Program management
ORE	ORE is a Spanish Acronym for Regional Educational Office
OSEM	Office of Support and Employment Modes
OSHA	Occupational Safety and Health Administration
OSY	Out-of-School Youth
OVRSCS	Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Services
OZ	Opportunity Zones
PAB	PAB is a Spanish Acronym for Benefits Adding Program
PAC	Pandemic Additional Compensation
PACIA	Performance Accountability and Customer Information Agency
PDJ	Youth Development Program
PDL	PDL is a Spanish Acronym for Workforce Development Program
PEA	Public Education Agency
PED	PED is a Spanish Acronym for Digital File Portal
PEI	PEI is a Spanish Acronym for Individualized Educational Program
PETSO	Pre-employment Transition Service Office
PIDE	PIDE is a Spanish Acronym for Educational Digital Innovation Program
PIPE	PIPE is a Spanish Acronym for Individualized Plan for Employment
PIR	Development of Individual Reemployment Plan

PIRL	Performance Indicators and Reporting Levels
PPC	Placement and Programming Committee
PPPE	PPPE is a Spanish Acronym for Energy Policy Public Program
PPT	Planning and Placement Team
PRA	Paperwork Reduction Act
PRAI	Puerto Rico Association of Industrials
PRATP	PRATP is a Spanish Acronym for Assistive Technology Advisory Council of Puerto Rico
PRDCR	Puerto Rico Department of Correction and Rehabilitation
PRDE	Puerto Rico Department of Education
PRDEDC	Puerto Rico Department of Economic Development and Commerce
PRDOA	Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture
PRDOL	Puerto Rico Department of Labor
PRDOLHR	Puerto Rico Department of Labor Human Resources
PRE-ETS	Pre-Employment Transition Services
PRG	The Policy & Research Group
PRIC	Puerto Rico Incentives Code
PRIS	Participant Record Information System
PROMESA	PROMESA is a Spanish Acronym for Puerto Rico Economic Stability, Management and Oversight Act
PRRID	Puerto Rico Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf
PRSWDB	Puerto Rico State Workforce Development Board
PRT&EC	Puerto Rico Trade and Export Company
PRVRA	Puerto Rico Vocational Rehabilitation Administration
PSI	Platform for Social Impact
PY	Program Years
PYMES	PYMES is a Spanish Acronym for "Small and Medium Enterprises
QA	Quality Assurance
QCEW	Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages
QCPMO	Quality Control and Programmatic Management Office
QRA	Quarterly Report Analysis
QWI	Quarterly Workforce Indicators
RA	Registered Apprenticeship
RAP	Registered Apprenticeship Program
RAPIDS	Registered Apprenticeship Partners Information Data System
RCSO	Rehabilitation Counseling Service Office
REE	Renewable Energy Expert
RES	Reemployment Services

RESEA	Reemployment Services, and Eligibility Assessment Program
RFP	Request for Proposal
RI	Related Instruction
RR	Rapid Responses
RRR	Roosevelt Roads Redevelopment
RRRA	Roosevelt Roads Redevelopment Authority
RSA	Rehabilitation Services Administration
RTAA	Reemployment Trade Adjustment Assistance
SAAL	State Assessment of Adult Literacy
SAEF	State Apprenticeship Expansion Formula
SBA	Small Business Administration
SBTDC	Small Business Technology and Development Center
SC	Sustainability Consultant
SCDD	State Council on Developmental Disabilities
SCSEP	Senior Community Service Employment Program
SEA	State Educational Agency
SEMC	Support and Employment Modalities Centers
SEMO	Support and Employment Modalities Offices
SFM	State Financial Mechanisms
SIA	SIA is a Spanish Acronym for Adult Information System
SIE	SIE is a Spanish Acronym for Student Information System
SIFC	State Insurance Fund Corporation
SIFDE	SIFDE is a Spanish Acronym for Financial Information System
SILC	State Independent Living Council
SLDS	Statewide Longitudinal Data System
SMA	State Monitor Advocate
SME	Subject Matter Experts
SME's	Small and Medium-Sized Business
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
SOEPP	State Office of Energy Public Policy
SRC	State Rehabilitation Council
SSA	Social Security Act
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
SUIA	State Unemployment Insurance Agency
SWA	State Workforce Agency
SWDB	State Workforce Development Board
SWIS	State Wage Interchange System

SWOT	Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threats
TAA	Trade Adjustment Assistance
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
TC	Transition Counselor
TEGL	Training and Employment Guidance Letter
TEN	Training and Employment Notices
TRA	Trade Readjustment Allowances
U.S.	United States
UC	Unemployment Compensation
UCFE	Unemployment Compensation for Federal Employees
UCX	Unemployment Compensation for Ex-servicemembers
UI	Unemployment Insurance
UPR	University of Puerto Rico
UPRU	Agricultural Technology/University of Puerto Rico at Utuado
USCIS	United States Citizenship and Immigration Services
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USDOE	United State Department of Education
USDOL	United State Department of Labor
VEP	Vocational Education Program
VETS	Veterans' Employment and Training Service
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor
VR	Vocational Rehabilitation
VRA	Vocational Rehabilitation Administration
VRC	Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors
VRCSC	Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Service Centers Services
VRCSO	Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Services Office
VRP	Vocational Rehabilitation Program
WBD	Workforce Development Board
WBLE	Work-Based Learning Experiences
WBO	Worker Benefit Orientation
WDB	Workforce Development Board
WDP	Workforce Development Program
WHC	Wellness and Health Coordinator
WHD	Wage and Hour Division
WIA	Workforce Investment Act of 1998
WIOA	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
WIPS	Workforce Integrated Performance System

WLMI	Workforce and Labor Market Information System
WOTC	Work Opportunity Tax Credit
WP	Wagner-Peyser Program
WPRS	Worker Profiling and Reemployment Services
WRIS	Wage Record Interchange System

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OVERVIEW OF THE 2024 PUERTO RICO UNIFIED STATE PLAN

Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the Governor of Puerto Rico is mandated to present a Unified or Combined State Plan to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), outlining a four-year strategy for the state's workforce development system. This plan, a key component of the national public-funded workforce development network, is designed to secure funds for essential programs.

Strategic Economic Framework and Collaborative Approach: Puerto Rico's government operates within a strategic economic development framework known as Proposito, facilitating workforce development. This integrated and collaborative project, involving public and private entities, non-profits, business associations, and government organizations, aims to learn from past experiences while fostering a diversified and multisectoral economy.

Alignment with WIOA and Labor Reform: The 2024 Unified State Plan, approved under WIOA requirements. It emphasizes improved alignment of federal investments in workforce training, integration, and service efficiency. A major focus of this plan is the transformation of labor through the integration of labor reforms, ensuring the workforce system is employment-driven and effectively connects employers with competitive citizens.

Reforms and Collaborative Approaches: The WIOA-driven reforms emphasize planning through basic programs, including this process in Unified or Combined State Plans. This encourages a shared understanding of workforce needs, 21st skills and fosters the development of comprehensive approaches, such as professional pathways and sectoral strategies. Successful implementation requires strong relationships between programs and improved coordination and partnerships with local entities and support service agencies.

Multisectoral Integration for Labor Development: Aligned with WIOA, the 2024 State Plan underscores local and regional multisectoral integration to strengthen the provision of workforce development services. This integration focuses on transforming the labor landscape by addressing the evolving needs of businesses and workers.

Strategic Technological Integration: As part of the strategic planning, the plan incorporates advanced and innovative technological infrastructure to increase the number of technological entrepreneurs. This technology aims to enhance the quality and efficiency of public services while promoting interagency connectivity to maximize data capture and service effectiveness.

Optimistic Outlook and Transformational Goals: Confident that the plan will exceed WIOA expectations, Puerto Rico anticipates achieving transformative labor development. The plan seeks to maximize resources, recruit and train talent with extraordinary knowledge and leadership capabilities, drive entrepreneurship, incentivize economic development, and prioritize community well-being, improving the quality of life for all residents.

DRAFT

I. WIOA STATE PLAN TYPE AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

(a) Unified or Combined State Plan.

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

Puerto Rico submits its Unified State Plan, which includes the following core programs:

- 1) Adult Program
- 2) Dislocated Worker Program
- 3) Youth Program
- 4) Wagner-Peyser Act
- 5) Adult Education and Family Literacy Act
- 6) Vocational Rehabilitation Program, including Blind Services

(b) Plan Introduction or Executive Summary.

Plan Introduction:

The Puerto Rico Workforce Development System continues to build on the WIOA core programs and required partnerships and other organizations to identify opportunities for market labor and improve the available data system. This approach allows Puerto Rico to be deliberate and thorough in its strategic planning efforts across programs and promotes economic development and sustainability.

As required by the WIOA and its commitment to providing a consumer-first workforce system, Puerto Rico continues to seek opportunities to improve its outcomes, increase partnership participation, and enhance customer service. Strategic effects are continuously revised to respond to changing economic conditions, demographics, employment trends and workforce needs.

Puerto Rico's WIOA Unified Plan is consistent with the requirements of federal and state law, with the following emphasis:

1. Unified services – Puerto Rico’s employment and training programs must be coordinated and consolidated at locally managed one-stop delivery system centers. The workforce must be available at every center for quick assistance. These actions resulted in increased workforce participation and productivity in Puerto Rico.
2. Empowering individuals – Eligible participants will make informed decisions and choose a qualified training program that best meets their needs. This allows individuals to acquire the necessary tools or capacities to face labor market challenges.
3. All access – Through a one-stop delivery system, every individual acquires access to employment services.
4. Rise of accountability – Puerto Rico’s localities and training providers will be held accountable for their performance.

This WIOA Unified Plan 2024 identifies major changes in Puerto Rico’s economic landscape and the level of administration of workforce programs across agencies in order to achieve a workforce transformation focused on modernizing, technology, competency and integration.

II. STRATEGIC ELEMENTS

(a) **Puerto Rico Economic, Workforce, and Workforce Development Activities Analysis.**

(1) **Economic and Workforce Analysis**

(A) **Economic Analysis.**

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

In the middle of the last century, Puerto Rico's economy was centered on the production of sugarcane and tobacco. It then transformed into an economy sustained by the petrochemical, electronic, and textile manufacturing industries. This event occurred from the 1970s to the 2000s. How has the world transformed over time? Puerto Rico was no exception, as it was part of the transformation experienced by the rest of the economies.

Puerto Rico experienced a series of events that affected its economic development and created an economic crisis. Some of these events are as follows:

- 1) The effects of hurricanes Irma and Maria resulted in the acceleration of the emigration of another 600,000 people from Puerto Rico.
- 2) The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to a decline in the country's economic activity.
- 3) Significant differentiation of poverty parameters between Puerto Rico and the United States (US). According to the 2020 census, 43.4% of the population lives in poverty, compared to 11.4% in the United States. However, by 2022, the poverty percentage in Puerto Rico had dropped to 39.8%.
- 4) Several reasons for the demographic exodus from Puerto Rico are related to the quality of life, security, government services or support, and high unemployment rate (UR), among others.
- 5) Distribution of Medicaid Benefits in Puerto Rico.

- 6) Overestimation of economic growth projections has resulted in deficits and increases in financial debt.
- 7) Changes in government policies, modifications in economic planning strategies, and inconsistent progression in diverse economic activities could potentially benefit society.
- 8) Lack of communication at all levels of the productivity sectors, both government and private companies.
- 9) The reorganization of COFINA's debt in 2018 under the Puerto Rico Economic Stability, Management and Oversight Act (PROMESA), which President Barack Obama signed into law on June 30, 2016. The debt increased to \$72 billion because of this reorganization. The government of Puerto Rico established COFINA, a public corporation, with the intention of issuing bonds to refinance the well-known extra-constitutional debt.
- 10) The energy crisis makes it difficult for businesses to operate and establish them. This has contributed to an increase in the cost of living since it increases the availability of necessities and causes their prices to increase in the market.
- 11) Ease and guidance for establishing new businesses.
- 12) The growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has stagnated since 2005, with a negative growth rate (-2%). This negative growth persisted until 2018 (-4.4%).
- 13) By 2022, the U.S. economy faced one of the highest inflation rates in 40 years. Therefore, Puerto Rico is facing significant economic challenges.

Although the GDP growth in Puerto Rico has been significantly affected since 1970, it was not from 2005 until 2018, when they registered negative percentage rates. Some reasons for this are wrong decisions about the debt, poor collection of tax revenues to cover government expenses and thus improve tax rates, the increase in the inflation rate, and the effects of the war between Russia and Ukraine, conflict in the middle east, among others.

However, during the 21st century, Puerto Rico's economy, influenced by changes in globalization and technological processes, manufacturing processes, meals, export of services, medical equipment, transportation, etc., began to boom. This stage is capital-

intensive and is characterized by large investments. The government plays a fundamental role in the establishment of industries and their continuous development, which allows for an increase in national wealth and better quality of life for society.

The goal of the government's efforts is to create an export-focused, multisectoral, export-diversified knowledge-based economy that is connected into international supply chains. Among the strategic sectors included in this diversification are the following:

1. Bioscience;
2. Aviation;
3. Information Technology;
4. Agrobusiness;
5. Travel and Tourism.

This is aligned with the feelings of employers in Puerto Rico, who have identified the need for six priority job families with highest potential to drive business growth over next decade:

1. Engineering talent to design new business processes and drive innovation in product – a particular priority for advanced manufacturing, pharmaceutical, and aerospace industries.
2. College-educated computer scientists – a particular priority for companies like Wovenware that are on cutting edge of tech innovation.
3. Workers with specific tech skills - to support digital and technical functions across all industries for example cybersecurity, data and analytics.
4. Skilled trade and construction workers – to enable physical expansion of facilities.
5. Natural Sciences talent to continue PR's edge on biopharma.
6. Business talent to drive successful project implementation – with a particular focus on need in project managers.

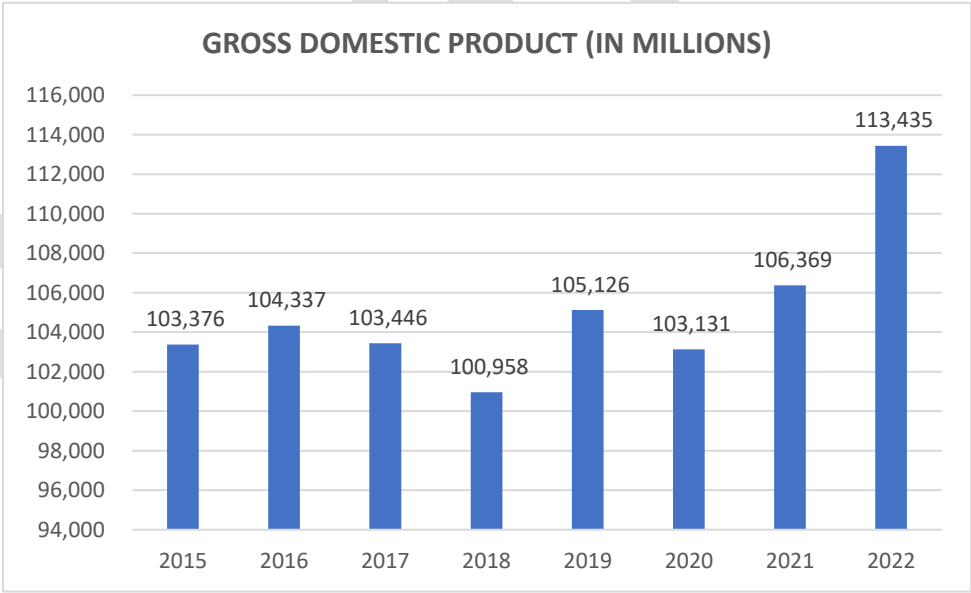
This is an opportunity to make the most of our workforce's talent and capacity, which will lead to sustainability and economic growth. By using this strategy, Puerto Rico will be able to adjust to the dynamic nature of globalization and assimilate the circumstances or impacts that arise on a local as well as a worldwide scale.

Economic Indicators:

A. GDP

GDP is a macroeconomic indicator that is considered when analyzing economic development, accumulation of wealth, and social welfare. This is the market value of all the final services and goods in each period. Its measurement can be obtained from two sources: income and aggregate expenditure. The trajectory of Puerto Rico's GDP from 2015 to 2022:

Graph 1: Gross Domestic Product in Millions from 2016 to 2022



Source: www.estadísticaspr.gov

The GDP increased in 2016 at a growth rate of 9.3% from 2015. Because of Hurricane Maria, the GDP decreased in 2017 and 2018 compared to 2016 to a level of -0.85% for 2017 and -3.2% for 2018. In 2019, GDP had a significant recovery compared to 2018 of 4.1%. In 2020,

GDP decreased compared to 2019 by -1.9%, as part of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the years 2021 and 2022, the GDP increased in relation to the year 2020 at a rate of 3.1% for the year 2021 and 10% for the year 2022.

Below are some macroeconomic indicators that influence economic development and sustainability. These are the Gross Domestic Product, Disposable Personal Income and Personal Consumer Expenditure for the years from 2013 to 2022. In these last two variables there is an expense above the available income for the years 2013, 2014, 2015, 2019 and 2022.

Table 1: Economics Indicator (2013-2022)

ECONOMICS INDICATORS										
2013-2022										
CURRENT PRICE (IN THOUSANDS)										
Years										
Economic Variable	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Gross Domestic Product	\$102,450	\$102,446	\$103,376	\$104,337	\$103,446	\$100,958	\$105,126	\$103,131	\$106,369	\$113,435
Disposable Personal Income	\$61,866	\$60,781	\$61,238	\$61,359	\$62,656	\$69,669	\$65,126	\$71,707	\$78,603	\$81,827
Personal Consumer Expenditure	\$62,478	\$61,899	\$61,641	\$60,979	\$62,454	\$65,157	\$68,759	\$65,470	\$72,529	\$82,416

Source: Puerto Rico Puerto Rico Planning Board - Ingreso y Producto 2022

The next table shows the same macroeconomic variables in per capita terms. This information shows that GDP increases over time except for 2020 because of the pandemic on production and population.

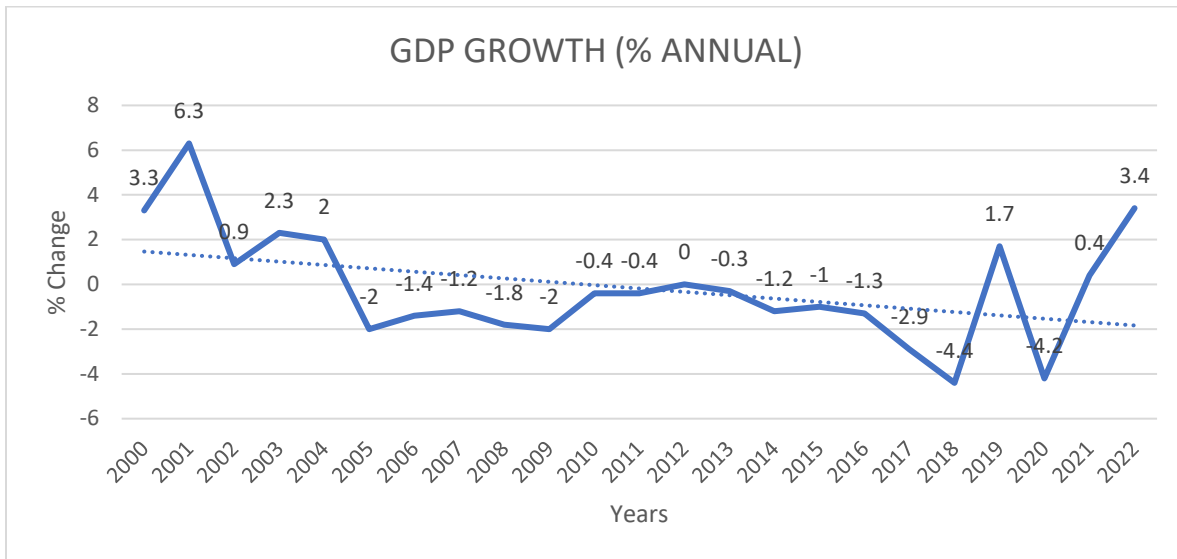
Table 2: Economics Indicator (2013-2022) Per Capita

ECONOMICS INDICATORS - PER CAPITA										
2013-2022										
Years										
Economic Variable	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Gross Domestic Product	\$28,348	\$28,745	\$29,502	\$30,330	\$30,732	\$30,978	\$32,914	\$31,854	\$32,503	\$34,989
Disposable Personal Income	\$17,118	\$17,054	\$17,477	\$17,837	\$18,614	\$21,377	\$20,390	\$22,148	\$24,019	\$25,240
Personal Consumer Expenditure	\$17,288	\$17,368	\$17,591	\$17,727	\$18,554	\$19,993	\$21,527	\$20,222	\$22,163	\$25,421

Source: *Puerto Rico Planning Board – Income & Product 2022*

To visualize these effects in detail, we present the percentage growth in GDP from 2000 to 2022.

Graph 2. GPD Growth from 2000 to 2021



Source: www.estadisticapr.gov

As shown, growth took several turns, but it was not until 2005, when it had negative growth and continued negatively until 2018. In 2019, it had a brief recovery (1.7%), but in 2020, it fell again to -4.4% because of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, a positive recovery of 3.4% was observed.

B. Gross National Product (GNP)

Gross National Product (GNP), like GDP, is a macroeconomic indicator that is highly considered in terms of economic development and sustainability. Below, you will find the trajectory of Puerto Rico's GNP from 2003 to 2022:

Graph 3. Gross National Product from 2003 to 2022

2000	38.47	62.34
2001	46.9	67.77
2002	47.17	65.86
2003	55.18	73.74
2004	55.08	68.57
2005	56.54	67.38
2006	60.12	68.88
2007	60.01	67.03
2008	63.95	68.3
2009	60.81	63.09
2010	61.66	62.67
2011	64.28	64.05
2012	58.35	57.45
2013	62.36	60.87
2014	62.31	60.82
2015	69.46	67.19
2016	71.74	68.76
2017	71.09	68.72
2018	60.53	59.95
2019	63.68	60.58

2020	62.24	60.35
2021	57.92	54.45
2022	59.79	52.71

Source: macro.trends.net/countries/PRI/puerto-rico/exports

Below is a comparison of exports of the main industries for the years 2020 and 2022.

Table 4. Top Puerto Rico Exports by Trade Dollar Value, 2020 and-2022

TOP PUERTO RICO EXPORTS BY TRADE DOLLAR VALUE 2020 and 2022				
	In Billions			
Industries	2020	2022	Difference	Change %
Pharmaceutical and Medical Manufacturing	\$12.90	\$16.30	\$3.40	26.36
Medical Equipment and Support Manufacturing	\$1.10	\$1.30	\$0.20	18.18
Basic Chemical Manufacturing	\$0.70	\$0.70	\$-	-
All Other Manufacturing	\$1.90	\$2.40	\$0.50	26.32

Source: US Census Bureau, Foreign Trade Statistics: <https://www.bls.gov/mxp/publications/regional-publications/puerto-rico-exports.pdf>

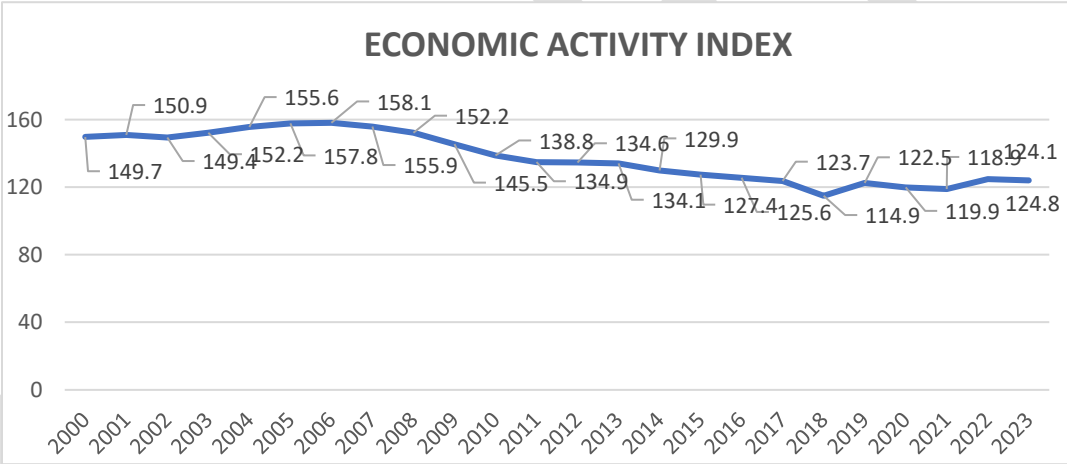
Certain businesses, such pharmaceuticals and medical manufacturing, saw development in Puerto Rico's export sector; this could be a sign of a strategic advantage or rising demand for these products worldwide. Nonetheless, during the analysis, exports' overall GDP contribution has decreased, which may indicate that the economy is diversifying or that other sectors are expanding more quickly. The drop in exports as a proportion of GDP after 2017 may possibly be the result of more general economic difficulties or changes in the

international market that Puerto Rico must adjust to. Even if exports as a percentage of GDP have generally decreased, the manufacturing sector is growing, which may offer opportunity for focused economic policies to promote and strengthen these high-growth industries.

D. Economic Activity Index (EAI)

EAI is another macroeconomic indicator in which trade dynamics are visualized at a given time to promote economic development. This indicator consists of energy consumption, cement sales, the number of non-agricultural wage earners employed and gasoline consumption. Next, the average behavior of this indicator from 2000 to 2023 is presented (the last data point represents the average of the data from July 2022 to February 2023).

Graph 4. Economy Activity Index from 2000 to 2023



Source: www.estadísticaspr.gov

If we visualize the movement of the index in the previous graph, it shows a reduction in economic activity from 2005, which continues at a decreasing rate until 2018. In 2019, this indicator improved, but in 2020, it fell again (COVID-19). It showed positive performance from 2021 to 2023, although it was from 2000 to 2004. This behavior coincides with the behavior discussed above regarding the GDP.

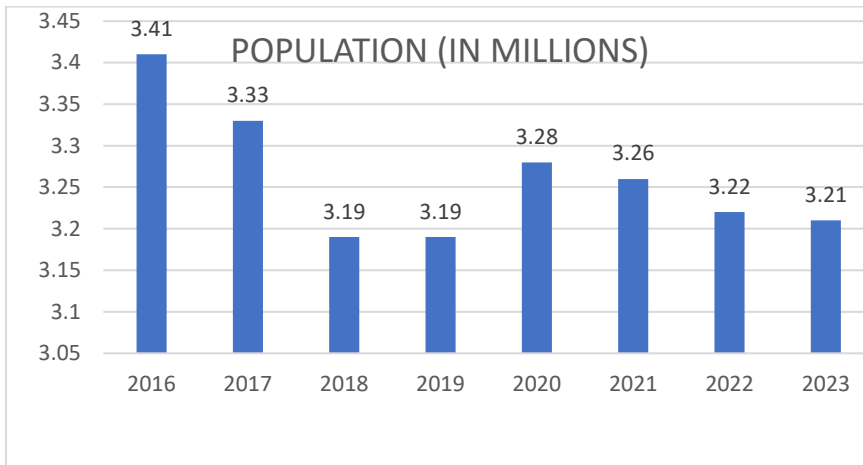
In general, EAI was significantly affected during this century. Some of the exogenous events that contributed to their behavior were as follows:

- 1) The United States Congress terminated the advantageous tax status for American businesses operating in Puerto Rico in 2006; consequently, it is anticipated that future support for these industries will be reduced. As a result, some may decide to go back to the United States or, in another scenario, move their industries or manufacturing lines to different Latin American nations.
 - 2) In September 2017, Irma and Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico. The entire economy was impacted by this. Normalizing economic activity has proven to be a very difficult task. We continue to get assistance today to repair or lessen the harm the hurricanes have inflicted.
 - 3) COVID-19 had an impact on the entire planet in 2020, including Puerto Rico. This incident affected the world economy, but it also made virtual labor more accessible and changed people's perspectives about it. This modality offered a fresh perspective on how market systems, particularly the labor market, may be changed as needed. It has also encouraged the development of novel corporate practices.
- E.** In 2022, the U.S. economy experienced the highest inflation rate in the last 50 years, which resulted in a transfer to the Puerto Rican economy. The reason for this event is the different economic stimuli used to address the impact of COVID-19.

F. Population

The Population variable is another important economic indicator since it is the main component of the elaboration, development, and growth of a sustainable economy. The population behavior of Puerto Rico from 2016 to 2023 is shown below.

Graph 5. Population in Thousands of Millions from 2016 to 2021



Source: www.estadísticaspr.gov

The behavior of the population also has a negative impact. Since 2016, the population has decreased from just over 3.4 million inhabitants to just over 3.3 million inhabitants by 2017. In 2018, the population of Puerto Rico experienced a sharp reduction of less than 3.2 million inhabitants, influenced by the effects of Hurricane Maria, which continued for the next three years. This situation caused many Puerto Ricans to emigrate to the US, which caused them to settle outside Puerto Rico, thus affecting the Puerto Rican labor market. This also caused a drop in students, affecting our education system because of parents' decisions to emigrate to the US. Starting in 2020, the population begins to decrease at least until 2023. (The years 2021, 2022 and 2023 are estimates).

Migration effects are an important factor for economic development since most of them are part of the country's workforce. Below is a distribution of the country's migration effect, for the years 2010 to 2023. Starting in 2010, the net migration rate has been increasing until 2020. From 2021 to 2023, this Migration rate begins to decrease. This is in part due to established government programs such as Purpose and 21 Century among others. The retention of workers is important to meet the strategies, objectives and goals established by the government.

Table 5. Puerto Rico Net Migration Rate Data (2010-2023)

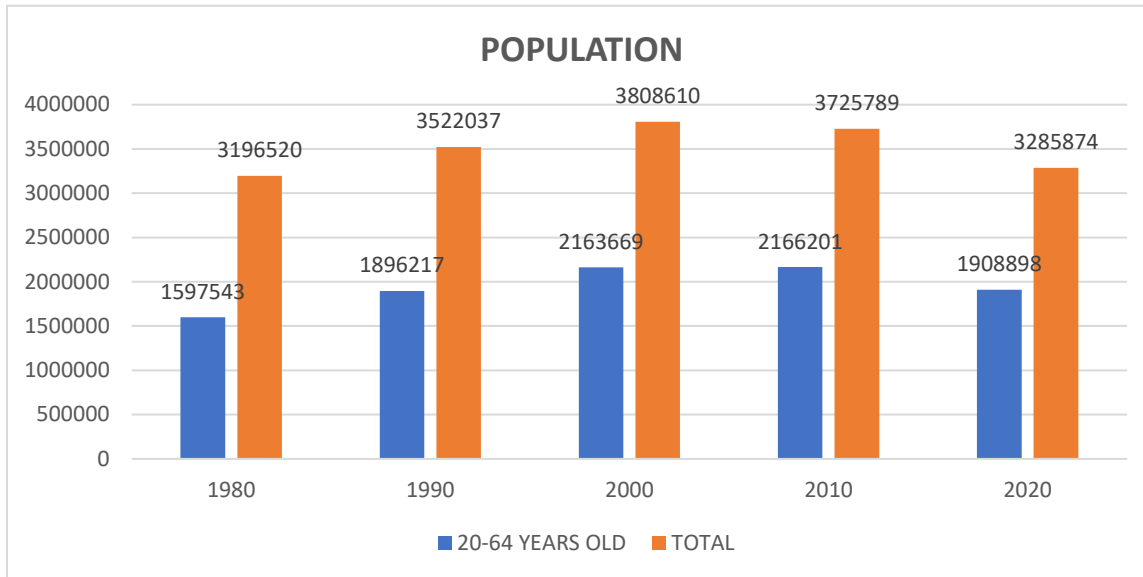
PUERTO RICO NET MIGRATION RATE DATA
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2010-2023		
Year	Net Migration Rate %	Growth Rate %
2010	-10.173	14.11
2011	-11.43	12.36
2012	-12.688	11.01
2013	-13.946	9.91
2014	-17.436	25.03
2015	-20.925	20.01
2016	-24.415	16.68
2017	-27.904	14.29
2018	-31.394	12.51
2019	-23.728	-24.42
2020	-16.061	-32.31
2021	-8.395	-47.73
2022	-0.728	-91.33
2023	6.938	-1053.02

Source: macrotrends.net/countries/PRI/puerto-rico/net-migration

Continuing with the significant effects and impacts on the workforce the working group with the greatest impact was those aged 20–64 years. The population changes in this group were as follows:

Graph 6. Population Data from 1980 to 2020



Source: www.estadisticaspr.gov

Population data from the 1980 Census to 2010 continued to grow or have a positive impact. However, for the 2020 census, it was reduced to -11.9% compared to the 2010 census. This was the result of hurricanes Irma and Maria, which occurred in 2017.

G. Labor market

The Labor Market is another vital component, as it is the main engine for structuring a sustainable economy. Below are data on the labor market in Puerto Rico:

Table 6. Mean Total Employment, Seasonally Adjusted and Percentage Change; Fiscal Year 2019-2023:

MEAN TOTAL EMPLOYMENT		
SEASONALLY ADJUSTED AND PERCENTAGE CHANGE		
FISCAL YEAR 2019-2023		
Year	Total Employment	Change%
2019	995	2.7

2020	994	-0.1
2021	1039	4.5
2022	1115	7.3
2023	1116	0.1

[Source:ResumenEconómicodePuertoicoAgosto2023/Vol.III,Num.8estadisticas.pr/files/inventario/resumen_economico/2023-09-18/Revista-Resumen-Economico-ago-2023.pdf](https://estadisticas.pr/files/inventario/resumen_economico/2023-09-18/Revista-Resumen-Economico-ago-2023.pdf)

Jobs begin to increase from 2020 to 2023. In 2021 the growth rate compared to 2020 was 4.5%, while for 2023 compared to 2022 it was 7.3%.

The working force is presented from the year 2019 to the year 2023. The working force for the years 2021 and 2022 had significant growth compared to the previous year. For the year 2021 it obtained a growth rate of 4.6%, while for the year 2022 it was 5.4%.

Table 7. Work Group, Seasonally Adjusted and Percentage Change; Fiscal Year 2019-2023

WORKER GROUP		
SEASONALLY ADJUSTED AND PERCENTAGE CHANGE		
FISCAL YEAR 2019-2023		
Year	Worker Group	Change%
2019	1087	0.6
2020	1086	-0.1
2021	1136	4.6
2022	1197	5.4

2023	1187	-0.8
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[Source:ResumenEconómicodePuertoicoAgosto2023/Vol.III,Num.8estadisticas.pr/files/inventario/resumen_economico/2023-09-18/Revista-Resumen-Economico-ago-2023.pdf](https://resumen-economico/2023-09-18/Revista-Resumen-Economico-ago-2023.pdf)

The agricultural wage employment presented from 2019 to 2023 had a decrease until 2021 by -0.8%. Then, for the years 2021 and 2022 they obtained an increase of 6.7% and 3.4% respectively.

Table 8. Agricultural Wage Employment: State Government, Seasonally Adjusted and Percentage Change; Fiscal Year 2019-2023:

AGRICULTURAL WAGE EMPLOYMENT: STATE GOVERNMENT		
SEASONALLY ADJUSTED AND PERCENTAGE CHANGE		
FISCAL YEAR 2019-2023		
Year	Agricultural Wage Employment	Change%
2019	873.7	1.9
2020	857	-1.9
2021	850	-0.8
2022	906.8	6.7
2023	938	3.4

[Source:ResumenEconómicodePuertoicoAgosto2023/Vol.III,Num.8estadisticas.pr/files/inventario/resumen_economico/2023-09-18/Revista-Resumen-Economico-ago-2023.pdf](https://resumen-economico/2023-09-18/Revista-Resumen-Economico-ago-2023.pdf)

The next table presents the 10 occupations with the highest salaries. The three occupations with the highest salaries are Physicians, All Other (\$162,260); Chief Executive (\$130,250) and Advertising and Promotions Managers (\$122,700).

Table 9. Top 10 Occupations with Highest Salary (May 2022):

TOP 10 HIGHEST OCCUPATION WITH SALARY				
2022 (MAY)				
Occupation Code	Occupation Title	Employment #	Mean Hourly Wage	Annual Mean Wage
11-1011	Chief Executive	3290	\$62.62	\$130,250.00
11-2011	Advertising and Promotions Managers	140	\$58.99	\$122,700.00
11-2021	Marketing Managers	810	\$47.90	\$99,640.00
11-3051	Industrial Production Managers	1150	\$53.90	\$112,120.00
11-9041	Architectural and Engineering Managers	970	\$53.14	\$110,530.00
23-1023	Judges, Magistrate Jusdges, and Magistrate	540	\$48.54	\$100,960.00
29-1218	Obstetricians and Gynecologists	60	\$58.68	\$122,060.00
29-1221	Pediatricians, General	80	\$50.25	\$104,520.00
29-1229	Physicians, All Other	840	\$78.01	\$162,260.00
29-1051	Pharmacists	2170	\$46.40	\$96,500.00

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: bls.gov/oes/current/oes_pr.htm

The next table presents the 10 occupations with the lowest salaries. The three occupations with the highest salaries are Physicians, All Other (\$162,260); Chief Executive (\$130,250) and Advertising and Promotions Managers (\$122,700). The three occupations with the lowest salaries are Massage Therapists (\$20,240); Childcare Workers (\$20,520) and Food Preparation Workers (\$20,550).

Table 10. Top 10 Occupations with the Lowest Salary (May 2022):

TOP 10 LOWEST OCCUPATION WITH SALARY				
2022 (MAY)				
Occupation Code	Occupation Title	Employment #	Mean Hourly Wage	Annual Mean Wage
31-1132	Orderlies	520	\$10.00	\$20,800.00
31-9011	Massage Therapists	140	\$9.73	\$20,240.00
31-9091	Dental Assistants	2600	\$10.05	\$20,910.00
35-2021	Food Preparation Workers	6160	\$9.88	\$20,550.00
37-2012	Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	3110	\$10.10	\$21,000.00
39-9011	Childcare Workers	1060	\$9.87	\$20,520.00
41-2011	Cashiers	30230	\$10.17	\$21,140.00

45-2099	Agricultural Workers, All Other	140	\$9.90	\$20,580.00
47-2061	Construction Laborers	8720	\$10.12	\$21,050.00
47-3012	Helpers-Carpenters	1090	\$10.25	\$21,320.00

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: bls.gov/oes/current/oes_pr.htm

The labor market for the past five years has remained at a stable pace despite the events of Hurricane Maria and the COVID-19 pandemic.

A study conducted by the DOL indicated that the occupations of greatest demand for 2021 without a baccalaureate are as follows:

- 1) Retailers
- 2) Cashiers
- 3) Customer Service Representatives
- 4) Fast Food Preparation Workers and Sample Clerks
- 5) Medical Secretaries
- 6) Janitors and Housekeepers, Except Domestic Employees and Housekeepers in Private Homes
- 7) Dental Assistants
- 8) Workers and Day Laborers Agriculture, Cultivation, Food and Greenhouse
- 9) Order Repositors and Preparers
- 10)Meal Preparation Workers

On the other hand, the occupations of greater demand with minimum education of the baccalaureate are as follows:

- 1) Retailers
- 2) Medical Secretaries
- 3) Customer Service Representative

- 4) Executive Secretaries and Executive Administrative Assistants
- 5) Registered Nurses
- 6) Office Employees, General Tasks
- 7) Accountant and Auditors
- 8) Secretary and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical and Executive
- 9) Medical and Clinical Laboratory Technologists
- 10) Lawyers

For the next ten years, labor trends are aimed at the following (DOL, 2021):

- 1) Jobs focused on advanced technology, such as the Security or Protection of Computer Systems, Robotics, Scientists and AI.
- 2) Jobs related to the management of Information such as "Big Data" (BD), Engineers, Communications, Information Systems and Statistics, among others.
- 3) Jobs focused on health, including Nurses, Speech Therapists, Physical Therapists, Nutritionists, Doctors, Radiologists and Laboratory Technicians.
- 4) Jobs focused on seniors such as Caregivers, Therapists, Social Workers, Nutritionists, Transportation, Medical Services and Personal Care.

It is important to bear in mind that many occupations with the highest demand today could tend to be eliminated or reduced considerably because technological advances in both access to information and robotics have gradually replaced human capital.

In addition, we must consider the effects of the pandemic on structure and work functions. Many of these employers had to structure and allow virtual work, so this modality, taking advantage of the available technology, anticipated what was expected to happen in the next ten years.

The projection of specialized occupations in the labor force towards the year 2030 with greater opportunities to integrate into economic development. Some of these occupations are as follows:

Table 11. Projected Job Growth (2020-2030):

Occupation	PR Employment	Projected Job Growth Rate (2020-2030)	Projected Job (2020-2030)	Mean Annual Salary	Education Level
Industrial Engineers	2,866	22%	3,497	\$72,300	Bachelor's degree
Civil Engineers	2,069	17%	2,421	\$62,180	Bachelor's degree
Computer Systems Analysts	1,339	13%	1,513	\$54,560	Bachelor's degree
Chemists	1,173	14%	1,337	\$68,470	Bachelor's degree
Psychologists, All Other	889	14%	1,013	\$82,820	Master's degree
Mechanical Engineers	711	23%	875	\$69,800	Bachelor's degree
Art Directors	455	22%	555	\$59,490	Bachelor's degree
Computer Network Architects	414	15%	476	\$71,090	Bachelor's degree

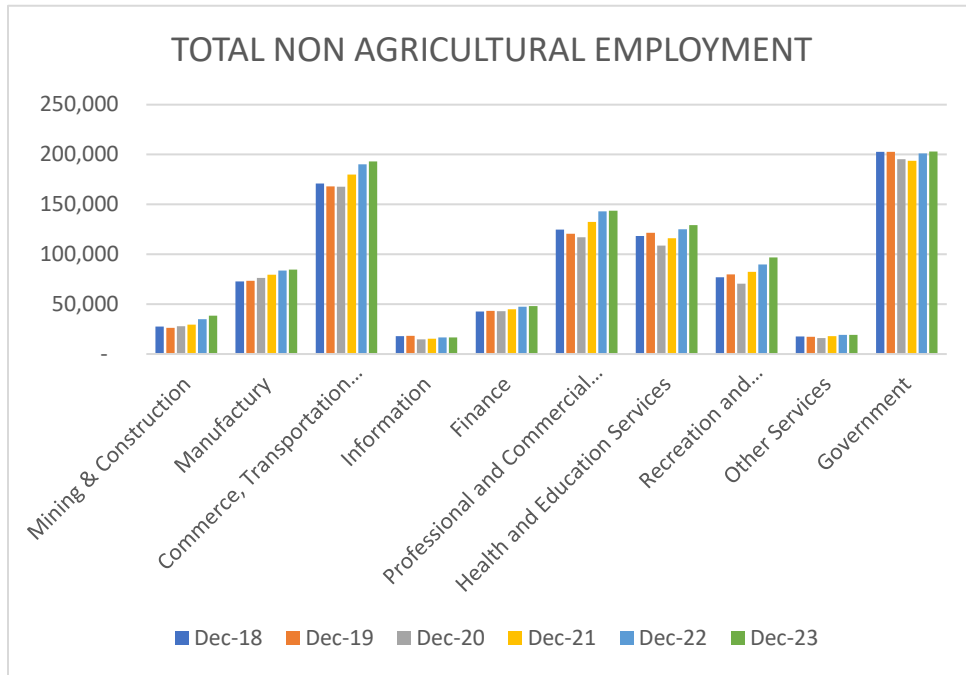
Electronics Engineers	322	19%	383	\$65,410	Bachelor's degree
Microbiologists	288	10%	317	\$52,590	Bachelor's degree
Computer Hardware Engineers	188	12%	211	\$87,840	Bachelor's degree
Chemical Engineers	141	15%	162	\$81,680	Bachelor's degree
Epidemiologists	74	24%	92	\$52,980	Master's degree
Actuaries	46	24%	57	\$62,610	Bachelor's degree

Resource: 21st Century Workforce Project Phase 1 Deliverable. January 2023.

F.1 Non-agricultural employment

The following graph shows the number of employees in the economic sectors (non-agricultural), which are composed of Mining and Construction, Manufacturing, Commerce, Information, Finance, Professional Services, Educational Services, Recreation, Government and Other Services. The distribution of jobs in these economic sectors has been exposed over the last five years (2018-2023).

Graph 7. Total Non-Agricultural Employment:



Source: www.estadisticaspr.gov

In addition, the non-agricultural wage employment, from year 2019 to year 2023, is shown with percentage changes.

Table 12. Non-Agricultural Wage Employment: State Government, Seasonally Adjusted and Percentage Change; Fiscal Year 2019-2023:

NON-AGRICULTURAL WAGE EMPLOYMENT: STATE GOVERNMENT		
SEASONALLY ADJUSTED AND PERCENTAGE CHANGE		
FISCAL YEAR 2019-2023		
Year	Non-Agricultural Wage Employment	Change %
2019	138.2	-5.2
2020	132.4	-4.2

2021	128.3	-3.1
2022	127.3	-0.8
2023	127.5	0.2

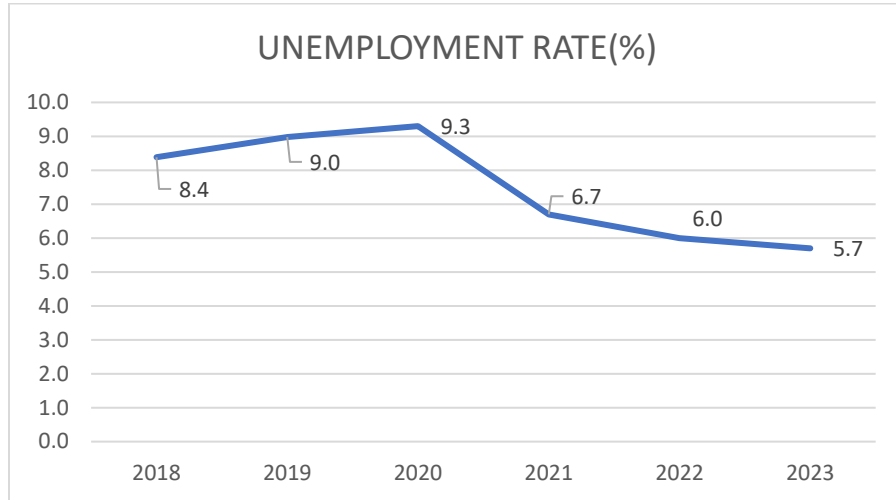
[Source:ResumenEconomicodePuertoicoAgosto2023/Vol.III,Num.8estadisticas.pr/files/inventario/resumen_economico/2023-09-18/Revista-Resumen-Economico-ago-2023.pdf](https://resumenEconomicodePuertoicoAgosto2023/Vol.III,Num.8estadisticas.pr/files/inventario/resumen_economico/2023-09-18/Revista-Resumen-Economico-ago-2023.pdf)

The economic development of Puerto Rico is based on economic sectors, which are the main forces for the movement of employees and for maintaining sustainable economic development. In the graph, the economic sectors with 100,000 jobs or more are Commerce, Professional Services, Educational Services and Government. Some sectors, such as Mining and Construction, Manufacturing and Finance, have had steady growth rates over the past five years. Although they have had a positive pace, the truth is that many capital investments have resulted in the replacement of human capital.

F.2 Unemployment Rate

Unemployment is an economic destabilizer. For Labor Force consideration, unemployed individuals must be 16 years of age or older, unemployed, and actively seek employment. The unemployment rates for 2018–2023 are as follows:

Graph 8. Unemployment Rate from 2018 to 2022:



Source: Department of Labor and Human Resources: Employment and Unemployment: December 2023.

In the graph presented on the unemployment rate from 2019 to 2023, an increase was observed for 2018 (effects of Hurricane Maria) and 2020 (effects of the pandemic or COVID-19). However, the unemployment rate has decreased since 2020, implying greater economic stability. The year 2023 was the lowest unemployment rate for the last five years with 5.7%. This coincides with the behavior of other indicators such as GDP and SAI.

Conversely, the labor participation rate presented for the years 2019 to 2023 shows a -.02% decline in percentage terms from 2019 to 2020. After that, it started to rise, but for the year 2023, it fell in comparison to the year before (2022). However, although 2023 reflected a slight percentage decrease compared to the previous year, its participation rate in 2023 is one of the highest in the last seven years.

Table 13. Participation Rate, No Seasonally Adjusted and Percentage Change; Fiscal Year 2019-2023

PARTICIPATION RATE		
NO SEASONALLY ADJUSTED AND PERCENTAGE CHANGE		
FISCAL YEAR 2019-2023		
Year	Participation Rate	Change%

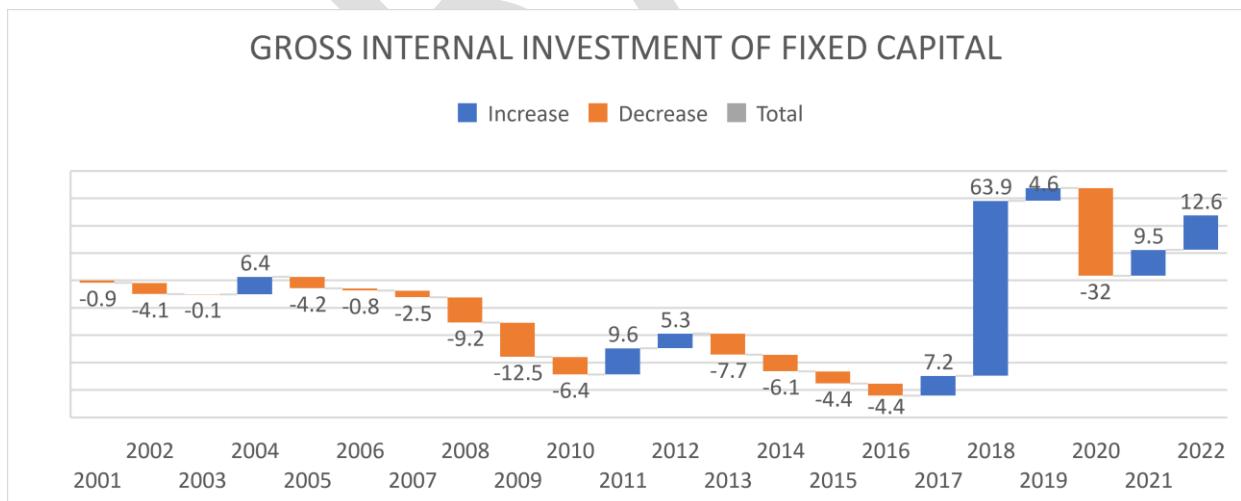
2019	40.7	0.6
2020	40.5	-0.02
2021	41.2	0.7
2022	43.5	2.3
2023	43.3	-0.2

Source: [Resumen Económico de Puerto Rico Agosto 2023/Vol. III, Num. 8 estadisticas.pr/files/inventario/resumen_economico/2023-09-18/Revista-Resumen-Economico-ago-2023.pdf](https://estadisticas.pr/files/inventario/resumen_economico/2023-09-18/Revista-Resumen-Economico-ago-2023.pdf)

H. Gross Internal Investment of Fixed Capital

Investment in fixed capital is a key component in sustainable economic development. Therefore, construction plays a vital role in this sector. Below, this variable shows the percentage change in real prices in Puerto Rico:

Graph 9. Gross Internal Investment of Fixed Capital from 2001 to 2022:



Source: DEDC. *Resumen de Cuentas Sociales AF 2022*

Table 14. Net Income to General Fund; Fiscal Year 2019-2023:

NET INCOME TO GENERAL FUND		
FISCAL YEAR 2019-2023		
Year	Net Income	Change %
2019	\$ 10,234,191.00	25.3
2020	\$ 8,551,318.00	-16.4
2021	\$ 10,312,148.00	20.6
2022	\$ 11,483,390.00	11.4
2023	\$ 11,162,520.00	-2.8

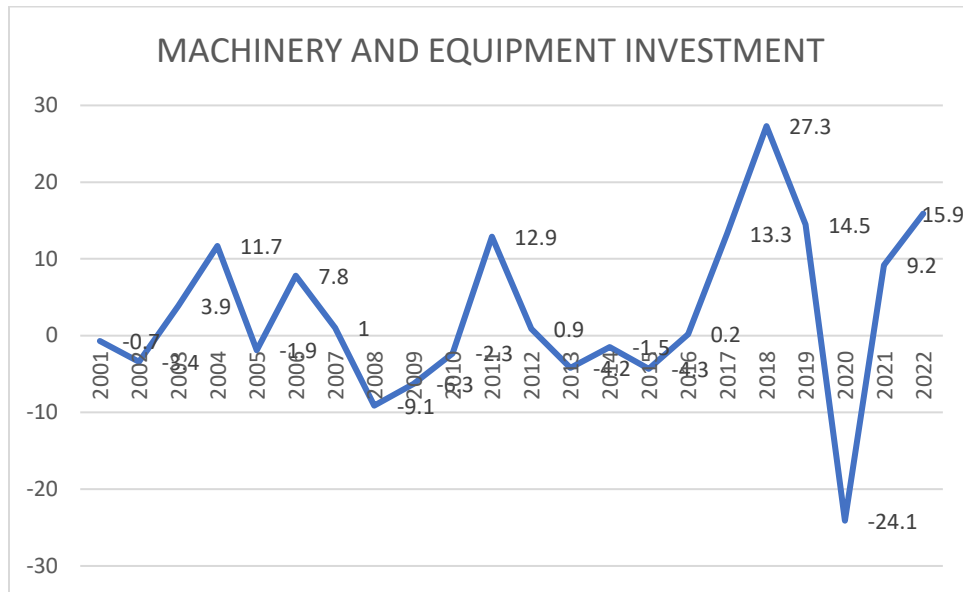
Source: [Resumen Económico de Puerto Rico Agosto 2023/Vol. III, Num. 8 estadisticas.pr/files/inventario/resumen-economico/2023-09-18/Revista-Resumen-Economico-ago-2023.pdf](https://estadisticas.pr/files/inventario/resumen-economico/2023-09-18/Revista-Resumen-Economico-ago-2023.pdf)

Construction investment amounted to \$4,846 million for the fiscal year 2022, showing an increase of 7.5%. At constant prices, there was an increase of 1.5% (\$392.4 million).

I. Machinery and Equipment Investment

Investment in machinery and equipment is important as it supports long-term economic management. The percentage behavior from 2001 to 2022 is as follows:

Graph 10. Machinery and Equipment Investment



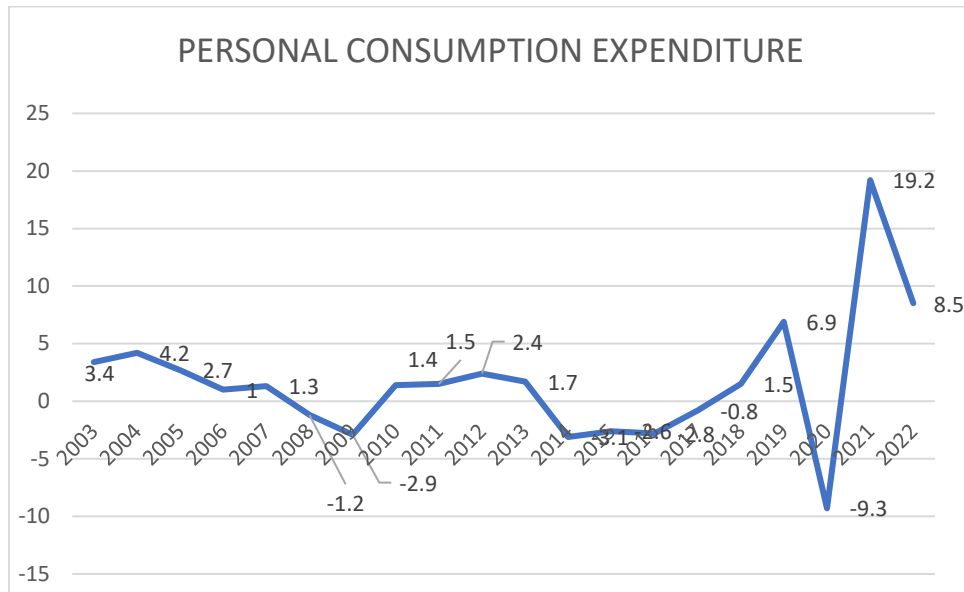
Source: DEDC. Resumen de Cuentas Sociales AF 2022

Investment in Machinery and Equipment increased by 15.7% (\$9,431.6 million) in fiscal year 2022, showing an increase of 12.2%. At constant prices, there was an increase of 15.9% (\$1,490.3 million).

J. Personal Consumption Expenditure

Personal Consumption Expenditure is an important variable because it is the main component of the consumption variable, and its behavior supports the growth of GDP. The behavior of disposable personal income from 2003 to 2022 is as follows:

Graph 11. Personal Consumption Expenditure from 2003 to 2022



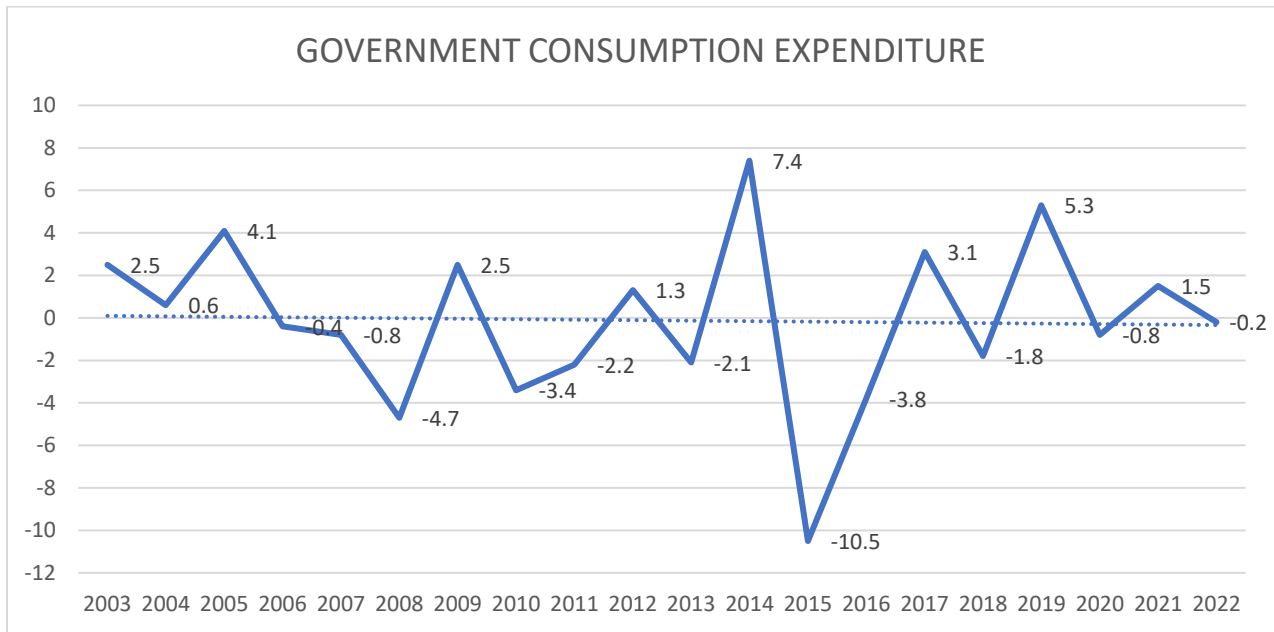
Source: DEDC. *Resumen de Cuentas Sociales AF 2022*

Personal consumption spending will increase by \$82,415.5 million in fiscal year 2022, an increase of 13.6%. At constant prices, prices increased by 8.5%.

K. Government Consumption Expenditure

The economic role of the government is to lead in terms of actions, expenditures, and investments aimed at improving society’s quality of life. Your contribution supports the efforts established for the development and sustainability of Puerto Rico’s economy. The percentage of consumer spending from 2003 to 2022 is as follows:

Graph 12. Government Consumption Expenditure from 2003 to 2022:



Source: DEDC. *Resumen de Cuentas Sociales AF 2022*

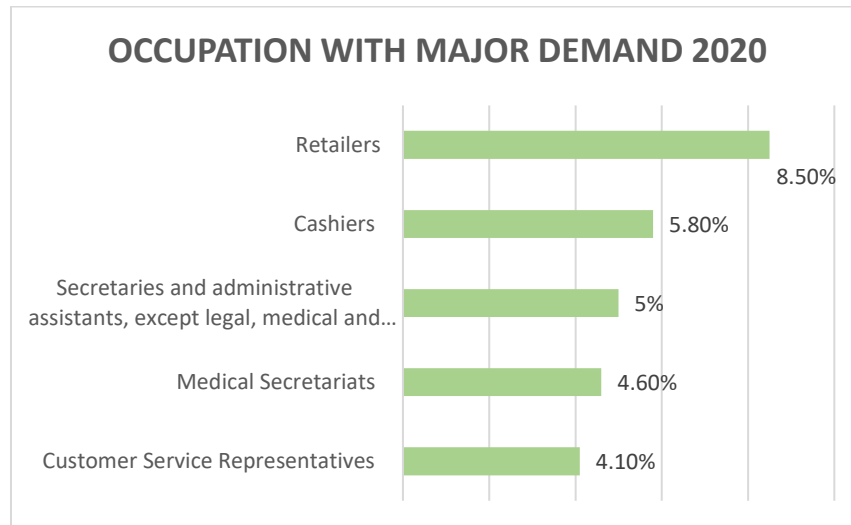
In fiscal year 2022, Government Consumer Spending was \$7,794.5 million, up 2.7% from fiscal year 2021. At constant prices, a decrease of 0.2% was observed. For the Central Government, Consumer Expenditure amounted to \$5,272.3 million, reflecting an increase of 2.9%. At constant prices, an increase of 0.2% was observed.

(i) Existing Demand Industry Sectors and Occupation - This provides an analysis of the industries and occupations in which demand exists.

EXISTING OCCUPATIONS OF GREATER DEMAND IN THE INDUSTRIAL SECTOR

The world of work changes continuously according to the needs and demands of society. The effects of globalization and technological changes make society learn to avoid labor lag and adapt to the new work environment in which it faces. Puerto Rico, who is not exempt from these situations or economic fluctuations, identifies jobs or occupations that, according to economic activities, are in greater demand in the industrial sector. The occupations that saw the highest demand in Puerto Rico in 2020 included the following:

Graph 13. Occupation with Major Demand 2020:



Source: estadísticas.pr

According to the above graph, retailers (8.5%) represent the group with the highest demand for 2020, followed by cashiers (5.8%). These two occupations are operationally related, as they share the same work environment. This was followed by secretaries and administrative assistants (5%), medical secretaries (4.6%) and customer service representatives (4.1%). Although these occupations are in high demand, they must be constantly reviewed to see how they adapt to uncontrollable exogenous changes, such as the environment and technology, among others.

Other occupations reflected an increase in jobs from 2012 to 2022. Despite the events of Hurricanes Irma, Maria and Fiona, tremors, and the COVID-19 pandemic, the industries with the greatest increase in new jobs are (mercadolaboral.pr.gov).

- 1) Local government, excludes Education and Hospitals
- 2) Wholesale of Non-Durable Goods
- 3) Social assistance
- 4) Health and Personal Care Stores
- 5) Professional and Technical Services
- 6) General Merchandise Stores
- 7) Outpatient Health Services
- 8) Food Services and Beverage Venues

- 9) Hospitals (Public and Private)
- 10) Administrative Services

Considering that these occupations have been increasing, many are oriented toward the fields of health and food. Another crucial factor to consider for these higher in-demand positions is income. The occupations with the highest increase in hourly wages from 2012 to 2022 were as follows (mercadolaboral.pr.gov):

- 1) Customer Service Representatives (\$10.88)
- 2) Garden and Green Areas Workers (\$8.79)
- 3) Food Preparation and Service Workers (\$8.16)
- 4) Secretaries and Administrative Assistants (\$10.03)
- 5) Personal Care Aides (\$8.10)
- 6) ATMs (\$8.31)
- 7) Security Guards (\$8.34)
- 8) Janitors and Housekeeping (\$8.66)
- 9) Registered Nurses (\$16.22)
- 10) Retail Sellers (\$9.01)

These occupations could change because of the effects of a change in minimum wage, which could become a positive call.

- (ii) Emerging Demand Industry Sectors and Occupations - Provide an analysis of industries and occupations for which demand is emerging.

EMERGING OCCUPATIONS OF GREATER DEMAND IN THE INDUSTRIAL SECTOR

Changes in globalization and the world of technology have led to the emergence of new business strategies. The development of digital technology is one of the main causes for the disappearance of jobs, as the creation or development of others takes advantage of job opportunities that arise to meet the needs of society and even employers.

According to experts in this field, the occupations that will have the greatest opportunity in the labor field are those focused on the Digital Field, Business, Science, Technology,

Engineering and Math (STEM) items, Green Economy, and Education. Some of the emerging profiles considered are as follows:

- 1) **AI Specialist** – Responsible for making operational improvements based on machine learning and developing new processes, objects, or services to solve problems or conduct functions independently.
- 2) **Data Scientist (DS)** – Responsible for extracting and analyzing huge volumes of data or information from multiple sources to transform them into valuable information.
- 3) **Data Analyst (DA)** – Collects, manages, and interprets data sets to make strategic decisions in a company or organizations in any sector.
- 4) **Cloud Engineer (CE)** – The CE is the specialist in designing, planning, implementing, and maintaining cloud systems in an organization.
- 5) **Cybersecurity Specialist (CS)** – It is responsible for the privacy and data protection of companies and organizations to avoid or anticipate cyberattacks.
- 6) **"Community Manager" (CM)** – It is a specialist in communication and "marketing" in digital environments.
- 7) **Sustainability Consultant (SC)** – Analyzes the environmental impact of a company and proposes strategies to improve it.
- 8) **Logistics Expert (LE)** - Manages and supervises all activities related to coordination, transport, and distribution of goods from origin to destination, both nationally and internationally.
- 9) **Experts in digital transformation (EDT)** – They are responsible for leading innovation and technological transformation processes in organizations in any sector.
- 10) **Renewable Energy Expert (REE)** – Specialist in designing, managing, and directing electricity generation projects based on renewable energy.
- 11) **Wellness and Health Coordinator (WHC)** – Consists of organizing and developing prevention measures to protect the mental and physical health of workers.
- 12) **Expert in Edtech (EE)** – Specialist in educational technology and digital skills that advises teachers and management teams in the proper implementation of technology in the educational center.

According to these labor trends, occupations are directed toward technology and STEM programs. This will promote greater operational flexibility as it facilitates remote or "blended" work. This will also represent a challenge for employers, who are responsible for identifying functions aimed at meeting the demands of society.

These emerging jobs will be able to share unique characteristics of adjusting and assimilating the changes demanded by media. Some key aspects that characterize these jobs in the future are as follows:

- 1) **Need for continuous training** – The updating of knowledge is essential to maintain the job and respond to the challenges that arise.
- 2) **Development of transversal competences** – These competences will have a lot of value in the professional profile. Competencies such as critical thinking, adaptability, proactivity, and teamwork will be highly valued.
- 3) **Adaptation and flexibility** – These traits will facilitate adaptation to demanding changes and enable configuration in the ever-evolving labor field.
- 4) **Development of digital skills** – Technology will be the fundamental basis for developing new guides and will help accommodation or permanence in the business world.
- 5) **Language proficiency** – Many positions require the knowledge of two or more languages.
- 6) **New ways of working** – Flexible jobs such as teleworking will emerge.
- 7) **Replacement of human labor by machines** – The development of technological innovation causes employees to be replaced. This is also where developers of computer programs and information systems have come in.
- 8) **Productivity and orientation** – It is challenging for employees to have the ability to organize and manage tasks to achieve established objectives.
- 9) **Proactivity and initiative** – Companies value employees' attitudes to meet the objectives of companies.
- 10) **Complex problem-solving** – This will facilitate employees to immerse themselves in technology and train them to solve complex problems.

- (iii) Employer Employment Needs - The industry sectors and occupations identified in (A), (i), and (ii) provide an assessment of the employment needs of employers, including a description of the knowledge, skills, and abilities required, including credentials and licenses.

EMPLOYER NEEDS

The labor market is a dynamic one, where the constant changes in globalization, technology, and fiscal and monetary policy decisions, among others, make employers look for ways to reinvent themselves and promote new horizons to recruit the best possible talent and stay competitive. This work environment creates a continuous challenge for employers to maintain a balance between their costs and the expected productive performance to meet established objectives. Employers need to identify talent and provide the necessary tools for employees to develop the skills and training necessary to increase productivity for the benefit of the company. The following are some characteristics that the employer looks for in employees:

- 1) Assessment
- 2) Competence
- 3) Achievement of objectives
- 4) Stimulation
- 5) Freedom and Flexibility

Employers should have a continuous seminar structure to reinforce their skills or provide new competitive tools to employees. In general, the employer must be flexible when selecting employees, as many of them do not necessarily have competitive skills. However, the reality is that human beings do not have the necessary tools for the positions connected, especially when the tasks relate to technology.

Operational strategies depend significantly on employees' talent, knowledge, and capabilities. To remain competitive, employers must focus their efforts on the following:

- 1) Funds for identifying and recruiting talent.

- 2) Management of labor market data to understand and identify new business development opportunities.
- 3) Analyze the productivity of employees and compare estimated production with actual production. With this, we can analyze the potential causes and effects of decision-making.
- 4) Create and strengthen incentive programs for employers to offer on-the-job training.
- 5) Possess labor tools and human resources where employees are motivated, thus increasing their labor productivity.

These are actions that employers must formalize as part of their strategies to get the right personnel, whose talents and knowledge can be exposed in the operational functions to achieve the objectives of the company.

(b) Workforce Analysis. A Unified or Combined State Plan must include an analysis of the current workforce in the State and within various state regions. Provide key analytical conclusions in aggregate and disaggregated among populations to identify potential disparities in employment and educational attainment and understand labor force conditions for items (i)-(iii) below. The populations analyzed must include individuals with barriers to employment, as described in the first paragraph of Section II. Analysis must include—

(1) Employment and Unemployment. It provides an analysis of current employment and unemployment data, including labor force participation rates and trends in the State.

(2) LABOR MARKET

The structure of Puerto Rico's labor market is one of the main components in terms of development and economic sustainability. This economic component plays a significant role in society, and its performance is reflected in sensitive macroeconomic variables such as GDP and EAI. The components of the labor market during this century are as follows:

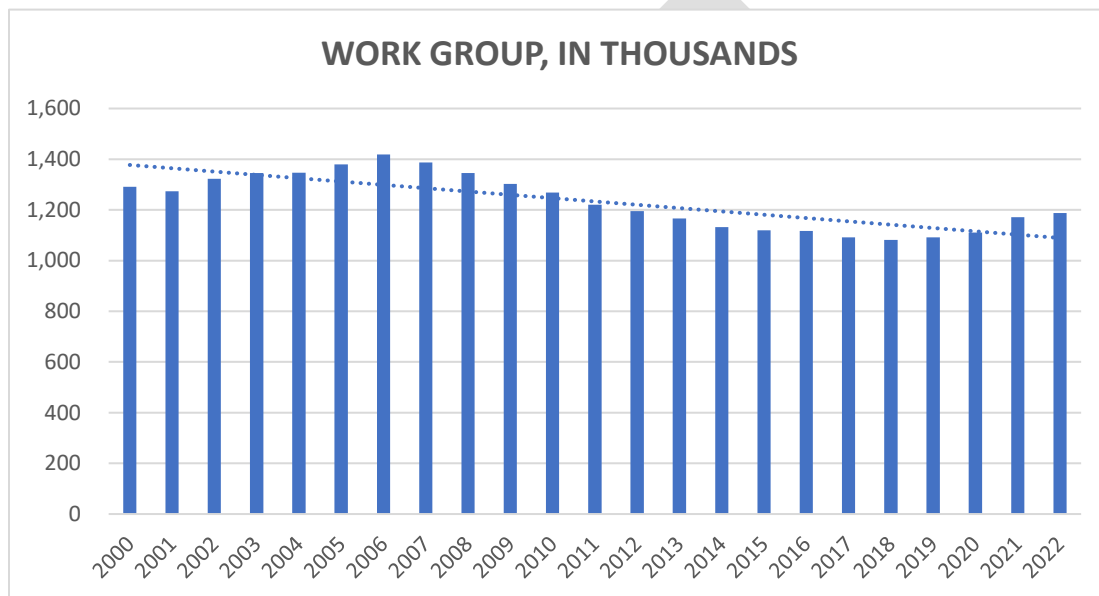
(3) Workforce

The worker group or labor force can be defined as the component or sector of the population that is working or employed and those who are not working but are looking for one. The labor force can be divided into two groups: unskilled and skilled.

The unskilled labor group is one that has not received any type of technical training or does not have the knowledge to execute a job at the time. On the other hand, a qualified labor group has the experience or knowledge to conduct an immediate task, so it allows you to obtain better salary remuneration.

In Puerto Rico, the behavior of the labor force from 2000 to 2022 is as follows:

Graph 14. Work Group, in Thousands from 2000 to 2022



Source: estadistica.pr.gov

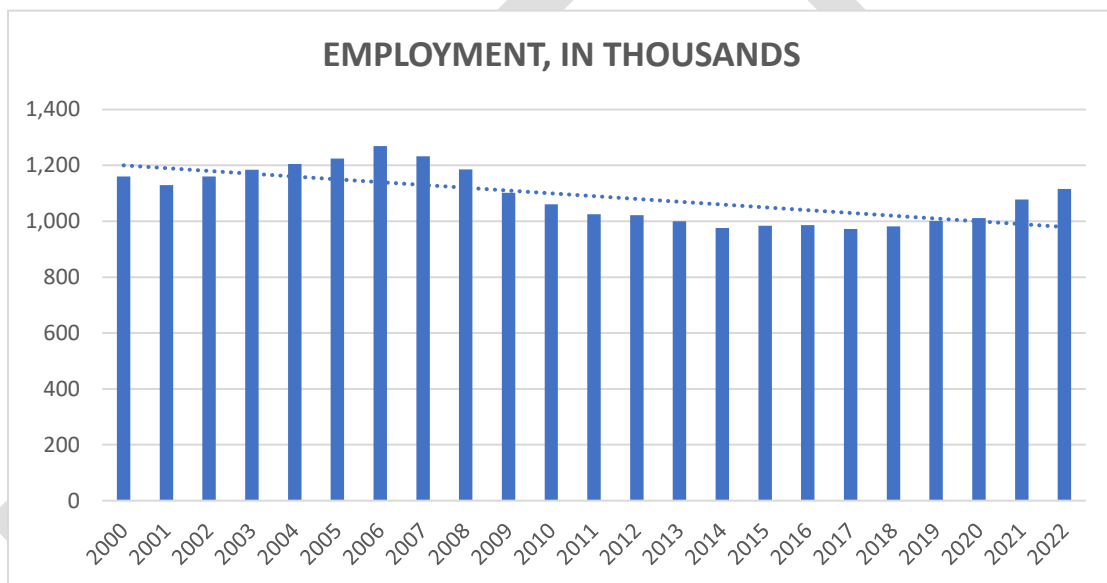
According to the graph, participation in the labor market in Puerto Rico exceeds one million people. If we compare the number of participants in the labor force in 2010 based on the year 2000, we can see that the labor force in 2000 of 1,291,000 decreased by 2010, where it registered 1,268,000 participants, representing a reduction in the labor force of (1.8%). On the other hand, when comparing 2020 with 2000, we note that the labor force for 2020 was 1,110,000 participants, representing a labor force reduction of (14%). This decrease in 2020 is due in part to the atmospheric phenomena of 2017 of hurricanes Irma and Maria, especially the latter. In addition, there were negative effects on society that contributed to structural deterioration, such as tremors, the COVID-19 pandemic, and emigration. For the year 2022, there is an improvement in this sector since it registered 1,188,000 participants,

registering a reduction in the labor force of (8%) based on the year 2000. Although it still has negative growth, the economy has shown signs of improvement in terms of labor participation.

(4)EMPLOYMENT

Employed people were over 16 years of age and worked either full-time or part-time. The workforce is the main component of economic development and growth. In Puerto Rico, the behavior of the labor force from 2000 to 2022 is as follows:

Graph 15. Employment in Thousands from 2000 to 2022:



Source: estadistica.pr.gov

According to the graph, the participation of employed people in the labor market exceeded one million, except for the years from 2014 to 2018. This decrease is partly due to the declining economic situation, the effects of Hurricanes Irma and Maria and the COVID-19 pandemic.

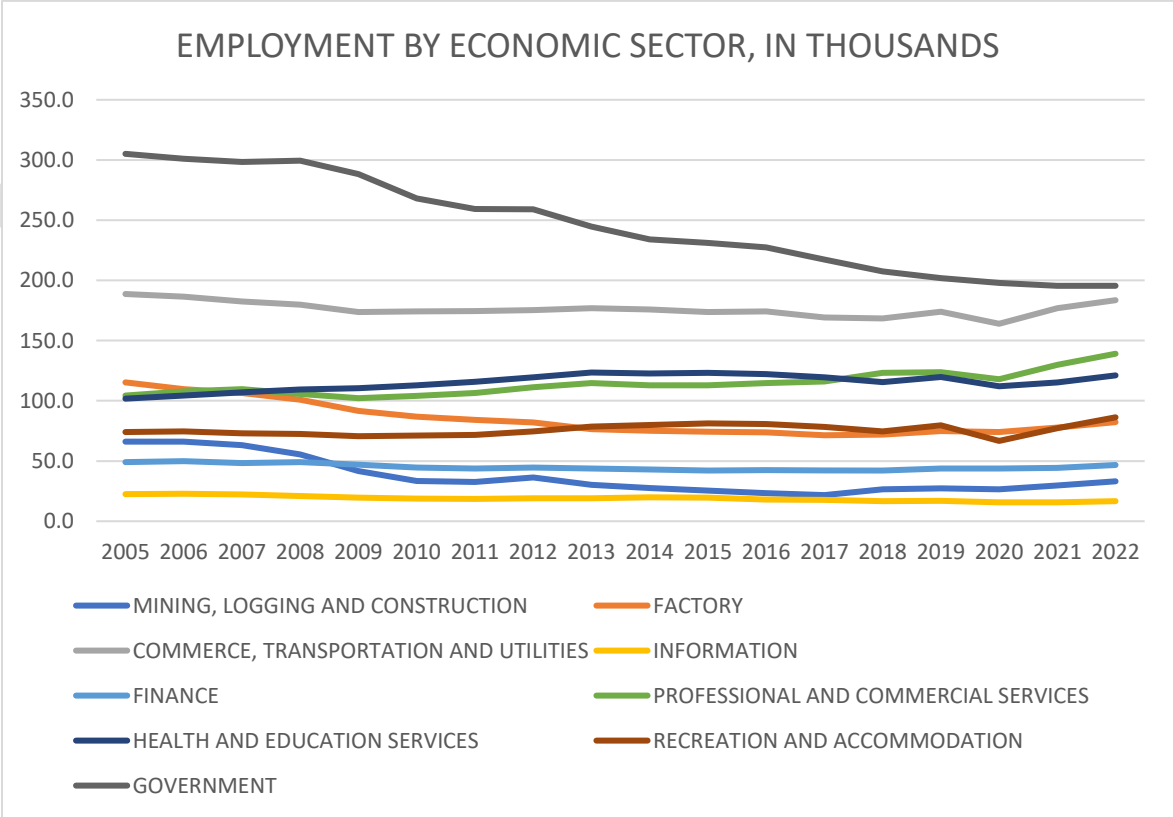
A comparison of the number of people employed in the labor force in 2010 based on the year 2000 shows that the number of people employed for the year 2000 (1,160, 000) decreased for the year 2010, where it registered 1,061,000 participants, representing a reduction in

employed persons (8.5%). On the other hand, when comparing 2020 with 2000, we can note that the number of people employed in 2020 was 1,061,000, representing a reduction of employed people of (12.8%). This decrease is partly due to the atmospheric phenomena of 2017 of hurricanes Irma and Maria, especially the latter. In addition, there were negative effects on society that contributed to structural deterioration, such as tremors, the COVID-19 pandemic, and emigration.

For the year 2022, there has been an improvement in this sector since it registered 1,116,000 participants, registering employed people (3.8%) based on the year 2000. Although it still shows negative growth, the economy has shown signs of improvement in terms of the people employed.

Employment in the industrial sector is a key component of Puerto Rico’s economic development. The following is a graph of the behavior of employed persons by economic sector in Puerto Rico:

Graph 16. Employment by Economic Sector in Thousands from 2005 to 2022:



Source: estadistica.pr.gov

The economic sectors with the highest number of employees from 2005 to 2022 are as follows.

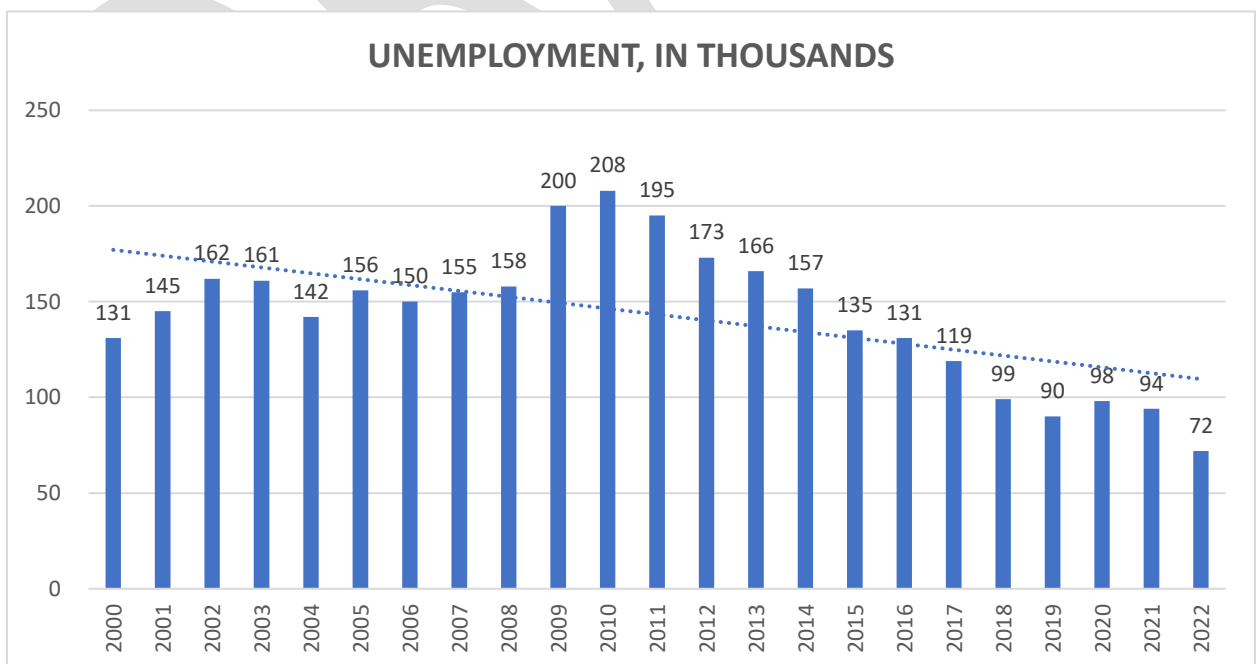
- a. Government
- b. Trade, Transportation and Utilities
- c. Professional and Commercial Services
- d. Educational and Health Service
- e. Factory

These sectors are expected to continue to promote the largest number of occupations in the future.

(5) UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployed people are those over the age of 16, who are out of work but are looking for one. This component of the labor force is a macroeconomic destabilizer, which, if left unchecked, the negative effects on the economy do not bring positive results. In Puerto Rico, the behavior of unemployed people from 2000 to 2022 is as follows:

Graph 17. Unemployment in Thousands from 2000 to 2022:



Source: estadistica.pr.gov

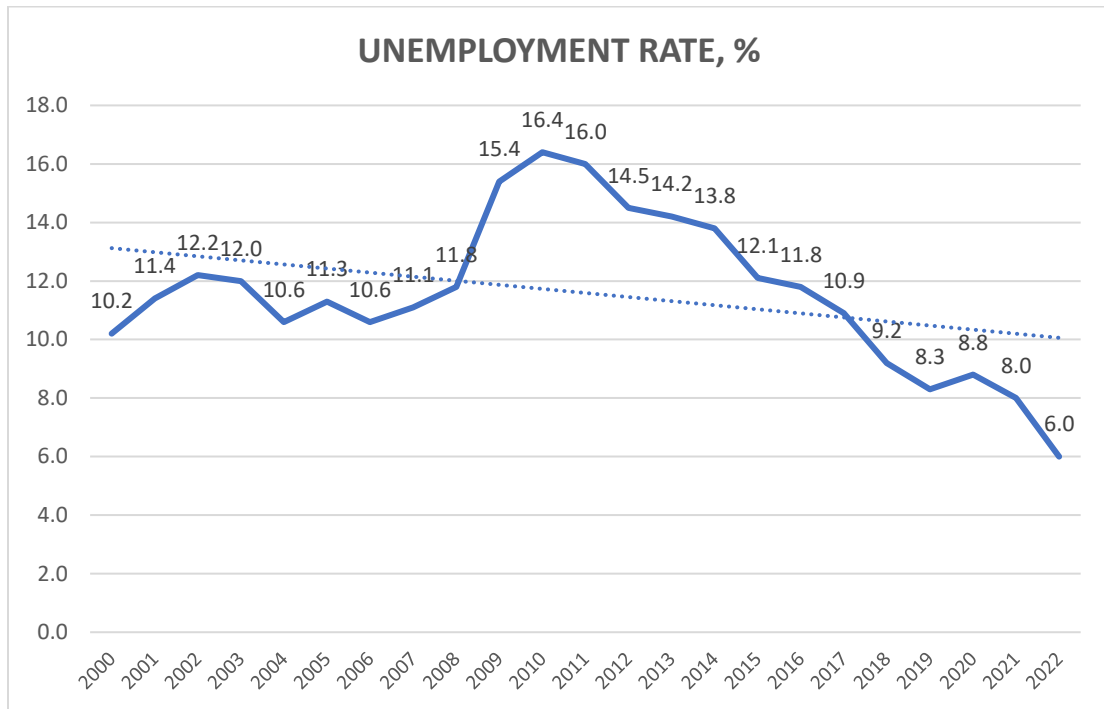
According to the graph, the participation of people exceeds 100,000 participants, except for the years 2018 to 2022. This decrease is partly due to the declining economic situation, the effects of Hurricanes Irma and Maria and the COVID-19 pandemic.

A comparison of the number of unemployed people in the labor force in 2010 based on the year 2000 shows that the number of unemployed people for the year 2000 was 131,000, while for the year 2010, there were 208,000 participants, representing an increase of 58.8% in unemployed people. However, when comparing the year 2020 with the year 2000, we note that the number of unemployed people for the year 2020 was 98,000, representing a reduction in the number of unemployed people (25.2%). This decrease in 2020 is partly due to the economic recovery that occurred after the atmospheric phenomena of the 2017 hurricanes Irma and María, especially the latter, and the COVID-19 pandemic. For the year 2022, there is an improvement in this sector since it has registered 72,000 participants, registering unemployed people (25.3%) based on the year 2000. This shows that after 2010, unemployment fell despite the events in 2017 and 2020.

(6) UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

The unemployment rate sets the percentage of unemployed people over the total labor force. The trajectory of the unemployment rate from 2000 to 2022 is as follows:

Graph 18. Unemployment Rate from 2000 to 2022:



Source: estadistica.pr.gov

Looking at the graph above, 2008–2012 had the highest unemployment rate. The years from 2013 to 2022 showed positive signs as the decline in this unemployment rate began. This is a sign of productivity, and therefore, an increase in GDP and EAI, which improves the quality of life of society.

(i) Labor Market Trends. It provides an analysis of key labor market trends, including those across existing industries and occupations.

TRENDS IN THE LABOUR MARKET

During the last few decades, international organizations, and experts in the field of human resources have sought and projected different labor trends in which companies or employers structure their operations according to the opportunities offered by the market. In addition, it allows us to review the criteria for searching for talent, knowledge, and skills.

Some basic characteristics that are sought as part of trends in the labor market are as follows (DOL, 2021):

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

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

- 1) **Temporary jobs:** These are hired for a brief period and can be of several types.
- 2) **Freelance jobs:** These types of contracts are used to develop or conduct projects.
- 3) **"Crowdsourcing":** This consists of outsourcing tasks originally performed by employees to a group of qualified individuals.

Below is a list of jobs in high demand through 2031 (DOL, 2021):

Table 15. Number of New Jobs Projected (2031) and Average Annual Salary (2021):

OCCUPATION	NUMBER OF NEW JOBS PROJECTED (2031)	AVERAGE ANNUAL SALARY 2021
Home health and personal care aides	924,000	\$29,430

Cooks, restaurant	459,900	\$30,010
Software developers	370,600	\$120,730
Fast food and counter workers	243,200	\$25,100
General and operations managers	209,800	\$97,970
Waiters and servers	197,000	\$26,000
Registered nurses	195,400	\$77,600
Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers, hand	168,400	\$31,230
Stockers and order fillers	157,900	\$30,110
Market research analyst and marketing specialists	150,300	\$63,920
First-line supervisors of food preparation and serving workers	145,700	\$36,570
Medical and health services managers	136,200	\$101,340
Financial managers	123,100	\$131,710
Medical assistants	117,800	\$37,190
Housekeepers and cleaners	116,400	\$28,780
Nurse practitioners	112,700	\$120,680
Light truck drivers	110,700	\$38,280

Management analysts	108,400	\$93,000
Bartenders	92,000	\$26,350
Heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers	90,900	\$48,310

According to the table, the trend of new jobs is related to health, food, business, and technology. As part of the technology, we must mention what is related to STEM, which includes, but is not limited to, various fields of biology, chemistry, engineering, mathematics, physics, robotics, genetics, and scientists.

- a. Workforce education and skill levels provide an analysis of a workforce's educational and skill levels.

(ii) Education And Skills Of Workers

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

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

The basic skills sought by employers are as follows (DOL 2021):

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

Employers establish the academic or technical qualifications that employees must have or be willing to acquire. Some jobs with these characteristics are as follows (DOL, 2021):

- I. Occupations with an associate degree or Post-secondary Degree without a degree are as follows:
 - 1) Heavy Truck and Cargo Drivers
 - 2) Licensed Practical and Vocational Nurses
 - 3) Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education
 - 4) Hairdressers, Hair Stylists and Cosmetologists
- II. Occupations with Baccalaureate Degree
 - 1) Accountants and auditors
 - 2) Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education
 - 3) Market Research Analyst and Marketing Specialists
 - 4) Management and Operations Managers
 - 5) Medical and Clinical Laboratory Technologists
- III. Occupations with Professional Degree, Doctorate, or Master's Degree
 - 1) Pharmacists
 - 2) Lawyers
 - 3) Medical Nurses
 - 4) Postsecondary Health Specialty Teachers

5) Health Care Social Workers

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

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

The job market in Puerto Rico is highly competitive due to a sizable portion of the workforce holding university credits, bachelor's degrees, or higher qualifications. The distribution of university studies across different age groups is provided below:"

Table 16. Distribution of University Studies by Age Groups:

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

Population 40 to 64 years	321,614	
Science and Engineering	81,440	25.3%
Science and engineering related fields	36,193	11.3%
Business	107,455	33.4%
Education	55,526	17.3%
Arts, Humanities and Others	41,000	12.7%
Population 65 years and over	127,866	
Science and Engineering	31,570	24.7%
Science and engineering related fields	10,557	8.3%
Business	30,969	24.2%
Education	39,081	30.6%
Arts, Humanities and Others	15,689	12.3%

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

According to the data presented, the group with the best academic preparation is the group aged 40 to 64 years, which is the concentration in business. This concentration is related to an increase in business creation and establishments.

2) LACK OF SKILLS

In the face of technological advances, the effects of globalization, the way of doing business, climate change, the way of interacting with others, and the way of working in groups are all

situations and challenges employers face today. In the future, it is expected that they will have them in the same manner. Many of them have experienced that many candidates and employees do not meet or have the basic or necessary skills to adjust to changes and handle situations. Some of the lack of skills or abilities that the employer faces and is difficult to recruit are as follows (DOL, 2021):

- 1) **Critical Thinking:** This is a rational process that involves reflection and favors problem-solving. This requires the analysis, comparison, interpretation, and evaluation of information. It encompasses three phases: A) Definition of the problem, (B) Planning and research, and C) Evaluation of results or findings.
- 2) **Creative Thinking:** This is the starting point for innovation. This involves the ability to use knowledge gained to create original solutions.
- 3) **Information Management:** Information management includes the ability to do the following:
 - a. Finding and accessing data in a digital environment.
 - b. Analyze and select information, applying reliability and validity criteria.
 - c. Classify information and organize it.
 - d. Integrating information to generate innovative ideas.
- 4) **Communication:** In a digital environment, it is essential to develop skills that enable exchange and collaboration. To be effective, they must target a specific audience with a predetermined goal.
- 5) **Collaboration:** The ability to work collaboratively is closely related to the ability to work as a team. The digital environment favors: a) collaborative work, (b) co-responsibility, (c) interdependence, and (d) group decision-making.
- 6) **Use of Technology** – This includes the use of hardware equipment, computer programs, web browsing, and peripherals to perform tasks. The skill includes:
 - a. The use of devices and operating systems
 - b. Application of basic computer security standards
 - c. Troubleshooting hardware, software, and networking issues

- d. Mastery of basic programs
- e. Knowledge and use of internet communication tools

These variable work skills will be benchmarks for employers to include the necessary training to keep their employees competitive, productive, and motivated.

- (iv) Comparison of economic and workforce analytical conclusions. Describe areas of opportunity for meeting hiring, education, and skills needs identified in the economy compared to the assets available in the labor force in the state.

Local Area Statistical Adjustment Model

Puerto Rico must report state levels of the WIOA-program's performance outcome targets, as part of the negotiation process to receive DOL federal funds. Those state outcomes dependent on (1) DOL's program participants characteristics and (2) economic factors related to the labor conditions and market dynamics. The first set of variables is known as Dominion I variables and the second set as Dominion II variables. Based on WIOA requirements, both sets must be evaluated and accounted for. Those last requirements can be achieved using *statistical models* which can fit and adjust performance goals for various kinds of served participants and market conditions. Those models can quantify how much those socio-economic variables can affect each of the program performance outcomes. Program performance outcomes are long-term goals on primary program indicators set by Federal and state labor/education authorities. Based on the previous information, this work aims to develop and evaluate an objective statistical adjustment model capable of accounting different socio-economic conditions controlling the assessment of the program performance goals.

“THE GOAL OF THOSE MODELS ARE CREATE AND ADJUSTMENT FACTOR FOR EACH (5) INDICATOR OF PERFORMANCE FOR EACH (15) LOCAL AREA WITHIN (3) ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER AND YOUTH DATA SET PROGRAMS.”

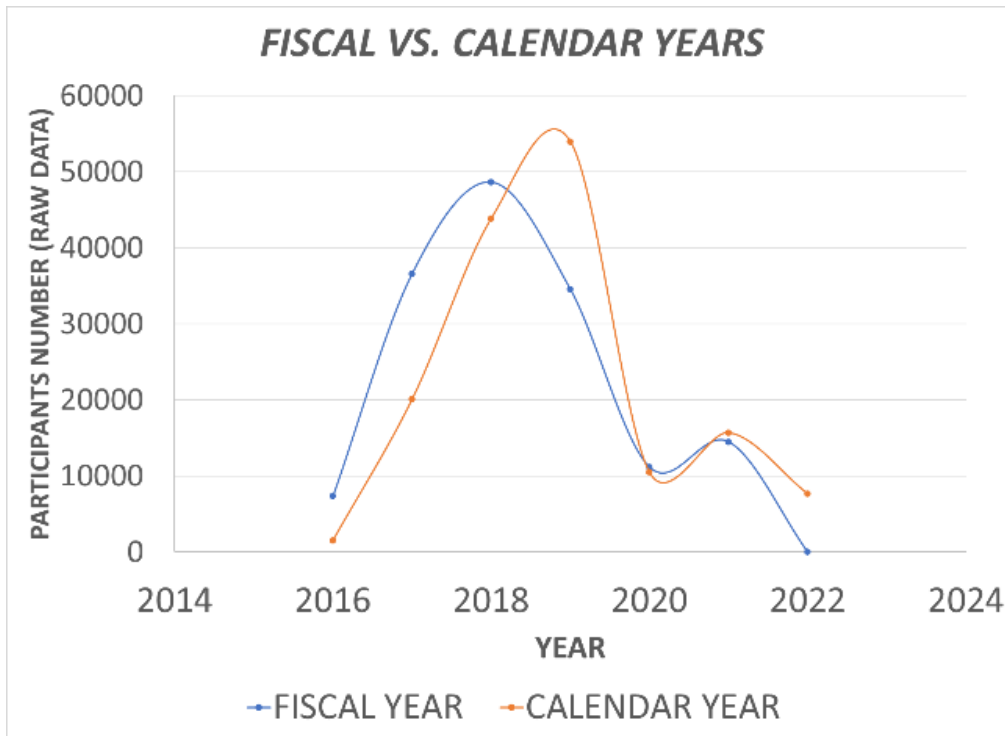
The statistical models developed used data from three WIOA programs: (1) Adults, (2) Dislocated Workers, and (3) Youth. For each program, five performance indicators (dependent variables) were modeled: (i) Employed in the second quarter after exit, (ii) Employed in the fourth quarter after exit, (iii) Earnings in the third quarter after exit, (iv) Credential Attainment, and (v) Measurable Skills Gains.

The 15 local areas of Puerto Rico were incorporated to represent spatial variation. In total, 225 modeling scenarios were generated (3 programs, 5 performance indicators, and 15 geographical areas).

Given the impacts on infrastructure and economic development in Puerto Rico from recent natural disasters such as Hurricane Maria (2017), the Earthquakes (2019), the COVID-19 pandemic (2020 onwards), and the post-pandemic years (2021+), two baseline comparison points (T0) were established:

(1) July 2019 to June 2022, (2) July 2020 to June 2022 - A total of 450 models were estimated, 225 models for each baseline. The next figure shows a lack of a clear trend in the raw data of WIOA program applicants during the last years. This behavior indicates the need to identify the best T0 timeframe to establish a correct comparison with T1.

Figure 1: Raw WIOA program applicants - Fiscal Vs. Calendar years:



Data Sources

The data used in the construction of the models comes from two main sources. The variables corresponding to the participants' demographic and socioeconomic characteristics (Domain II) were obtained from the Performance Indicators and Reporting Levels (PIRL) database. On the other hand, the variables related to economic factors and regional labor market conditions (Domain I) were extracted from the Puerto Rico Labor Market Information website (<https://www.mercadolaboral.pr.gov>). The unit of observation used in this analysis was *individual level* of observations, it means individual records of the WIOA program applicants. Domain I and II variables were collected and cleaned for each individual record.

Program Data



PIRL & Local Employment Data

(e.g., PY 2018,
2019, 2020, 2021)

Specifically, data was used from the statistical tables on employment by industry, occupation, and other labor market metrics available on said website. Since these tables were organized by town rather than by region, a consolidation was conducted to calculate the metrics at the level of the local areas of the WIOA programs. Some of the constructed variables were unemployment rate, wholesale and retail trade employment, finance and insurance employment, real estate employment, professional and technical services employment, education services employment, among others. The next table shows all the collected dominium I variables:

Table 17. Domain I matrix variables:

Domain II variables can be observed on the next table, note the intercept variables used on the regression models:

WIOA Statistical Adjustment Model - Variable and Coding Logic Crosswalk

PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

Full Variable Name	Variable Name	PIRL Element No.	PIRL logic	WIASRD Element No.	WIASRD logic	Adult	DW	Youth	IN FILE?
Administracion Publica	Administracion_Publica					X	X	X	OK
Agricultura Bosque Pesca Caza	Agricultura_Bosque_Pesca_Caza					X	X	X	OK
Alojamiento Servicios de Alimentos	Alojamiento_Servicios_Alimentos					X	X	X	OK
Arte Entrenamiento Recreacion	Arte_Entrenamiento_Recreacion					X	X	X	OK
Bienes Raices Renta Arrendamiento	Bienes_Raices_Renta					X	X	X	OK
Comercio al Detal	Comercio_al_Detal					X	X	X	OK
Comercio al por Mayor	Comercio_al_por_Mayor					X	X	X	OK
Construccion	Construccion					X	X	X	OK
Electricidad Agua Gas	Electricidad_Agua_Gas					X	X	X	OK
Finanzas Seguros	Finanzas_Seguros					X	X	X	OK
Gerencia de Companias y Empresas	Gerencia_Companias_Empresas					X	X	X	OK
Informacion	Informacion					X	X	X	OK
Manufactura	Manufactura					X	X	X	OK
Mineria	Mineria					X	X	X	OK
Servicios Adm Desperdicios Solidos	Servicios_Adm_Desperd_Solidos					X	X	X	OK
Servicios Salud Asistencia Social	Servicios_Salud_Assist_Social					X	X	X	OK
Servicios Educativos	Servicios_Educativos					X	X	X	OK
Servicios Profesionales Tecnicos	Servicios_Profesionales_Tecn					X	X	X	OK
Transportacion Almacenamiento	Transportacion_Almacenamiento					X	X	X	OK
Otros Servicios Excepto Adm Publica	Otros_Servicios_no_Adm_Publica					X	X	X	OK
Otros Establecimientos no Clasificados	Otros_Establecimientos_no_Clasif					X	X	X	OK
TASA DESEMPLEO TIME range	TASA_DESEMPLEO_2019_2021					X	X	X	OK

WIOA Statistical Adjustment Model - Variable and Coding Logic Crosswalk

PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

Full Variable Name	Variable Name	PIRL Element No.	PIRL logic	WIASRD Element No.	WIASRD logic	Adult	DW	Youth	IN FILE?
Male (INT)	male	p201	p201=1	item_201	item_201=1	x	x	x	OK
Female	female	p201	p201=2	item_201	item_201=2	x	x	x	OK
Age 14 to 15	age1415	p200	age >=14 and age <=15	item_200	age >=14 and age <=15				OK
Age 16 to 17	age1617	p200	age >=16 and age <=17	item_200	age >=16 and age <=17				OK
Age 14 to 18 (INT YOUTH)	age1418	NEW	age >=14 and age <=18					x	
Age 18 to 19	age1819	p200	age >=18 and age <=19	item_200	age >=18 and age <=18			x	OK
Age 20 to 21	age2021	p200	age >=20 and age <=21	item_200	age >=20 and age <=21			x	OK
Age 22 to 24	age2224	p200	age >=22 and age <=24	item_200	age >=22 and age <=24			x	OK
Age 18 to 24	age1824	NEW	age >=18 and age <=24			x	x		OK
Age 16	age16	p200	age < 16	item_200	age < 16				OK
Age 25 to 44	age2544	p200	age >=25 and age <=44	item_200	age >=25 and age <=44	x	x		OK
Age 45 to 54	age4554	p200	age >=45 and age <=54	item_200	age >=45 and age <=54				OK
Age 55 to 59	age5559	p200	age >=55 and age <=59	item_200	age >=55 and age <=59				OK
Age 45 to 59	age4559	NEW	age >=45 and age <=59			x	x		OK
Age 60+ (INT AD DW)	age60	p200	age >=60 and (age not missing)	item_200	age >=60 and (age not missing)	x	x		OK
Hispanic Ethnicity	hispanic	p210	p210=1	item_204	item_204=1	x	x	x	OK
Race: Black (ONLY)	onlyraceblack	p213	p213=1	item_207	item_207=1	x	x	x	OK
Race: White (ONLY) (INT)	onlyracewhite	p215	p215=1	item_209	item_209=1	x	x	x	OK
Race: More than one	other_races	p210 thru p215	Records are identified as racemulti if more than one of the race variables are selected	item_210 thru item_215	Records are identified as racemulti if more than one of the race variables are selected				OK
Highest grade completed: Less than high school graduate (INT)	hsdropout	p408	p408=0	item_410	item_410>=0 and item_410<13	x	x	x	OK
Highest grade completed: High school equivalency	hsgrad	p408	p408=1 or p408=2	item_410	item_410=88 or item_410=87	x	x	x	OK
Highest grade completed: Some college	collegedropout	p408	p408=4	item_410	item_410>12 and item_410<16	x	x	x	OK
Highest grade completed: Certificate or Other Post-Secondary Degree	certotherps	p408	p408=5	item_410	item_410=89 or item_410=90	x	x	x	OK
Highest grade completed: Associate degree	associate	p408	p408=6	item_410	item_410=91	x	x		OK
Highest grade completed: Bachelor degree	ba	p408	p408=7	item_410	item_410=16	x	x		OK
Employed at participation	empentry	p400	p400=1	item_400	item_400=1	x	x	x	OK
School status at participation	edstat	p409	p409=1 or p409=2 or p409=3	item_411	item_411=1 or item_411=2 or item_411=3	x	x	x	OK
Individual with a disability	disabled	p202	p202=1	item_202	item_202=1	x	x	x	OK
Veteran	veteran	p300	p300=1	item_300	item_300=1	x	x		OK
Median wage in 2nd preprogram quarter	payq2prior	p1701	median of p1701	item_1601	median of item_1601				NO
Had earnings in 2nd preprogram quarter	wages2qprior	p1701	p1701 not missing and nonzero	item_1601	item_1601 not missing and nonzero				NO
Received services financially assisted under the Wagner-Peyser Act	wp	p918	p918=1	item_951	item_951=1	x	x	x	OK
Limited English-language proficiency	englearner	p803	p803=1	item_703	item_703=1	x	x	x	OK
Single parent	singleparent	p806	p806=1	item_704	item_704=1	x	x	x	OK
Low income	lowinc	p802	p802=1	item_702	item_702=1	x	x	x	OK
TANF recipient	rectanf	p600	p600=1	item_600	item_600=1	x	x	x	OK
Homeless	homeless	p800	p800=1	item_700	item_700=1	x	x	x	OK
Offender	offender	p801	p801=1	item_701	item_701=1	x	x	x	OK
Unemployment insurance claimant, non-exhaustee	uicclaimant	p401	p401=1 or p401=2 or p401=3 or p401=5	item_401	item_401=1 or item_401=2	x	x	x	OK
Unemployment insurance claimant, exhaustee	uixhaustee	p401	p401=4	item_401	item_401=3	x	x	x	OK
Received supportive services	recsuppserv	p1409	p1409 not missing	item_1400	item_1400=1	x	x	x	OK
Received needs-related payments	recneeds	p1500	p1500=1	item_1401	item_1401=1	x	x	x	OK
Received intensive services	recindividualcs	p1200	p1200 not missing	item_1200	item_1200 not missing and nonzero	x	x		OK
Received training services	retraining	p1300	p1300=1	item_1208	item_1208 not missing and nonzero	x	x	x	OK
Established Individual Training Account (ITA)	estabita	p1319	p1319=1	item_1223	item_1223=1	x	x		OK
Pell grant recipient	recpell	p1320	p1320=1	item_1224	item_1224=1	x	x	x	OK
Received pre-vocational activity services	recprevoc	p1210	p1210 not missing	item_1207	item_1207=1	x	x		OK
Days in program	dsinprog	p900 p901	p901 minus p900	item_900 item_901	item_901 minus item_900	x	x	x	OK
School status at exit	edstatexit	p1812	p1812=1 or p1812=2 or p1812=3	item_1701	item_1701=1 or item_1701=2 or item_1701=3			x	OK
Pregnant or parenting youth	yparent	p701	p701=1	item_800	item_800=1			x	OK
Youth who needs additional assistance	ynaa	p702	p702=1	item_801	item_801=1			x	OK
Youth with basic literacy skills deficiency (at or below 8th grade)	ybasiclit	p804	p804=1	item_802	item_802=1			x	OK
Youth that is or was in foster care	yfoster	p704	p704=1	item_803	item_803=1			x	OK
Youth that received educational achievement services	yedachievesvc	p1402	p1402 not missing	item_1301	item_1301 not missing			x	OK
Youth that received employment opportunities	yworkexp	p1405	p1405 not missing	item_1308	item_1405 not missing			x	OK
Average standardized pre-test score	avgpretestscore	p1904 p1911 p1918	average of (p1904, p1911, p1918)	item_1805	item_1805			x	OK
Average standardized post-test score	avgposttestscore	p1907 p1914 p1921	average of (p1907, p1914, p1921)	item_1808 item_1811 item_1814	average of (item_1808, item_1811, item_1814)				NO
Average Adult Basic Education Functioning Pre-test Level	avgabeprelvl	p1905 p1912 p1919	average of (p1905, p1912, p1919)	n/a	n/a			x	OK
Average Adult Basic Education Functioning Post-test Level	aveabepostvl	p1908 p1915 p1922	average of (p1908, p1915, p1922)	n/a	n/a			x	OK
Average English as a Second Language Pre-test Level	avgeslprelvl	p1905 p1912 p1919	average of (p1905, p1912, p1919)	n/a	n/a			x	NO
Average English as a Second Language Post-test Level	avgeslpostvl	p1908 p1915 p1922	average of (p1908, p1915, p1922)	n/a	n/a			x	NO
Beneficiary any assistenship program	benanyassisprog	d1	d1=1			x	x	x	OK
Long-Term Unemployed at Program Entry	logtermunemp	p402	p402=1			x	x	x	OK
Displaced Homemaker	disphome	p807	p807=1			x	x		OK
Out of School Youth	osy	p409 p905	(p905=1 or p905=2 or p905=3) and (p409=1 or p409=2 or p409=3) and (16<= age <=24)	item_3011 item_3012 item_411	(item_3011=1 or item_3012=1) and (item_411=4 or item_411=5) and (16<= age <=24)			x	OK

Table 18: Domain II matrix variables

The *fixed effect* of the local areas is included in the regression models. Those areas are showing the geographic distribution of the WIOA programs.

Figure 2: PR Local Areas Location:

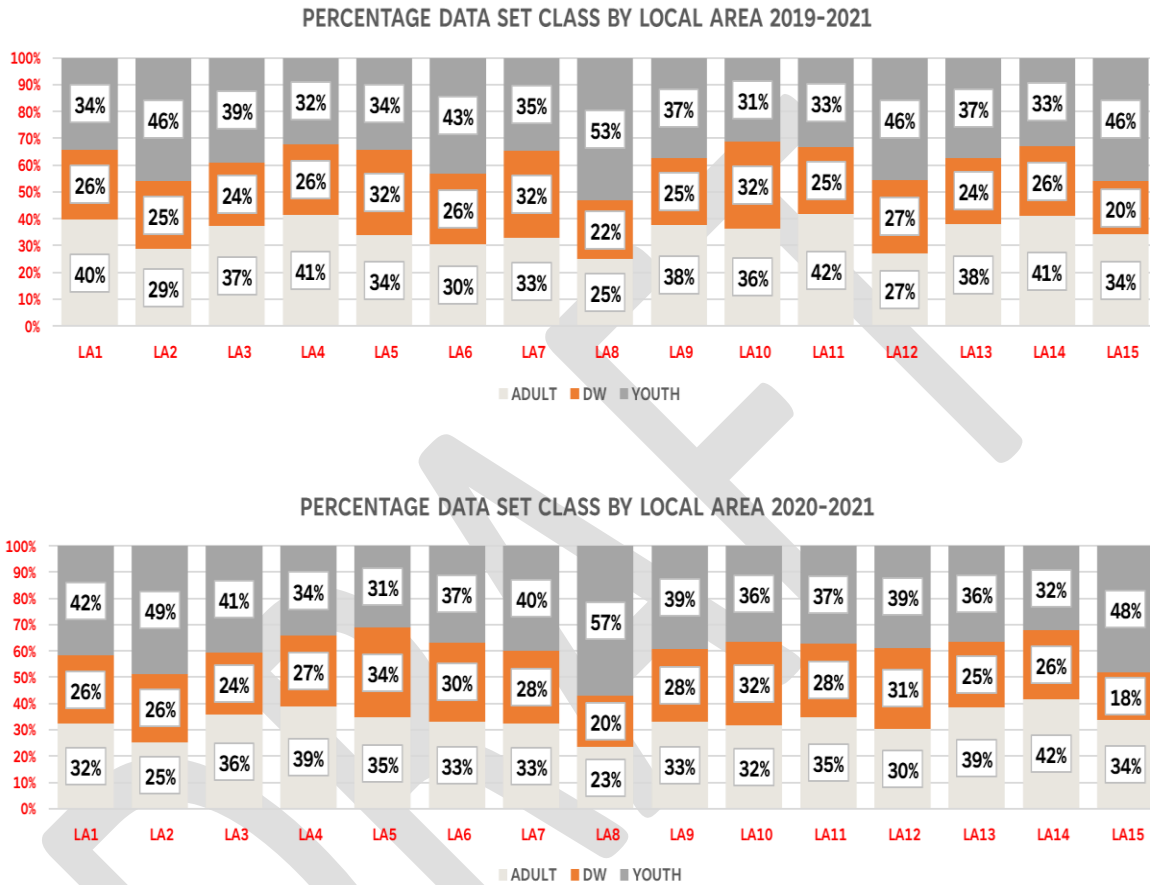


Local Areas	Local Name
L.A 1	ALDL San Juan
L.A 2	ALDL Ponce
L.A 3	ALDL Norte-Central Arecibo
L.A 4	ALDL Noroeste
L.A 5	ALDL Mayagüez-Las Marías
L.A 6	ALDL Suroeste
L.A 7	ALDL Sureste
L.A 8	ALDL Noreste
L.A 9	ALDL Guaynabo-Toa Baja
L.A 10	ALDL Carolina
L.A 11	ALDL Manatí-Dorado
L.A 12	ALDL La Montaña
L.A 13	ALDL Bayamón-Comerío
L.A 14 (INT)	ALDL Caguas-Guayama
L.A 15	ALDL Sur Central

From the previous figure is important to note that those local areas are different among them showing a high heterogeneity in its socio-economic indicators and demographic patterns. Those patterns can be observed in the next figures: (1) in general LA8 (Noreste) shows the highest applicants into the Youth program, (2) Mayaguez – Las Marias (LA5) shows the

highest applicants into the D.W program, and (3) Caguas – Guayama region (LA14) shows the highest applicants into the Adult Program.

Figure 3: WIOA program distribution by Local Areas:



The total final applicant numbers after the phase II Data preparation and cleaning are shown in the next tables:

2019-2021

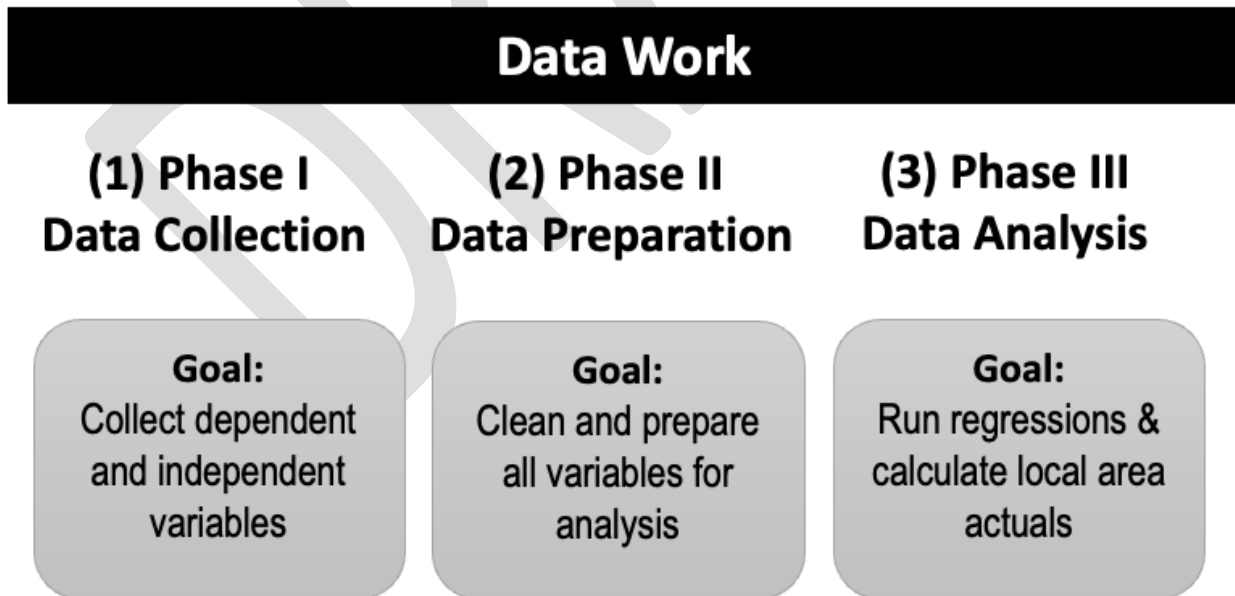
2020-2021

Program	Amount	Program	Amount
Adults	7,882	Adults	4,985
DW	5,948	DW	3,969
Youth	9,229	Youth	6,021
Total	23,059	Total	14,975

Tables show the highest final number of applicants in the Youth programs followed by the Adult WIOA programs for both timeframes for T0.

Statistical Model Development

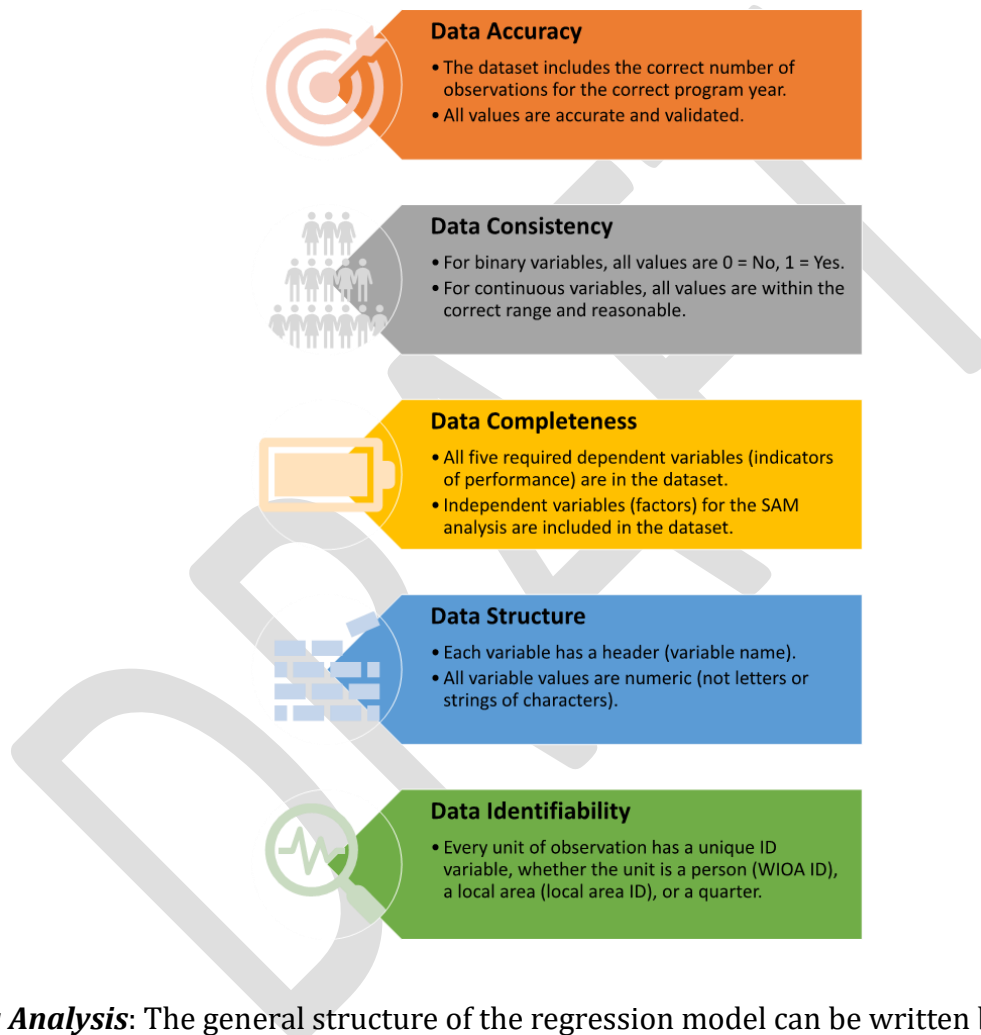
The model development consists of three phase routines: (1) Data collection, (2) Data preparation and (3) data Analysis.



Phase I Data Collection: The first phase controls the collection of the WIOA required data from the PIRL and economic data from DOL and other sources (independent and dependent

model variables). **The second phase: Data Preparation**, controls the cleaning and validation of the data sets: Data accuracy, Data Consistency, Data completeness, Data structure and Data identifiability. **The third phase: Data Analysis** is related to the statistical regression model itself.

The next pictogram shows the five stages of Phase II with their main goals:

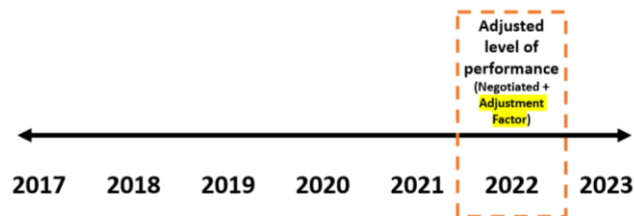


Data Analysis: The general structure of the regression model can be written by:

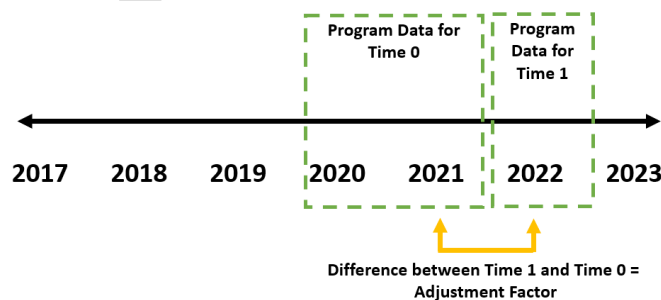
$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * X_1 + \beta_2 * X_2 + \beta_3 * X_3 + \dots + \beta_n * X_n + \epsilon$$

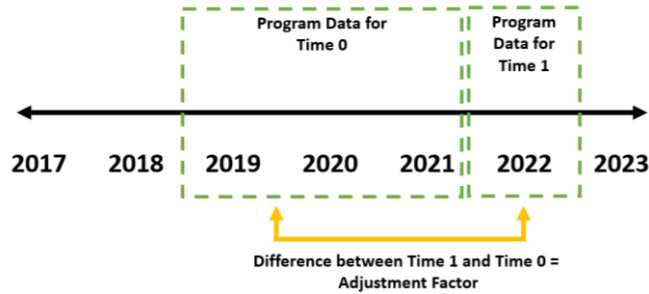
Where Y_i is the outcome of each of the 5 dependent variables, X_i are the independent variables (dominium I and II variables), β_i are the regression coefficients for each independent variable and, ϵ is the error of the variance of the model. Developed regression models were influenced by:

- 1) Most of the Dominion I, dependent and independent variables are dichotomous binary variables.
- 2) A generalized liner statistical model (GLM) was used to evaluate the correlation matrix using a logit link function. That matrix was exported as an input for a linear regression model to evaluate the “Variance inflation factor, VIF” as a tool to quantify the collinearity effects among the modeled variables.
- 3) Based on the VIF, the standard error, the magnitude of the beta coefficients and the P values, variables were removed from the model and the loop was run again until VIF values below 10 and consistent coefficients were obtained.
- 4) The final objective of the models is obtaining the ***“ADJUSTED LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE”*** in this case for program year 2022.

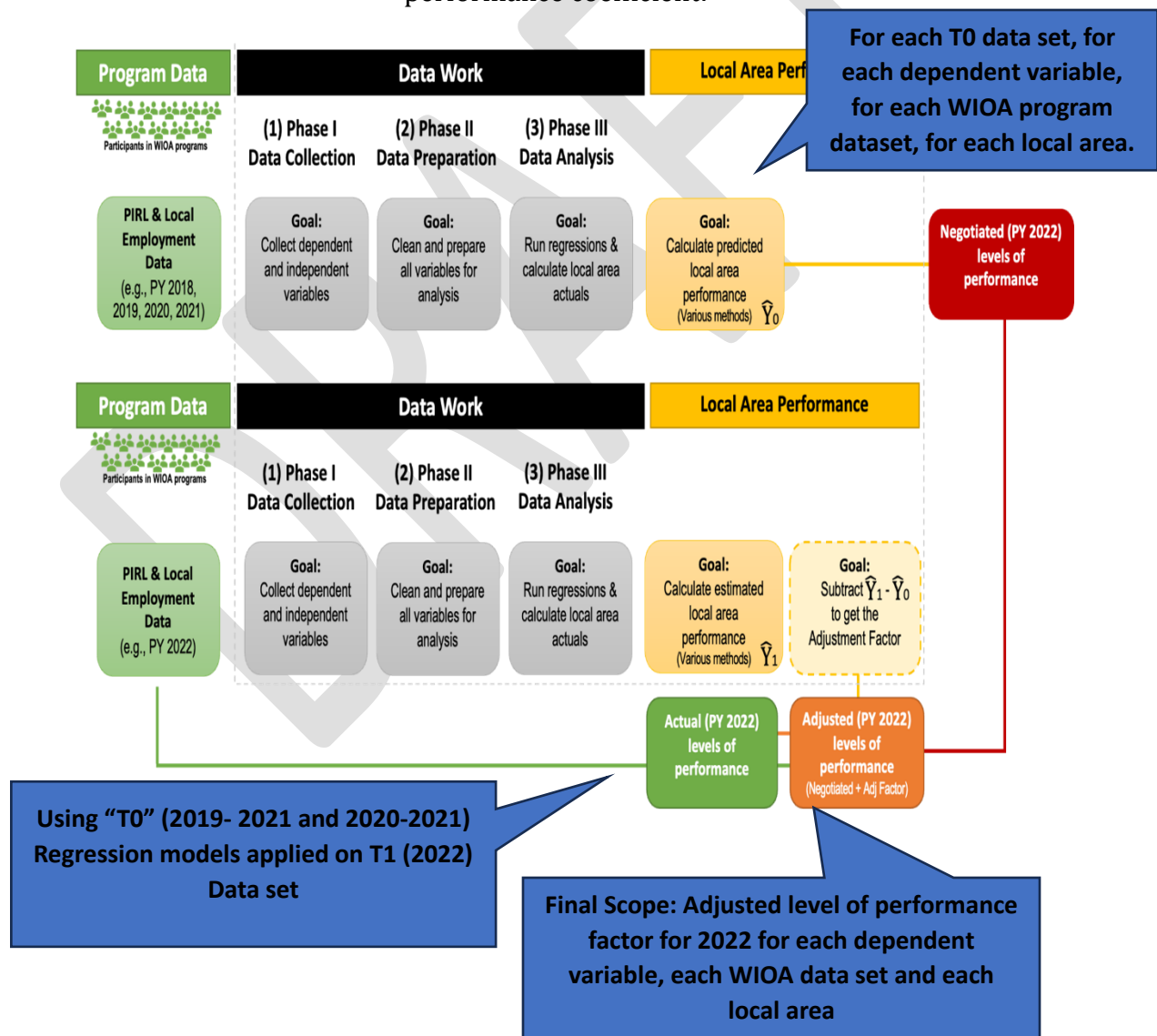


- 5) Due to the influence of external factors on the PR data (External factors affecting the dataset: Hurricanes and tropical storms, earthquakes, the Covid-19 pandemic, and post pandemic events) there is not a clear trend form the historical datasets. To estimate a better assessment of ***the statistically adjusted local area performance, Time zero (To) coefficients,*** (for the negotiation process) two different temporal data sets were run independently: (1) data form 2019-2021 and (2) data from 2020 -2021.





Correlations for to models will be used to adjust data for the **Statistically adjusted local area performance, T_1** . This will allow evaluation of the **“ADJUSTED LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE.”** Next figure shows the routine to obtain that ultimate adjusted level of performance coefficient:



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

This must include an analysis of—

(A) *The State's Workforce Development Activities.* Provide an analysis of the State's workforce development activities, including education and training activities of the core programs, Combined State Plan partner programs included in this plan, and required¹ and optional one-stop delivery system partners.²

Puerto Rico's economy must be adjusted and modified according to the environment that surrounds us. This refers to local as well as international situations. This makes the labor and productive sector adjust to market trends, where it can participate in economic and sustainable development. To make some adjustments according to labor market trends, we can mention the following characteristics (Department of Labor, 2021):

- 1) Training and adaptability – It refers to qualities of the employee such as leadership, critical thinking, communication, and digital skills that allow adapting to the diverse types of jobs and the demands of each economic sector.
- 2) Permanent digital transformation – Companies will accelerate the digitization of their work processes and the automation of work. This will cause some jobs to disappear or to maintain themselves, new skills and ways of working will be required.
- 3) Temporary employment and outsourcing of services – Permanent employment will be less frequent and the search for new job opportunities will increase. Companies will gradually eliminate permanent positions and replace them with professional services.

¹ Required one-stop partners: In addition to the core programs, the following partner programs are required to provide access through the one-stops: Career and Technical Education (Perkins), Community Services Block Grant, Indian and Native American programs, HUD Employment and Training programs, Job Corps, Local Veterans' Employment Representatives and Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program, National Farmworker Jobs program, Senior Community Service Employment program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) (unless the Governor determines TANF will not be a required partner), Trade Adjustment Assistance programs, Unemployment Compensation programs, and YouthBuild.

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

- 4) Work flexibility – Teleworking, total or partial, and flexible schedules will allow employees to have a better quality of life for themselves, family, and work environment.

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

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

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

- 1) Punctuality and accountability
- 2) Ability to follow instructions

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

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

I. Occupations with an Associate Degree or Postsecondary Degree without a degree are as follows

- 1) Heavy Truck and Cargo Drivers
- 2) Licensed Practical and Vocational Nurses
- 3) Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education
- 4) Hairdressers, Hair Stylists and Cosmetologists

II. Occupations with Baccalaureate Degree

- 6) Accountants and auditors
- 7) Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education
- 8) Market Research Analyst and Marketing Specialists

9) Management and Operations Managers

10) Medical and Clinical Laboratory Technologists

III. Occupations with Professional Degree, Doctorate or Master's Degree

6) Pharmacists

7) Lawyers

8) Medical Nurses

9) Postsecondary Health Specialty Teachers

10) Health Care Social Workers

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

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

Table 19. Educational level in Puerto Rico by age as of 2021:

Item	Total	Percent %
Population	3,263,584	
Population 18 to 24 years	314,885	9.6%
High School graduate or higher	258,028	81.9%
Bachelor's degree or higher	30,938	9.8%
Population 25 to 34 years	419,212	12.8%
High School graduate or higher	386,366	92.2%

Bachelor's degree or higher	142,487	34.0%
Population 35 to 44 years	403,558	12.4%
High School graduate or higher	355,278	88.0%
Bachelor's degree or higher	133,685	33.1%
Population 45 to 64 years	872,417	26.7%
High School graduate or higher	722,040	82.8%
Bachelor's degree or higher	254,072	29.1%
Population 65 years and over	703,925	21.6%
High School graduate or higher	416,268	59.1%
Bachelor's degree or higher	127,866	18.2%

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

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

Degree or more" component, the 25 to 34 age group and the 35 to 44 age group were older than in the 65 and older age group.

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

Item	Total	Percent %
Population 25 to 39 years	208,630	
Science and Engineering	61,216	29.3%
Science and Engineering related fields	33,440	16.0%
Business	53,793	25.8%
Education	24,972	12.0%
Arts, Humanities and Others	35,209	16.9%
Population 40 to 64 years	321,614	
Science and Engineering	81,440	25.3%
Science and Engineering related fields	36,193	11.3%
Business	107,455	33.4%
Education	55,526	17.3%
Arts, Humanities and Others	41,000	12.7%

Population 65 years and over	127,866	
Science and Engineering	31,570	24.7%
Science and Engineering related fields	10,557	8.3%
Business	30,969	24.2%
Education	39,081	30.6%
Arts, Humanities and Others	15,689	12.3%

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

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

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

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

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

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

Strengths and Weaknesses of Workforce Development Activities

The Government of Puerto Rico carried out various activities to meet the needs of participants in the labor market to encourage and motivate them to integrate them into the labor market. This represents an ongoing challenge in the face of the economic scenarios that the country is facing. Below is a "SWOT" analysis to describe the level of labor competitiveness to support Puerto Rico's economic development.

Strengths:

- The integration of workforce and economic development efforts mandated by WIOA has been made easier by Act 171-2014, which moved the Workforce Development Program from the PRDOLHR to the PRDEDC. Among the organizations that have benefited from these initiatives are the Youth Development Program, the Federal Contracting Center, and the Commerce and Exports Corporation's One-Stop Entrepreneur Support Network.
- An integrated statewide LEA oversees the public education system and tries to facilitate data integration, policy and program implementation, and result measurement easier.
- The amount of the population served and the effect that transfer payments have on the financial circumstances of people who are enrolled in large-scale federal assistance programs (SNAP, HUD, subsidiary programs, and other benefit systems, among others), which enable an important percentage of people to obtain more education, training, and work experience.
- The availability of numerous training and service providers, as well as trained staff, especially to provide services to target populations, including people with disabilities, supports core programs.

- In areas such as Applied Research, Incubators Startups, Accelerator Startups, Substitution of Imports of Goods and Services to Entrepreneurship Projects, and PYMES created that respond to market changes and economic development, PRDEDC offers Technical and Financial Assistance.
- The way structural reform is set up. Here are a few of them:
 - The Labor Transformation and Flexibility Act, Act 4-2017. improves labor market competitiveness, raises the workforce participation rate, and stops the flow of residents to other labor markets by amending labor laws.
 - Act 8-2017 – The Government Act for the Management and Reform of Human Resources. permits the moving of employees within the Government in order to reduce attrition and save \$100 million.
 - Act 13-2017 – Act on Enterprise Puerto Rico. establishes a nonprofit organization with the goals of advancing Puerto Rico's economic growth, luring in foreign direct investment, and providing incentives for technology investments made in partnership with the private sector.
 - Act 18-2018 – Improves the quality and efficiency of processing requests for all licenses, permits, inspections, complaints, certifications, consultations, and other authorizations that impact a business's ability to operate in Puerto Rico, including those issued by municipalities. This is achieved by streamlining, reforming, and speeding up the permitting process.
 - Act No. 47-2021 - The Minimum Wage Act, Act No. 47-2021, was passed by Puerto Rico, raising the minimum wage on the island from \$7.25 to \$8.50 beginning of January 1, 2022. Unless a required decree changes that rise, more hikes to the minimum wage will be implemented on July 1, 2023, when it will be raised to \$9.50, and possibly on July 1, 2024, when it would reach \$10.50.

- DEDC has created the following public rules or processes for the distribution of funds under WIOA and other federal programs in order to protect the state fund's financial integrity:

Table 20. Public Rules or Processes for the Distribution of Funds under WIOA and other Federal Programs

DDEC-WIOA-11-20	Close-out reports under Financial Reports
DDEC-WIOA-10-20	Policies and methods for payroll based on budget are outlined in the Payroll Cost Allocation Policy.
DDEC-WIOA-09-20	Allocation of costs and fund reimbursement
DDEC-WIOA-06-20	TAA Defines the region that can be relocated.
DDEC-WIOA-05-20	Guidelines for evaluating requests for Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) training funding.
DDEC-WIOA-RR-01-20	COVID-19 Layoff Aversion Fund Policy
Waiver Policy	Operational Protocol for Executing the Business Capitalization Waiver

- The following are some initiatives to strengthen fiscal integration:
 - Every year, a financial oversight of the operations funded by state reserve funds is conducted.
 - The State Board assesses transactions involving State Reserve money over \$500,000 through its Executive and Planning Committee. Furthermore, regardless of the total amount of money spent, a report on all projects developed with Reserve monies is required.

- The DEDC publishes Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for the hiring of any kind of professional service in order to set up competitive processes for the development of the state-mandated activities. Permanent members of the DEDC staff with experience in the service to be contracted staff the Auction Committee. When developing an RFP process, the DEDC complies to the state OGP's rules and regulations.
- The DEDC also complies with state regulations for the disbursement of public monies. Additionally, the Office of the Puerto Rico Comptroller may examine any contract.

WEAKNESSES:

- By openly relying on non-competitive formula money, the government has missed chances to improve the workforce structure.
- A number of choices on system rearrangement have not yet been made since PR has not been able to offer performance reports for the previous few years.
- It's possible that a silo approach to handling government programs reduced the capacity to take advantage of program opportunities. The proper design and upkeep of MOUs must permit more lateral redirection across programs to improve collaboration between operators, local boards, and core and necessary programs, maximizing resources and exchanging referrals.
- Funding stream braiding and mutual leveraging require more effort, which includes improving the advising role and giving legislators and policymakers timely, accurate, and comprehensive data.
- Information products must be produced to assess particular elements of the labor system, such as aggregated data for assessing services offered to people who are having trouble finding work, real-time dynamics of supply and demand in the labor market, or data that describes underemployment, self-employment, and the influence

of the informal economy on the labor market. A across the system data integration roadmap is essential.

- Gender-skewed outcomes in post-secondary education and the labor market require the development of policies.
- The efficacy and performance of the structure as a whole are severely compromised by the public sector's financial impairment as a major employer and provider of funds for workforce operations.
- A few concerns to compile data so that sponsors can make decisions.
- To manage sponsor sensitivity data, the IT infrastructure must be updated.

OPPORTUNITIES:

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

Partnership with economic development entities: Government entities responsible for economic development operate under the Department of Economic Development and Commerce. As a result, education on Puerto Rican incentives that encourage creation of jobs is one of the tactics used to avert layoffs. Law 120-2014, Law 135-2014, and the Incentive for Micro-entrepreneurs are a few of these instances. Consequently, a component of our approach is enabling businesses to reduce payroll costs by utilizing state incentives provided by the DEDC. These are state resources, but WIOA participants can still use them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

THREATS:

1. LACK OF SKILLS

Employers face a variety of situations and challenges today, including those related to technology advancements, the effects of globalization, business practices, climate change, interpersonal interactions, group work, etc. It is anticipated that these issues will persist into the future. Many of them have encountered the reality that a large number of applicants and

workers lack the fundamental abilities needed to deal with changing circumstances. The following are some of the competencies or capabilities that the company faces and finds challenging to hire:

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

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

1. POVERTY

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

Table 21. Puerto Rico’s Poverty Levels as of 2021:

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

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

An examination of the population revealed that 42.7% of the general population fell below the poverty level. The age group of 18–64 years has the most significant impact, and this demographic's economic status influences a country’s overall development. Within the labor

force aged 16 and over, 28.1% fall below poverty level. Notably, the unemployed segment exhibits a higher poverty rate (64.7%) than other groups.

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

2. WORK INCAPACITY

Incapacity for work can be defined as the inability of a worker to perform the normal functions of his job. This labor barrier presents an ongoing challenge to incorporating participants into the labor market.

The population by age for 2021 is as follows:

Table 22. Population by Age for 2021:

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

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

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

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

Table 23. Type of Disability or Work Barriers:

Disability Type	Total	Percent (%)
With a hearing difficulty	147,422	9.6%
With vision difficulty	218,097	14.2%
With a cognitive difficulty	303,088	19.7%
With an ambulatory difficulty	391,862	25.4%
With a self-care difficulty	170,510	11.1%
With an independent living difficulty	309,235	20.1%
Total	1,540,214	100%

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

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

3. VETERANS

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

Table 24. Veterans' Economic Development:

Item	Total	Percent (%)
Population	71,064	
Age		
18 to 34 years	3,418	4.8%
35 to 54 years	9,254	13.0%
55 to 64 years	12,544	17.7%
65 to 74 years	18,676	26.3%
75 years and over	27,172	38.2%
Disability Status		
18 years and over	70,461	
With any disability	32,054	45.5%

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

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

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

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

- 1) Changes in technology.
- 2) International relations or conflicts.

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

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

- 1) Guidance for establishing or expanding business:
 - a. Preparation and drafting of the business plan.
 - b. Guidance on financing options available at the state and federal levels.
 - c. Incentives for new businesses or existing businesses.
- 2) The Voluntary Chain Program is a group of independent businesses operating under a brand or name, which comes together with the purpose of realizing a common market and strengthening competitiveness, where each participant continues to own their own business. Among the benefits of this incentive are the following:
 - a. This exempts the chain from paying municipal patents to the volume of sales generated through the program.
 - b. It exempts the chain from paying tax on inventory or movable property, avoiding double taxation because it is paid only as an individual business.
 - c. It provides the opportunity to make purchases to obtain better prices, better payment terms, minimization of inventory costs, and maximization of profits.
 - d. Reduction of operational costs.
 - e. It maintains a legal personality.
 - f. It allows for the establishment of a common brand.

- 3) Certification is a local supplier for cruise ships, whose purpose is to promote the acquisition of provisions and services from Puerto Rican hands. Every local distributor or manufacturer must operate in Puerto Rico and register with the Department of Treasury.
- 4) Federal grant from the Economic Development Administration (EDA), whose main purpose is to assist Puerto Rico in economic recovery. The initiatives under this grant are intended to impact Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). The following are the initiatives covered by this grant:
 - a. Entrepreneurship Centers where it allows the development and expansion of the business. This collaborative space integrates co-working spaces through training services, incentives, support programs, and collaborators in the same place. Some of the services offered in these centers are as follows:
 - i. Creative lab with capacity for 12 people
 - ii. Internet service up to 50 mbps
 - iii. Use of photocopiers
 - iv. Conference room for up to 8 people
 - v. Multipurpose room with capacity for 50 people
 - vi. Audiovisual equipment for presentations
 - vii. Business Advisory Services
 - b. Business training, in which workshops are offered to SMEs, focuses on development, strengthening, and local and international expansion.
 - c. The Puerto Rico Innova Program, in partnership with the UPR Mayagüez Campus, seeks to empower local entrepreneurs to forge an entrepreneurial vision that allows them to generate innovative ideas that promote business projects with a high potential for expansion and development.
 - d. High-tech Business Accelerator seeks to boost twelve companies that are at an early stage to accelerate their growth and adequately prepare to target investors with a proven business idea.

- 5) The Puerto Rico Exports Program seeks to promote the export of products and services by local companies to become a continuous and permanent activity. This program consists of four phases:
 - a. Diagnostics: Determines the level of a company's export capacity.
 - b. Export plan development: essential tool for exporting products and services. In addition, it should be part of the company's business plan.
 - c. Execution of the export plan: This offers several tools aimed at executing the export plan, including, among other training, trade missions (individual, sectoral, multisectoral, or reversed). They can be either face-to-face or virtual.
 - d. Follow-up: Individualized advice on the next steps led by international trade specialists.
- 6) The Expo Partner Program is a mentoring program that provides access to trained human capital for international trade. The company will receive assistance in the following areas:
 - a. Investigation of operational strengths and weaknesses.
 - b. Preparation of an export plan.
 - c. Implementation assistance
 - d. Information on opportunities in foreign markets of interest.
- 7) Export incentives of up to 10,000 bring companies into the international markets. Services with this incentive, among others, are as follows.
 - a. Expenses related to travel, business meetings, and/or participation in international events.
 - b. Marketing campaign
 - c. Business Intelligence Services
 - d. Website translation
 - e. Development of an "E-Commerce" Platform.
- 8) The Federal Contracting Center focused on assisting local businesses in selling their products and services to the federal government.
- 9) The Artisan Development Program aims to provide artisans with technical assistance for their operations and economic development. Some of these are:

- a. Assistance in the promotion, marketing, distribution, and sale of handicraft products.
- b. It organizes centers where artisans can produce, exhibit, and distribute their products.
- c. It encourages artistic work both inside and outside of Puerto Rico.

Its strategic goals are as follows:

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

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

Table 25. Average Annual Salaries of Some Creative Occupations from 2016 to 2020:

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

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

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

- a. Innovative SMEs: This program offers the opportunity to obtain the capital they need up to a maximum of \$100,000 to start or scale their operations, with a view to commercialize and export their innovations.
- b. Special Incentive for Foreign Transportation: Its purpose is to stimulate the growth of local companies' exports. It provides a refund of 20% of the cost of transporting products either by sea or by air abroad, up to approximately \$ 2,000 per shipment. The maximum amount awarded to each company is 50,000. The incentive contract has a duration of one year and can be requested only on three occasions.
- c. Special Incentive for Marketing Activities: Intended to stimulate the marketing of products and services of local businesses. This initiative offers reimbursement of up to 50% of the expenses incurred for these purposes. Up to a maximum of 50,000 overseas marketing strategies.
- d. Program for the generation and retention of jobs: Establish a program of tax incentives to enable development and commercial expansion and the creation of new jobs. These incentives apply to newly created and expanding SMEs that incur net operating losses. The benefits received by SMEs are as follows:

- i. Extension of 50% of the payment of premiums from the State Insurance Fund with operational or expanding losses.
 - ii. The contributions to preferential income over the three years are 5%, 10%, and 15%, respectively.
 - iii. Extension of 50% in contribution to movable and/or immovable properties.
 - iv. 50% of payments for municipal patents.
 - v. Expedited process for evaluation and permission.
 - vi. Payment of a staggered Christmas bonus.
- e. Certification of SMEs to do business with the government: This certification provides the opportunity for the business to actively participate in the government procurement market.

The business world is dynamic, affecting the way we operate, both locally and internationally. Therefore, the government issues laws or resolutions to adjust atmospheric conditions in commercial terms to ensure the continuity of Puerto Rico's economic development. Some measures signed by the government over time to address these situations and maintain economic development are as follows:

- 1) Law 166-1995, as amended, is known as the "Artisanal Development Program Law".
- 2) Law 117-2001, as amended, is known as the "Agricultural Loan and Loan Guarantee Act."
- 3) Law 16-2002, as amended, ordered banks to establish a Special Fund for emergency loans to small businesses in the tourism sector in Puerto Rico.
- 4) Act No. 152-2002, as amended, is known as the "Act to Create the Vieques-Culebra Special Economic Development Zone."

- 5) Law 194-2003, as amended, is known as the "Law for the Technological Development of Microentrepreneurs, Small and Medium Traders."
- 6) Law 389-2004, as amended, established the Financial Opportunities Program for Young Entrepreneurs attached to the bank.
- 7) Law 457-2004, as amended, creates the public fund in trust to be known as "Trust for the Financing of Companies in Special Communities," with independent legal personality, non-profit, irrevocable, and in perpetuity, attached to the bank.
- 8) Law 475-2004, as amended, is known as the "Law for the Development of Establishments for the Elderly in the Special Communities of Puerto Rico."
- 9) Law 73-2008, as amended, is known as the "Law of Economic Incentives for the Development of Puerto Rico."
- 10) Law 197-2009, which orders the bank to prioritize the consideration of loans requested by small and medium-sized enterprises for the manufacture, sale, and installation of solar equipment, windmills, and/or any other system used to generate electricity from renewable energy sources.
- 11) Law 27-2010, which provides special importance to loans requested by private companies to develop new products made with recyclable materials as raw materials for their manufacture.
- 12) Law 32-2010, as amended, is known as the "Law of the Agroeconomic Corridor of the Central Region of Puerto Rico."
- 13) Law 39-2010, as amended, is known as the "Law of the Corridor for the Socioeconomic Development of the Mountain."
- 14) Law 120-2014, as amended, is known as "Law of Incentives for the Generation and Retention of Jobs in SMEs."

15) Law 135-2014, as amended, is known as the "Law on Incentives and Financing for Young Entrepreneurs."

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

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS SERVICES:

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

Table 26. Program Services offered by Puerto Rico's Government:

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

Agency:	DEDC
Program:	Air Cargo Logistics Community (ACLC)
Population served:	The new Air Cargo Community of Puerto Rico will include airlines, airports, medical and pharmaceutical device manufacturers, ground operators, and carriers.

Program Description:	<p>Make Puerto Rico the most important air cargo operations center in the Americas. The community will have three main objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve the overall quality of air transportation operations in Puerto Rico through the adoption of best practices and a standardized way of operating and representing the community to lawmakers and authorities, 2. Raise international awareness of Puerto Rico's air transportation capabilities, and 3. Leverage Puerto Rico's expertise in the life sciences field.
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Agency:	DEDC
Program:	<p>Club JOVEM (CJ YDP)</p> <p>(Young entrepreneurs)</p> <p>(Youth Development Program)</p>
Population served:	Youth from public and private academic institutions.
Program Description:	Promote an entrepreneurial lifestyle and a sense of leadership in youth through educational workshops.
Authority:	DEDC

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

	on the first \$500,000 of gross income generated during the first three years of operation.
Authority:	Law 135-2014 (now in Law 60 Incentives Code (L135-2014/L60-ICIFL-YE) Incentives and Financing Law for Young Entrepreneurs.

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

Agency:	DEDC
Program:	Law to Incentivize the Relocation of Individual Investors to Puerto Rico
Population served:	Investors
Program Description:	The purpose of this measure is to encourage individuals who have not been residents of Puerto Rico for at least the last fifteen years before the approval of this Law, and who maintain investments in or outside of the US, to establish their residence and invest in Puerto Rico. This law fully exempts these individuals from paying taxes in Puerto Rico on passive income derived from their investments.
Authority:	Act 22 of the year 2012.

Agency:	DEDC
Program:	Puerto Rico Incentives Code (PRIC)

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

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

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

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

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

Agency:	Puerto Rico Trade and Export Company (PRT&EC)
Program:	Creative Industries

Population served:	Self-employed entities and individuals
Program Description:	Its purpose is to provide economic support. This incentive is focused on aiding those who are not eligible under other incentives provided by the Government of Puerto Rico or the U.S. CARES Act.
Authority:	Act 173-2014

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

Agency:	State Office of Energy Public Policy (SOEPP)
Program:	Energy Public Policy Law of Puerto Rico (EPPLPR)
Population served:	People of Puerto Rico
Program Description:	Create parameters that will guide a resilient, dependable, and robust energy system, with fair and reasonable rates for all classes of consumers, enable the energy service user to produce and participate in energy generation, facilitate the interconnection of distributed generation and microgrids, and disaggregate and transform the electrical system into an open one.
Authority:	Law Number 17 of the year 2019.

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

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

Other programs:

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

Agency:	U.S. Department of the Treasury and Internal Revenue Service (IRS)
Program:	Government of Puerto Rico
Population served:	Opportunity Zones (OZ)

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

CONCLUSION

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

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

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

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

The labor market is the main engine that complies with government strategies and allows for sustainable economic development. Thus, these economic indicators are of paramount

importance in the design and planning of government strategies. In 2021, the DOL published the highest number of in-demand occupations. Some of these are as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

Strategies designed by the government must address the following challenges:

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

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

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

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

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

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

(a) State Strategic Vision and Goals. The Unified or Combined State Plan must include the State's strategic vision and goals for developing its workforce, and meeting employers' needs to support economic growth and economic self-sufficiency. This must include –

(1) Vision. Describe the State's strategic vision of its workforce development system.

Puerto Rico's workforce development system and its network of American Job Centers succeeded in being the service of choice to meet the needs of industries, businesses, employers, and job seekers, and expanding access to education, training, and employment opportunities for adults, youth, dislocated workers, people with disabilities, and individuals facing barriers to employment, including veterans, thus contributing to further economic development.

State Strategic Vision and Goals:

Puerto Rico continues to develop innovative, diverse, and inclusive strategies that allow the development, promotion, and retention of a competent, skilled, and responsive workforce in dynamic times. Thus, achieving the elimination of employability barriers, contributing to the development of an economic, prosperous, sustainable, and competitive culture at a global level, aligns with the historical strategy of economic development.

To achieve this vision, 'WIOA Partners' will work on:

- a) Comprehensive Development formation of individuals - to expand access to human capital training through educational programs and inclusive training that allows them to function and integrate into competitive labor scenarios aligned with Puerto Rico's strategic economic development plan.
- b) Provide aid, support, and follow-up services to individuals - to expand and integrate access to inter-agency information that offers opportunities based on the needs of individuals and/or families according to demographic distribution and skills.

- c) Update infrastructure and information systems mechanisms - to achieve transparency, compliance, and commercial and productive agility by providing stakeholders with an integrated information system mechanism.
- d) Designing multisectoral strategic alliances – to maximize the power of strategic alliances – it is imperative to participate and coordinate with various sectors. These alliances support and facilitate labor development and the creation of new economic opportunities.

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

- A. Goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce, including preparing youth and individuals with barriers to employment³ and other populations.⁴**
- B. Goals for meeting employers’ skilled workforce needs.**

Puerto Rico's workforce development system has developed four goals to achieve the state's vision of the workforce system as part of its strategic plan, each of which employs several strategies. These goals are defined at the workforce system level and address both (a) the preparation and education needed to develop an educated and skilled workforce, including preparing youth and individuals with barriers to employment and other populations and (b) the goal of meeting the skilled workforce needs of employers.

GOAL 1: Human Capital and Workforce - develop talent based on the economic development of Puerto Rico through professional development opportunities tailored to the needs of the global and local market.

³ Individuals with barriers to employment include displaced homemakers; low-income individuals; Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians; individuals with disabilities, including youth who are individuals with disabilities; older individuals; ex-offenders; homeless individuals, or homeless children and youths; youth who are in or have aged out of the foster care system; individuals who are English language learners, individuals who have low levels of literacy, and individuals facing substantial cultural barriers; eligible migrant and seasonal farmworkers (as defined at section 167(i) of WIOA and Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 3514); individuals within 2 years of exhausting lifetime eligibility under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program; single parents (including single pregnant women); and long-term unemployed individuals.

⁴ Veterans, unemployed workers, and youth and any other populations identified by the State.

GOAL 2: Inter-agency Collaboration - modernize information management systems to integrate emerging technologies in harmony in the context of the continuously changing globalized market.

GOAL 3: Agile and Competitive Market - Foster the development and expansion of robust apprenticeship programs across Puerto Rico, aimed at enhancing productivity and competitiveness within diverse industries. Through strategic collaboration among stakeholders, prioritize the establishment of apprenticeship initiatives tailored to the specific needs of key sectors, thereby equipping individuals with high-quality skills and credentials aligned with the demands of the evolving labor market.

GOAL 4: Strategic and multi-sector alliances–Design a diverse and self-sustaining ecosystem through new opportunities for economic and labor development.

The goals outlined in the narrative are intricately linked to specific objectives delineated in Table 30 - Alignment of goals with strategies plan of PR workforce system, ensuring a cohesive and targeted approach towards achieving desired outcomes. Each goal corresponds directly to a set of strategic objectives detailed within the alignment table, providing a clear roadmap for implementation and progress monitoring within the Puerto Rico workforce system. This strategic alignment enhances accountability and facilitates the effective execution of the State Unified Plan initiatives.

(3) Performance Goals. Using the table provided in Appendix 1, include the State's expected levels of performance relating to the performance accountability measures based on the primary indicators of performance described in Section 116(b)(2)(A) of WIOA. (This Strategic Planning element only applies to core programs.)

Appendix 1: Performance Goals for the Core Programs

Each state submitting a Unified or Combined State Plan must identify the expected levels of performance for each of the primary indicators of performance for the first two years covered by the plan. The state is required to reach an agreement with the Secretary of Labor, in conjunction with the Secretary of Education, on state-negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the plan.

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

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

- **Rate of Employment in the 2nd Quarter Post-Exit:** This metric assesses the proportion of individuals who secured non-subsidized jobs in the second quarter following their departure from the program. For young participants, this measure also included those engaged in educational or vocational training within the same time limit.
- **Rate of Employment in the 4th Quarter Post-Exit:** This indicator assesses the proportion of individuals who have found non-subsidized employment in the fourth quarter after leaving the program. The youth demographics include those involved in educational or vocational activities during that quarter.
- **Median Income in the 2nd Quarter Post-Exit:** This refers to the median income earned by individuals who have found non-subsidized employment in the second quarter after leaving the program.
- **Credential Achievement:** This metric indicates the proportion of participants who have either earned recognized tertiary education credentials or completed their high school education (or an equivalent) either while enrolled in the program or within a year of exiting it.
- **Documented Skill Advancements:** This measures the proportion of participants who, within a program year, are enrolled in educational or vocational training aimed at achieving recognized post-secondary credentials or employment, and have made verifiable gains in academic, technical, or occupational skills.
- **Employer Engagement Effectiveness:** This evaluates the efficacy of Puerto Rico's workforce system in meeting employer needs. It does so by examining metrics such as employee retention rates, the extent of employer engagement, and the rate of repeat business by employers.

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

Table 27. Levels of Performance for Title I, II, III, and IV Programs:

	Title I – Adult Program			
	Program Year: 2024		Program Year: 2025	
	Expected Level	Negotiated Level	Expected Level	Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)	53.3%		53.8%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)	59.6%		51.1%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)	\$2,672.00		\$2,708.00	
Credential Attainment Rate	42.6%		43.1%	
Measurable Skill Gains	80.2%		80.7%	

	Title I – Dislocated Worker Program	
	Program Year: 2024	Program Year: 2025

	Expected Level	Negotiated Level	Expected Level	Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)	52.6%		53.1%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)	53.7%		54.2%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)	\$2,750.00		\$2,775.00	
Credential Attainment Rate	51.8%		51.3%	
Measurable Skill Gains	58.1%		58.6%	

	Title I – Youth Program			
	Program Year: 2024		Program Year: 2025	
	Expected Level	Negotiated Level	Expected Level	Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit) ⁵	51.0%		51.5%	

⁵ For Title I Youth programs, employment, education, or training.

Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit) ⁶	51.2%		51.7%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)	\$2,058.00		\$2,037.00	
Credential Attainment Rate	20.4%		20.9%	
Measurable Skill Gains	35.2%		35.7%	

	Title II – Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program			
	Program Year: 2024		Program Year: 2025	
	Expected Level	Negotiated Level	Expected Level	Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)	12.00%		12.50%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)	14.00%		14.5%	

⁶ For Title I Youth programs, employment, education, or training.

Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)	\$ 3,400.00		\$ 3,450.00	
Credential Attainment Rate	10.00%		10.5%	
Measurable Skill Gains	57.80%		57.90%	

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	Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service Program			
	Program Year: 2024		Program Year: 2025	
	Expected Level	Negotiated Level	Expected Level	Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)	50.00%		50.00%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)	50.00%		50.00%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)	\$2,300.00		\$2,300.00	
Credential Attainment Rate	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Measurable Skill Gains	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

	Vocational Rehabilitation Program			
	Program Year: 2024		Program Year: 2025	
	Expected Level	Negotiated Level	Expected Level	Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit) ²²	30.0%		30.0%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit) ²²	30.0%		30.0%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit) ⁷	\$4,000		\$4,000	
Credential Attainment Rate	32.0%		32.0%	
Measurable Skill Gains	50.0%		50.0%	

	Effectiveness in Serving Employers			
	Program Year: 2024		Program Year: 2025	
	Actual Level	National Level	Actual Level	National Level
Retention Same Employer Rate	67.4		38.4	56.5
Employer Penetration Rate	4.8		8.3	8.0

Additional Indicators of Performance
1.
2.
3.
4.

(4) Assessment. The evaluation of the effectiveness of the workforce development system in the PR State is under the jurisdiction of the PRDEDC. In adherence to Sec. 116(d)(2) of WIOA, the State’s performance report aligns with the stipulations in 20 CFR Sec. 677.160. This includes comprehensive assessments for each core program, involving:

- A state performance report detailing program levels achieved, focusing on the number of participants served.
- In-depth data on participants exiting each core program, with specific attention to disaggregated counts for those facing barriers to employment.

- **Demographic information of participants.**
- **A comprehensive overview of participants and program exit who received career and training services for the most recent program year and the preceding three years.**
- **Assessment of levels achieved for primary indicators in career and training services over the same period.**
- **Determination of the percentage of program participants securing unsubsidized employment linked to Title I-B program training.**
- **Analysis of funds allocated to each type of career and training service for the most recent program year and the preceding three years.**
- **Calculation of the average cost per participant for those availing career and training services during the specified program years.**
- **Examination of the percentage of the State's annual allotment spent on administrative costs.**
- **Inclusion of any additional information facilitating comparisons of programs with those in other States.**

The State Board, in collaboration with Core Programs, will actively enforce the integration of assessment protocols aimed at continuous improvement. This enforcement will occur through the selection and certification processes for Local Boards, Operators, and Providers. Furthermore, the implementation of sector strategies and career pathways will be monitored through devised measurement mechanisms to account for and analyze outcomes, ensuring ongoing enhancements to the workforce development system.

(b) State Strategy. The Unified or Combined State Plan must include the State's strategies to achieve its strategic vision and goals. These strategies must consider the State's economy, workforce, workforce development, education and training activities, and the analysis provided in Section (a) above.

Include discussion of specific strategies to address the needs of the populations provided in Section (a).

(1) Describe the strategies the State will implement, including industry or sector partnerships related to in-demand industry sectors, occupations, and career pathways, as required by WIOA section 101(d)(3)(B), (D). The "Career

pathway” is defined in WIOA Section 3(7) and includes registered apprenticeship. “In-demand industry sector or occupation” is defined at WIOA section 3(23).

The strategic plan of the Puerto Rico workforce system establishes the strategies necessary to achieve each of the four goals proposed in the strategic plan. The strategies focus on the following areas: economic development, skills and education attainment, innovation and governance, service integration, and system alignment.

Table 28- Allignment of goals with strategies plan of PR workforce system

<p>GOAL 1: Human Capital and Workforce - develop talent based on the economic development of Puerto Rico through professional development opportunities tailored to the needs of the global and local market.</p>
<p>1.1 Increase the number of individuals who participate in human capital training programs.</p>
<p>1.2 Modernize the system of service to the individual and/or families through the inclusion of emerging technologies.</p>
<p>1.3 Increase the effectiveness of inclusive educational programs to better serve individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds.</p>
<p>1.4 Enhance the effectiveness of assistance, support, and follow-up services by providing relevant training and development opportunities to participants.</p>
<p>GOAL 2: Inter-agency Collaboration - modernize information management systems to integrate emerging technologies in harmony in the context of the continuously changing globalized market.</p>
<p>2.1 Achieve better alignment and compliance with the offerings, operation and management offered at the regional job centers.</p>

2.2 Enhance the compliance of plan participants and collaborators by making infrastructure mechanisms and information systems more user-friendly and accessible.

2.3 Improve inter-agency coordination and information-sharing to better align assistance and support services with individual and family needs.

GOAL 3: Agile and Competitive Market - Agile and Competitive Market - Foster the development and expansion of robust apprenticeship programs across Puerto Rico, aimed at enhancing productivity and competitiveness within diverse industries. Through strategic collaboration among stakeholders, prioritize the establishment of apprenticeship initiatives tailored to the specific needs of key sectors, thereby equipping individuals with high-quality skills and credentials aligned with the demands of the evolving labor market.

3.1 Improve the quality and relevance of training programs to meet the needs of Puerto Rico's competitive work environments.

3.2 Increase the number of individuals who receive comprehensive services based on their individual needs.

3.3 Improve the commercial and productive agility of plan participants and collaborators by making infrastructure mechanisms and information systems more responsive to their needs.

3.4 Expand the availability of Human Capital for youth, adults and displaced people segments allowing their incorporation into the workforce.

3.5 Expand the inter-agency collaboration through modern and collaborative technological investments.

GOAL 4: Strategic and multi-sector alliances–Design a diverse and self-sustaining ecosystem through new opportunities for economic and labor development.

4.1 Support the development of economic strategic sectors by aligning human capital to specific business needs in the region.

4.2 Increase the number of strategic alliances with various sectors that support and facilitate labor development and the creation of new economic opportunities.

4.3 Enhance the effectiveness of existing strategic alliances through coordination and cooperation with multiple sectors.

4.4 Improve the sustainability of strategic alliances by incorporating relevant stakeholders and ensuring their commitment to the program.

4.5 Increase the number of individuals who participate in apprenticeship programs that lead to skilled and well-paying jobs.

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

The State has identified areas in which the workforce needs to be trained strategically to meet current market trends. For this, four unified strategies are in place to describe how the State plans to strategically align goals with specific tactics to be implemented by the stakeholders. These areas are (1) Technology, (2) Modernization, (3) Integration, and (4) Competencies/competitive.

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

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

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

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

process in which certification process of businesses can be done online; currently, it is being done manually which causes a backlog of applications.

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

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

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

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

VRA has established an alliance with The Puerto Rico Manufacturers Association to increase the number of participants with disabilities being placed in the workforce. Other alliances are being considered to integrate and being competitive in today's job market which can be challenging for people with disabilities. Also, VRA has implemented pre-employment services known as Work Based Learning Experience (Aprendizaje Basado en Trabajo) to coordinate placement not only within Public Agencies but the Private Sector as well.

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

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

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

VRA is aware of how competitive the current Job Market is and for this is increasing their presence through Service Fairs. Some of the mandatory services provided are the following: Career Exploration Counseling, Counseling on Post Secondary Education Transition, Work

Based Working Experience, Social Skills, and Independent Life Skills Experiences. This should result in better preparing potential candidates to be integrated into the Job Market.

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

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

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

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

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

Educational challenges loom large, with the K-12 system leaving students ill-equipped for technical roles, faculty shortages hindering post-secondary education, and barriers impeding student completion. The stark decline of 44% in K-12 enrollment between 2006 and 2019, coupled with widespread school closures, underscores the imperative for a robust education strategy. The younger workforce, with distinct priorities and preferences for non-traditional working models, necessitates a recalibration of educational paradigms.

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

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

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

III. OPERATIONAL PLANNING ELEMENTS

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

State Strategy Implementation. The Unified or Combined State Plan must include—

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

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

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

Functions:

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

- (a) Crafting and implementing a comprehensive State Unified Plan with clearly defined performance metrics.
 - (b) Facilitating collaboration among key sectors and occupations to foster workforce development strategies.
 - (c) Formulating and aligning policy directives to meet the evolving needs of Puerto Rico's workforce.
 - (d) Modernizing and improving the accessibility of the one-stop delivery system for job seekers and employers.
- (1) **Implementation of the State Strategy. Describe how the lead State agency is responsible for the administration of each core program or a Combined State Plan partner program included in this plan will implement the State's Strategies identified in II(c) above. This must include a description of—**

- (A) **Core Program Activities to Implement the State strategy. Describe the activities that the entities conducting the respective core programs will fund the implementation of the State's strategies. In addition, we describe how such activities will be aligned across the core programs and Combined State Plan partner programs included in this plan, and**

among the entities administering the programs, including using co-enrollment and other strategies, as appropriate.

To enhance resource integration, consistent information sharing occurs among networks of Core Partners and other service providers. At the local level, State staff facilitate meetings with local area Core Partners, educational institutions, and TANF staff to discuss available resources, target populations, and services. Local areas are encouraged to sustain these discussions and cultivate ongoing relationships.

Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs) and their American Job Centers (AJCs) adhere to AJC certification policies, which mandate regular cross-training sessions among core and mandatory partners. These sessions aim to enhance understanding of partner programs, eligibility requirements, and co-enrollment practices. Additionally, LWDBs and AJCs establish cross-functional teams and referral procedures to streamline service delivery and support the State's workforce development objectives.

The table below delineates Core Program Activities aligned with the State's strategic goals, reflecting the concerted efforts to realize the State's vision. The integration of resources is accomplished through the regular sharing of information among the networks of Core Partners and other providers. At the local level, State staff sponsored meetings with local area Core Partners, educational institutions, and TANF staff to discuss their resources, target groups, and services.

Local areas are intended to continue discussions and build upon the initiated relationships. At LWDBs and their AJCs, the AJC certification policy requires that core and mandatory partners regularly provide cross-training on partner programs, implement cross-functional teams, are familiar with eligibility requirements for all programs, establish co-enrollment practices, and establish procedures for referrals.

Table 29 - Core Program Activities to Implement the State's Strategy

Core Program	Program Activities to Implement the State's Strategy
WIOA Title I (DEDC)	1. All MOUs will be reviewed. (4.2)

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. An analysis will be conducted to define the new regions of the Workforce Development System in Puerto Rico. (4.1; 3.3) 3. Expand the Registered Apprenticeship program in Puerto Rico. (4.5) 4. Puerto Rico Workforce System Brand Analysis. (4.1; 1.4; 2.3) 5. Develop and implement state policies to improve operational processes under WIOA. (4.2, 4.3, 2.3) 6. Use SAM to assess title I program outcomes and performance using quality, objective, and reliable data. (4.1; 3.3) 7. Continue as the state leader to improve integration of services, development of database, use of technology and delivery of service. (4.1; 3.3)
<p>WIOA Title II (PRDE)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Partnership with the Career and Technical Education area. (1.4, 3.5, 4.3) 2. Partnership with the public and not-for-profit private institutions to foster new initiatives in integrated education and training. (1.1; 2.1, 3.1, 4.1) 3. Implementation of online professional development for teachers. (1.2, 1.4; 3.1, 3.3, 3.5) 4. Collaboration with other core programs and partner's agencies. (2.1, 2.3, 3.5) 5. Update the Implementation effort of the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCR Standards). (1.3, 2.1, 2.3, 3.1, 4.1, 4.2) 6. DEPR-AEP will foster the development and implementation of technology applications, translation technology, distance education, and professional development to support the use of instructional technology. (3.1, 3.5; 4.2) 7. Incorporation of Internet service technology into adult education classrooms. (3.3, 3.5; 4.1, 1.2) 8. Preparation and setting of interactive classrooms in instruction centers. (2.1, 2.2, 2.3; 3.1) 9. Provision of portable notebooks in classrooms. (3.5) 10. Incorporating the online public domain and subscription-based search platforms in interactive classrooms. (3.1, 3.5; 1.2, 1.3)

	11. Development of a distance education program. (3.1, 3.5; 4.1)
Wagner-Peyser Act (PRDOL)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide technical assistance to WP staff to strengthen strategies to respond to the new challenges and demands of the labor market in the AJCs. (1.2, 1.3, 1.4; 2.1, 2.3; 3.1, 3.5; 4.1, 4.2, 4.3) 2. Provide the competencies and skills necessary for the WP staff to understand the key role that technology plays in the provision of career services to job seekers today. (1.2, 1.4; 2.1, 2.3; 3.1, 3.3, 3.5; 4.1, 4.3)
Rehabilitation Act (VRA)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue the dissemination of the services through Social Media Networks, in radio, newspapers, and television programs to increase the number of participants in the AJCs. (1.2) 2. Continue to encourage among the agency's participants the involvement in post-secondary training programs in line with their functional capacity, interests, and the labor market. 3. Offer cross-training to staff to strengthen their knowledge about the services available in each program to continue providing services to the population of people with disabilities who come to the program or through the AJCs. 4. Provide technical assistance and information to employers to promote the employment and retention of people with disabilities. 5. Identify referrals to the services of the Core Programs. (2.1, 2.3, 4.3) 6. Participate in the meetings to which the Core-programs are summoned to outline information exchange strategies. 7. Continue providing technical assistance and training to staff to strengthen their knowledge and skills in providing services to the participants. 8. Coordinate the participation of VRA staff in the American Job Centers (AJC), to properly channel the needs of those with disabilities who request information and/or services in such centers. (1.3, 1.4, 2.1, 2.3, 3.4) 9. Provide the AJC staff with guidance on diverse topics of interest that are requested related to people with disabilities. (1.3, 1.2, 2.3, 3.4)

	<p>10. Actively participate in job fairs coordinated by the AJC. (1.4)</p> <p>11. Continue providing services aimed at the placement and employment of participants with the most significant impairments.</p> <p>12. Coordination of staff training activities with universities and other institutions preparing professionals related to the rehabilitation field. (4.2, 4.3, 3.1)</p> <p>13. Expand the provision of services to people with disabilities through collaborative agreements with other agencies or entities.</p> <p>14. Continuation with the financing efforts to assist and support better employment opportunities and independent living for our applicants/consumers. (4.4, 4.3, 3.2, 1.3)</p>
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Note: The numbering inside parenthesis after each Program Activity reflects its alignment with the goals aimed at achieving the State's Vision, derived from the comprehensive analysis of the State's economic landscape, workforce dynamics, and developmental initiatives. This alignment underscores the strategic integration of stakeholder activities with the overarching vision for the State's workforce development, offering a clear depiction of their intrinsic alignment with the broader objectives.

(B)Alignment with Activities outside the plan Describe how the activities identified in (A) will be aligned with programs and activities provided by the required one-stop partners and other optional one-stop partners and activities provided under employment, training (including Registered Apprenticeships), education (including career and technical education), human services, and other programs not covered by the plan, as appropriate, assuring coordination of, and avoiding duplication among these activities.

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

Job Corps

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

YouthBuild

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

Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers Program

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The main goal of the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program is to assist workers who have lost or may lose their jobs because of foreign trade. The TAA program offers a variety of benefits and services to eligible workers, including job training, income support, job search and relocation allowances, and wage subsidies to workers aged 50 years and older. This program seeks to provide skills, credentials, resources, and support to displaced workers to

encourage them to an early return to the labor force. The State Dislocated Worker Unit and TAA services will be effectively integrated into the AJCs and use the network as the main point of participant intake and delivery of TAA program benefits and services. PRDEDC has developed *State Policy Number 2020-001* to ensure that the correct process is implemented with the assistance of TAA clients.

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

PRDOLHR, through the Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG), is committed to serving eligible transitioning service members in need of individualized career services, as well as veterans and eligible spouses, by providing resources to assist veterans with significant barriers to employment, and other eligibility in accordance with VPL 03-14 change 1 and 2 and VPL 03-19, to obtain meaningful careers and maximize their employment opportunities. JVSG commitment is an important part of fulfilling national obligations for people who have served our country.

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

Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program Specialist (DVOP)

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

disabled veterans, and other categories of veterans in accordance with priorities determined by the USDOL. Policies and procedures are in place to specifically prohibit DVOP specialists from performing non-veteran-related duties that detract from their ability to perform statutorily defined duties related to meeting the employment needs of eligible veterans. Additionally, regular audits are performed by DVET to ensure compliance with the limitations of the duties of the DVOP specialists.

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

Local Veterans' Employment Representative (LVER)

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

- Planning and engaging in job and career fairs
- Conducting employer outreach

- In conjunction with employers, conducting job searches and workshops and establishing job search groups
- Coordinating with labor unions, apprenticeship programs, and businesses or business organizations to promote and secure employment and training programs for veterans
- Informing Federal contractors of the process of recruiting qualified veterans.
- Promoting credentialing and licensing opportunities for veterans; and
- Coordinating and participating in business outreach efforts.

Gold Card Initiative

The Gold Card provides unemployed post-9/11 era veterans with individualized career services and follow-up services needed to succeed in today's job market in accordance with TEN 15-11. The Gold Card initiative is a joint effort of the USDOL/ETA and the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS). ETA and VETS have developed a series of enhanced individualized career services, including follow-up services, to identify the barriers to employment faced by veterans in the 9/11 era.

Veterans are to identify themselves as veterans at the reception desk and complete a short questionnaire, where one of the questions is whether he or she is a 9/11 veteran. Once identified as a 9/11 veteran, the individual is triaged and referred to the DVOP to receive six months of individualized career services to assist the veteran in seeking and securing a job.

The services, when provided under the Priority of Services to Veterans, are designed to overcome those barriers and to reinsert the 9/11 era veterans into the labor workforce.

The enhanced in-person services available for Gold Card holders at the local American Job Center may include:

- Job readiness assessment, including interviews and testing,
- Development of an Individual Development Plan (IDP),
- Career guidance through group or individual counseling that helps veterans make training and career decisions,
- Provision of labor market, occupational, and skills transferability information that informs educational, training, and occupational decisions,

- Referral to job banks, job portals, and job openings,
- Referral to employers and registered apprenticeship sponsors,
- Referral to training by WIOA-funded or third-party service providers, and
- Monthly follow-up by an assigned case manager for up to six months.

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

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

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

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

workshops, orientation of services available through the One-Stop Centers, referral to job offers, UI eligibility review, and providing of UI claimants with labor market information. These services will be managed by the Re-employment Service staff and as appropriate, by a licensed career counselor where available (not all offices have a career counselor on-site).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MOU DEDC, PRDOLHR, and ADSEF

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

PILOT PROJECT WITH ADSEF – SNAP

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

inform the implementation of SNAP, delineating service flows, policies, and reporting protocols.

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

The process is outlined as follows:

- ADSEF uploads the list of TANF and PAN recipients referred for WIOA services through the AJC into PRIS.
- AJC's partner programs receive referrals via Task Management.
- Activation of the PRIS Reportable Profile.
- AJC case managers contact individuals to ascertain their interest in continuing to receive WIOA services.
- AJC staff conduct interviews, provide services, and record them in PRIS.
- ADSEF staff access PRIS to review WIOA services provided at the AJC.
- PRIS transmits data to DSEF for generating programmatic reports.
- ADSEF submits the FSN-583 report.

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

- Supervised Job Search (SJS)
- Job Search Training (JST)
- Self-Employment Training (SET)
- Basic/Foundational Skills instructions (includes High School Equivalency Programs) (EPB) ▪
- Career/Technical Education Programs or other Vocational Training (EPC)
- English Language Acquisition (EPEL)

- Work Readiness Training (EPWRT)
- Work Activity (WA) ▪ Internship (WBLI)
- Pre-Apprenticeship (WBLPA) ▪ Apprenticeship (WBLPA)
- On-the-Job-Training (WBLOJT)
- Work-based learning - Other (WBLO)
- NAP E&T program general measure Median Earnings
- NAP E&T program general measure Unsubsidized Employment

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

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

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

Registered Apprenticeship

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

Since 2018, the Puerto Rico Department of Economic Development and Commerce, through the Workforce Development Program, is serving as an Apprenticeship Office under USDOL-OA Region I oversight. Registered Apprenticeships are a top priority for WDP. As a proven

training model to best meet the needs of businesses and provide long-term sustainable career opportunities for individuals, apprenticeships are the ideal workforce development tool to address the diverse challenges faced by the public workforce system. Consequently, WDP is investing significantly in the expansion and strengthening of Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs) throughout the state. WDP has assembled an Apprenticeship Team in the State office to assist employers, local boards, and partners across the state with establishing new RAPs. The State is investing in training, guidance, and technical assistance to the business services staff in each region to equip them to better assist with the creation of new RAPs and to better understand how to fully utilize WIOA funds to support the creation and sustainability of RAPs.

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

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

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

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

The State Apprenticeship Expansion Formula (SAEF) Grant was awarded to the Puerto Rico Department of Economic Development and Commerce to continue developing, expanding, and modernizing the Registered Apprenticeship Program in Puerto Rico. The use of this grant will be focused on increasing participation of traditionally underrepresented populations through diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in targeted and emerging industries such as: healthcare, hospitality, energy, and education, among others. The performance period ends on June 30, 2024.

By mid-January 2024, Puerto Rico has 50 Registered Apprenticeship Programs. The total number of active apprentices surpasses 1,000.

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

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

(B)Coordination, Alignment and Provision of Services to Individuals. Describe how the entities carrying out the respective core programs, Combined State Plan partner programs included in this plan, and required. The optional one-stop partner programs will coordinate activities and resources to provide comprehensive, high-quality, customer-centered services, including supportive services (e.g. transportation), to

individuals, including those populations identified in section II(a)(1)(B), and individuals in remote areas, the activities described shall conform to the statutory requirements of each program.

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

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

Inter-agency Efforts

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

Data Communication

The focus on service integration enacted by the WIOA has motivated the DEDC to consider ways to link and allow tracing of participant data between partners, especially core

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

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

Coordination of Services through One-Stop Centers

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

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

Coordination among Programs

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

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

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

of labor exchange services through self-service, self-service technology tools, and staff-assisted services.

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

Title II Services

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

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

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

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

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

One-Stop Centers one day a week to evaluate adult education potential participants and make referrals to the adult education service providers approved by the AEP for services. These AEP employees make cross-referrals between One-Stop centers and AEP service providers.

Youth

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

Adults and Dislocated Workers

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

employment services. The PRIS database platform contains integration elements using the same database: case management, intake, and reporting.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

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

State Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) One Stop Partners

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

The objectives of the state MOU are as follows:

- to establish the parameters of negotiation at the local level,
- define the framework of reference that should govern each agreement between the Local Board and the partners,

- clearly define the parameters of the respective human resources commitments for each grantee,
- Provide foundation elements for representatives of state agencies (grantees) and Local Boards to negotiate their respective memoranda of understanding.

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

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

MOU Summary

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

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

3. Youth,
 4. Job Corps,
 5. YouthBuild,
 6. Native American programs, and
 7. Migrant and seasonal farmworker programs.
2. The required partners are the entities responsible for administering the following programs and activities in the local area:
- a. The Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act (29 U.S.C. 49 et seq.), as amended by the WIOA title III.
 - b. The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) program authorized under title II of WIOA;
 - c. The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program authorized under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 720 et seq.), as amended by WIOA title IV:
 - d. The Senior Community Service Employment Program authorized under title V of the Older Americans Act of 1965 (42 U.S.C. 3056 et seq.);
 - e. Career and technical education programs at the post-secondary level authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (20 U.S.C. 2301 et seq.);
 - f. Trade Adjustment Assistance activities authorized under chapter 2 of title II of the Trade Act of 1974 (19 U.S.C. 2271 et seq.);
 - g. Jobs for Veterans State Grant programs authorized under Chapter 41 of title 38, U.S.C.;
 - h. Employment and training activities conducted under the Community Services Block Grant (42 U.S.C. 9901 et seq.);
 - i. Employment and training activities conducted by HUD.
 - j. Programs authorized under State unemployment compensation laws (in accordance with applicable Federal law)
 - k. Programs authorized under sec. 212 of the Second Chance Act of 2007 (42 U.S.C. 17532); and
 - l. TANF authorized under Part A of title IV of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.), unless exempted by the Governor under §678.405(b).

Roles and Responsibilities

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

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

Delivery of Basic Career Service

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

Service to people with barriers to employment.

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

- a. Displaced homemakers.
- b. Low-income individuals.
- c. Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians are defined in Section 166.
- d. Individuals with disabilities, including youths with disabilities.
- e. Older individuals.
- f. Ex-offenders.

- g. Homeless individuals (as defined in Section 41403(6) of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (42 U.S.C. 14043e-2(6))), or homeless children and youths (as described in Section 725(2) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11434a (2))).
- h. Youths who are in or have aged out of the foster care system.
- i. Individuals who are English language learners, individuals who have low levels of literacy, and individuals facing substantial cultural barriers.
- j. Eligible migrant and seasonal farm workers, as defined in Section 167(i).
- k. Individuals within two years of exhausting lifetime eligibility under Part A of Title IV of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.).
- l. Single parents (including pregnant women).
- m. Long-term unemployed individuals.
- n. Other groups such as the Governor determine.
- o. Employer services fall into two categories:
 - I. Participation and Commitment- Educate and provide general information to employers on how the services in the AJC can represent solutions to their challenges or needs in terms of the employment of qualified personnel.
 - II. Business Services- Develop customized strategies based on their profile to determine the needs of employers in a way that addresses the challenges related to Recruitment, Employment, Training, Closures, and Layoff.

Resources and Cost Sharing

- The provision of direct services to participants and employers is a priority in AJC.
- Each partner is responsible for subsidizing the direct services related to their program without losing the perspective that the provision of services for each partner must be transparent to the participant.
- All partners share equitable and proportionate responsibilities for the operating expense costs of the AJC.

Continuous Improvement and MOU Validity

- All partners must participate in the process of programmatic review, continuous improvement, integration of original ideas, innovation, and efficient approach.

- Partners seek feedback from participants regarding their satisfaction with the services provided in the AJC.

Local Memorandum of Understandings

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

Terms and Economic Conditions

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

1. Set and maintain the local workforce development system at a level that meets the needs of job seekers and the business conditions of the Local Board
2. Reduce duplication and maximize the use of resources and technologies.
3. Expenses are appropriately shared by determining the center's proportional use and benefits received, and all funds are used only for permissible activities under the WIOA.
4. The budget includes the following cost categories required by WIOA and its regulations:
 - a) Infrastructure Costs
 - b) Career Services
 - c) Operator Costs
 - d) Shared Services
5. All costs shall be included in the Infrastructure Funding Agreements (IFA), distributed according to the proportional use and relative benefits received by the partner, quarterly reconciled against current expenses, and adjusted to the budget accordingly.
6. The operating budget of the UGC-AJC must be transparent, and all partners must negotiate in good faith and pursue reasonable and fair outcomes.

Cost Allocation Plan (CAP)

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

AJC Financing

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

Miscellaneous Clauses

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

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

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

Non-Discrimination Policy

MOU partners and staff representing them in the AJC shall not discriminate against applicants, complainants, participants, and staff of the programs in the AJC based on race, color, gender, age, religion, birth, origin or ethnic identification, political ideology, physical or

mental disability, socioeconomic status, having been victims of domestic violence, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender or marital identity of the parties, genetics, immigration status as an immigrant legally admitted and authorized to work in the US or to participate in any subsidizing program or activity under WIOA Title I, and will take affirmative action to prevent such discrimination.

MOU Dispute Resolution Process

Include a process to resolve disputes among the partners.

Complaints Process between Partners

Include a process to resolve complaints among the partners.

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

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

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

These strategies are aimed at business service teams to develop relationships with employers in their local areas, use the networks of the private sector employers on their local boards to expand their contacts and to provide information on industry trends, identify potential red flags, develop other sources of early information on potential issues within their local areas, and develop responses to address identified issues.

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

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

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

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

Services to employers include the following:

- Interviews and screening of job candidates to select skilled and trained personnel who will fulfill their labor force needs,
- Labor market information,
- Membership in the State, local boards, working groups, sector partnerships, employers' committees, among other entities, to intervene in policymaking for education, training, and employment in the local, regional, and statewide levels,
- Use of the One Stop Center network and systems to disseminate job offers; and

- Incentives, subsidies, follow-up, and supportive services to employees, including initial services to obtain Health and Drug Testing, criminal records, and required certifications for prospective employees.

Employment Service staff:

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

(E)Partner Engagement with Educational Institutions and other Education and Training Providers. Describe how the State’s strategies will engage its community colleges, adult education providers, area career and technical education schools, providers on the State’s eligible training provider list, and other education and training providers as partners in the workforce development system to create a job-driven education and training system. WIOA Section 102(b)(2)(B)(iv). Include how the State’s strategies will enable the State to leverage other Federal, State, and local investments to enhance access to WDP at these institutions.

The State's strategies for Partner Engagement with Educational Institutions and other Education and Training Providers will be robust and comprehensive. The State Board, in

collaboration with key stakeholders such as the PRDE's State Board for Career and Technical Education and the PRDOLHR, will ensure effective delivery of occupational education tailored to high-demand, mid- and high-skilled, and technologically advanced occupations. Leveraging its convening authority under WIOA, the State Board will coordinate with the Education Council, the PRDE, institutions of higher education (IHEs), and Career and Technical Education (CTE) institutions to establish a unified framework supporting career pathways and aligning educational and workforce systems. Educational institutions will serve as providers of essential educational and training services, pivotal for the successful implementation of the Registered Apprenticeship program. Furthermore, the system will equip AJC staff with training programs on structured work-based learning, fostering collaboration on pre-apprenticeship programs designed to meet industry demands.

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

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

(F)Improving Access to Post-secondary Credentials. Describe how the State's strategies will improve access to activities leading to recognized post-secondary credentials, including Registered Apprenticeship certificates. This includes credentials that are industry-recognized certificates, licenses, or certifications that are portable and stackable.

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

- Conduct analyses of economic, geographic, and demographic factors affecting applicant populations, considering accessibility challenges.
- Identify occupations in demand within their geographic regions.
- Maintain an ongoing process for initial eligibility determination.
- Define eligibility criteria, additional information requirements, and minimum performance standards for training providers, tailored to specific local areas.
- Ensure compliance with FERPA regulations to protect the confidentiality of education records.
- Regularly invite public and private educational institutions and community-based organizations to apply for eligibility determination based on demand for training.
- Facilitate the automatic inclusion of apprenticeship program providers in the State List upon request, as per the Registered Apprenticeship Act and State provisions.

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

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

Main Components of Economic Development:

Puerto Rico's economic landscape is poised for transformation through the strategic integration of PPropósito's initiatives with the WIOA State Plan. This collaboration marks a pivotal shift toward developing a globally competitive knowledge-based economy, focusing on enhancing digital literacy, technological skills, and infrastructure.

The connection between PPropósito's plans and the WIOA State Plan is crucial in transforming Puerto Rico's economy into a competitive, knowledge-based one. PPropósito's focus on digital literacy and infrastructure development works well with WIOA's goals for

workforce development, aiming to provide the workforce with the necessary digital and technological skills. This alignment is important in adjusting to the fast-paced changes and requirements of the global market.

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

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

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

Local Economic Integration and Workforce Development

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

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

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

Accessibility and Quality of Services through Job Centers

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

This localized approach ensures that the services offered are not only standardized in quality, but also relevant to the unique economic and employment landscape of each region. AJCs facilitate a crucial connection between job seekers and the labor market, offering resources,

training, and support tailored to local industry demands. Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) guides the collaboration and roles of partners within AJCs, ensuring a cohesive approach to service delivery.

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

Enhancing Collaboration with Educational Institutions

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

Improving Access to Post-secondary Credentials

Improving access to post-secondary credentials in Puerto Rico is a crucial component of the State's workforce development strategy. This effort focuses on facilitating pathways to industry-recognized certificates, licenses, and certifications that are both portable and stackable, catering to the evolving needs of the modern labor market. The State's approach

involves maintaining a publicly accessible list of eligible training providers, accompanied by performance and cost information, ensuring transparency and informed decision-making for potential participants. Local boards play a key role in this process by evaluating the impact of various factors such as economic trends and demographic characteristics on the accessibility of training services. They are tasked with identifying in-demand occupations within their geographic regions, thus aligning training opportunities with the local labor market needs. This strategy emphasizes continuous openness in the eligibility determination process, ensuring that a wide range of training providers can participate in and contribute to a diverse educational landscape. Additionally, the State's strategy includes safeguarding the confidentiality of educational records in compliance with FERPA, further ensuring the integrity of the system. Overall, the focus on post-secondary credentials is more than just on training; it is about creating a seamless bridge between education, training, and employment, ensuring that the workforce is equipped with the qualifications and skills required for successful and sustainable employment in Puerto Rico's dynamic economy.

Coordination, Alignment, and Provision of Services to Individuals

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

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

the specific needs of their geographic areas, offering a range of services from various partners, including adult education and vocational rehabilitation.

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

Coordination, Alignment, and Provision of Services to Employers

In Puerto Rico, the coordination and alignment of services with employers are crucial aspects of the workforce development strategy. This process was spearheaded by the Employer Engagement Committee of the State Board and Workforce Development Program of the Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DEDC). Their primary objective is to develop a Business Service Unit at the state level, leading to the creation of a Statewide Business Services Framework Plan. This plan guides Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs) and American Job Centers (AJCs) in collaboration with businesses.

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

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

Partner Engagement with Educational Institutions and Other Education and Training Providers

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

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

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

Jobs for the Future Inc (JFF)

Platform for Social Impact (PSI), in collaboration with Jobs for the Future, Inc. (JFF), presents an innovative workforce development model tailored to address Puerto Rico's urgent economic recovery needs. Our unsolicited proposal aims to harness catalytic capital to build, evaluate, and scale workforce programs, aligning with the government's comprehensive objectives. With a skilled team and a focus on timely execution, we aim to impact 10,000 families by enhancing education, economic opportunities, and health services. Our strategy

prioritizes wage growth, job placement, talent development, increased labor force participation, and retention of Puerto Rican talent, fostering collaboration between public and private sectors. Through this initiative, PSI and JFF seek to catalyze economic growth, leveraging both public and private resources to bolster infrastructure and human capital. The project envisions a phased approach, engaging stakeholders to refine and expand a community-based development model. PSI's recent \$41M fundraise and the launch of OASIS, a multipurpose center in San Juan, signify our commitment to piloting and scaling transformative education and workforce solutions across Puerto Rico. Initial phases will focus on landscape analysis, policy development, participatory research, and solution testing, culminating in a scalable model for regional implementation.

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

Improving Access to Post-secondary Credentials:

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

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

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

Coordination, Alignment, and Provision of Services to Employers

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

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

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

The DEDC's initiative to evaluate the AJC brand among employers further enhances this approach. This evaluation involves qualitative and quantitative assessments to understand

employer awareness, perception, and utilization of AJC services, followed by recommendations to improve services and increase brand awareness.

Through these concerted efforts, Puerto Rico aims to increase employer participation rates, enhance employee retention rates, and foster greater employer confidence in the workforce, leading to more robust employer engagement in the workforce development system.

Partner Engagement with Educational Institutions and Other Education and Training Providers

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

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

Overall, the strategy aims to leverage federal, state, and local investments to enhance access to workforce development programs at these educational institutions, ensuring that the

workforce development system in Puerto Rico is comprehensive, inclusive, and effectively meets the needs of its diverse population.

Coordination and Alignment of Services

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

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

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

Improve the Case Management process and Empower Participants Selection

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

1. Identify areas that need to be improved in case management development, discuss with case manager at local areas and develop public policies and procedures required to standardize the process across the AJC.
2. Improve technical assistance on LMI resources targeting more informed participants decision making and empower their strategies choice....
3. to place more emphasis on career development and job placement, and help more adults get on and stay on a path toward earning postsecondary degrees
4. Leverage external partners for recruitment and program design, like community-based organizations serving most in need adults and youth, as key partners for local board in recruiting and enrolling students in post-secondary education, like Boys and Girl Clubs, Sor Isolina Ferre Centers, Politécnico Amigo, among others.
5. Community-based organizations can become a strong referral base for local areas recruitment, by referring their clients of disadvantages youth, foster homes youth, single parents, among others.
6. Case management can identify student needs in a methodical way, structuring as an on-going process.
7. Improve youth and adult empowerment to visualize their goals and see their progress.
8. Case management involve community resources, including members of the family, in the strategies design and follow-up process.
9. Increase support services to postsecondary participants to stay in training, achieve their educational and occupational goals, until job placement.
10. Technical assistance to Local Board to improve approval processes for new credentials linked to employer demand.

11. Support services and programs of study would be structured and delivered to meet the needs of part-time students who are balancing work and family obligations while attending school.

Case Management Certification

To improve case management at AJCs, WDP is implementing a Case Management Certification for case managers from the 15 LWDAs, in a contract with Workforce180, a training provider to workforce professionals from more than 500 organizations in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, US Virgin Islands and Guam. This credential will help case managers have a standardized view of the case management process for AJC participants and clients, with a specialized focus on WIOA. The training curriculum includes themes like the process of case management; effective assessment; service partnership; managing the caseload; follow-up; attitudes and behaviors; strategies for problem solving; and crisis case management, among others. Complete detail of the credential will be found in the Workforce180 electronic profile at Case Management Certification – Workforce180.

Key Initiatives:

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

- **Research and Development:** This aspect aims at developing knowledge for wealth generation and commercialization, positioning Puerto Rico among the top jurisdictions for ease of doing business globally. The focus areas include access to capital, permit agility, and energy resilience.
- **21st Century TechForce Puerto Rico:** This initiative is designed to address the rapid changes in the job market, especially the increasing demand for digital skills. The goal is to make Puerto Rico one of the top states/territories for 21st-century talent development, aiming to produce around 50,000 additional skilled workers in the next decade. This includes:

- **Credential Accumulation:** Scholarships are provided to selected universities to redesign curriculums and develop short, stackable credentials in computer science and related fields.
- **Short-term Credentials:** To increase the skilled workforce in technology areas, grants are given to tech and programming academies to expand and retain top faculty talent.
- **Educational Digital Innovation Program (PIDE):** Grants are awarded to selected middle and high schools to finance innovative solutions connecting students with 21st-century jobs.
- **Quick Start:** This program aims to create a one-stop service center for employers to address 21st-century talent needs by designing and adapting curriculums focused on industry-specific requirements.
- **Centro de Investigación en Ciencias Moleculares (CICIM):** This public corporation affiliated with the University of Puerto Rico focuses on advanced research in molecular sciences. The DEDC has signed a collaboration agreement with CICIM to boost its infrastructure and programmatic projects.
- **Carga Aérea:** The DEDC collaborates with the Puerto Rico Air Cargo Community to support initiatives that optimize this competitive element, aiding the industrial and commercial sector on the island.
- **Energy Policy Public Program (PPPE):** This program focuses on sustainable energy development, including initiatives like the “Bipartisan Infrastructure Law” for Puerto Rico’s Weatherization Assistance Program and certifications for Energy Service Companies (ESCO).

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

The economic transformation of Puerto Rico, guided by PPropósito and WIOA, is designed to establish a competitive, knowledge-based economy. This strategy is centered on improving digital literacy, technological proficiency, and infrastructure. PPropósito's initiatives complement WIOA's aims to develop a skilled workforce by focusing on workforce development. Critical components of this strategy include expanding high-speed internet access, aligning training programs with local economic requirements, and providing quality

services through American Job Centers. Collaborating with educational institutions and concentrating on post-secondary qualifications are essential. The Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DEDC) guarantees seamless service delivery to both individuals and employers, preparing a workforce that is ready to meet current and future market demands. This comprehensive approach promises inclusive economic growth and positions Puerto Rico as a significant participant in the global digital economy.

III. (b) State Operating Systems and Policies. The Unified or Combined State Plan must include a description of the State operating systems and policies that will support the implementation of the State strategy described in Section II Strategic Elements. This includes—

- b) State operating systems that support coordinated implementation of State strategies (e.g., labor market information systems, data systems, communication systems, case management systems, job banks, etc.).**

Workforce and labor market information systems:

The workforce and labor market information system (WLMI) established under Section 491-2 of the Wagner-Peyser Act is administered by the PRDOLHR. The Department also maintains a Bureau of Labor Statistics and a Research Division on Occupational Skills and administers the Occupational Employment and Wages Survey, the Nonfarm Employment Survey, and special surveys, studies, and research. The products are readily available at <http://www.mercadolaboral.pr.gov/>.

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

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

education, economic development and business engagement in sector strategies and career pathway initiatives.

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

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

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

The system integrates data from the Student Information System of the PRDE (SIE, for its acronym in Spanish), which collects information on all students enrolled in the public education system, the Financial Information System (SIFDE, for its acronym in Spanish), data from the Special Education Program, and data on students who are Spanish learners, among other data.

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

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

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

DATA, COMMUNICATION AND CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Participant Record Information System (PRIS)

The Puerto Rico database system is the Participant Record Information System (PRIS), became available on March 9, 2020. Technology solutions include common registration and

case management across Title I and Title III programs. The software solution for WIOA workflows follows the Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 05-16, and WIOA Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL).

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

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

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

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

The PRIS collects and reports on performance measures for Title I and Title III programs. Currently, ETA 9169 was submitted and certified by WIPS continually.

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

- Case Management – The case management module is a supplemental tool to facilitate the collection of data from case managers in the AJC. Its design was made through the input of a sample of case managers, WP and WDP staff.
- Eligible Training Providers Module – This module electronically integrates the entire process for eligible training service providers to: submit documentation to the Local Boards of trainings eligible for WIOA funds; allow the Local Board process for evaluating and approving recommended training in accordance with occupational demand; as well as the evaluation at state level and the creation of the ETPL. The module collects the ETPL performance data elements required in ETA 9171.
- Registered Apprenticeship Module – In addition to the required elements of the PIRL, contain additional data fields to collect information relevant to case management and will be aligned with the RAPIDS database.
- Youth Module – This module collects information from service providers of the 14 elements of the youth program from the local areas and state level.
- Rapid Response Module – Collects information from dislocated workers receiving rapid response services.

AJC Partners Integration

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

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

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

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

The PR Department of Labor & Human Resource is the SUIA agency. "SUIA" is the state agency that holds wage data, whether such agency also administers the state's unemployment

insurance program. On the other hand, PACIA' is the Performance Accountability and Customer Information Agency designated by the governor to be responsible for coordinating the state's program for assessing state and local program performance and evaluating training provider performance. The PACIA are PR Department of Economic Development & Commerce – Access PACIA; PR Department of Education – Access PACIA; PR Department of the Family – Access PACIA; and the PR Vocational Rehabilitation Administration – Access.

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

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

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

Consumer Rehabilitation Information System (CRIS). PRVRA maintains a Consumer Rehabilitation Information System. It keeps data on services provided to applicants and consumers and the data required for federal and state reporting. CRIS is not currently integrated with PRDOLHR or the One-Stop systems. The case management capabilities of the system have been updated to collect data on Pre-Employment Transition Services delivered to students with disabilities.

Job Banks. PR.JOBS is the official Job Bank of the PRDOLHR. This resource, available to employers and job seekers in general, is provided free of cost by Direct Employers as part of an agreement with the NASWA to provide a valuable tool to State Workforce Agencies. Direct Employers Job Central is a web clearinghouse operated by Direct Employers, where employers can post available jobs and recruit eligible job candidates; job seekers may also search for job openings and apply for employment.

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

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

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

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

- Case Management
- Eligible Training Providers

- Registered Apprenticeship Module
- Youth Module
- Rapid Response Module
- ETPL Module

The WDP hired an IT vendor to develop the integration of the databases of the core and required partners of the system, seeking that the PRIS can be used by the required partners as their database platform and share relevant information from other partners to avoid duplication of services and track clients through their participation. The WDP and partners have already begun the process of outlining the process of integrating services, including databases, which is in the stage of initiating the evaluation of the partners' IT infrastructure. This work will support the objectives of integrating and reporting the results of the entire workforce system.

The expected results are as follows:

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

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

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

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

The PRDE-AEP reporting process is as follows:

- The AEP implemented an Adult Information System (AIS) with the purpose of maintaining accurate participant data and continuous improvement in data quality. Training in the platform use is offered to service providers' center directors through workshops focused on key issues such as how to gather and save data, data quality validation, data usefulness to demonstrate service effectiveness, performance level standards negotiated with NRS and follow-up to performance indicators.
- Additional technical assistance is provided through phone calls and e-mails. Issues are also addressed through the Adult Information System (AIS) call center. This effort is implemented at central AEP offices to guide local providers in the daily operations of data collection for adult education activities.
- The Adult Information System (AIS) is also used to continue reviewing local activity data gathering on educational functioning level gains and the number of participants post-tested. This review process allows the program staff to thoroughly assess program operations.

- The AIS is also used to analyze the reported performance data. To perform this analysis, the process conducted at the State and local levels is based on the data collected by the service providers and uploaded to the Adult Information System (AIS) at the AEP central level. A detailed data review and validation of each data indicator is performed by the central office. The specific identified anomalies are checked for corrections. The errors, when identified, are resolved by telephone calls and discussion of the raw data indicators with the education centers directors, teachers, and counselors at each center.

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

- c) State policies that support the implementation of the State's strategies (for example, co-enrollment policies and universal intake processes where appropriate). In addition, provide the State's guidelines for State-administered one-stop partner programs' contributions to a one-stop delivery system and any additional guidance for one-stop partner contributions.

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

Table 30. State Policies and Procedures

1	DDEC-WIOA-07-2023	Compliance Guidance of Expenditures of Fund in in Government Public Outreach in an Election Year
2	WIOA-PP-05-2021-amended December 12, 2023	Guidelines to Programmatic Data Validation for Title I Programs under WIOA
3	WIOA-PP-03-2020-amended 1, December 12, 2023	Selection of Eligible Youth Service Providers
4	WIOA-PP-02-2021-amended 1,December 12, 2023	Procedure and Requirements for the Subsequent Designation and Redesignation of Local Workforce Development Areas under WIOA
5	WIOA-PP-08-2023	Travel expenses and representation expenses (per diem) for attendance at Local Workforce Development Board meetings
6	WIOA-PP-07-2023	Transfer of funds between the Adult and Dislocated Workers Programs
7	WIOA-06-2023	Plan for the Operations of AJC after Emergencies
8	WIOA-PP-05-2023	Transitional Jobs for Adults and Dislocated Workers
9	WIOA-PP-04-2023	Work Experience under the Adult, Dislocated Workers, and Youth Programs

10	WIOA-PP-03-2023	Support services and "Needs Related Payments (NRPs)"
11	WIOA-PP-02-2023	Priority of Services in Title I Adult Program
12	DDEC-WIOA-PP-01-2023	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA)
13	DDEC-WIOA-05-2023	21ST Century Techforce Puerto Rico
14	DDEC-WIOA-04-2023	Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDA) faculty to provide a summer bonus as part of fringe benefits to their employees
15	DDEC-WIOA-03-2023	Instruction for Use the PRIS Participant Module (PRIS 2.0)
16	DDEC-WIOA-02-2023	New Workforce Brand "Conexión Laboral"
17	DDEC-WIOA-01-2023	Guide to Procurement of Legal Services in the WDLA
18	WIOA-PP-04-22 – Amendment 1	Work-Based Training (WBT) activities under WIOA
19	DDEC-WIOA-08-2022	Launch of the new brand "Conexión Laboral". This policy establishes the creation of a unified brand and image to promote and maximize the participation and services offered by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act ("WIOA").

20	DDEC-WIOA-07-2022	Participation of LWDA Employees in Emergency Relief in Municipalities Affected by Hurricane Fiona
21	DDEC-WIOA-06-2022	Appointing Authority for Executive Directors of Local Workforce Development Areas
22	DDEC-WIOA-05-2022	Applicability of Law No. 47 of 2021, on Minimum Wage to Municipal Consortia and Program Participants under the WIOA Act
23	DDEC-WIOA-004-2022	Applicability of 29CFR38 and 29USC3248 (WIOA) to the provision of services in One-Stop or One-Stop Partners, statutes, and prohibition of discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, age, disability, gender, place of residence, political affiliation, or belief, in the provision of services.
24	DDEC-WIOA-03-2022	Guide to Allowable and Non-Permissible Costs with WIOA Funds
25	DDEC-WIOA-02-2022	Policy related to allowable expenses to travels paid with WIOA Funds
26	DDEC-WIOA-01-2022	Visits and Face-to-Face Services to the T&Cs/AJC
27	DDEC-WIOA-05-2021	Guide to Programmatic Data Validation under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Program

28	Carta Circular DDEC-WIOA- 04-2021	Faculty of local areas to pay a summer bonus as part of fringe benefits to their employees
29	DDEC-WIOA- 03-2021	Prohibition of total closure of the AJC during the administrative closures decreed by the municipalities
30	DDEC-WIOA- 02-2021	Procedure for subsequent designation and re-designation of local areas - To provide guidance and process for the designation and subsequent designation of Workforce Development Areas.
31	DDEC- WIOA- 01- 2021	Policy to comply with the Sunshine Provision for Local Board activities under the Workforce Opportunity and Innovation Act WIOA
32	RESOLUCION NUM 01-2021	State Board Resolution No. 01-2020 to Temporary Jobs
33	DDEC WIOA- RR-02-20	Public Policy to allocation of funds for COVID Prevention
34	DDEC-WIOA- 11-20	Financial Reports - Close-Out Reports
35	DDEC-WIOA- 10-20	Payroll Cost Allocation Policy - Guidelines and procedures for payroll base on budget
36	DDEC-WIOA- 09-20	Cost allocation and fund reimbursement
37	DDEC-WIOA- 08-20	Case Management and Record-Keeping Policy

38	DDEC-WIOA-07-20	Procedure for the follow-up service required by WIOA for participants of the Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Programs
39	DDEC-WIOA-06-20	TAA Definition of eligible displacement area
40	DDEC-WIOA-05-20	TAA Training - Requirements when approving Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Training funds request.
41	DDEC-WIOA-04-20	Guidelines to the process of certification, recertification, and decertification of Local Boards
42	WIOA-03-20	WIOA-03-20 - Policy for the Competitive Selection of Eligible Youth Service Providers
43	DDEC-WIOA-02-20	DDEC-WIOA-02-20 - Technical Assistance Guidelines to 14 elements of youth program - Guide to define concepts, eligibility, and other aspects related to the youth program
44	DDEC-WIOA-RR-01-20	Policy for COVID-19 Layoff Aversion Fund
45	WIOA 03-2017	Circular Letter on Public Policy and Requirements for Publicity, Transparency, Openness and Disclosure of Local Board Affairs
46	WIOA 2-2017	Guideline to the Competitive Selection of One Stop Center Operators - American Job Center
47	WIOA 01-2017	Policy to the development of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and IFA with AJC partners

48	State Board Rule	Internal Rule of the State Board
49	State Board Sanctions	Policy to establish the procedure for the determination of WIOA rules violations and the imposition of state board sanctions

MOU and IFA policy

The WDP developed the public policy **WIOA- 01-2017, a Process to Develop the Memorandums of Understanding**, issued on April 24, 2017, distributed to the presidents of the Local Boards, CEO, and Partners of the AJC. It establishes the legal basis and process for Local Boards and partners to negotiate memorandums of understanding. The policy entitled **Guide to the Preparation of the Infrastructure Financing Agreement (IFA) and Resource Allocation** was prepared using as reference *TEGL 17-16, Infrastructure Funding of the One-Stop Delivery System*. The WIOA-01-2017 policy sets the parameters for negotiation and the content that the agreement should have. The development of local memorandums is based on the state agreement signed by the grantees of the partner programs of the system.

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

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

1. **Universal Access:** All clients, including those with barriers to employment, will have access to job search, training, and occupational services in all AJCs and will also be

provided with information leading to decision-making targeting career development and the employment market.

2. Service in the One-Stop System: All clients can explore career development and job preparation services and access information on employment opportunities.
3. Individual Choice: Customers will be able to choose from a variety of careers, skills, employment, and training information to obtain the services and skills they need to increase their employability opportunities based on individual needs, which will be nurtured by the advice and escape of AJC staff.
4. Regional Development: Create a labor development system that promotes the regional labor market's skills and improves the economic development of the Region and Local Area. Services such as commas, tax credits, incentives, and labor market information must be accessible within the AJC.
5. Cost-efficiency: All customers must have access to a system that minimizes costs and promotes the participation of employers and job seekers who use the system so that services do not double.
6. WIOA emphasizes full and active collaboration, good-faith negotiation, and the best agreement between the parties regarding services, costs, resources, and other provisions related to the best and most efficient Single Gestion System, which is required by law and other applicable regulations.

MOU must contain at least the following information:

1. Description of the services to be provided through the AJC, including how those services will be coordinated and provided.
2. A fiscal plan on how the costs of services and system operation will be subsidized, including infrastructure, operational, and hared costs.

3. Methods for referral of individuals between the operator/ is of the UGC-AJC and partners for the service and activity concerned.
4. Methods to ensure that the needs of workers, youth, and individuals with barriers to employment, including individuals with disabilities, are addressed through the provision of appropriate services, including access to technology and materials available in the UGC-AJC.
5. Description of the reports that each partner must produce under the program/agency regulation it represents concerning the services it provides in the UGC-AJC, who and how he will be responsible for collecting and submitting the required information.
6. Description of the services to be provided through the AJC UGC, including how those services will be coordinated and provided.
7. Duration of MOU and procedures for amending and/or reviewing it.
8. Guarantees that each MOU will be reviewed, at least every three (3) years so that appropriate funds are allocated, and the provision of services is ensured.
9. MOU must be updated in a period of no more than three (3) years to reflect any changes in signers and cost sharing.
10. If a partner using the process described in section 678.750 of the WIOA Final Rule appeals to the determination of the assigned infrastructure cost, resulting in a change in the WIOA's contribution to infrastructure costs, the MOU must be updated to show such a determination.
11. The determination of the format that the MOU will have been of the Local Board, also complying with the requirements set out in section 678.500 of the WIOA Interpretative Regulations and with any other provisions by the State.
12. The MOU may contain any other provision agreed upon by the parties, which must be consistent with WIOA Title I and its Regulations, Laws and regulations related to

programs administered by partners and other applicable legal regulations. Such additional provisions may not contravene the provisions of this Circular Charter.

Availability of Career Services and Employer Services

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

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

Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA) and Resource Allocation Guidelines

Infrastructure Funding of the One-Stop Delivery System (AFI) and Resource Allocation Agreement Guidelines were prepared using TEGL 17-16, Infrastructure Funding of the One-Stop Delivery System. The WIOA-01-2017 policy sets the parameters for the negotiations of the one-stop center cost allocation. The allocation and distribution among AJC core programs and infrastructure costs are governed by WIOA Section 121(h), its Final Regulations, and the Federal Cost Principles contained in the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Principal Costs, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards of 2 CFR Part 200 (Uniform Guidance).

1. All programs must contribute to infrastructure costs and certain additional costs, comma required by 20 CFR 678.700 and 678.760, 34 CFR 361.700 and 361.760, and 34 CFR 463.700 and 463.760, respectively. Under federal cost principles, a member's contribution must be reasonable, necessary, and assignable to the program.
2. The Guide describes the governor's responsibilities, the State and State board, the Local Board, CEOs, and partners to determine infrastructure costs and their roles in the development of Local Financing Mechanisms (LFMs) and State Financing Mechanisms (MFS).
3. All costs incurred in the operation of the AJC must be allocated in compliance with federal cost principles and by using an accepted cost allocation methodology. These methodologies should be described in an Infrastructure Financing Agreement (IFA), in which each Local Board must submit to the State along with the Memorandum of Understanding and the Local Plan.
4. The IFA must be certified and approved by the AJC Operator and each required and optional partner.
5. Consistent with 20 CFR 678.755, 34 CFR 361.755 and 34 CFR 463.755, IFA must include the following elements:
 - a. the validity of the IFA (which may differ from that of the MOU);

- b. identification of the infrastructure cost budget, which is a component of AJC's operational budget;
- c. identification of all AJC partners, the CEO(s) and the Local Board participating in the IFA;
- d. a description of the process for periodic review and modification to ensure equitable benefits between partners in the agreement;
- e. information on the Local Board's measures, the CEO(s), and the core partners to reach consensus or ensure that the Local Area followed the state financing process (SFM);
- f. a description of the process to be used among partners to resolve infrastructure financing issues during the MOU's duration, in cases where no consensus is reached.

Infrastructure Financing Mechanisms

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

AJC Operational Costs

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

references on infrastructure costs can be found in sections 20 CFR 678.755, 34 CFR 361.755, and 34 CFR 463.755

1. **Infrastructure Costs** -Infrastructure costs are defined as the overall operating costs of the AJC, not related to the payment of human resources (salaries, or marginal benefits, among others), and may include the rental of physical facilities, utilities and maintenance, equipment (including products related to evaluation and technological assistance for persons with disabilities) and technology to facilitate access to the JJ (including planning activities and candidate search (outreach)) and may include the costs associated with establishing the identifier American Job Center (AJC) and related materials, as defined in Uniform Guidance 2 CFR 200.94, necessary for the operation of the center. Include:
2. **Non-personnel costs** - Non-personnel costs are all costs that are not compensation for personal services
3. **Personnel costs** -. In contrast to non-personnel costs for the one-stop system, personnel costs include salaries, wages, and fringe benefits of the employees of partner programs or their sub-recipients, as described in 2 CFR 200.430 (Compensation – personal services) and 2 CFR 200.431 (Compensation – fringe benefits) of the Uniform Guidance.
4. **Additional Costs**- One-stop partners must share in additional costs, which must include applicable career services, and may include shared operating costs and shared services necessary for the general operation of the one-stop center.
5. **Career Services** - One-stop partners must ensure that at least some career services, described in WIOA sec. 134(c)(2), are provided at the one-stop center.
6. **Shared Operating Costs and Shared Services** - One-stop partners may also share other costs that support the operations of the one-stop centers and the costs of shared services. The costs of shared services may include initial intake, assessment of needs, appraisal of basic skills, identification of appropriate services to meet such needs,

referrals to other one-stop partners, and business services (WIOA sec. 121(i)(2), 20 CFR 678.760, 34 CFR 361.760, and 34 CFR 463.760, respectively).

Funding Types and Sources.

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

Uniform Guidance – Federal Cost Principles

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

Proportionate Use

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

Relative Benefit

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

Partner Programs with Multiple Grant Recipients

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

Cost Allocation

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

1. Definition of Allocation of 2 CFR 200.4

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

2. Assignable Cost

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

3. Allocation Methodologies.

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

4. Allocation Bases

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

5. Inputs

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

6. Outputs

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

Basic Cost Allocation Principles

1. Allowable Costs

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

2. Reasonable Costs

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

1. Whether the cost is of a type recognized as normal and necessary for the operation of the organization or the management of the assignment.

2. The requirements or restrictions imposed by factors such as generally accepted business practices, state and federal laws, regulations and terms and conditions of the allocation.
3. If the individuals and/or parties concerned act prudently within the circumstances, considering their responsibilities to the organization, its members, employees, customers, the public and public interest.
4. Important deviations from established organizational practices can unreasonably increase operating costs.

3. Assignable Costs

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

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

4. Benefits

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

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

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

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

1. An organizational chart that identifies all partners, type of services and staff functions.
2. A description of the types of services and programs delivered at the center.
3. A copy of the official budget that includes all the costs to operate the AJC.
4. A description of the methods used in allocating expenses for each cost objective that includes the following:
 - a. A narrative description of the methodology for the allocation of expenses for each cost objective.
 - b. An overview of direct costs and cost types.
 - c. A list of indirect costs, pool costs, basis for the allocation of each pool cost type, and supporting documentation for each allocation base.
 - d. A summary of the allocation of the costs of the core services allocated for the operation of the AJC.
 - e. A certification from the AJC operator that the cost allocation methodology has been prepared in accordance with the guidelines and instructions given by the State. If the AJC wishes to certify your PAC, you can use a certification statement developed by the Local Board.

Factors to Develop a PAC

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

Example of a Cost Allocation Process

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

Certification of the AJC Infrastructure Financing Agreement

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

AJC Partners Integration

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

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

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

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

- Case Management

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

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

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

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

Public policy requires DEDC and local areas to take affirmative action to prevent inequality, discrimination, and harassment in apprenticeship programs and services. DEDC as a recipient and administrator of WIOA federal funds affirms and pursues to ensure that the precepts of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility are respected among visitors, applicants, recipients of WIOA Program benefits, as well as within its own WDP employees and Local Area employees. Going forward, WDP staff, as well as all LWDA staff, should work to identify strategies to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, and to eliminate, where applicable, barriers to equity when doing work related to programs funded

in whole or in part by WIOA in such a way that all individuals, regardless of their social or economic conditions, their gender identity, their sexual orientation, their race, their religious ideology, their participation or identification with ethnic groups

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

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

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

As part of this policy, DEDC will promote a data-driven approach that promotes diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in the workplace while protecting employee privacy by

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

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

LWDA Navigators

J-PAL North America State Innovation Initiative Grant

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

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

- i an initial skill diagnosis.
- ii offering support in developing individual action plans and motivating and encouraging their implementation.
- iii connecting clients with job opportunities, both in the local area and beyond.
- iv providing information on high-demand occupations, including earnings, and skill requirements to broaden search horizons.
- v delivering instruction on using job search engines effectively.
- vi assisting clients in crafting resumes, preparing for interviews, signaling their skills, and exploring opportunities for career advancement, among other activities that facilitate the matching between clients and suitable employment opportunities. Once employment is secured, clients will continue to benefit from an array of services:
 - vii receiving ongoing guidance to address challenges associated with job retention and accessing the necessary assistance to further their careers, with support provided for a period of six months post-employment.

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

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

workforce development efforts and streamline career guidance services for program participants.

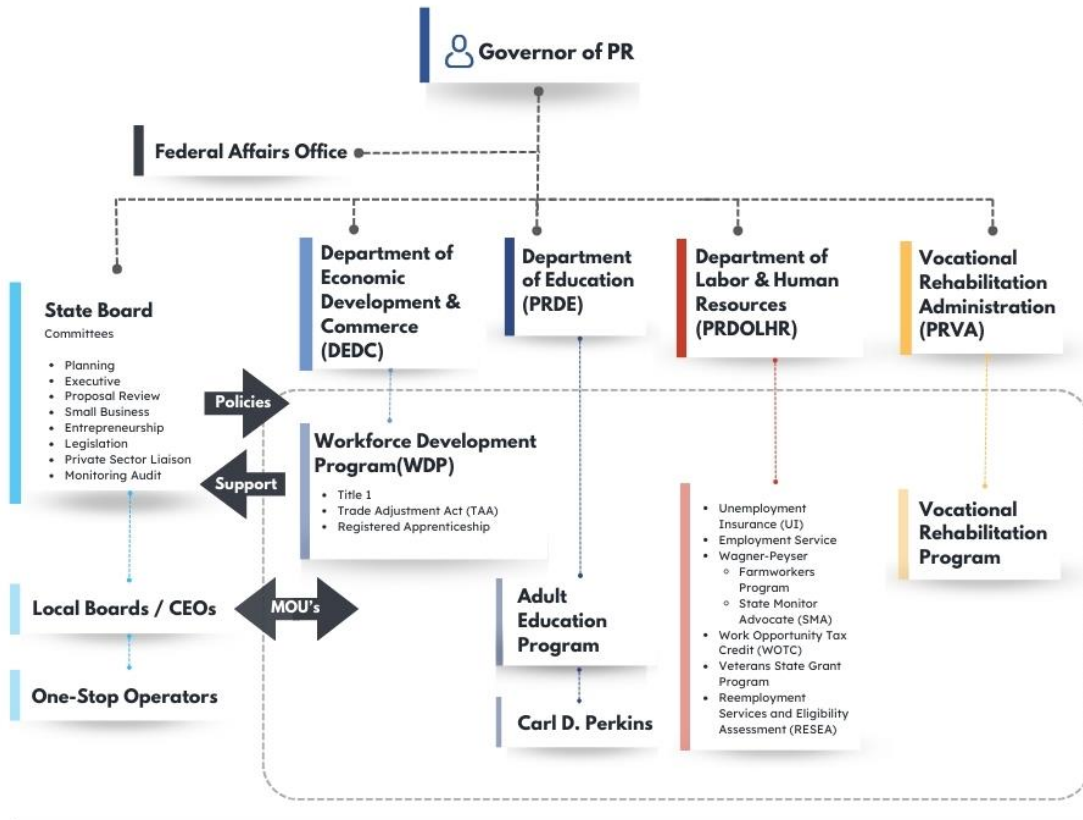
(D) State Program and State Board Overview.

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

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

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

Figure 4. Analysis of Workforce Development:



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

Figure 5. DEDC Organization Chart

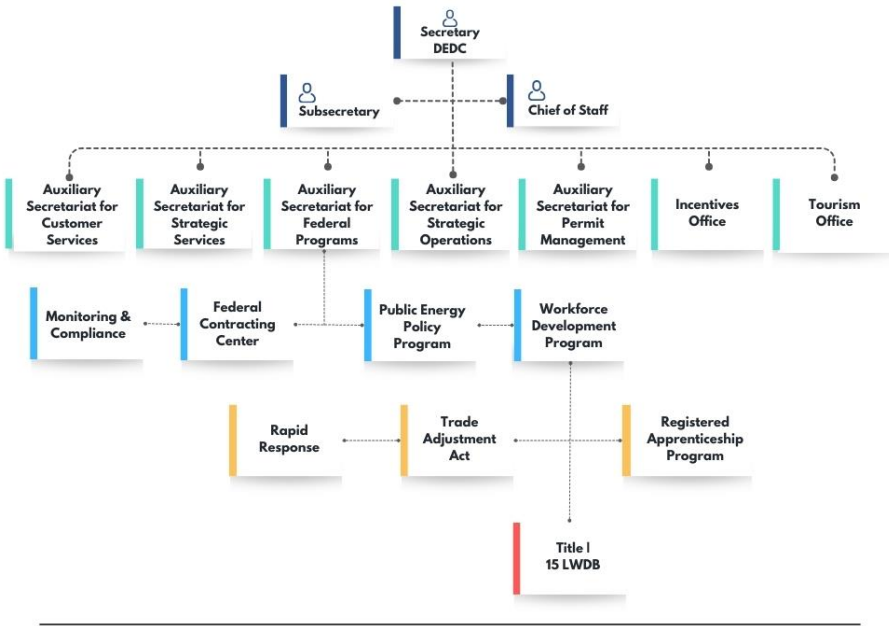
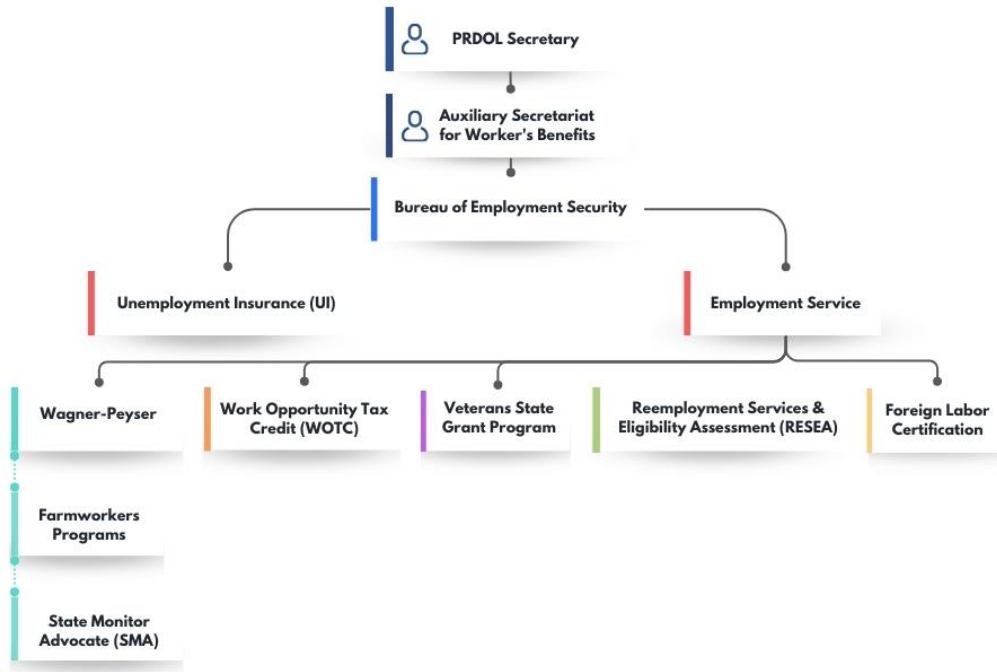


Figure 6. PRDE Organization Chart

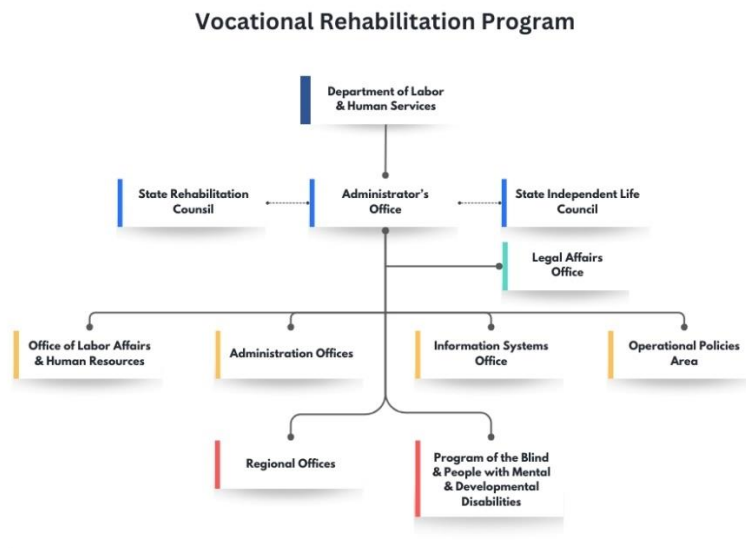


Figure 7. PRDOL Organization Chart



DR

Figure 8. VRA Organization Chart



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

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

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

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

administrative processes within the Budget, Finance, Purchasing, Documents, and General Services Divisions.

(i) State Board. Provide a description of State Board activities that will assist State Board members and staff in conducting State Board functions effectively. In addition, provide a membership roster for the State Board consistent with 20 CFR 679.110-120, including members’ organizational affiliations and position titles.

Table 31. PR State Workforce Board Members

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

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

State Workforce Development Board (WIOA)

Sector	Name	Position / Organization
Governor’s Office	Lcdo. Yamil J. Ayala Cruz	Governor of PR representative
Chamber of the State Legislature Representatives	Hon. Domingo H. Torres García	Representative, Chamber of Representatives
	Vacant	Representative, Senate of PR
Government Representatives	Hon. Manuel Cidre Miranda	Secretary, DEDC

	Hon. Yanira Raíces Vega	Secretary, DE
	Hon. Gabriel Maldonado González	Secretary, DLHR
	Dra. María M. Gómez García	Administrator, VRA
	Hon. Lornna J. Soto Villanueva	Mayor, Canóvanas Municipality
	Hon. Jaime Alverio Ramos	Mayor, San Lorenzo Municipality
Representatives of Businesses or	Mrs. Viviane Fortuño Cosimi PRESIDENT SB	President, CTI Consulting Group
	Mrs. Ivis E. González Rosa SECRETARY SB	President Del Carmen Pharmacy
	Mr. José E. Vázquez Barquet, Ph.D.	President, Subway Restaurants
	Lcda. Julybeth Alicea Rodríguez, esq.	Human Resources Manager, International Aireko Construction

	Mrs. Sonia E. Navarro González	President, Fina Consulting Group
	Mrs. Bettina Mercado	President Bettina Cosmetics
	Lcdo. Juan A. Alvarado Zayas, CPA	Administrator, Alvarado Tax & Business Advisors
	CPA Carl R. Leyva Ramos	Senior Associate, Carl Leyva & Associates, Corp.
	Lcdo. Luis A. Gierbolini Rodríguez	President Gierbolini Consulting Group

Note: Board vacancies are pending Governor's appointments.

Board Activities

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

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

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

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

- Developing and implementing the State Unified Plan and performance measures.
- Formulating and expanding strategies for partnerships in in-demand sectors/occupations.
- Crafting and aligning policies to meet workforce development goals.
- Overseeing the development and continuous improvement of the one-stop delivery system.
- Formulating policies and guidance pertaining to the role and resource contribution of one-stop partners.

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

The executive committee's responsibilities encompass overseeing the strategic plan implementation, monitoring workgroup plans and progress, aligning workgroups, advocating for efficiency and cooperation, overseeing strategies for education and business

outreach, and providing recommendations to the Governor on geographic designations for workforce development areas.

A key priority of the PRSWDB is enhancing information technology functions, focusing on technological integration with Labor Development System partners, online availability, and responsive career information. Emphasis is also placed on performance functions, concentrating on continuous improvement and contributions to achieving the PR State Unified Plan goals. The performance system evaluates process and outcome measures related to WIOA performance common measures and other relevant areas.

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

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

Fostering Career Pathways for Individuals with Disabilities

The PRDE-AEP is actively engaged in implementing a comprehensive career pathways program, which operates based on a meticulously crafted strategic plan consisting of nine core components:

5. Establishing Strategic Partnerships
6. Cultivating a Career Pathways Culture
7. Analyzing Labor Market Information (LMI)

8. Integrating Career Pathways in Onboarding Processes
9. Developing Student Education and Career Plans
10. Providing Intensive Advising
11. Delivering Instruction within a Career Pathways Model
12. Offering Support Services
13. Ensuring Sustainability for Continuous Improvement

Throughout the 2021-2022 period, a total of 50 service providers, 50 counselors, and 50 conversational English teachers underwent comprehensive training in career pathway plan development. This six-week workshop program, hosted by a national expert, was conducted in collaboration with the Puerto Rico Department of Education Adult Education Program (PRDE-AEP).

The strategy encompasses the execution of memoranda of understanding with the 15 local workforce development boards and their respective One-Stop Centers.

VRA Initiatives:

1. Seek guidance from the Advocacy Office for People with Disabilities to aid One-Stop Centers (American Job Centers) in maintaining compliance with accessibility policies that benefit individuals with disabilities. The office provides technical assistance, including accessibility guides in line with current legislation.
2. Evaluate the public policies of the American Job Centers and offer recommendations for enhancement.
3. Provide advice to the American Job Center in Guaynabo, Puerto Rico, to procure tests and instruments for assessing the interests, aptitudes, academic skills, and learning styles of individuals with disabilities.

4. Collaborate with American Job Centers to utilize the Accessibility Study Form, offering guidance on content and implementation with the expertise of VRA Occupational Therapists.
5. Conduct a Workshop on Sensitivity towards the Population with Disabilities for the staff of all American Job Centers, with a focus on blindness, deafness, and physical impairments.

(4) Assessment and Evaluation of Programs and One-Stop Program Partners.

(a) Assessment of Core and One-Stop Program Partner Programs. Describe how the core programs will be assessed each year based on the State performance accountability measures described in Section 116(b) of the WIOA. Describe how other one-stop delivery system partner program services and Combined State Plan partner programs included in the plan will be assessed annually. This State assessment must include the quality, effectiveness, and improvement of programs broken down by local areas or providers. State assessments should consider the local and regional planning goals.

The respective administrative State agency will do an assessment of core programs. Core programs are assessed each year based upon actual performance relative to federally required negotiated performance levels in the state and local areas. Performance assessments are conducted quarterly and annually through data validation and compliance with WIOA requirements and subsequent reporting to USDOL and USDOE.

The State Board meets regularly throughout the year with an agenda to assess performance and expenditure in LWDB. At the end of each quarter, the WDP prepares a report on the performance rates and expenses levels, which is sent to the CEO and the President of the Local Board. These reports are used in monthly meetings with all local workforce development boards to show how each LWDB is performing against its locally negotiated targets for each measure and rate of expenditure. In addition, state-level teams provide technical assistance to local boards on any performance issues.

DEDC Programmatic Monitoring Unit conducts annual participant file reviews and monitoring of the WIOA Adult, Youth, and Dislocated Worker programs in the 15 LWDBs. These reviews ensure the LWDBs adhere to Federal, state program requirements, and

provide appropriate services. In addition, a formal written monitoring report identifying best practices, areas of concern, and findings resulting from the review are generated upon completion of each review.

PR has already completed the development of the Statistical Adjustment Model (SAM).

program performance goals. SAM is the primary tool that will be used by the state board and governor to evaluate the performance and delivery of services at the AJCs. It will help to assess the Title I programs each year based on State performance accountability measures described in section 116(b) of WIOA. SAM outcomes will provide the state board and governor quality data to assess the effectiveness and improvement of programs by local area.

The guidance provided in “Procedimiento para la Determinación de Violaciones y la Imposición de Sanciones de WIOA,” provides for consequences to local boards in situations indicating a pattern of low performance, and programmatic and financial deficiencies found during quality assurance monitoring reviews.

Title I-B

The State will continue to assess the program based on the results of fiscal and programmatic monitoring, customer satisfaction surveys, and the analysis performance and accountability measures.

Adult Education

Section 212 of WIOA requires a description of how the eligible agency will evaluate annually the effectiveness of adult education and literacy activities based on the performance measures described in section 116. The evaluation will address the extent to which local providers have implemented each of the thirteen required activities specified in Section 231 and will focus in two key features: a formative evaluation is conducted to assure quality of program management by tracking the effectiveness of program development and implementation; followed by a summative evaluation that documents the educational impact

on learners, and determines the extent to which populations specified in the State Plan are served.

The project staff, together with the evaluator, design and formalize the evaluation plan. The evaluation tasks are divided into the following tasks:

- Documenting the project's implementation process;
- Periodically aligning program elements with program goals;
- Monitoring outcomes and impact;
- Following up on studies of former participants;
- Measuring the effectiveness of teacher training; and
- Assessing the extent to which adult education goals and objectives of individuals with barriers to employment and ensuring their access, and other special populations have been met.

The evaluation plan will yield both quantitative and qualitative data, needed to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the program's functions and services. The program evaluator will utilize a combination of strategies, which include but are not limited to Pre and post inquiries; Surveys; Interviews; Standardized tests; Placement tests; Attendance records; Observations; and Questionnaires.

The product of the evaluation will include:

- Applicable information about the effectiveness of the Section 231 grant program
- Characteristics of the adult learners
- Improvements in literacy levels and educational gains of learners
- Analysis of learner goal attainment

- Outcomes of performance standards
- Services provided

The outcome reports will include the new requirements of the National Reporting System (NRS).

Pursuant to Section 116 of the Adult Education and Literacy Act, each local provider must report student progress measures obtained from all students who have attended at least twelve (12) hours of instruction in programs receiving Section 231 federal supplemental funds. The evaluation activities will require local providers to:

- Collect and analyze student performance and program improvement data;
- Determine performance levels on standard and core indicators;
- Identify needs and support services; and
- Implement continuous improvement initiatives to meet performance levels for standards and core indicators.

Documented progress of student performance measures must include at a minimum:

- Literacy skill level improvements in reading, writing, and speaking the English Language, English language acquisition, problem solving, numeric, and other literacy skills;
- Placement in, retention in, or completion of post-secondary education, training, or unsubsidized employment or career advancement;
- A secondary school diploma or its equivalent; and
- Attainment of student learning goals.

All participating local providers will be required to maintain individual student records for all students who have attended 12 hours of instruction. Each record must contain:

- Student identification and Intake information;
- Demographic data;
- Attendance data;
- Assessment data;
- Attainment data; and
- Other relevant information as specified by the data management system.

Monitoring of providers

The Puerto Rico Department of Education Adult Education Services continues to promote its comprehensive accountability system to determine program effectiveness and measure the progress of local providers towards continuous improvement. The agency reviews program delivery strategies, processes, and evaluation data to support and improve the literacy services provided and to optimize the return of the investment of federal funds in adult education literacy activities.

Monitoring processes include risk monitoring to determine that the allocated funds are used efficiently; monitor files to validate that local programs meet the eligibility criteria of the participants; and programmatic and fiscal monitoring. Said monitoring activities will be conducted each school year, to demonstrate compliance with the applicable program regulations. The monitoring effort will continue throughout the Plan and will include:

- **Mid-year Reports** - The Puerto Rico Adult Education Program requires all local providers to submit quarterly reports that reflect participation levels for the first three months.
- **Annual Program Evaluation** - The Program conducts continuous comprehensive program evaluation. This evaluation includes all participating local providers and uses surveys of all local providers, on-site observations, and interviews. It provides recommendations for state level planning and development activities for the

following year. It will also identify the best practices and emerging needs in conjunction with the training and technical assistance needed for local providers to establish high quality, effective instructional programs to the targeted populations specified in the State Plan.

- **Student Follow-up** - The Adult Information System's report submitted to the USDOE will reflect the grantee's progress in achieving the objectives in the application of the program and the effect of the program on participants served.

Vocational Rehabilitation

The agency will assess its performance accountability measures, described in section 116(b) of WIOA, through:

- Reports on WIOA indicators based on data gathered through the case management system;
- Satisfaction surveys to customers, employers, and Community Rehabilitation Programs;
- Compliance with strategies established in the VR Portion of the Plan; and
- Internal programmatic monitoring.

To collect data for the WIOA performance indicators, PRVRA staff will follow-up on customers and request data on employment and wages records from other agencies.

The VRA has developed the following strategies to assist other WIOA components in helping people with disabilities:

1. Coordinate the participation of VRA staff in the American Job Centers [AJC] to properly channel the needs of those with disabilities who request information and service in such centers.
2. Identify possible referrals to the services of the VRA.

3. Provide the AJC staff with guidance on several topics of interest that are requested related to people with disabilities.
4. Actively participate in job fairs coordinated by the AJC.
5. Exchange of employment networks/employers.

B. Assessment of One-Stop Partner Programs

(a) Describe how other one-stop delivery system partner program services and Combined State Plan partner programs included in the plan will be assessed each year. State assessments should consider local and regional planning goals.

The respective administrative State agency will do an assessment of core programs. Core programs are assessed each year based upon actual performance relative to federally required negotiated performance levels in the state and local areas. Performance assessments are conducted quarterly and annually through data validation and compliance with WIOA requirements and subsequent reporting to USDOL and USDOE.

The State Board meets regularly throughout the year with an agenda to assess performance and expenditure in LWDB. At the end of each quarter, the WDP prepares a report on the performance rates and expenses levels, which is sent to the CEO and the President of the Local Board. These reports are used in monthly meetings with all local workforce development boards to show how each LWDB is performing against its locally negotiated targets for each measure and rate of expenditure. In addition, state-level teams provide technical assistance to local boards on any performance issues.

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program performance goals. SAM is the primary tool that will be used by the state board and governor to evaluate the performance and delivery of services at the AJCs. It will help to assess the Title I programs each year based on State performance accountability measures described in section 116(b) of WIOA. SAM outcomes will provide the state board and governor quality data to assess the effectiveness and improvement of programs by local area.

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Title I-B

The State will continue to assess the program based on the results of fiscal and programmatic monitoring, customer satisfaction surveys, and the analysis performance and accountability measures.

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The project staff, together with the evaluator, design and formalize the evaluation plan. The evaluation tasks are divided into the following tasks:

- Documenting the project's implementation process;
- Periodically aligning program elements with program goals;
- Monitoring outcomes and impact;
- Following up on studies of former participants;
- Measuring the effectiveness of teacher training; and
- Assessing the extent to which adult education goals and objectives of individuals with barriers to employment and ensuring their access, and other special populations have been met.

The evaluation plan will yield both quantitative and qualitative data, needed to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the program's functions and services. The program evaluator will utilize a combination of strategies, which include but are not limited to Pre and post inquiries; Surveys; Interviews; Standardized tests; Placement tests; Attendance records; Observations; and Questionnaires.

The product of the evaluation will include:

- Applicable information about the effectiveness of the Section 231 grant program
- Characteristics of the adult learners
- Improvements in literacy levels and educational gains of learners
- Analysis of learner goal attainment
- Outcomes of performance standards
- Services provided

The outcome reports will include the new requirements of the National Reporting System (NRS).

Pursuant to Section 116 of the Adult Education and Literacy Act, each local provider must report student progress measures obtained from all students who have attended at least twelve (12) hours of instruction in programs receiving Section 231 federal supplemental funds. The evaluation activities will require local providers to:

- Collect and analyze student performance and program improvement data;
- Determine performance levels on standard and core indicators;
- Identify needs and support services; and
- Implement continuous improvement initiatives to meet performance levels for standards and core indicators.

Documented progress of student performance measures must include at a minimum:

- Literacy skill level improvements in reading, writing, and speaking the English Language, English language acquisition, problem solving, numeric, and other literacy skills;
- Placement in, retention in, or completion of post-secondary education, training, or unsubsidized employment or career advancement;
- A secondary school diploma or its equivalent; and
- Attainment of student learning goals.

All participating local providers will be required to maintain individual student records for all students who have attended 12 hours of instruction. Each record must contain:

- Student identification and Intake information;
- Demographic data;
- Attendance data;

- Assessment data;
- Attainment data; and
- Other relevant information as specified by the data management system.

Monitoring of providers

The Puerto Rico Department of Education Adult Education Services continues to promote its comprehensive accountability system to determine program effectiveness and measure the progress of local providers towards continuous improvement. The agency reviews program delivery strategies, processes, and evaluation data to support and improve the literacy services provided and to optimize the return of the investment of federal funds in adult education literacy activities.

Monitoring processes include risk monitoring to determine that the allocated funds are used efficiently; monitor files to validate that local programs meet the eligibility criteria of the participants; and programmatic and fiscal monitoring. Said monitoring activities will be conducted each school year, to demonstrate compliance with the applicable program regulations. The monitoring effort will continue throughout the Plan and will include:

- **Mid-year Reports** - The Puerto Rico Adult Education Program requires all local providers to submit quarterly reports that reflect participation levels for the first three months.
- **Annual Program Evaluation** - The Program conducts continuous comprehensive program evaluation. This evaluation includes all participating local providers and uses surveys of all local providers, on-site observations, and interviews. It provides recommendations for state level planning and development activities for the following year. It will also identify the best practices and emerging needs in conjunction with the training and technical assistance needed for local providers to establish high quality, effective instructional programs to the targeted populations specified in the State Plan.

- **Student Follow-up** - The Adult Information System's report submitted to the USDOE will reflect the grantee's progress in achieving the objectives in the application of the program and the effect of the program on participants served.

Vocational Rehabilitation

The agency will assess its performance accountability measures, described in section 116(b) of WIOA, through:

- Reports on WIOA indicators based on data gathered through the case management system;
- Satisfaction surveys to customers, employers, and Community Rehabilitation Programs;
- Compliance with strategies established in the VR Portion of the Plan; and
- Internal programmatic monitoring.

To collect data for the WIOA performance indicators, PRVRA staff will follow-up on customers and request data on employment and wages records from other agencies.

The VRA has developed the following strategies to assist other WIOA components in helping people with disabilities:

1. Coordinate the participation of VRA staff in the American Job Centers [AJC] to properly channel the needs of those with disabilities who request information and service in such centers.
2. Identify possible referrals to the services of the VRA.
3. Provide the AJC staff with guidance on several topics of interest that are requested related to people with disabilities.
4. Actively participate in job fairs coordinated by the AJC.

5. Exchange of employment networks/employers.

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

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

(A) Previous Assessment Results. For each four-year state plan and state plan modification, provide the results of assessments of the effectiveness of the core programs and other one-stop partner programs and Combined State Plan partner programs included in the Unified or Combined State plan during the preceding 2-year period (i.e., the 2-year period of the plan modification cycle), in accordance with methods described in 4(A). Describe how the State adapts its strategies based on these assessments. Beginning with the state plan modification in 2018 and for subsequent state plans and state plan modifications, provide the results of assessments of the effectiveness of the core programs and other one-stop partner programs and Combined State Plan partner programs included in the Unified or Combined State plan during the preceding 2-year period (i.e., the 2-year period of the plan modification cycle). Describe how the State is adapting its strategies based on these assessments.

Beginning with the state plan modification in 2018 and for subsequent state plans and state plan modifications, provide the results of assessments of the effectiveness of the core programs and other one-stop partner programs and Combined State Plan partner programs included in the Unified or Combined State plan during the preceding 2-year period (i.e., the 2-year period of the plan modification cycle). Describe how the State is adapting its strategies based on these assessments.

Title I Programs Assessments

The Monitoring and Compliance Division of DEDC assesses the Operational, Administrative, and Fiscal Systems using the DEDC Monitoring Rule and the Resolution of Audit Reports of WIOA grants and other funds allocated by USDOL. The DEDC rule defines monitoring as a continuous process of structured assessment of the operations of local areas and sub-recipients to identify at an early stage those inappropriate practices that may result in non-compliance with the purposes of the act and the 20 CFR.

Some of the objectives established in the State Monitoring System, as instituted in the current rule, are:

- Conduct annual on-site monitoring reviews of local areas' compliance with 2 CFR part 200, as required by sec. 184(a)(3) of WIOA.
- Verify expenditures have been made against the proper cost categories and within the cost limitations specified in WIOA and the regulations.
- Determine the compliance with WIOA regulations and other applicable laws
- Verify that services to participants qualify for Title I programs and as specified in the Local Plan and annual funding allocation plan.
- Evaluate the internal control structure concerning these objectives to determine the risk of illegal acts or violations of the Allocation Contract, Applicable Laws, or Regulations.
- Expand the analysis conducted by DEC units regarding financial reports, identify any deviation or unexpected result reflected in the reports, and corrective actions implemented at the local level.

The Monitoring and Compliance Division during the (AP) 2022-2023, complied with the provisions of 20 CFR 683.410 (b)(2)(1) and conducted monitoring remotely and on-site. In the PY 2023-24, fifteen (15) Local Areas were completed, innovative projects with governor

reserve funds, rapid response projects, *Trade Adjustment Assistance* (TAA) program, and *Apprenticeship*.

TITLE I PROGRAMS PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM PY 2021 & 2022

Program Participation Levels

Participant Record Information System (PRIS) which is Puerto Rico's database system reflects 13,257 participants in PY21: 49% adults, 41% dislocated workers, and 11% youth. Regarding the type of services, 71% of youth, adults, and dislocated workers received career services, and 29% received training services.

Table 32: Program Year 2021 Participants by Title I Program

Program Year 2021 Participants by Title I Program				
Type of Service	Adults	Dislocated Workers	Youth	TOTAL
Career Services	4,294	4,279	882	9,455
Training Services	2,141	1,119	542	3,802
TOTAL	6,435	5,398	1,424	13,257

Program Year 2021 Exits by Title I Program				
Type of Service	Adults	Dislocated Workers	Youth	TOTAL
Career Services	2,599	1,968	690	5,257
Training Services	1,021	457	184	1,662
Total	3,620	2,425	874	6,919

The programmatic exits reflected in PY 21 were 6,919 participants with 52% adults, 35% dislocated workers and 13% youth. Related to the type of services, 75% of the participants received career services, while the remaining 25% received training services.

EFFECTIVENESS IN SERVING EMPLOYERS PERFORMANCE INDICATOR

The DEDC (Title I programs) and the core partners (Title II, III and IV) selected the *retention with same employer* and *employer penetration rate* to report the *Effectiveness in Serving Employers* (ESE) performance measure. The WIPS downloaded the following reporting data:

Table:33 Program Year Exit 2021

Employer Services	Establishment Count
Employer Information and Support Services	1,817
Workforce Recruitment Assistance	1,665
Engaged in Strategic Planning/Economic Development	42
Accessing Untapped Labor Pools	44
Training Services	220
Incumbent Worker Training Services	3
Rapid Response/Business Downsizing Assistance	6
Planning Layoff Response	0

Pilot Approaches	Numerator/Denominator	Rates
Retention with Same Employer in the 2nd and 4th Quarters After Exit Rate	884	38.40%
	2,301	
Employer Penetration Rate	3,797	8.30%
	45,895	

TITLE I PROGRAMS PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

The Youth, Adults and Dislocated Workers Programs served 13,257 participants in PY21. Participants with exits from the program were 6,919, which represents 46% of the participants. The adult program served 4,532 participants and 2,236 with program exits, or 49%, while the dislocated workers program served 3,180 and 1,369 program exits. The youth program served 1,315 participants with 545 exits, equivalent of 41% of which received service.

Performance Indicators	PY 2021		%
	Negotiated Rate	Actual	
Adult Program			
Employment Rate - Second Quarter After Exit	62.0%	71.50%	115%

Employment Rate - Fourth Quarter After Exit	47.0%	63.0%	134%
Median Earnings - Second Quarter After Exit	\$2,980	\$3,510	118%
Credential Attainment Rate	47.0%	59.9%	127%
Measurable Skill Gains	25.0%	78.6%	314%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers - Retention with the Same Employer	-	-	-
Dislocated Worker			
Employment Rate - Second Quarter After Exit	64.0%	68.5%	107%
Employment Rate - Fourth Quarter After Exit	50.0%	64.2%	128%
Median Earnings - Second Quarter After Exit	\$3,544	\$3,263	92%
Credential Attainment Rate	51.0%	52.2%	102%
Measurable Skill Gains	17.5%	14.3%	82%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers - Retention with the Same Employer	-	-	-
Youth			
Employment Rate - Second Quarter After Exit	44.0%	60.5%	138%
Employment Rate - Fourth Quarter After Exit	44.0%	61.6%	140%
Median Earnings - Second Quarter After Exit	\$2,980	\$2,524	85%
Credential Attainment Rate	47.0%	43.5%	93%
Measurable Skill Gains	30.1%	25.0%	83%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers - Retention with the Same Employer	-	-	-

During PY21, Puerto Rico complied with twelve (12) of the fifteen (15) performance measures negotiated with the USDOL. The measures not reached are Measure *Skill Gains* in the Dislocated Workers and Youth and the *Median Earnings - Second Quarter After Exit* in the youth program. The performance in PY21 reflected a substantial improvement compared to PY20, in which only seven of the 15 negotiated measures were achieved. The PRIS database has allowed PR to comply with the programmatic reports required in the WIOA regulations and beyond reporting quarterly and annual reports according to the schedule established by the USDOL.

In the following section, we present a summary of the results obtained from each one of the negotiated performance measures.

For the *Employment Rate - Second Quarter After Exit*, the Adult Program reached 71.5% performance rate. The Dislocated Worker Program reached 68.5% performance rate and the youth program 60.5% performance rate. The three programs exceeded 100% of the negotiated measure.

In the measure of *Employment Rate - Fourth Quarter After Exit*, Adult, Dislocated Workers Programs and Youth met and exceeded the negotiated measure with 63.0%, 64.2.5% and 61.6%, respectively.

The *Median Earnings Second Quarter After Exit* was achieved in the Adult and Dislocated Workers programs, with over 90% of the negotiated measures. In the Youth programs, the median earnings reached 85% of the negotiated performance measure. However, although 90% of the median earnings were not reached, the program reflected a significant increase compared to the PY 2020, in which the performance was 9% of the negotiated median.

Related to the *Credential Attainment Rate*, the three (3) programs reached the 90% required to comply with the negotiated measure, with rates of 59.9% in adults, 52.2% in dislocated workers, and 43.5% in the youth program. The Measurable Skill Gains were achieved with considerable scores in the adult program. However, the state will assess the database to identify the possible factors for high performance, considering the number of participants that were considered to calculate the rate. In dislocated workers, and youth programs, the negotiated measures of skill gains were reached, but with a gap of less than 8% to reach the 90% required to meet the indicator.

We are currently assessing with the state and local boards the strategies that need to be implemented to surpass this performance measure in the next program year. In addition, the state will offer technical assistance to the 15 LWDA's to increase service delivery to ensure that the performance measures can be reached in the following program year.

The actual Puerto Rico's database system is the *Participant Record Information System* (PRIS), reflects 18,467 participants in PY22, with 44% adults, 30% dislocated workers and

26% youth. Related to the type of services, 71% of youth, adults and dislocated workers received career services and 29% received training services.

Program Year 2022 Participants by Title I Program

Type of Service	Adults	Dislocated Workers	Youth	TOTAL
Career Services	4,889	3,939	4,360	13,188
Training Services	3,217	1,540	522	5,279
TOTAL	8,106	5,479	4,882	18,467

Program Year 2022 Exits by Title I Program

Type of Service	Adults	Dislocated Workers	Youth	TOTAL
Career Services	2,986	3,154	854	6,994
Training Services	1,265	691	203	2,159
Total	4,251	3,845	1,057	9,153

The programmatic exits reflected in the PY22 were 9,153 participants with 46% adults, 42% dislocated workers and 12% youth. Related to the type of services, 76% of the participants received career services, while the remaining 24% received training services.

EFFECTIVENESS IN SERVING EMPLOYERS PERFORMANCE INDICATOR:

In terms of reporting performance measures on services to employers under WIOA, the DEDC and core partner are still in the process to developing the performance goals to be applied under WIOA. Preliminary reporting performance measures were submitted through the WIPS. PR core partners selected the employer penetration rate to develop a common measure. The following reporting data was downloaded by the WIPS:

Employer Services	Establishment Count
Employer Information and Support Services	1,208
Workforce Recruitment Assistance	774

Engaged in Strategic Planning/Economic Development	39
Accessing Untapped Labor Pools	36
Training Services	264
Incumbent Worker Training Services	0
Rapid Response/Business Downsizing Assistance	8
Planning Layoff Response	0
Pilot Approaches	Rates
Retention with Same Employer in the 2nd and 4th Quarters After Exit Rate	67.4%
Employer Penetration Rate	4.8%

TITLE I PROGRAMS PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM:

The adult program served 8,106 participants and 4,251 exited, or 52%, while the dislocated workers program served 5,479 and 3,845 exited the program, equivalent to 70% of total served. The youth program served 4,882 participants with 1,057 exits, equivalent to 22% of which received service.

Performance Indicators	PY 2022		
	Negotiated Rate	Actual	%
Adult Program			
Employment Rate Second Quarter After Exit	53.50%	53.50%	100%
Employment Rate Fourth Quarter After Exit	49.00%	44.50%	91%
Median Earnings Second Quarter After Exit	\$2,500	\$3,500	140%
Credential Attainment Rate	42.00%	57.20%	136%
Measurable Skill Gains	80.00%	53.30%	67%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers - Retention with the Same Employer	-	-	-
Dislocated Worker			
Employment Rate Second Quarter After Exit	52.50%	58.80%	112%
Employment Rate Fourth Quarter After Exit	52.00%	55.70%	107%

Median Earnings Second Quarter After Exit	\$2,600	\$3,733	144%
Credential Attainment Rate	21.00%	65.20%	310%
Measurable Skill Gains	58.00%	65.1%	112%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers - Retention with the Same Employer	-	-	-
Youth			
Employment Rate Second Quarter After Exit	50.00%	57.60%	115%
Employment Rate Fourth Quarter After Exit	50.00%	57.30%	115%
Median Earnings Second Quarter After Exit	\$1,800	\$2,337	130%
Credential Attainment Rate	20.00%	30.40%	152%
Measurable Skill Gains	32.10%	72.20%	225%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers - Retention with the Same Employer	-	-	-

During PY22, Puerto Rico complied with fourteen (14) of the fifteen (15) Performance Measures negotiated with the USDOL. The rate that was not reached was Measure Skill Gains in the Adults program. The PRIS database has allowed PR to comply with the programmatic reports required in the WIOA regulations and beyond reporting quarterly and annual reports according to the schedule established by the USDOL. In the following section, we present a summary of the results obtained from each one of the negotiated Performance Measures.

For the Employment Rate Second Quarter After Exit, the Adult Program reached a 100% performance rate. The Dislocated Worker Program reached a 112% performance rate and the youth program rose to a 115% performance rate. The three programs achieved a rate above 100% of the negotiated measure. In the measure of Employment Rate Fourth Quarter After Exit in the Adult program reach a rate of 44.5%, equivalent to 91% of the negotiated level of 49.0%, meanwhile in the Dislocated Workers Programs and Youth complied with negotiated measure with 55.7%, and 57.3%, respectively, equivalent to 107% and 115%, also with a rate above the negotiated rate.

The Median Earnings Second Quarter After Exit was achieved in the Adult, Dislocated Workers, and Youth programs, with over 100% of the respective negotiated level. The three

programs reflected a significant increase compared to the AP 2021. Related with the Credential Attainment Rate the three (3) programs reached over 100% of the rates required to comply with the negotiated measure, with rates of 57.2% in adults, 65.2% in dislocated workers and 30.4% in the youth program. Is necessary to outstanding the dislocated program in which the rate rise over 300 percent.

The Measurable Skill Gains did not achieve the required rates in the adult program, with a performance of 67.0% of the performance indicator. However, the state level will assess the database to identify the possible factors for this performance and provide technical assistance to local areas. In dislocated workers and youth programs, the negotiated measures skill gains were reached with over the 90 per cent required to meet the indicator. Is necessary to outstanding the youth program in which the rate rise over 200 percent of the negotiated rate.

We are currently assessing with the state and local boards the strategies to be implemented to overcome this performance measure in the next program year. The state will offer technical assistance to the 15 LWDA's, to increase the delivery of service to ensure that the performance measures can be reached in the next program year.

WDP Evaluations

DEDC provides tools to local areas that enable them to track their performance measures as the year progresses and to track the impact on the performance of each of their participants. In addition to federally mandated reports, the WDP has developed a variety of locally requested reports that allow staff to track caseloads, correct data entry errors, and analyze performance at the state, local, and desk levels. A quarterly report on the execution, level of expenditures and participants is sent to the CEOs, LWDBs and LWDA staff.

Through the monitoring reviews, the State Board identified technical assistance needs to address the primary monitoring and oversight findings such as:

1. MOU's and IFA's compliance with requirements established in the policy WIOA – 01–2017: *Memorandums of Understanding and Infrastructure Agreements* and on the statutory requirements of WIOA and its implementing regulations.
2. Some LWDBs do not meet all the requirements of the Sunshine Provision in compliance with the related Public Policy *DDEC-WIOA-01-2021: Guidance on the responsibility of Local Boards to comply with transparency and disclosure requirements*.
3. Some LWDBs did not demonstrate that they conducted a monitoring review of the Youth Program.
4. Lack of documentation in the files of participants in the adult and dislocated worker programs related to skills assessment, support service needs, and incomplete or generalized Individual Employment Plan (IEP) goals, among others.
5. For the Youth Program, we found files with generalized Individual Service Strategy (ISS), a lack of documents evidencing eligibility, and a lack of follow-up to participants.
6. The contracts lack the required minimum clauses and correct references to WIOA law. DEDC will be issuing a policy related to this issue.
7. There is a need for technical assistance in determining the eligibility of participants in the youth, adult, and particularly dislocated worker programs.
8. Lack of controls to meet the 20% spending requirement in the work experience element of the Youth Program. Quarterly reports are already being worked on with DEDC Finance to track the level of LWDB spending.
9. Lack of several public policies such as priority of service, needs additional assistance, among others.
10. Lack of complaints and grievance procedures
11. Some local boards didn't demonstrate that they have taken steps before the competition of its One-Stop operators, such as market research, requests for

information, and collection of a cost price analysis, among others. WDP staff will provide technical assistance to ensure compliance with policy WIOA-02-2017.

12. Lack of documentation demonstrates the competitive selection of professional and career service providers, etc.
13. Lack of internal controls related to property management and others with state legislation.
14. There is a need to improve technological access to people with disabilities in the AJCs.
15. The self-service and career resource area in the AJCs does not have all the required information.

Title IV - Vocational Rehabilitation Assessments

The PRVRA conducted a Comprehensive Statewide Assessment of Rehabilitation Services' Needs (CSNA) between 2020-2021 whose results are presented under section J of the Vocational Rehabilitation portion of this State Plan. The CSNA includes aspects of the quality, effectiveness, and needs for improvement, which are considered by the PRVRA to develop its Goals and Strategies. Also, Section P of the VR portion of this plan includes the results on how the VR program goals were achieved during PY 2019 and 2020.

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program had negotiated levels of performance starting in PY 2020 and for the Measurable Skill Gains indicator only. Therefore, the following indicators were designated as "baseline" for the VR program:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit); and
- Credential Attainment Rate

Table 36. Special Performance Indicators for VR, starting PY 2020:

Performance Indicators	PY 2021 Negotiated Level	PY 2022 Achievement	PY 2021 Negotiated Level	PY 2022 Achievement
Employment Second Quarter After Exit	None	30%	None	41%
Employment Fourth Quarter After Exit	None	31%	None	26%
Median Earnings Second Quarter After Exit	None	\$3,915	None	\$3,915
Credential Attainment Rate	None	28.5%	None	35%
Measurable Skill Gains	None	19.8%	17%	34%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable (not negotiated by core-program)	Not Applicable	Not Applicable (not negotiated by core-program)	Not Applicable

Based on the evaluations and other programmatic monitoring conducted by the central office of the PRVRA, the agency adjusted its goals and strategies.

Title II - AEP Assessment

The Adult Education Program (AEP) of the Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE), WIOA Title II delegate agency, conducts continuous annual evaluations of local service providers of activities under Title II. The evaluation is conducted as part of the requirements of the proposals that the service providers present to the Adult Education Program. Each year the effectiveness of service providers in providing educational services to adult program participants is evaluated. The methods used are as follows:

Effectiveness evaluation

The Puerto Rico Department of Education uses valid and reliable evaluation methods to evaluate the execution of the Educational Functioning Levels (EFL). The EFL is a measure of what students should know at each level of functioning. The performance of the functioning levels is evaluated by making comparisons of two years or more of the percentages that the service providers obtain when offering the educational services to the participants. To have a good execution, the results of the evaluations of the service centers must respond to the performance levels that are negotiated with the Federal Government and if they do not comply with this criterion, they must show that their percentages have improved compared to the previous year. The performance levels are negotiated with the Federal Government, and this is the metric used to demonstrate the effectiveness of the service providers. This data are collected through the National Reporting System (NRS) from adult program participants.

The use of standardized tests

To assess the quality of educational services under title II, the DEPR-AEP uses standardized tests to require controls to measure the quality of teaching and provide the opportunity for participants to go beyond the classroom. Test administration provides accurate information and ensures placement of adult learners at appropriate instructional levels. In addition, it allows to obtain in a reliable way the educational gain and with it the promotion of the participants to a more advanced level.

PRDE uses the following guidelines to document achievements:

1. Selection and use of appropriate evaluation instruments
2. Manage the pre-test for diagnostic purposes and guide the teaching process.
3. Placement to place the student in the appropriate program and level of instruction.
4. Use post-test results to validate educational gain and promotion to the next level.
5. Establishment of valid performance standards
6. Report valid and reliable evaluation results and related information.

Annual AEP assessment of individual service providers

To meet the annual assessment requirement, AEP Adult Information System (AIS) staff maintains an ongoing assessment program that provides technical assistance and verifies compliance by all local services providers. The evaluation program includes quarterly technical assistance seminars for all educational service providers to discuss progress in data collection and data quality.

Annually, at the end of the current program year, staff prepare a summary evaluation report, which is used by a team of three staff serving as academic and operations facilitators to visit local providers and discuss performance results and the areas of improvement.

As part of the annual assessment, the AEP assesses the past effectiveness of local providers (WIOA Criterion 3) in improving the literacy of eligible individuals, to meet State-adjusted performance levels for primary indicators of performance standards outlined in WIOA section 116, especially with respect to eligible individuals who have low literacy levels.

In addition, annually, the AEP verifies that each service provider meets the performance levels negotiated by PRDE with the OCTAE - NRS and, in case of non-compliance, whether there has been an improvement compared to the previous program year. If there has been an

improvement, the AEP views this as a performance gain and provides an extension to the service provider for compliance.

(A) Evaluation. Describe how the State will conduct evaluations and research projects of activities carried out in the State under WIOA core programs; how such projects will be coordinated with, and designed in conjunction with, State and local boards and with State agencies responsible for the administration of all respective core programs; and, further, how the projects will be coordinated with the evaluations provided for by the Secretary of Labor and the Secretary of Education under WIOA (WIOA Section 116(e)).

State Board Evaluations

There are several aspects of WIOA which need to be evaluated since WIOA implementation and development initiatives to transform the provision of services, increase the use of funds, and improve performance. We will follow the recommendation to use DOLETA resources and tools to design the evaluation of the areas or issues identified by the State Board and the core and required partners of the AJC:

- WorkforceGPS Evaluation and Research Hub
- Evaluation Toolkit: Key Elements for State Workforce Agencies September 2020
- Peer Learning Cohort on Evaluation (EvalPLC)

The Evaluation and Monitoring Committee of the State Board will be activated to manage the evaluation process, and the DEDC Auction Committee will be used to develop the respective RFPs for the contracting of external resources to conduct the evaluations. It is recommended to perform the following activities:

1. Surveying the cores and required partners to identify common evaluation areas
2. Identify the areas that can be assessed with the internal staff of the partners:
 - a. Selection of One-Stop Operator
 - b. Competitive selection of youth service providers

- c. Common intake and co-enrollment process
3. Survey the state board to identify areas of concern
4. Develop RFPs to hire evaluators for items that require expertise or be evaluated by external resources objectively
5. Some of the evaluation topics identified are:
 - a. Number of Local Areas needed
 - b. Local Areas Organization Designs
 - c. Comprehensive AJC
 - d. Policy development process and standardization
 - e. Delivery of services in the youth program
 - f. Employer engagement and services in AJC
 - g. AJC flow of services among partners
 - h. Dissemination and Outreach approaches
 - i. Promising practices, discontinued or obsoletes practices
 - j. Most in needed accessibility, outreach, and delivery of services
 - k. Participant empowerment to design and select their services
 - l. Remote Workforce Services and Online Learning
6. Complete at least the following assessments in the next two years:
 - a. Four internal assessments with partner staff
 - b. Four evaluations through procurement (two in each PY)

7. Develop a plan to address evaluation findings, including discussion with Local Boards and CEOs
8. The state Board and local boards must develop public policy to promote the required changes to the system based on the results of the evaluations.

Risk Analysis at Local Boards

Risk analysis is the process of identifying, assessing, and evaluating potential risks to understand their likelihood of occurrence and potential impact. Conducting a risk analysis can help organizations determine whether they should undertake a project or approve a financial application, and what actions they may need to take to protect their interests. There are two types of risk analysis: quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative risk analysis uses mathematical models and simulations to assign numerical values to risk, while qualitative risk analysis relies on a person's subjective judgment to build a theoretical model of risk for a given scenario.

The DEDC applied a risk analysis in the 15 local areas, to analyze five management areas of the local areas, Human Resources, Administration, Budget, Contract/Legal and Information Systems Management. The results of the risk analysis show that human resource management and MIS are the operational areas that require the most attention, with results of less than 70% in a few local areas. In the human resources item, they are related to the lack of standardized processes, regulations, classification plans, among others. MIS is associated with the use of the new PRIS platform, which continues to be developed to add new tools required for participant case management. The state level will provide follow-up and technical assistance on the results of this analysis.

Evaluation program vs. monitoring program: Description of AEP Monitoring program

The AEP does not have a formal evaluation program but a monitoring program. To validate compliance with the rules and regulations that apply to the AEP, monitoring is conducted with the primary objective of evidencing the day-to-day services.

In the monitoring application process, the staff assigned to the AEP must collaborate with the Regional Educational Office (ORE) staff and local provider's education centers to be monitored. The monitors will be duly identified and authorized to have broad access to all

the documentation related to the administration and implementation of the activities of the Adult Education Program. They will maintain the level of confidentiality established by law. In addition, they will have access to all the facilities where projects subsidized with federal funds are implemented. The monitors, if requested, can assist in the investigation of any activity at the request of the AEP management.

It is the responsibility of the education center's management to comply with the recommended corrective action plans. The staff assigned to the PEA will monitor their compliance.

The officer conducting the monitoring will make a checkmark under Yes, No, or N/A in each criterion to be evaluated. At the end of each evaluation area, will add the evaluated criteria and the criteria marked as YES and write the subtotal reached for each evaluation area; will add the subtotals of each area to determine the score obtained and then divide the score obtained by the total criteria evaluated to calculate the result of the monitoring according to the percentage of the evaluation scale.

The service provider will present all the evidence required for the application of this guide, including but not limited to agendas, attendance lists, minutes, files, reports from the Adult Information System (SIA), calendars, work plans, improvement plans, among others. At the end of the monitoring administration process, it will be discussed, and technical assistance will be offered in the areas that merit it. Educational service providers scoring 69% or less may have their contracts terminated and will not be considered for contracting in future competitive proposals.

The process of administration, follow-up, and compliance with the Programmatic and Fiscal Monitoring Guide will be conducted according to the provisions of the Monitoring Unit Procedure Guide, which constitutes a support system in the effective implementation of the Program to promote its continuous improvement.

(5) **Distribution of Funds for Core Programs. Describe the methods and factors the State will use in distributing funds under the core programs in accordance with the provisions authorizing such distributions.**

The Governor allocates WIOA formula funds according to services to youth, adults, and dislocated workers in accordance with WIOA sections 128(b) and 133(b). The Governor's reserve funds from each of these sources for state-wide workforce investment activities. In making these reservations, the Governor reserves up to 15 percent from each of these sources. Reserved funds are combined and spent on statewide employment and training activities for adults and dislocated workers, and statewide youth activities, without regard to the funding source of the reserved funds. In addition, the Governor reserves a portion of the dislocated worker funds for statewide rapid-response activities, as described in WIOA. In making this reservation, the Governor reserves up to 25 percent of the dislocated worker funds.

(A) *For Title I programs provide a description of the written policies that establish the State's methods and factors used to distribute funds to local areas for —*

(1) Youth activities in accordance with WIOA section 128(b)(2) or (b)(3),

The Governor elects to distribute funds in accordance with the allocation formula in section 133(b), as follows:

1. 33 1/3 percent based on the relative number of unemployed individuals in areas of substantial unemployment in each workforce investment area, compared to the total number of unemployed individuals in areas of substantial unemployment in the State,
2. 33 1/3 percent based on the relative excess number of unemployed individuals in each workforce investment area, compared to the total excess number of unemployed individuals in the State; and,
3. 33 1/3 percent based on the relative number of disadvantaged adults in each workforce investment area, compared to the total number of disadvantaged adults in the State.

4. **Minimum Funding Provisions**-According with section 683.125 (a) in case of fund reduction related to previous program year, for funding authorized by secs. 128(b)(2), 133(b)(2)(A), and 133(b)(2)(B) of WIOA, which are youth, adult, and dislocated worker funds, a local area must not receive an allocation percentage for a fiscal year that is less than 90 percent of the average allocation percentage of the local area for the 2 preceding fiscal years.
5. **Ratable Reduction**-According with section 683.125 (e), if the amounts of WIOA funds appropriated in a fiscal year are not sufficient to provide the amount specified in paragraph (a) of this section to all local areas (*less than 90 percent of the average allocation percentage of the local area for the 2 preceding fiscal years*), the amounts allocated to each local area must be ratably reduced.

(ii) Adult and training activities in accordance with WIOA section 133(b)(2) or (b)(3),

The Governor elects to distribute funds in accordance with the allocation formula in section 133(b), as follows:

1. 33 1/3 percent based on the relative number of unemployed individuals in areas of substantial unemployment in each workforce investment area, compared to the total number of unemployed individuals in areas of substantial unemployment in the State.
 2. 33 1/3 percent based on the relative excess number of unemployed individuals in each workforce investment area, compared to the total excess number of unemployed individuals in the State; and
 3. 33 1/3 percent based on the relative number of disadvantaged adults in each workforce investment area, compared to the total number of disadvantaged adults in the State.
4. **Minimum Funding Provisions**-According with section 683.125 (a) in case of fund reduction related to previous program year, for funding authorized by secs.

128(b)(2), 133(b)(2)(A), and 133(b)(2)(B) of WIOA, which are youth, adult, and dislocated worker funds, a local area must not receive an allocation percentage for a fiscal year that is less than 90 percent of the average allocation percentage of the local area for the 2 preceding fiscal years.

- 5. Ratable Reduction**-According with section 683.125 (e), if the amounts of WIOA funds appropriated in a fiscal year are not sufficient to provide the amount specified in paragraph (a) of this section to all local areas (*less than 90 percent of the average allocation percentage of the local area for the 2 preceding fiscal years*), the amounts allocated to each local area must be ratably reduced.

(iii) Dislocated worker employment and training activities in accordance with WIOA section 133(b)(2) and based on the data and weights assigned.

The Governor elects to distribute funds in accordance with the following allocation formula:

1. Insured unemployment data: 20 percent of the allocation.
2. Unemployment concentration: 20 percent of the allocation.
3. Long-term unemployment data: 20 percent of the allocation.
4. Farmer-rancher economic hardship data: 5 percent of the allocation.
5. Plant closing and mass layoff data – 20 percent of the allocation; and
6. Declining industries data: 15 percent of the allocation.
7. Total – 100 percent of allocation
8. **Minimum Funding Provisions** According with section 683.125 (a) in case of fund reduction related to previous program year, for funding authorized by secs. 128(b)(2), 133(b)(2)(A), and 133(b)(2)(B) of WIOA, which are youth, adult, and dislocated worker funds, a local area must not receive an allocation percentage for a fiscal year that is less than 90 percent of the average allocation percentage of the local area for the 2 preceding fiscal years.
9. **Ratable Reduction**-According with section 683.125 (e), if the amounts of WIOA funds appropriated in a fiscal year are not sufficient to provide the amount specified in paragraph (a) of this section to all local areas (*less than 90 percent of the average allocation percentage of the local area for the 2*

preceding fiscal years), the amounts allocated to each local area must be ratably reduced.

(B) ***For Title II:***

(i) **Describe the methods and factors that the eligible agency will use to distribute Title II funds.**

The Department of Education of Puerto Rico (DEPR) is the eligible agency for adult education, literacy programs, and implementation activities under Title II of WIOA. The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), the Assistant Secretary for Alternative Education-Adult Education Program (AEP) and the State Director for Adult Education, are the implementation unit for these programs.

The implementation of the curriculum in all Adult Education program centers requires continuous faculty development efforts to ensure that teachers are thoroughly familiar with the requirements of academic content standards. Hired curriculum facilitators will provide technical assistance in the implementation of the curriculum in all Adult Education program centers and activities. The directors and key staff of the AEP Program will provide technical assistance to program teachers in curriculum implementation. Adult Education program teachers will receive specialized training on the standards, indicators, assessment activities of the curriculum, and activities related to the development of 21st Century skills relevant to competitiveness in the global labor market, STEM, employability, workforce preparation skills, and career pathways.

The AEP emphasizes the importance of the lives of people who have not completed high school, the need for English language learning and civic participation, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens. This aligns with the purpose of AEFLA to assist immigrants and other individuals who are English language learners to improve their reading, writing, and comprehension skills in English and mathematics as well as to understand the American system of Government, individual freedom, and the responsibilities of citizenship. The commitment of the AEP is focused on providing a structured, innovative, flexible, and

contextualized curriculum, in addition to being dynamic and adaptable to changes in social and educational systems in a contextualized environment.

The AEP will update the workforce preparation curriculum according to labor trends with opportunities and allow the expansion of the career pathway model. These activities on career pathways and soft skills in the new curriculum will provide the transferable skills needed by individuals to make them “employable” to an employer, including problem-solving, oral communication, adaptability, collaboration, resource management, organizational skills, written communications, and technology use. In addition, this training allows participants to develop their own businesses.

The Service Providers of each center will receive technical assistance related to all requirements of the AEP training activities to achieve better academic performance and greater preparation so that adult participants can compete in post-secondary levels and/or in the areas of need required.

(ii) Describe how the eligible agency will ensure direct and equitable access to all eligible providers to apply and compete for funds and how the eligible agency will ensure that it is using the same grant or contract announcement and application procedures for all eligible providers.

The program will ensure that service providers deliver services to eligible individuals who have attained at least 16 years of age, are not enrolled, need to be enrolled in a secondary school under Puerto Rico law, lack basic skills, do not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, or are English language learners.

The following organizations will be eligible to apply for funding, provided they have demonstrated effectiveness and comply with the following considerations:

1. Local education agency
2. Community-based or faith-based organizations.
3. Volunteer literacy organization
4. Public or private non-profit agency
5. a public housing authority

6. a library
7. a consortium or coalition of the agencies, organizations, institutions, or libraries
8. a partnership between an employer and an entity
9. an institution of higher education
10. A non-profit institution that can provide adult education and literacy activities to eligible individuals.

An eligible provider must establish that it has demonstrated effectiveness through performance data on its record of improving the skills of eligible individuals, particularly those with low levels of literacy in reading, writing, mathematics, English language acquisition, and other subject areas relevant to the service provided in the state's application for funds. In addition, the provider must provide information regarding its outcomes for participants related to employment, attainment of secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and transition to post-secondary education and training.

The providers could demonstrate past effectiveness in basic skill-deficient eligible individuals in all the following areas: reading, writing, mathematics, and English language acquisition. The outcomes used to determine the demonstrated effectiveness are as follows:

- 1) The number of eligible individuals with basic skills deficient in reading, writing, math, and English language skills.
- 2) Attainment of secondary diploma/equivalent
- 3) Transition to post-secondary education and training

A. Providers' grant distribution criteria.

The PRDE's Adult Education Program uses the following parameters to distribute funds to approved applicants:

1. No less than 82.5 percent of the grant funds will be used to award grants and contracts under Section 231 and to conduct Section 225, of which no more than 20 percent of such amount shall be available to conduct Section 225.

2. Shall not use more than 12.5 percent of the grants to conduct State Leadership activities under Section 223.
3. Shall not use more than 5 percent of the grant funds or \$85,000, whichever is greater, for the administrative expenses of the eligible agency.
4. Every effort is made to select at least one eligible provider for each local area of the workforce system in Puerto Rico.
5. The provider's grants will be distributed based on the ability to meet the following AEFLA purposes outlined in WIOA:
 - a. Assist adults in becoming literate and obtaining the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and economic self-sufficiency.
 - b. Assisting parents and family members in becoming fully engaged partners in their children's educational growth.
 - c. Promote the transition from adult education to post-secondary education and training through career pathways.
 - d. Assist adults in completing high school and holding a diploma or equivalent certificate.
 - e. Assist immigrants and English language learners improve reading, writing, math, and comprehension of the English language and acquire an understanding of the American government, individual freedom, and responsibilities of citizenship.

The PRDE's AEP will fund each eligible provider to establish or operate programs that provide adult education and literacy activities, including programs that provide such activities concurrently. The eligible provider is responsive to the

1. Regional needs as identified in the local plan under WIOA; and
2. Serving individuals in the community who were identified in such a plan as most in need of adult education and literacy activities, including individuals who:
 - a. Have low levels of literacy skill; or
 - b. Are English language learners.

3. The ability of the eligible provider to serve eligible individuals with disabilities, including those with learning disabilities.
4. The providers' activities, including reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, and English language acquisition, are based on the best practices derived from the most rigorous and appropriate research available, including scientifically valid research and effective educational practice.
5. Provide learning in context, including through integrated education and training, where participants acquire the skills needed to transition to and complete post-secondary education and training programs, obtain and advance employment leading to economic self-sufficiency, and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
6. The provider's activities are delivered by well-trained instructors, counselors, and administrators, who meet any minimum qualifications established by the State.
7. The provider maintains a high-quality information management system that can report measurable participant outcomes and monitor program performance.

(C) Vocational Rehabilitation Program

In the case of a State that, under section 101(a)(2)(A)(i) of the Rehabilitation Act designates a State agency to administer the part of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan under which VR services are provided for individuals who are blind, describe the process and the factors used by the State to determine the distribution of funds among the two VR agencies in the State.

Rehabilitation Act 93-112 provides the necessary services to eligible certified persons with disabilities. Services are offered so that people with disabilities can prepare, enter, advance, obtain, or retain employment consistent with their strengths, priorities, resources, interests, concerns, unique skills, and informed selections. The population that can be referred to this program must comply with the following criteria:

1. A qualified professional determines that the applicant has a physical or mental impairment.
2. The physical/mental condition of a person constitutes or results in substantial impediment to employment.
3. The applicant requires vocational rehabilitation services to prepare for, secure, obtain, retain, or advance employment that is consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, abilities, interests, functional residual abilities, and informed selection.
4. Presumption that the person can benefit from vocational rehabilitation services to obtain a job.

(6) **Program Data**

(A)Data Alignment and Integration. Describe the plans of the lead State agencies with responsibility for the administration of the core programs, along with the State Board, to align and integrate available workforce and education data systems for the core programs, unemployment insurance programs, and education through post-secondary education, and to the extent possible, the Combined State Plan partner programs included in this plan. The description of the State’s plan for integrating data systems should include its goals for achieving integration and any progress to date. Describe data collection and reporting processes used for all programs and activities, including the State’s process of collecting and reporting data on co-enrollment, and for those present in one-stop centers.

- (i) **Describe the State’s plans to make management information systems for the core programs interoperable to maximize the efficient exchange of common data elements to support assessment and evaluation.**

Planning Note: States should be aware that Section 116(i)(1) establishes the obligation for core programs, local boards, and elected officials to establish and operate an information system that encompasses both fiscal and administrative accountability. This system must adhere to the guidelines set forth by the Secretaries of Labor and Education. Furthermore, it is important to note that the Departments of Labor and Education are willing to collaborate with states, providing guidance and potentially assisting in the collection of information related to these accountability systems in the future. States

should initiate necessary preparations to comply with these fiscal and management accountability requirements. It is important to recognize that any adjustments made to fulfill these elements may present opportunities or generate impacts on the existing fiscal and management accountability system.

The Government intends to adhere to the USDOL's specified financial and management accountability information system.

Regarding the management information systems of Puerto Rico and the plans to make them interoperable, there are various topics to be discussed:

1. **PRIS Implementation and Expansion:** The Participant Record Information System (PRIS) serves as the backbone for data management in Puerto Rico's labor development system. Initiated in March 2020, it is designed to record participant information and generate comprehensive reports for Title I-B and Title III programs under WIOA. The expansion plan includes integrating modules for Title II (Adult Education and Literacy) and Title IV (Vocational Rehabilitation Act) to enhance collaboration and data integration across these programs. This initiative reflects a commitment to creating a more cohesive and efficient data management system that spans the entire spectrum of workforce development programs.
2. **Data Sharing and Co-Enrollment Strategy:** The State's strategy focuses on bridging the gap between various workforce development programs. While there is existing co-enrollment between Title I and Title III, the plan aims to extend this framework to other titles. By leveraging PRIS, the system will facilitate identifying participants enrolled in multiple programs, using shared data elements like social security numbers. This integrated approach is crucial for delivering coordinated services and understanding the cumulative impact of multiple workforce development initiatives on an individual participant.
3. **Technological Upgrades and Vendor Collaboration:** Recognizing the dynamic nature of federal labor regulations and the evolving needs of workforce development, the State is actively working with IT vendors to upgrade the PRIS system. These

upgrades are not just about expanding the system's capacity but also about ensuring its responsiveness to legislative changes and the growing demand for more sophisticated data analysis and reporting capabilities.

4. **Streamlining Intake and Service Delivery:** The integration of participant management systems across WIOA Titles I, II, and IV is a significant step towards streamlining the service delivery process. By developing a common intake and case management framework, the State aims to eliminate redundancies, reduce administrative burdens, and ensure that individuals seeking services through the workforce development system receive appropriate and coordinated support.
5. **Collaboration with the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration (VRA):** The VRA's involvement is pivotal in collecting common data among WIOA partners. Their strategies focus on sharing statistical information, formulating intervention plans, and updating case management systems to enhance post-program follow-ups. These initiatives are integral to ensuring that the State's workforce development programs align with evaluation standards and performance indicators, particularly for individuals with disabilities.
6. **Focus on Performance Indicators and Evaluation Standards:** Moving beyond basic descriptive statistics to more advanced predictive and prescriptive analysis marks a significant shift in how the State evaluates its workforce development programs. This analytical approach involves a deeper examination of the factors influencing program performance, foreseeing future trends, and identifying targeted actions to improve client services. It represents a more data-driven and proactive approach to workforce development.
7. **Technological and Administrative Strengthening:** Implementing technology projects for case management and document sharing is part of a broader strategy to improve the efficiency and accuracy of data management in workforce development programs. This technological enhancement goes hand in hand with regular

performance evaluations and updates to administrative procedures, ensuring continuous improvement and adherence to performance standards.

These detailed strategies collectively form a robust plan for developing an interoperable management information system across core programs, aiming to facilitate efficient data exchange and enhance the overall effectiveness of the State's workforce development system.

(ii) Describe the State's plans to integrate data systems to facilitate streamlined intake and service delivery to track participation across all programs included in this plan.

The WDP has established plans with the aim of integrating data systems to streamline admission and service delivery, while facilitating the tracking of participation across all programs included in this plan. The primary objective is to enable the required partners to use the Participant Registration Information System (PRIS) as their central database platform, simultaneously facilitating the exchange of relevant information among different partners. This is done to prevent service duplication and to allow for more efficient client tracking as they engage with the program.

Currently, Title I and Title III use the PRIS system as their registration platform. By contrast, Titles II and IV employ their own systems. This disparity in the registration systems has been identified as a challenge. The phase of development regarding the interoperable integration of Title II and Title IV programs is currently in the analytical stage. This suggests that careful evaluation of how to achieve integration before proceeding to full implementation is underway.

In a recent meeting among key partners, the need for technological integration was emphasized. The PRIS system is prepared to integrate with partners who do not use the same system through the "Enterprise Service Bus," which acts as an integration hub. In the short term, ongoing efforts are being made to establish communication between systems, enabling electronic referrals, tracking, and the retrieval of results. Regarding the targeted completion date for integration of the database among partners, December 2024 was set as the objective. This period signifies a long-term commitment to achieving desired technological integration.

(ii) Explain how the State board will assist the governor in aligning technology and data systems across required one-stop partner programs (including design and implementation of common intake, data collection, etc.), and how such alignment will improve service delivery to individuals, including unemployed individuals.

WIOA's lead agencies in Puerto Rico are committed to the governor's vision for workforce development and recognize its relevance to the island's economic and social progress. The progress of participants is monitored through the PRIS system, allowing the identification, evaluation, and reporting of participants' performance in terms of obtaining educational credentials or securing jobs that contribute to economic development. The Puerto Rico Workforce Development Program recognizes the importance of evaluating the success of the WIOA program on the island. The State Board plays a critical role in collaborating with the Governor to align technology and data across all comprehensive partner programs, including One-Stop Partner Programs. This alignment aims to improve the delivery of services to people, including the unemployed.

Under WIOA, core partners are expected to collaborate within a AJC system to provide comprehensive services to job seekers and employers. The State Board evaluates the execution of each core partner in coordination with the core partners to ensure that they meet the objectives and expectations established in their respective parts of the plan.

Specific evaluation processes and criteria may vary from one AJC to another and may be defined in the local Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between lead partners. The evaluation includes assessing each lead partner's contribution to the AJC's overall performance, such as its effectiveness in serving jobseekers and employers, achieving program objectives, and meeting program objectives. WIOA requirements.

These evaluations are conducted periodically, and performance assessments help identify areas for improvement, effectively allocate resources, and ensure that the AJC system continues to provide high-quality services to its clients. It also helps maintain accountability and transparency among key partners in the AJC system. To ensure that the system is

operating in the shortest time possible, the WDP and State Board hold follow-up meetings on the status of system development and improvements.

As established in the WIOA Act, the Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DEDC) must provide the Governor of Puerto Rico with program execution indicators. These reports are based on those submitted through the Program Planning Information System (Workforce Integrated Performance System (WIPS)). After reporting on the WIPS, a report will be produced on Puerto Rico's execution of Title I. The State Board coordinates the compilation of these execution reports and presents them as a unified report published on the State Board's website, which is on the DEDC website.

(ii) Describe the State's data systems and procedures to produce the reports required under section 116, the performance accountability system. (WIOA section 116(d)(2)).

The State's enhanced plan to develop and produce reports under Section 116, performance accountability system (WIOA section 116(d)(2)), based on the prior and current data, includes

Advanced Utilization of PRIS: Continuing to use the Participant Record Information System as the central platform, ensuring comprehensive data management and report generation in line with the PIRL guidelines and DOLETA validation rules.

- a. Integration Across Titles: Focusing on integrating data from WIOA Titles I, II, III, and IV, with particular emphasis on finalizing the integration of Titles II and IV into the PRIS system. This integration will enhance the scope and accuracy of reporting.
- b. Continuous Improvement and Error Rectification: Building on past challenges, the plan involves rigorous error-checking processes and rectifying issues related to data migration and the incorporation of new WIOA data elements.
- c. Timely Submission and Certification of Reports: Ensuring the timely submission and certification of crucial reports, such as ETA 9169 for PY 2021 and 2022, as well as ETA 9173 reports, through enhanced collaboration among WIOA partners and stringent internal review processes.

- d. Collaborative Efforts for Data Accuracy: Strengthening collaboration with partners, especially Title III, for review and correction of data before report generation, thereby ensuring the accuracy and WIOA compliance of the submitted reports.

This comprehensive plan aims to build upon past experiences and leverage technological advancements to ensure effective, accurate, and timely reporting in accordance with WIOA section 116(d)(2) requirements.

(A)Assessment of Participants' Post-Program Success. Describe how lead State agencies will use the workforce development system to assess the progress of participants exiting from core programs in entering, persisting in, and completing post-secondary education, or entering or remaining in employment. States may choose to set additional performance indicators.

WIOA's lead agencies are committed to the governor's vision of Puerto Rico's workforce development and its importance to economic and social development. The participants' progress is monitored using the PRIS system. WDP has been identifying effective measures for evaluating current and historical data to move from simple descriptive statistics to predictive statistics, and more importantly, to formulate prescriptive analyses.

Several factors that influence the outcomes achieved and future planning must be considered to assess and improve the execution of programs under WIOA. These factors include collecting and analyzing accurate data on the progress and outcomes of the program, such as employment placement, income growth, and the completion of training programs. Additionally, it is crucial to understand the changing demands of the labor market by identifying growing sectors or industries, in-demand skills, and emerging opportunities. Stakeholder engagement, involving employers, educators, community organizations, and clients, provides essential feedback on a program's effectiveness. Furthermore, establishing a continuous evaluation process that allows real-time corrective actions and continuous feedback from stakeholders is essential.

The methodology used to evaluate these factors involved collecting data from participants, including demographic information, services received, educational achievements, and employment outcomes. Local areas and the state have access to a dashboard that allows them

to visualize data and monitor program execution. Moreover, data analysis and extraction techniques can be employed to identify trends, patterns, and areas that require improvement. Surveys should also be conducted among program participants, employers, and educational institutions to gather valuable insights into program effectiveness.

Regarding performance indicators for programs under the WIOA, core partners assess key indicators, such as employment in the second quarter after exit, employment in the fourth quarter after exit, median income in the second quarter after exit, credential attainment rate, and measurable skill gains.

For the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service program, similar indicators are assessed, including employment in the second quarter after exit, employment in the fourth quarter after exit, and median income in the second quarter after exit. It is important to note that the credential attainment rate and measurable skill gain indicators do not apply to the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service program. Finally, the Employer Service Effectiveness (ESE) indicator is measured as a shared outcome among the six core programs within each state to ensure a comprehensive approach to serving employers. Due to the lack of historical data, states are not required to submit the expected levels of performance for the ESE indicator in 2022 and 2023. Each core program must submit expected performance levels for all other applicable indicators.

(A) Use of Unemployment Insurance (UI) Wage Record Data. Explain how the State will meet the requirements to utilize quarterly UI wage records for performance accountability, evaluations, and as a source of workforce and labor market information, consistent with Federal and State law. (This Operational Planning element applies to core programs.)

The wage record information is used to determine employment, retention, and average earnings. Puerto Rico's Unemployment Insurance (UI) wage records are the primary data source. The signing of the SWIS (State Wage Interchange System) Agreement between Puerto Rico and the United States Department of Labor (DOLETA) is a crucial step for collaboration in the collection of interstate quarterly wage records. This agreement allows the exchange of salary data between Puerto Rico and the federal government, specifically with DOLETA, to use this information for purposes related to workforce programs and law enforcement. The

SWIS Agreement replaces the Wage Record Interchange System (WRIS and WRIS2) Data Sharing Agreements previously executed by most States. States signing the Agreement will be able to exchange interstate quarterly wage records with any other State signing the Agreement to satisfy performance reporting requirements in Section 116 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

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

Puerto Rico has met the requirements for utilizing quarterly Unemployment Insurance (UI) wage records for accountability, evaluations, and as a source of information on the workforce and labor market in accordance with federal and state laws. This achievement is facilitated by the State Wage Interchange System (SWIS).

All inquiries for wage data related to applicable programs are processed through the SWIS Clearinghouse. The Department of Labor and Human Resources (DTRH) in Puerto Rico generates a list detailing the employment status of each participant, including the employers they are working for and their salaries. This list, known as the "State Wage Record File," is loaded into the "Participant Record Information System" (PRIS) to record the wages corresponding to each participant in the WIOA program. This enables the identification of employed participants, their employment industry, and their salary information.

In addition, to enhance wage data collection and ensure data accuracy, the SWIS file was implemented. The integration of data from this file into the PRIS allows us to obtain more

precise and validated information about participants who have received services under the WIOA program and have obtained exit dates.

While Title II and Title IV programs do not enroll their participants in the PRIS, they have signed the SWIS agreement, granting them access to the information. These programs have their own protocols for requesting salary information from the DTRH. In summary, Puerto Rico established an effective system for using quarterly UI wage records as a source of information to meet accountability and evaluation requirements for programs under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. This ensures data accuracy and transparency during the execution of the programs.

(A) Privacy Safeguards. Describe the privacy safeguards incorporated in the State's workforce development system, including safeguards required by Section 444 of the General Education Provisions Act (20 U.S.C. 1232 g) and other applicable Federal laws. The State adheres to Section 444 of the General Education Provision Act, Section 2(c)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 491-2(a)(2) of the Wagner Peyser Act, 2 CFR 200.303, OMB Uniform Guidance, and all other applicable provisions. Additionally, it complies with all relevant local provisions, such as those outlined by the Puerto Rico Institute of Statistics, regarding the access, dissemination, and confidentiality of government information.

The PRIS Management Information System, being a crucial component, employs a role-based access control to protect confidential data, ensuring that only authorized personnel with specific privileges can access sensitive information. This system is consistently monitored to maintain security and compliance. Additionally, the State's commitment to technological integration, data sharing, and efficient service delivery, as outlined in the program data, reinforces the importance of safeguarding participant information while improving overall program effectiveness. The strategic approach to managing data across various workforce development programs, including the integration of Titles II and IV into PRIS and the use of SWIS for wage record data, exemplifies a robust and coordinated effort in data management and privacy protection.

(7) **Priority of Service for Veterans.**

(A) Describe how the State will implement the priority of service provisions for covered persons in accordance with the requirements of the Jobs for Veterans Act,

codified in section 4215 of 38 U.S.C., which applies to all employment and training programs funded in whole or in part by the DOL.

In compliance with the Jobs for Veterans Act, codified in section 4215 of 38 U.S.C., and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Puerto Rico is committed to prioritizing service provisions for covered persons. The State has a multi-layered approach to ensure that these individuals are prioritized in all employment and training programs funded, either fully or partially, by the Department of Labor (DOL). The D.O.L has meticulously aligned its State Unified Plan with this federal legislation, ensuring that all policies, procedures, and guidelines are in full compliance with section 4215 of 38 U.S.C.

1. Identifying Covered Persons

- **Definition:** A "covered person" includes the veterans and spouses of certain veterans. This definition is in line with the Jobs for Veterans Act of 2002 and PRDOLHR's commitment to identifying veterans, veterans with disabilities, and eligible persons.
- **Scope:** The priority of service provisions is applicable to all employment and training programs funded in whole or in part by the DOL, including but not limited to programs under WIOA, the Wagner-Peyser Act, and other specialized programs.
- **Data Collection:** Application forms should include specific questions to identify veterans and eligible spouses, as outlined in the Strategic Plan implemented by Wagner-Peyser.
- **Verification:** The PRIS will be used to verify the status of veterans and eligible spouses, aligning with the PRDOLHR's strategy to confirm the priority of service.
- **Specialized Staff:** The Veteran Program Coordinator (JVSGC) and Wagner-Peyser merit staff are responsible for overseeing the identification process, ensuring that the priority of service is granted to the correct individuals.
- **Data Security:** Given that personal information will be collected and verified, it is crucial to outline the measures that will be taken to secure sensitive data.

2. Priority of Service

- **Legal Mandate:** The law mandates that covered persons must be given priority over non-veterans for employment, training, and placement services. This is reinforced by the PRDOLHR's commitment to establishing relationships with various agencies to ensure service priority.
- **Resource Allocation:** Priority will be provided by the Wagner-Peyser merit staff, and the Veteran Program Coordinator (JVSGC) will oversee compliance.
- **Service Tiers:** Different tiers of service could be established to prioritize veterans with significant barriers to employment, such as homelessness or disability, as defined in the 2020 WIOA State Unified Plan.
- **Customization:** Services are customized based on the individual needs of the covered persons, ensuring that they receive the most relevant and effective support.
- **Ensure that the advanced analytics tools used for real-time monitoring comply with data privacy laws and are accessible to all users.**
- **Appeals Process:** An appeals process should be in place for individuals who believe they have been wrongly denied the priority of service.

3. Implementation by State and Local Workforce Investment Boards

- **Guidance:** The Office of Workforce Investment provides specific guidelines that are further detailed in the PRDOLHR's Strategic Plan.
- **Local Implementation:** Local Workforce Investment Boards are responsible for on-the-ground implementation, including training staff members and periodic reception and Labor Exchange Staff reinforcement, as outlined in the 2020 WIOA State Unified Plan.
- **Performance Metrics:** While you mentioned key performance indicators, specific metrics for success could be further elaborated to ensure methodological monitoring.
- **Inter-agency Collaboration:** The PRDOLHR is committed to establishing relationships with a wide range of organizations, including municipalities, colleges, and faith-based organizations, to ensure a comprehensive approach to service priorities.

- Partnerships: Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) will be established with these entities to formalize roles, responsibilities, and resource sharing.
- Stakeholder Input: Consider obtaining feedback from veterans' organizations and other stakeholders to ensure that the program meets the needs of the community it serves.

4. Monitoring Compliance

- DOL Oversight: The U.S. The Department of Labor has the authority to monitor and enforce compliance. This is further supervised by the JVSGC in Puerto Rico.
- Audits: Regular internal and external audits should be conducted, aligned with PRDOLHR's commitment to data and report validation.
- Real-time Monitoring: Advanced analytics tools can be employed to provide real-time monitoring of service provision, ensuring immediate corrective action if discrepancies are found.
- Data-driven decision-making: These analytics will also inform future policy decisions, ensuring that the program evolves based on empirical data rather than theoretical models.
- PACT Act: The PACT Act has an open enrollment period for post-9/11 combat veterans who meet specific criteria. This is particularly relevant for Puerto Rico given its high veteran population.
- Healthcare Benefits: The VA in Puerto Rico focuses on comprehensive healthcare coverage, which could be a selling point for attracting veterans to DOL-funded programs.
- Technology: VA's commitment to providing accessible technology can be leveraged to make DOL-funded programs more accessible and efficient.
- Skill Matching: Advanced AI algorithms could be used to match veterans with the most suitable employment opportunities based on their skills and preferences.

- **Legal Review:** Given the legal implications, it would be prudent to have this document reviewed by legal experts familiar with federal and state employment laws.
- **Performance Metrics:** While you mentioned key performance indicators, specific metrics for success could be further elaborated to ensure methodological monitoring.
- **Whistleblower Protection:** Procedures should be in place to protect employees who report non-compliance from retaliation.

By adhering to these guidelines and continually monitoring the effectiveness of the priority service provisions, Puerto Rico can ensure compliance with the Jobs for Veterans Act. Given the specific needs and resources of Puerto Rico, the implementation strategy may vary; however, the core principles remain the same. This detailed approach ensures a robust, compliant, and effective implementation of the priority of service provisions for covered persons in strict accordance with the Jobs for Veterans Act and other relevant legislation.

(a) Describe how the State will monitor priority of service provisions for veterans.

This section elaborates on the oversight mechanisms in place to monitor compliance with the priority of service provisions. This includes data collection methods, audit procedures, and staff training programs aimed at ensuring effective implementation.

1. Data Collection and Reporting

The Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources (PRDOLHR) will utilize PRIS and its robust data collection and reporting system to monitor compliance with the priority of service provisions. This system tracks key performance indicators, such as the number of veterans served, types of services provided, and outcomes achieved.

- 2. Third-party Audits:** Third-party audits should be used for unbiased assessment of compliance.

3. Audits and Inspections

Regular audits and inspections will be conducted by the U.S. The Department of Labor (DOL) and the Veteran Program Coordinator (JVSGC) ensure that all workforce

development programs comply with the Jobs for Veterans Act of 2002. These audits will include a review of the collected data and may involve site visits to local American Job Centers (AJCs).

4. Staff Training and Reinforcement

Staff members will undergo periodic training to ensure that they are well-versed in the priority of service provisions. Wagner-Peyser staff will continue to announce and provide priority of service to veterans according to Federal law and applicable regulations.

5. Public Awareness

The workforce system network in Puerto Rico keeps the public informed about the Priority of Service entitlement to veterans, covered persons, and eligible spouses through announcements posted on bulletin boards and near the entry service delivery point.

7) Describe the triage and referral process for eligible veterans and other populations determined eligible to receive services from the Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) Program's Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist/consolidated position.

This section describes the triage and referral processes in place to direct eligible veterans and other specified populations to appropriate services. It details the roles of Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists and other key personnel in this process.

DVOP Specialists

DVOP specialists focus on providing intensive services to meet the employment needs of veterans, particularly those who are economically or educationally disadvantaged, including homeless veterans, veterans with disabilities, and veterans who face other significant barriers to employment.

Roles and Responsibilities of DVOP Specialists:

- a. Intensive Case Management: DVOP specialists provide individualized career services, including comprehensive assessments, the development of individual employment plans, and career counseling.
- b. Skill Identification: They help veterans identify their skills, including transferable skills from their military service, and match them with suitable employment or training opportunities.
- c. Resource Navigation: DVOP specialists guide veterans through various federal, state, and local resources available for job training, employment placement, and other support services.
- d. Employer Liaison: They often function as a bridge between employers and veterans, helping to identify job openings and facilitating job placements.
- e. Special Populations: DVOP specialists are trained to work with special populations of veterans, such as those with disabilities, to ensure that they receive appropriate accommodation in the workplace.
- f. Follow-Up Services: They provide follow-up services to ensure that veterans remain employed and address any issues that may arise post-placement.
- g. Reporting and Compliance: DVOP specialists are responsible for maintaining accurate records of their activities and outcomes, which are used for program evaluation and compliance with federal regulations.
- h. Training and Development: They often engage in continuous professional development to stay updated on best practices in veterans' employment services.

Jobs for Veterans' State Grants (JVSG)–U.S. Department of Labor

Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP)–U.S. Department of Labor

By providing these specialized services, DVOP specialists play a crucial role in helping veterans transition successfully from military to civilian life, particularly those facing significant barriers to employment.

1. Initial Identification and Verification

Upon entering AJCs, veterans and eligible spouses are notified of their priority right of service under the Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Specialized staff, including Wagner-Peyser merit staff and JVSG Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists, will identify eligible veterans. Verification through the required paperwork will be conducted, especially if eligibility is determined.

2. Triage Process

Veterans and eligible spouses are triaged based on their specific needs and barriers to employment. Those meeting the definition of a Veteran with Significant Barriers to Employment will be referred to as one of the JVSG DVOP Specialists for the provision of services. This includes services such as re-employment orientation, individualized career assessment, and job search assistance.

Training and Development for DVOP Specialists: DVOP specialists should engage in continuous professional development to stay updated on best practices in veterans' employment services.

Emergency Response: Procedures for immediate responses to urgent cases, such as veterans with acute mental health issues, should be outlined.

3. Referral to DVOP Specialists

Veterans meeting specific criteria, such as being a special disabled or disabled veteran, homeless, recently separated, etc., will be referred to DVOP specialists for intensive services. These services are designed to address the unique challenges faced by these populations, and may include focused case management services, re-employment orientation, individualized career assessment, and job search assistance.

By incorporating these detailed strategies and mechanisms, Puerto Rico aims to comply fully with the Jobs for Veterans Act, ensuring that veterans and their eligible spouses receive priority of service to which they are entitled. This comprehensive approach involves multiple stakeholders, including federal and state agencies, local workforce development boards, and

community organizations, all working in concert to serve this important population effectively.

(8) Addressing the Accessibility of the One-Stop Delivery System for Individuals with Disabilities. Describe how the one-stop delivery system (including one-stop center operators and one-stop delivery system partners) will comply with Section 188 of the WIOA (if applicable) and applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.) regarding the physical and programmatic accessibility of facilities, programs, services, technology, and materials for individuals with disabilities. This must also include a description of compliance by providing staff training and support to address the needs of individuals with disabilities. Describe the State's one-stop center certification policy, particularly the accessibility criteria.

Section 188 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) prohibits discrimination against individuals who apply to, participate in, work for, or contact programs and activities that receive financial assistance from the Department of Labor (DOL). This includes discrimination based on disability. Section 188 also mandates that reasonable accommodations be provided to qualified individuals with disabilities. The DOL has issued regulations implementing Section 188 non-discrimination requirements that apply to programs or activities offered through the American Job Center (AJC) system, also known as the one-stop delivery system.

Puerto Rico's workforce system must be prepared to serve jobseekers from diverse backgrounds facing different barriers. Positive outreach encompasses both the physical accessibility of all facilities, as well as programmatic accessibility, particularly with customers' access needs. This will allow for better integration of service delivery and coordination among workforce system partners. Advances in personal computing and telecommunications technology have enabled the provision of services tailored to each participant's needs to be delivered with ease directly to their homes.

The success of this program depends on the values and actions that local Workforce Development Boards and their partners use to guide their planning and operations, which they must consider as follows:

- 1) Integrated: Think and function as an integrated system of partners that share common goals with services delivered by various organizations with the best capabilities for a seamless customer experience.
- 2) Accountable: Committed to high-quality customer services with regular program performance review based on shared data and actions that enhance outcomes.
- 3) Affirmative Outreach: Meets the needs of customers by ensuring affirmative outreach to programs, services, and activities for all eligible individuals.
- 4) Continuous Improvement: Create a delivery system that utilizes feedback from employers and current and future jobseekers to challenge the status quo and innovate to drive measurable improvements.
- 5) Partnership: Address to align goals, resources, and initiatives with economic development, business, labor, and education partners.
- 6) Regional Strategy: Work with counterparts to address broader workforce needs of the regional economy and leverage resources to provide a higher quality and level of services.

WIOA requires that there be at least one physical one-stop career center in each local area. To achieve the goal of increased access, Puerto Rico must consider three process levels:

- 1) Comprehensive
 - a. Accessible to the public during regular business days as well as physical and programmatic access to individuals with disabilities.
 - b. Portal sites for electronic access.
 - c. Provider of basic and individualized career services, educational services, and training services.
 - d. Provider of business services.
 - e. Representation of partners.
 - f. Additional related employment and training resources.
- 2) Affiliated

- a. Access to the public is physically and programmatically accessible to individuals with disabilities.
- b. Portal sites for electronic access.
- c. Providers of Basic Career Services.
- d. Representation of one or more mandated partners.
- e. Additional related employment, education, and training resources.
- f. Established working relationships as part of an integrated system of WorkSource sites.

3) Connection

- a. Accessible to the public with barriers outlined in WIOA, which include physical and programmatic access to individuals with disabilities.
- b. Portal sites for electronic access.
- c. Providers of Basic Career Services.
- d. Additional related employment and training resources.
- e. Established working relationships as part of an integrated system of WorkSource sites.

To maximize the efforts of all participants with access to services, each one-stop site must:

- 1) Describe how their site works cooperatively with WIOA's core partners to provide quality services to all customers. Describe their outreach to populations with barriers in the community and their relationships with core programs and community partners to effectively serve them.
- 2) Provide evidence that basic ADA requirements are met.
- 3) Describe initiatives or strategies in developing positive outreach, provide tangible evidence of implementation or solution-driven plan development, and address the following four specific areas of access:
 - a. Physical: Architectural or building
 - b. Information: All the official documents printed, and materials posted.
 - c. Digital: Software, web-based programs, and print alternatives.
 - d. Communication: Verbal and non-verbal access to services, phones, and others.

- 4) Describe the wireless Internet infrastructure.
- 5) Address how the needs of populations with barriers are met through staff assistance and other means.
- 6) List any best practices to highlight and share for continuous improvement.

In Puerto Rico, Title I and the PRVRA will lead the efforts to adapt the USDOL Office of Disability Employment Policy's (ODEP) recommendations contained in its "Promising Practices in Achieving Universal Access and Equal Opportunity: A Section 188 Disability Reference Guide". The resulting guidance will be adopted by the State Board and mandated to all local areas as part of the local area certification and operator competitive selection processes.

Assessment of Accessibility to Individuals with Disability

At least once every three years, local boards must assess the effectiveness, physical and programmatic accessibility, and continuous improvement of one-stop centers and delivery systems. Considering this point, local boards determine appropriate actions to address the necessary policies and procedural modifications. This assessment also provides feedback to the local board, which supports the development of local planning goals.

WDP has utilized two mechanisms to conduct assessments of the workforce system, and these are the following:

- 1) **One-Stop Certification Process:** The State Board Certification Criteria provides a certification tool and outlines the certification process. At least once every three years, local boards must assess the effectiveness, physical and programmatic accessibility, and continuous improvement of one-stop centers and delivery systems.
- 2) **One-Stop System Monitoring:** The monitoring of compliance with accessibility for individuals contains the following evaluation elements:
 - a. **Designation of Equal Opportunity Official:** An Equal Opportunity Officer (EOO) has been appointed (29 CFR 38.23)

- b. Equal Opportunity and Non-Discrimination Policy Dissemination: Procedures or methods are in place to ensure communication with persons with disabilities. The Monitoring and Compliance Office conducts an annual inspection of auxiliary aids and services to ensure communication with disabled individuals.
- c. Review Of Commitment, Plans, Contracts and Procedures: The entity ensures that each applicant for funds and training providers interested in being eligible for receipt of funds under Title 1 of WIOA includes, in their application, the commitment to comply with the laws and regulations prohibiting discrimination outlined in 29 CFR 38.20(a).
- d. Universal Access: This includes the following:
 - i. The subrecipient has made efforts to broaden the composition of groups considered for participation or employment to include members of both sexes, racial and ethnic groups, individuals of various ages, and individuals with disabilities, including the following efforts (29 CFR 37.42):
 - 1. The subrecipient has a method to make reasonable accommodations and modifications available to individuals with disabilities section 29 CFR 38.8.
 - ii. The subrecipient physical facilities provide structural access to persons with disabilities, such as 29 CFR 38.4(2) and 38.9(e):
 - 1. The subrecipient provides auxiliary aids and services when necessary to afford individuals with disabilities the opportunity to participate and enjoy the benefits of Title I of WIOA. The primary consideration for providing such aid and services is the requests of individuals with disabilities section 29 CFR 38.9(b).

2. If the subrecipient communicates via telephone with beneficiaries, registered individuals, eligible applicants, participants, job seekers, and/or employees, the same utilizes telecommunication mechanisms for individuals with hearing impairments (TDD/TTY). or equally effective communication systems section 29 CFR 87.9 (c).
3. The subrecipient has signs at the main entrance of those facilities with no access, directing the public to a location where they can obtain information about accessible facilities. These signs meet the requirements prescribed by the General Service Administration in 41 CFR 102-76/Regulation section 29 CFR 38.9 (e) (1).
4. The eligibility criteria used for the participation of individuals in programs or activities under Title I of WIOA provide individuals with disabilities equal opportunity and access to the benefits, aids, training, programs, or activities provided to other individuals, section 29 CFR 38.7 (i), (j) and (l).

e. Data and Information Collection and Record-Keeping

- i. The Entity has designed procedures for data and information collection and record keeping.
- ii. The VRA also collaborates with the American Job Center, allowing them to use our accessibility study to access the compliance of their facilities with legislation:
 1. Expansion of the availability of information resources or training for new recruitment staff through the agency's internal page (Intranet).

2. It continues with the use of remote interpretation video technology for the deaf.

Staff Training and Support for Compliance

- Reasonable Accommodations: The document states that training and support services must be provided to qualified individuals with disabilities unless doing so would cause undue hardship. This is in line with 29 CFR 37.8 and 29 CFR 32.13. (Page 54)
- Reasonable Modifications: It is necessary to provide reasonable modifications to policies, practices, and procedures for the registration and provision of career, training, and support services to individuals with disabilities. Unless such modifications fundamentally alter the nature of the service, program, or activity. (Page 54)
- Integrated Setting: Programs and activities must be administered in the most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of qualified individuals with disabilities. (Page 54)
- AJC Staff Responsibilities: American Job Center (AJC) staff are instructed not to automatically refer jobseekers with disabilities to State vocational rehabilitation programs. Referrals are made based on whether the individual would benefit from such services, in addition to other programs and services available in the AJC. (Page 35)
- Universal Access and Equal Opportunity: The document outlines various sections dedicated to ensuring equal opportunities, including providing reasonable accommodations and modifications, effective communication, and program accessibility. (Page 3)
- Prohibitions and Modifications: The document mentions that compliance involves adhering to prohibitions and providing reasonable accommodations and modifications. It also involves administering programs in the most integrated setting to ensure effective communication. (Page 9)

- Monitoring and Continuous Improvement: There should be ongoing monitoring for compliance and continuous improvement.

Source Document: "Promising Practices in Achieving Universal and Equal Opportunity: A Section 188 Disability Reference Guide" by the US Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment, Pages 3, 9, 35, 54, 56, 57.

(9) **Addressing the Accessibility of the One-Stop Delivery System for Individuals who are English Language Learners.** Describe how the one-stop delivery system (including one-stop center operators and partners) will ensure that each one-stop center is able to meet the needs of English language learners, such as through established procedures, staff training, resources, and other materials. Describe how English language learners will be made aware of the opportunity to enroll and/or co-enroll in all core programs for which they are eligible.

The WIOA Act establishes, among other things, that accessibility is guaranteed to participants regardless of the language in which they communicate. This law is enacted in the existing multilingualism in the 50 states of the United States, where the variety of languages is very diverse. In the case of Puerto Rico, although there is a need to provide services in different languages, established public policy requires that the official languages in which agencies and instrumentalities must offer services and access to information are Spanish and English.

In order to comply with both, the Public Policy established in the document entitled, Transparency and Disclosure Requirement (Sunshine Provision) of the activities of local boards under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (DDEC-WIOA-01 -2021), effective April 8, 2021, by the Government of Puerto Rico, as well as the regulations established in the WIOA law and the Executive Order on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce, we develop below the actions to follow to achieve such an important objective:

- Evaluation: It is essential to carry out a comprehensive needs assessment to identify the specific challenges and opportunities that exist in the population to receive this service. This assessment should include demographics, language proficiency levels, and challenges accessing services and data collected by the United States Census Bureau.

- **Development:** Develop and implement comprehensive language access plans for each local area. These plans should describe strategies for providing language assistance services to participants, such as interpretation and translation services.
- **Training:** Train staff who provide services in the local area, including front-line employees, case managers, in language development and understanding of other cultures.
- **Recruitment:** Recruiting bilingual or multilingual staff who can communicate with participants in their languages of speech is essential. Staff highly trained in multilingual communication will significantly improve accessibility to the service.
- **Tool Identification:** Identify free or low-cost translation software that performs text-to-text, text-to-speech, and speech-to-text translations to provide support and service to potential multicultural clients visiting local areas.
- **Document Repository:** Developing a repository of documents translated into the various languages spoken by participants is essential. This repository should include outreach materials, application forms, program brochures, and other resources needed to access services.
- **Video Resources Repository:** Develop short training videos where you explain in other languages how you can serve a person seeking services in the Local Area.
- **Collaborative Alliances with Third Sector:** Establish collaborative alliances with the Consular Corps of Puerto Rico (CCPR) for interpretation services in other languages. The CCPR is a non-political, secular, and non-profit institution established under the laws of Puerto Rico. It has consuls from 31 countries, accredited in the US and officially represented in Puerto Rico and serves its resident citizens. This agreement would frame interpretation services in other languages which can be performed in local areas or virtually. These can collaborate in the translation of brochures, service documentation such as: eligibility criteria. Likewise, they can collaborate in the review of non-discrimination policies. In addition, they can collaborate in the dissemination of the services offered by the local area and serve as a bridge for participants.

- Collaborative Alliances with Government Resources- The Immigrant Counselling and Services Office is created in 2020 by through Law No. 254 of October 28, 2000, by the Department of State of Puerto Rico. Dedicated to attend to the affairs of immigrants who are Puerto Rico residents. Collaborates in coordinating services among foreign residents to facilitate the prompt handling and monitoring of their cases with the Local Areas.

- Outreach Campaigns: Guaranteeing equal opportunity in the receipt of services, launch an outreach campaign in the main media, social networks and in service offices where the offering of multilingual services in local areas is made known. In the AJC there is availability of documents in the respective translations in the main languages of older speakers. If an individual of some kind who does not have the translation of documents requests services, the translation service will be requested through one of the organizations with prior agreements.

By implementing these initiatives in Local Areas, they can better adapt to the needs of participants in the language of their preference and ensure equitable access to essential employment and training services.

IV. COORDINATION WITH STATE-PLAN PROGRAMS.

Describe the methods used for joint planning and coordination among the core programs and with the required one-stop partner programs and other programs and activities included in the Unified or Combined State Plan.

The Puerto Rico State Plan Advisory Committee and Joint Policy Workgroup have played a pivotal role in the development and coordination of the Unified State Plan of Puerto Rico 2024. The collaborative effort involves representatives from key programs, with the Department of Economic Development and Commerce serving as the lead executor. This review focuses on the planning process, collaborative efforts, and key responsibilities undertaken by both state and local entities in aligning workforce policies and services with regional needs.

Unified State Plan Development:

The establishment of a WIOA Unified State Plan Review Task Force in PR is led by the Title I-B; it signifies a concerted effort to create an integrated, aligned, and viable WIOA Unified State Plan. The advisory team, comprising representatives from major programs, such as Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Wagner-Peyser, and Vocational Rehabilitation Program, has been instrumental in the review of the Unified State Plan for 2024.

Strategic Planning Process:

The planning process commenced with comprehensive meetings with representatives of major programs to assess the implementation of strategies outlined in the Unified and Conditionally Approved Plan 2022. The goal was to identify achievements and areas for improvement, incorporating new strategies to enhance services. Collaboration with programs such as Adult Education, Employment Services for Older Workers, and Vocational Rehabilitation has been integral to this process.

Local Workforce Development Boards and Chief Elected Officials:

At the local level, the involvement of Local Workforce Development Boards (LDBs) and Chief Elected Officials (CEOs) in the design and governance of the system is essential. Their responsibilities include conducting workforce studies, collaborating with system partners to develop local plans, and establishing public policies in line with state directives. Additionally, efforts are directed towards engaging employers, implementing career pathways, utilizing technology, and ensuring accessibility in accordance with WIOA and the ADA Act.

Certification of AJCs:

A crucial aspect of the local board's responsibilities involves the annual evaluation of the physical and programmatic accessibility of AJCs, aligning with WIOA and ADA Act provisions. Certification of these centers, in accordance with 20 CFR Sec. 678.800, mandates that the Local Board cannot operate the AJC.

Emerging Themes and Priorities:

The advisory team has highlighted three emerging themes in the WIOA State Plan: Maximizing access to employment, reviewing implemented strategies, and modernizing the workforce system. While addressing customer needs remains a priority, the cohesive vision for the workforce system emphasizes interagency collaboration strategies and multisectoral alignment.

Governor's State Workforce Development Board Approval:

Upon completion, the reviewed and refined Unified State Plan is presented for review and approval by the Governor's State Workforce Development Board of the State of Puerto Rico, ensuring alignment with state policies and objectives.

The collaborative efforts of the Puerto Rico State Plan Advisory Committee and Joint Policy Workgroup, in conjunction with state and local entities, reflect a commitment to enhancing workforce development strategies. The comprehensive review process underscores the dedication to achieving a cohesive vision for the workforce system in Puerto Rico.

V. COMMON ASSURANCES (for all core programs)

Table 37. Common Assurances:

	The Unified or Combined State Plan must include assurances that:	Included
1.	The State has established a policy identifying circumstances that may present a conflict of interest for a State Board or local board member, or the entity or class of officials that the member represents, and procedures to resolve such conflicts;	Yes
2.	The State has established a policy to provide to the public (including individuals with disabilities) access to meetings of State Boards and local boards, and information regarding activities of State Boards and local boards, such as data on board membership and minutes;	Yes
3.	The lead State agencies with optimal policy-making authority and responsibility for the administration of core programs reviewed and commented on the appropriate operational planning elements of the Unified or Combined State Plan,	Yes

	and approved the elements as serving the needs of the populations served by such programs;	
4.	<p>(a) The State obtained input into the development of the Unified or Combined State Plan and provided an opportunity for comment on the plan by representatives of local boards and chief elected officials, businesses, labor organizations, institutions of higher education, the entities responsible for planning or administrating the core programs, required one-stop partners and the other Combined Plan programs (if included in the State Plan), other primary stakeholders, including other organizations that provide services to individuals with barriers to employment, and the general public, and that the Unified or Combined State Plan is available and accessible to the general public;</p> <p>The State provided an opportunity for review and comment on the plan by the State Board, including State agency official(s) for the Unemployment Insurance Agency if such official(s) is a member of the State Board;</p>	Yes
5.	The State has established, in accordance with WIOA section 116(i), fiscal control and fund accounting procedures that may be necessary to ensure the proper disbursement of, and accounting for, funds paid to the State through allotments made for the core programs to conduct workforce development activities;	Yes
6.	The State has taken appropriate action to secure compliance with uniform administrative requirements in this Act, including that the State will annually monitor local areas to ensure compliance and otherwise take appropriate action to secure compliance with the uniform administrative requirements under WIOA section 184(a)(3);	Yes
7.	The State has taken the appropriate action to comply with WIOA section 188, Nondiscrimination, as applicable;	Yes
8.	The Federal funds received to conduct a core program will not be expended for any purpose other than for activities authorized with respect to such funds under that core program;	
9.	The State will pay an appropriate share (as defined by the State board) of the costs of conducting section 116, from funds made available through each of the core programs;	Yes

10.	The State has a one-stop certification policy that ensures the physical and programmatic accessibility of all one-stop centers with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA);	Yes
11.	Service providers have a referral process in place for directing Veterans with Significant Barriers to Employment (SBE) to DVOP services, when appropriate; and,	Yes
12.	Priority of service for veterans and eligible spouses is provided in accordance with 38 USC 4215 in all workforce preparation, development or delivery of programs or services funded directly, in whole or in part, by the DOL.	Yes

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VI. PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR CORE PROGRAMS

The State must address all program-specific requirements in this section for the WIOA core programs, regardless of whether the State submits either a Unified or Combined State Plan.

Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Activities under Title I-B. The Unified or Combined State Plan must include the following with respect to activities conducted under subtitle B—

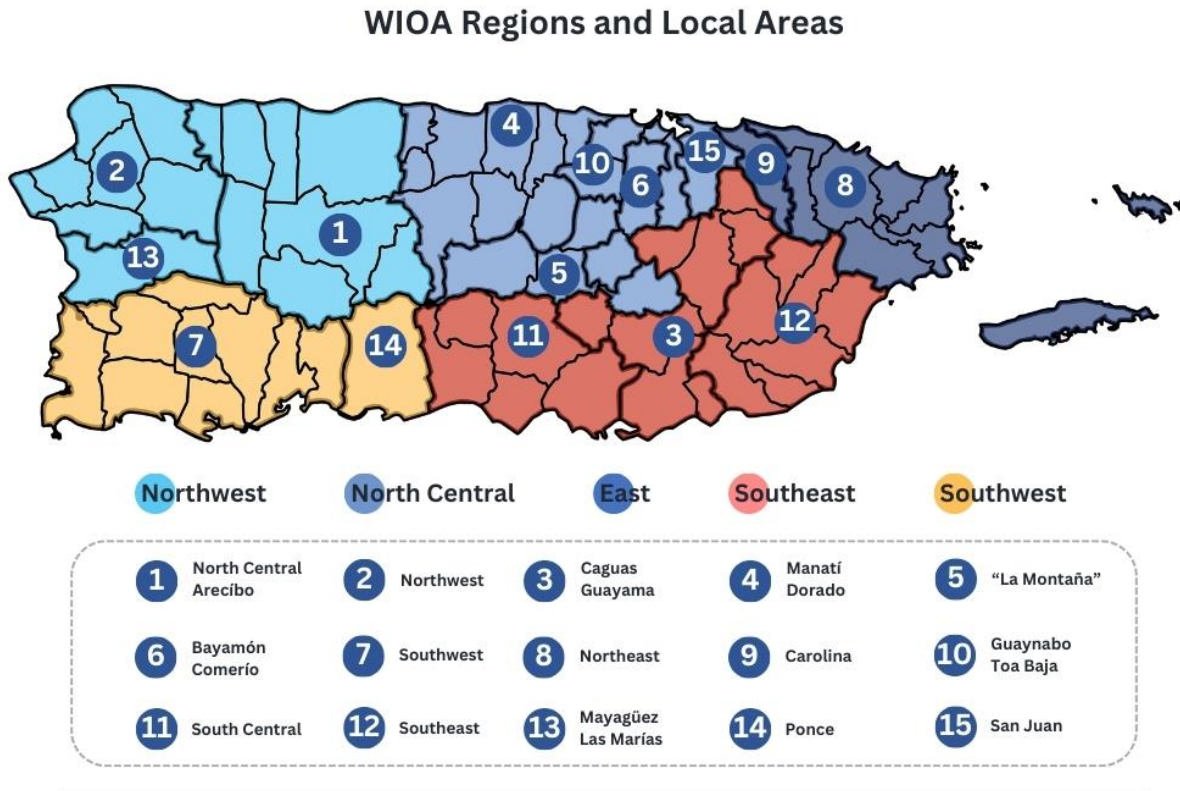
(a) General Requirements

(1) Regional and Local Workforce Development Areas.

(A) Identifying the regions and local workforce development areas designated in the State.

In 2016, Puerto Rico's governor divided the economic development regions into five sectors based on the predominant economic activities influencing the island. Presently, these regions remain in effect, but the government is assessing their effectiveness and performance amidst ongoing economic fluctuations impacting the island. There is a contemplation of reorganizing these regions to align with emerging trends in the job market and the evolving requirements of both participants and employers, aiming for a more economically responsive structure.

Figure 9. WIOA Regions and Local Areas:



The main characteristics of the regions are:

- Northwest: Known for its robust industrial cluster in computing, aerospace, and agriculture, contributing significantly to the local economy.
- Southwest: Diverse industries, including agriculture, ecotourism, hospitality, and logistics technology, shape the economic landscape of this region.
- North Central: Specializing in pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, logistics technology, health services, research and development, and medical tourism, these regions boast a dynamic economic profile.

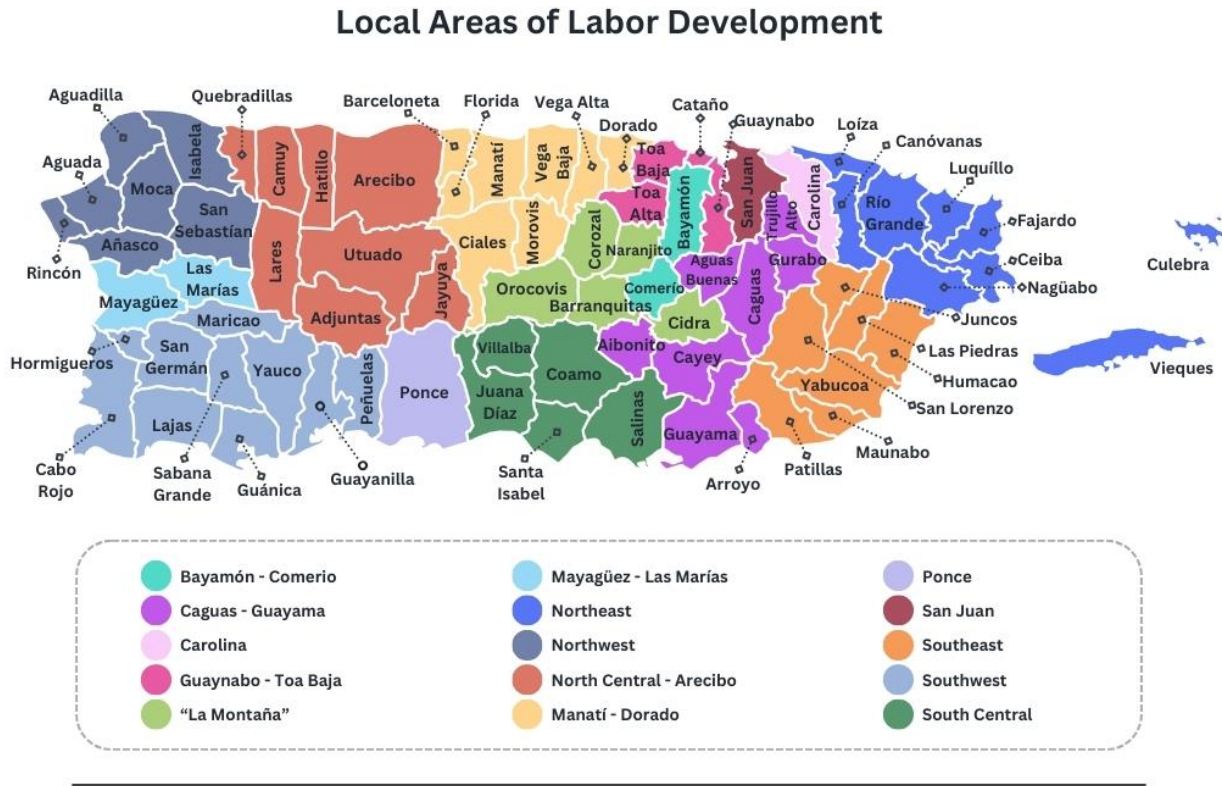
- Eastern: Primarily focused on tourism and logistics technology, playing a key role in local and broader market economic activities.
- Southeast: Notable for concentrations in pharmaceuticals and agriculture biotechnology, including crop research and development, contributing substantially to Puerto Rico's economic fabric.

The Governor and State Board will collaboratively establish public policies and guidelines for developing regional plans within local areas. These policies align with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Regulations and include:

- Targeted technical assistance for local areas in regional planning and streamlined service delivery.
- Seamless alignment of regional plans with state economic development strategies.
- Integration of economic development initiatives by local government consortia.
- Seamless integration of industrial conglomerates and promotion of sectoral strategies.
- Adaptation of operating systems to prevailing economic trends.
- Strategic alignment of job training with market opportunities.
- Collaboration with the private sector for tailored participant recruitment and training.
- Evaluation and enhancement of work activity effectiveness through consortia engagement.
- Active participation in projects for sustaining and generating employment opportunities.
- Collaboration with business associations to stimulate economic growth.

Notably, Puerto Rico has 15 local areas with 17 American Employment Centers (AJCs), illustrated in the accompanying map, providing a visual representation of economic regions. Further details on each region and local area are in the subsequent section.

Figure 10. Local Areas of Labor Development:



(B) Describe the process and policy used to designate local areas, including procedures for determining whether the local area met the criteria for “performed successfully” and “sustained fiscal integrity” in accordance with 106(b)(2) and (3) of WIOA. Describe the process used for identifying regions and planning regions under Section 106(a) of the WIOA. This must include a description of how the State consulted with the local boards and chief elected officials to identify the regions.

The process for designating local areas under WIOA, as outlined in state board policy DDEC-WIOA-02-2021, involves considering initial and subsequent designations, including circumstances for local area resignation within economic development regions. The state

board, advising the governor, designates local zones after consulting with local boards and elected officials.

WIOA emphasizes a client-centric system, aligning services with regional needs. The governor, in collaboration with the state board, chief elected officers, and local boards, designates local areas for WIOA funds. PRDEDC serves as the designated WIOA Title 1 grantee, per EO-2014-64 AND ACT 171-2014. Prior designation to WIOA designation occurs through automatic designation or discretionary appointment, considering successful performance and fiscal integrity, as per state board administrative letter wioa-02-2021.

The state regulations are issued pursuant to sections 3 and 106 of WIOA, Act 171-2014, which transferred the WDP to the PRDEDC, and the Governor's EO-2014-64 which designated the PRDEDC as the grantee, administrator, and overseer of WIOA funds allocated to the State and established by the State Board.

The State Board Administrative Letter WIOA-02-2021, also promulgates a public policy to guide the process of reassigning local areas. In summary, the process of transitioning from a previously designated local area to being initially designated as a local area under WIOA can occur using one of two methods:

- Automatic designation. Under section 106(b)(2) of the WIOA, the Governor must approve an application from the area previously designated for initial designation under the WIOA, provided that there has been no change in the composition of the local zone; and during the 2 programmatic years prior to the adoption of WIOA approval, the local area "performed successfully" (during FYs 2012 and FY2013) and met the criteria for "sustained fiscal integrity."
- Discretionary appointment. Upon recommendation by the State Board, and pursuant to section 106(b)(4) of the WIOA, the Governor may approve an application by any general local government unit, including a combination of those units, for designation as a local area under the WIOA, if the State Board recommends and determines that the unit or units share a common labor market; share the same economic development area; and have federal resources available and non-federal, including

education and training institutions, assigned for the service provision of services for the workforce.

At any time, the Governor may review the performance and results of a local area to assess whether it meets the requirements for subsequent designation.

Puerto Rico’s five regions and 15 local areas are determined using THE CENSUS Bureau data on workflows, aligning with OMB statistical areas. The state office of WIOA defines geographic labor markets based on home-to-work flows, ensuring rational regional planning. all local areas fall within specific regions, avoiding an excessively large labor market area. The current regions and local areas are detailed in the provided table.

Table 38: Local and Regional Areas

Region	Municipality	Workforce Area
East	Carolina	Carolina
East	Canóvanas	Northeast
East	Ceiba	Northeast
East	Culebra	Northeast
East	Fajardo	Northeast
East	Loíza	Northeast
East	Luquillo	Northeast
East	Naguabo	Northeast

Region	Municipality	Workforce Area
East	Río Grande	Northeast
East	Vieques	Northeast
North-Central	Bayamón	Bayamón-Comerío
North-Central	Comerío	Bayamón-Comerío
North-Central	Cataño	Guaynabo-Toa Baja
North-Central	Guaynabo	Guaynabo-Toa Baja
North-Central	Toa Alta	Guaynabo-Toa Baja
North-Central	Toa Baja	Guaynabo-Toa Baja
North-Central	Barranquitas	<i>La Montaña</i>
North-Central	Cidra	<i>La Montaña</i>
North-Central	Naranjito	<i>La Montaña</i>
North-Central	Orocovis	<i>La Montaña</i>
North-Central	Barceloneta	Manatí-Dorado

Region	Municipality	Workforce Area
North-Central	Ciales	Manatí-Dorado
North-Central	Corozal	Manatí-Dorado
North-Central	Dorado	Manatí-Dorado
North-Central	Florida	Manatí-Dorado
North-Central	Manatí	Manatí-Dorado
North-Central	Morovis	Manatí-Dorado
North-Central	Vega Alta	Manatí-Dorado
North-Central	Vega Baja	Manatí-Dorado
North-Central	San Juan	San Juan
Northwest	Las Marías	Mayagüez-Las Marías
Northwest	Mayagüez	Mayagüez-Las Marías
Northwest	Moca	Northwest
Northwest	Rincón	Northwest

Region	Municipality	Workforce Area
Northwest	San Sebastián	Northwest
Northwest	Jayuya	Norte-Central Arecibo
Northwest	Lares	Norte-Central Arecibo
Northwest	Adjuntas	North-Central Arecibo
Northwest	Arecibo	North-Central Arecibo
Northwest	Camuy	North-Central Arecibo
Northwest	Hatillo	North-Central Arecibo
Northwest	Quebradillas	North-Central Arecibo
Northwest	Utua	North-Central Arecibo
Northwest	Aguada	Northwest
Northwest	Aguadilla	Northwest
Northwest	Añasco	Northwest
Northwest	Isabela	Northwest

Region	Municipality	Workforce Area
Southeast	Aguas Buenas	Caguas-Guayama
Southeast	Aibonito	Caguas-Guayama
Southeast	Arroyo	Caguas-Guayama
Southeast	Caguas	Caguas-Guayama
Southeast	Cayey	Caguas-Guayama
Southeast	Guayama	Caguas-Guayama
Southeast	Gurabo	Caguas-Guayama
Southeast	Trujillo Alto	Caguas-Guayama
Southeast	Coamo	South Central
Southeast	Juana Díaz	South Central
Southeast	Santa Isabel	South Central
Southeast	Villalba	South Central
Southeast	Humacao	Southeast
Southeast	Juncos	Southeast

Region	Municipality	Workforce Area
Southeast	Las Piedras	Southeast
Southeast	Maunabo	Southeast
Southeast	Patillas	Southeast
Southeast	San Lorenzo	Southeast
Southeast	Salinas	Southeast
Southeast	Yabucoa	Southeast
Southwest	Ponce	Ponce
Southwest	Cabo Rojo	Southwest
Southwest	Guánica	Southwest
Southwest	Guayanilla	Southwest
Southwest	Hormigueros	Southwest
Southwest	Lajas	Southwest
Southwest	Maricao	Southwest

Region	Municipality	Workforce Area
Southwest	Peñuelas	Southwest
Southwest	Sabana Grande	Southwest
Southwest	San Germán	Southwest
Southwest	Yauco	Southwest

The economic regions as established as Northeast, Northwest, North Central, Southeast, and Southwest, have conducted various activities to support the workforce and be able to contribute to the development and economic sustainability of the island. Among the implementing measures for the years 2022 and 2023 are the following:

Table 38. WIOA Performance Indicator:2022

WIOA PERFORMANCE INDICATOR					
WIOA ADULTS	NORTHEAST	NORTHWEST	NORTH CENTRAL	SOUTHEAST	SOUTHWEST
Employment Rate in the Second Quarter	53.50%	53.50%	53.50%	53.50%	53.50%
Employment Rate in the Fourth Quarter	49.00%	49.00%	49.00%	49.00%	49.00%

Median Earnings	\$2,500.00	\$2,364.00	\$2,250.00	\$2,425.00	\$2,500.00
Credential Achievement Rate	42.00%	42.00%	42.00%	42.00%	42.00%
Measurable Gains in Skills	72.00%	72.00%	72.00%	72.00%	72.00%
WIOA POSTED WORKERS					
Employment Rate in the Second Quarter	52.50%	52.50%	52.50%	52.50%	52.50%
Employment Rate in the Fourth Quarter	52.00%	52.00%	52.00%	52.00%	52.00%
Median Earnings	\$2,600.00	\$2,500.00	\$2,510.00	\$2,568.00	\$2,600.00
Credential Achievement Rate	51.00%	51.00%	51.00%	51.00%	51.00%

Measurable Gains in Skills	52.20%	52.20%	52.20%	52.20%	52.20%
WIOA YOUTH					
Employment Rate in the Second Quarter	50.00%	50.00%	50.00%	47.0%	50.00%
Employment Rate in the Fourth Quarter	50.00%	50.00%	50.00%	47.0%	50.00%
Median Earnings	\$1,620.00	\$1,800.00	\$1,682.00	\$1,800.00	\$1,800.00
Credential Achievement Rate	20.00%	20.00%	20.00%	20.00%	20.00%
Measurable Gains in Skills	28.9%	32.10%	28.89%	28.89%	32.10%

2023

WIOA PERFORMANCE INDICATOR					
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WIOA ADULTS	NORTHEAS T	NORTHWES T	NORTH CENTRA L	SOUTHEAS T	SOUTHWES T
Employment Rate in the Second Quarter	54.00%	54.00%	54.00%	54.00%	54.00%
Employment Rate in the Fourth Quarter	51.00%	51.00%	51.00%	51.00%	51.00%
Median Earnings	\$2,600.00	\$2,600.00	\$2,340.00	\$2,525.00	\$2,600.00
Credential Achievement Rate	42.50%	42.50%	42.50%	42.50%	42.50%
Measurable Gains in Skills	72.45%	72.45%	72.45%	72.45%	72.45%
WIOA POSTED WORKERS					
Employment Rate in the Second Quarter	53.00%	53.00%	53.00%	53.00%	53.00%

Employment Rate in the Fourth Quarter	54.00%	54.00%	54.00%	54.00%	54.00%
Median Earnings	\$2,700.00	\$2,700.00	\$2,610.00	\$2,668.00	\$2,700.00
Credential Achievement Rate	51.50%	51.50%	51.50%	51.50%	51.50%
Measurable Gains in Skills	52.65%	52.65%	53.00%	52.65%	52.65%
WIOA YOUTH					
Employment Rate in the Second Quarter	50.50%	50.50%	50.50%	47.5%	50.50%
Employment Rate in the Fourth Quarter	50.50%	50.50%	50.50%	47.5%	50.50%
Median Earnings	\$1,710.00	\$1,710.00	\$1,782.00	\$1,900.00	\$1,900.00

Credential Achievement Rate	20.50%	20.50%	20.50%	20.50%	20.50%
Measurable Gains in Skills	30.7%	30.7%	30.69%	30.7%	34.1%

According to the table, for the year 2023 it represented a slight increase in all performance indicators in both Adults, Displaced Workers, and Youth. Another line item that the economic regions have had is the employment rates in the second and fourth quarters. For the year 2022, it had a slight decrease from the second to the fourth quarter, while for the year 2023, these indicators for the variables considered obtained an increase, for an average of a little more than 50%. In addition, measurable gains in skills in 2023 increased compared to 2022.

In conclusion, these indicators represent a better management of job training in the economic regions of the island, which will allow greater economic production and therefore a better quality of life.

(B) Provide the appeal process and policy referred to in section 106(b)(5) of the WIOA relating to the designation of local areas:

The state policy DDEC-WIOA-02-2021 outlines the process for seeking initial designation of local areas to administer WIOA funds, including the appeal procedure for adverse determinations. If a local area disagrees with a different determination and seeks revision, it can submit a reconsideration statement to the State Board within 15 calendar days of receiving the notification. The State Board will issue a final determination within 15 calendar days of receiving the review requested. If denied, the local entity can appeal to USDOL within 30 calendar days of receiving the State Board's determination.

The appeal process for local area designation is as follows:

The content of the State Policy on the Local Area Designation Appeal Process is as follows:

1. A unit of general local government or grant recipient not granted local area designation can submit a written appeal to the Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DEDC) within 14 days of the decision.
2. The appeal, addressed to the Secretary of DEDC and the President of the State Workforce Development Board, must state specific grounds for the appeal.
3. The State Board reviews the appeal within 60 days, considering both the original request and any supplemental information provided.
4. The Governor makes the final decision.
5. If the appeal is related to an initial designation request and does not result in designation, the entity may request a review by the Secretary of Labor within 14 days to assess procedural rights and WIOA Section 106(b)(2) or Section 106(b)(3) criteria:

Assistant Secretary of Employment and Training
United States Department of Labor
200 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20210

A copy of the appeal must be simultaneously provided to the:

ETA Regional Administrator
United States Department of Labor
John F. Kennedy Federal Building
Room E-350
Boston, Mass 02203

(B) Provide the appeals process and policy referred to in section 121(h)(2)(E) of WIOA relating to determinations for infrastructure funding.

MOUs and IFAs State Policy

The Workforce Development Program, on May 5, 2017, approved the “Carta Circular WIOA-01-2017 Memorandum of Understanding MOU” policy. As per WIOA, One-Stop partners have the right to appeal the determination of funds allocated for One-Stop infrastructure costs and

can request a hearing. The appeal, along with the hearing request, should be sent in writing to the State Board within 21 calendar days from the Local Board's infrastructure cost determination.

One-Stop partners also have the option to appeal against the governor's decision concerning their share of funds for infrastructure costs. Additionally, a Grievance and Complaint Policy is currently under consideration by the State Board, applicable to entities and individuals appealing decisions at the local or state levels.

The appeals process for infrastructure funding determinations is outlined as follows:

1. The governor, with SWDB assistance, will make the final determination of each required partner's proportionate share of statewide infrastructure costs under the State funding mechanism.
2. Any required partner can appeal the governor's determination based on claims that it is inconsistent with the proportionate share requirements or cost contributions caps stated in 20 CFR 678.735(a), 20 CFR 678.736, and 20 CFR 678.738.
3. The process ensures prompt resolution of the appeal for timely fund distribution, aligning with the requirements of 20 CFR 683.630.
4. Appeals must be submitted formally in writing via registered mail within 21 days of the governor's determination, no later than 15 days from receiving the notice of denial or revocation.

(2) Statewide Activities.

(b) Provide State policies or guidance for the statewide workforce development system and use of State funds for workforce investment activities.

The Planning Guidelines are the official document that sets out public policy and requirements for allocating local area funds for Youth, Adult, and Displaced Worker programs. Consistent with WIOA regulations, priorities, and objectives, state planning will address the service needs of specific populations and minorities, as well as those of

participants and employers. The annual Planning Guidelines compile state and federal public policies regarding the management of WIOA funds. The design of this guide is to ensure compliance with ETA policies and objectives, as outlined in the Training and Employment Guidance Letters (TEGLs), Training and Employment Notices (TENS), WIOA Final Rules, as well as State Board policies. For more details, see *State Policies and Procedures*.

On May 5, 2017, the Workforce Development Program approved the policy: "Circular Letter WIOA-01-2017 Memorandum of Understanding MOU". According to WIOA, One-Stop partners can appeal to the Governor's determination on the portion of the funds to be provided for the cost of One-Stop's infrastructure and request a hearing. For this process, they must mail a written appeal and a request for a hearing within 21 calendar days of the Governor's infrastructure cost determination.

In the appeal, you must state the reasons for the appeal. The appellant must describe how the Governor's infrastructure cost determination is inconsistent with the proportionate participation requirements, cost contribution limitations, and/or cost contribution limits, in accordance with Section 678.750(b) of the WIOA Notice of Proposed Rulemaking.

The appellant will be contacted within 10 calendar days of the receipt of the appeal and a hearing date will be scheduled. To ensure a prompt resolution of the appeal and distribution of funds in a timely manner, the appellant will receive a written decision no later than 15 calendar days after the hearing.

- i Describe how the State intends to use the Governor's set aside funding for mandatory and discretionary activities, including how the State will conduct evaluations of Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth activities.

Governor set-aside funds

Statewide activities funds are being used and prioritized to conduct the following required activities:

- **Operating a fiscal management and accountability system:** The DEDC has established, in accordance with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Section 116(i), fiscal control and fund accounting procedures that are necessary to ensure the proper disbursement of, and accounting for, funds paid to the State through allotments made for adult, dislocated worker, and youth programs to carry out workforce investment activities.
- **Dissemination of the State’s list of Eligible Training Providers:** Section 122(c) of WIOA mentions that states must have an application procedure for providers and training programs, to maintain their eligibility and the eligibility of their programs. States, in partnership with local boards, their partners, and the One-Stop system, play a leading role in ensuring the success of the system of eligible training providers. The Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) module, part of PRIS, is a crucial tool for participants seeking training or skills enhancement to identify appropriate providers and relevant information, such as program cost and outcomes. With PRIS, career planners can make it easier for participants to identify training providers that offer programs in high-demand, economically trending industries that result in greater well-being and economic development. This system will provide up-to-date information on in-demand occupations, training programs that address employers' skills needs, and information on available jobs and occupations.
- **Technical Assistance to local areas:** The State will publish quarterly performance results for all local areas. The availability of these reports allows the State and local areas to monitor performance results to establish trends and identify areas or administrative processes that require corrective action. WIOA program staff will monitor performance, identify issues, and provide technical assistance as needed.
- Programmatic reviews ensure that the workforce development system achieves quality program outcomes that meet the requirements and objectives of WIOA and federal and state regulations. Puerto Rico will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of local programs through programmatic reviews and oversight activities for the entire workforce development system. WIOA's programmatic reviews will provide

guidance and direction to local programs to foster quality workforce development to our clients and identify new opportunities under WIOA. Program reviews also provide an opportunity to disseminate information about effective program practices throughout the workforce development system. State staff will continue to conduct programmatic reviews to ensure effective monitoring and oversight of grants. These reviews will be conducted through the integration of various administrative activities such as on-site monitoring, quarterly document reviews, technical assistance, and ongoing training.

- Use of DEDC Monitoring Guidelines by WIOA State Coordinators is required. In addition, the Monitoring Guides are living documents that are regularly updated to reflect changes in legislation, regulations and/or policy and changes in economic trends, as well as to include any improvements that make the guides easier and more effective to use.
- **Evaluations:** The State will conduct evaluations and research projects on activities under WIOA's core programs. Its main objective is to establish and promote methods to improve such activities that allow for high-level performance within the state workforce system. Such projects will be coordinated and designed in conjunction with state and local boards and state agencies responsible for the administration of all respective core programs. Evaluations will include analysis of customer feedback, job placement outcomes, training, and process measures for the labor investment system, as needed.

In addition to funding the WIOA activities mentioned above, state activity funds are being used for those activities deemed essential to the basic functions of the workforce investment system. This includes oversight of local workforce investment boards and WIOA programs. The activities permitted with the use of these funds are as follows:

- **State Level Administration** includes the following functions:
 - Staff costs for program oversight and monitoring.

- Participant Records Information System (PRIS) and related personnel costs: The state uses a single, integrated data collection system, known as the Participant Records Information System. This ensures that all local providers collect, report, and maintain the same data elements.
- **Special Projects Funding:** Funds have been set aside that could include, but are not limited to, workforce and economic needs for information and data, support for state planning activities around WIOA, support for regional and local activities, surveys, and evaluations. Funds can also be used to provide additional support to local board operations.
- **Professional Development and Capacity Building Funds for our workforce development system:** Funds will be allocated to support activities that meet the strategic plans and needs of local employers for a skilled workforce. In addition, funds can be used, among others, to support state and local partnerships to build equitable pathways to high-wage careers, improve the system's ability to provide opportunities where people with occupational barriers enter in-demand industrial sectors or occupations, and non-traditional occupations. This will allow the development and improvement of work performance and economic production level.
 - ii Describe how the State will utilize Rapid Response funds to respond to layoffs and plant closings and coordinate services to quickly aid companies and their affected workers. States should also describe any layoff aversion strategy implemented to address at-risk companies and workers.

State Unit for Dislocated Workers and Employers – Rapid Response Services

The Department of Economic Development and Commerce facilitates the statewide Rapid Response services and serves as the recipient of plant closings or mass layoff notices required under the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act.

Rapid Response is a key component of Puerto Rico's strategy to create a unified local approach while working and providing a wide range of business services to employers. The Rapid Response service will promote a range of business services to support businesses at all stages of the business cycle. Early intervention facilitates a relatively quick and unhindered transition to employment or training, whether after a permanent shutdown or mass layoff, or a natural (or other) disaster resulting in massive employment dislocation.

The State Unit for Displaced Workers and Employers of DEDC's Workforce Development Program oversees Rapid Response services and coordinates the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Program. The Rapid Response process involves a unification of state agencies and local service providers, along with the private sector and organized labor. The goal of all stakeholders is to provide displaced workers with a variety of resources and technical assistance to support the transition to reemployment. State RR and TAA Coordinators participate in cross-training reemployment and assistance programs for each local area or region. Subsequently, the State RR and TAA Coordinators function as a liaison between the Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs), Wagner Peyser and PRDOLHR Unemployment Insurance, and applicable federal, state, and private resources to ensure that all information about reemployment and support services is available to assist employers and workers experiencing mass layoff or closure of a business plant.

The state has developed a comprehensive rapid response and TAA procedures, which will be continually reviewed to improve business engagement and layoff aversion services. The Rapid Response team begins the process by interacting with companies that have laid off or plan to lay off workers. Information about WIOA's TAA and Dislocated Worker Programs is provided to the company and, if applicable, union officials at this early stage. Meetings with workers are planned currently to discuss available workforce programs in more detail.

State TAA and RR Coordinators thoroughly document displacement events, allowing for trend analysis and initiative-taking strategy development. In addition, it organizes the necessary communications and coordinates relevant services to support affected workers. All these strategies are part of a system driven by demand and occupational trends, both of which are key to a comprehensive layoff aversion strategy.

Fund Allocation Policies

To ensure the fiscal integrity of the state fund, DEDC has developed the following public policies or procedures for the allocation of funds under WIOA and other federal programs:

Table 41. Fund Allocation Policies:

DDEC-WIOA-11-20	Financial Reports - Close-Out Reports
DDEC-WIOA-10-20	Payroll Cost Allocation Policy - Guidelines and procedures for payroll base on budget
DDEC-WIOA-09-20	Cost allocation and fund reimbursement
DDEC-WIOA-06-20	TAA Definition of eligible displacement area
DDEC-WIOA-05-20	TAA Training - Requirements when approving Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Training funds request.
DDEC-WIOA-RR-01-20	Policy for COVID-19 Layoff Aversion Fund
Waiver Policy	Operational Procedure for Implementing the Waiver for Business Capitalization
State Board Sanctions	Policy to establish the procedure for the determination of WIOA rules violations and the imposition of state board sanctions
DDEC-WIOA-04-2021	Faculty of local areas to pay a summer bonus as part of fringe benefits to their employees

DDEC-WIOA-11-20	Financial Reports - Close-Out Reports
WIOA-03-2021	Prohibition of the total closure of the One Stop Centers (OSC) during the administrative closures decreed by the municipalities
DDEC-WIOA-02-2022	Policy related to allowable expenses to travels paid with WIOA Funds

These procedures were approved by the State Board. In addition, the following procedures were included to ensure the fiscal integrity of the program:

- A single audit of the use of the funds is conducted once a year.
- Financial monitoring of the activities conducted with funds from the state reserve is conducted once a year.
- Contracts that exceed \$10,000 must be referred to the Governor's office. If they exceed \$50,000, they must also be sent to the OGP.
- The State Board is in the process of establishing public policy for the evaluation and approval of any delegation of funds from the state reserve.
- The State Board, through its Executive and Planning Committee, evaluates transactions of State Reserve funds that exceed \$500,000. In addition, it requires a report of all projects developed with Reserve funds regardless of the amount of funds used.
- The WDP has a Planning Guide that is reviewed each program year to bring it in line with the public policies issued by DOLETA. It contains all instructions on the use of funds. This guide is also used for permitted state reserve activities.

- For the development of the activities required by the state, the DEDC develops competitive processes by publishing RFPs for the hiring of any professional service. There is a permanent Auction Committee, which is staffed by additional DEDC personnel who specialize in the service to be contracted. The DEDC follows the protocols and policies of the state OGP to develop any RFP process.
- All contracts are regulated by the 2 CFR ensuring that obligations and funds are not used for: food and beverage, branding, and marketing projects, including website development, indirect administrative costs, politically related activities, entertainment, fines and penalties, donations, fundraising activities, individual memberships, and subscriptions.
- For incumbent workers training, the employers must sign certifications and warranties and complete the contract process. Funds will be reimbursed as expenses are incurred. So, the State Board, through the Fiscal Agent, will ensure that companies submit performance reports and expense receipts before issuing reimbursements. The performance reports will include the amount of work savings, the estimated amount of annual wage savings, and the specific project measures and results. Employers benefiting from the fund must retain receipts for at least three years beyond the end of the grant period.
- The WDP will agree with employers receiving the fund that they may be subject to local, state, or federal monitoring.
- The DEDC also adheres to state laws regarding the use of public funds. And all contracts are subject to review by the Puerto Rico Comptroller's Office.

To prevent risk for companies and employees, state strategies for layoff aversion are oriented in four dimensions:

Partnership with economic development entities: The Department of Economic Development and Commerce is the umbrella for government economic development agencies. Therefore, part of the strategies for the prevention of layoffs is the orientation on

incentives in Puerto Rico that promote job creation. Some of these examples are Law 120-2014, Law 135-2014, Incentive for Micro-entrepreneurs, among others. Therefore, part of our strategy is that companies can have savings in their payrolls through state incentives under the DEDC. Even though these are state resources, they apply to WIOA participants.

Incumbent Workers training: Employee training reduces the risk of dislocation of the incumbent workers. Lifelong education is the basis for companies to be competitive in a global and changing economy.

Research and Development: Permissible activities under Rapid Response allow local areas to contract consulting services and labor market research. These actions will encourage data-based decision making and expert research.

Improving technology transfer: The DEDC is developing a case management program that will allow for a better monitoring picture of WIOA participants (employees and employers). This system will be able to keep a better record of the activities that occur in companies.

The DEDC contracted an external resource to develop policies and procedures for establishing a Business Service Unit within the State Unit for Dislocated Workers and Employers. The State Board has a draft policy under consideration: "PRDDEC-WIOA-RR-04-20". This policy details the procedures for the implementation of Rapid Response activities in Puerto Rico

(iii) Describe the State policies and procedures to provide Rapid Responses in cases of natural disasters, including coordination with FEMA and other entities.

The State Board has a draft policy under consideration: "PRDDEC-WIOA-RR-04-20". This policy details the procedures for the implementation of Rapid Response activities in Puerto Rico. The statewide RR coordinator and team respond to natural disasters in the same manner as other dislocations, while adapting to the unique characteristics of the event. The coordinator will organize and develop a coordinated response with the appropriate federal, state, and local agencies to ensure impacted individuals receive the services they need.

When the Governor declares an emergency and formally requests a federal emergency declaration, the Puerto Rico Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DEDC) will work with the local board(s) to determine if the disaster could result in a potentially large loss of employment and evaluate whether sufficient resources are available to adequately provide workforce services. If a funding shortfall is anticipated, the DEDC will seek Emergency Dislocated Worker Grant funding pending federal designation. If FEMA declares a natural disaster and establishes a designated disaster area, the DEDC will formally apply for assistance and work with the local area(s) on implementation.

PR recently has been affected by diverse types of disasters; hurricanes, earthquakes, and the latest COVID-19 pandemic. For this reason, the DEDC requested a waiver allowance of WIOA section 134(a)(2)(A), (2)(B) and (3) to add flexibility in the use of the funds reserved by the Governor for use to provide statewide rapid response activities (i.e. WIOA section 134(a)(2)(A)), for use to provide statewide employment and training activities (i.e. WIOA section 134(a)(2)(B) and (3)) to provide disaster relief to affected areas. This waiver is submitted in this plan modification for ETA evaluation for PY 2022 and 2023.

Under this waiver allowance, permitted WIOA statewide fund use includes, but is not limited to:

- Expeditious allocation of funds to a local workforce development board, or local board, so they may respond quickly to a disaster, emergency, or other qualifying event as described at 20 CFR 687.100(b). Only those events, and cascading events caused by a qualifying event, that have been declared as an emergency or disaster by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), by the chief official of a Federal Agency with jurisdiction over the Federal response to a disaster with potential significant loss of employment, or the Governor of Puerto Rico as a qualifying event, qualify for the use of WIOA statewide funds.
- The conduct of comprehensive disaster relief employment and training activities, and the provision of necessary humanitarian resources and services, including such other services or resources as deemed necessary as described in 20 CFR 687.180(b)(1).

- An individual's disaster relief employment is limited to 12 months or 2080 hours for work related to recovery from a single emergency or disaster. The Workforce Development Program (WDP) of the DEDC may extend an individual's disaster relief employment for up to an additional 12 months or 2080 hours if requested and sufficiently justified by the local board.
- Employment and training activities as described in WIOA section 134(c) and (d) are supported for WIOA eligible participants.
- Provide support services that enable the participation of individuals in disaster relief employment, including costs such as transportation, childcare, and personal safety equipment and clothing in accordance with local policies.
- Individuals shall be eligible to be offered disaster relief employment and employment and training services if such individual is a dislocated worker; is a long-term unemployed individual as defined by the State; is temporarily or permanently laid off as a consequence of the emergency or disaster; or in the case of an individual who is self-employed, becomes unemployed or significantly underemployed as a result of the emergency or disaster as well as appropriate adults and youth ages 18 and over.

The waiver request is under consideration by USDOLETA.

The DEDC is in the process of developing a comprehensive procedure, to serve customers using the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Rapid Response (RR), the WIOA Dislocated Worker, and Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) programs. Both TAA and Rapid Response activities are shared by the State Unit for Dislocated Workers and Employers within the Workforce Development Program of DEDC to ensure the provision of an all-inclusive approach. The Rapid Response section is comprised of Rapid Response (RR) and TAA State Coordinators who are assigned to serve layoffs/closings across the state.

(iii) Describe how the State provides early intervention (e.g., Rapid Response) and ensures the provision of appropriate career services to worker groups on whose behalf a Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) petition has been filed. (Section 134(a)(2)(A) and TAA Section 221(a)(2)(A).) This description must include how the

State disseminates benefit information to provide workers in the groups identified in the TAA petitions with an accurate understanding of the provision of TAA benefits and services in such a way that they are transparent to the dislocated worker applying for them (Trade Act Sec. 221(a)(2)(A) and Sec. 225: Governor-Secretary Agreement). Describe how the State will use funds that have been reserved for Rapid Response to provide services for every worker group that files a TAA petition, and how the state will ensure the provision of appropriate career service to workers in the groups identified in the petition (TAA Sec. 221(a)(2)(A)).

The RR Coordinators begins the process by interacting with companies that have, or plan to, lay off workers. As soon as company closure or layoff information is known, this information is investigated by the assigned Coordinator. Investigation and fact-finding of potential trade impact is immediately conducted for consideration of a TAA Petition. If found that a TAA petition filing is warranted, the TAA State Coordinator discusses with the employer, and if applicable, the Union Officials, the next steps for petition filing as well as potential benefits if approved. If the impacted employer or Union prefers to file the TAA Petition with the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL), the TAA State Coordinator is available for assistance.

Depending upon the employer preference, a Rapid Response and/or Worker Orientation meeting is arranged to discuss the re-employment, state, federal, and local resources, as well information presented by the W-P and UI staff. If TAA certified, the TAA Worker Benefit Orientation (WBO) meetings are arranged in coordination with all applicable partners, including LWDBs.

The TAA WBO meetings expand upon the Rapid Response worker orientation and provide detailed information on all TAA benefits and services. The integration of the State's Rapid Response and TAA Program ensures workers will receive prompt and accurate information to make informed career and employment decisions.

The LWDBs are highly encouraged to co-enroll TAA participants into the WIOA Dislocated Worker programs as applicable. The TAA Comprehensive Manual states "In accordance with federal regulations, each LWDB shall provide a full range of reemployment services, including mandated services, to eligible workers. These services include case management, training, job search/relocation allowances and other dislocated worker programs

administered by the LWDB to maximize program efficiency and prevent duplication of services.”

Qualified participants for this program can receive the following services:

- Skills assessments, individual employment plans, career counseling, supportive services, and information on training labor markets;
- Classroom training, on-the-job training, customized training designed to meet the needs of a specific employer or group of employers, apprenticeship programs, and more;
- Income support available in the form of weekly cash payments to workers who are enrolled in a full-time training course and have exhausted their unemployment insurance;
- Reimbursement for costs of seeking employment outside of the worker’s commuting area;
- Reimbursement for relocation costs for employment outside of the worker’s commuting area; and
- A wage subsidy for up to two years that is available to re-employed older workers and covers a portion of the difference between a worker’s new wage and their old wage (up to specified maximum amount).

(c)Adult and Dislocated Worker Program Requirements.

(a)Work-Based Training Models. If the State utilizes work-based training models (e.g., on-the-job training, incumbent worker training, transitional jobs, and customized training) as part of its training strategy, and these strategies are not already discussed in other sections of the plan, describe the State’s strategies for how these models ensure high-quality training for both the participant and the employer.

WDP presented to state board a draft of a policy to provide guidelines regarding the Work-based Training, including On the Job Training, Customized Training, Incumbent Workers Training, and Registered Apprenticeship, which is pending for board review and approval.

Work-based training is employer-driven with the goal of unsubsidized employment after participation. In general terms, work-based training involves a commitment by an employer or employers to fully employ successful participants after they have completed the program. Work-based training can be an effective training strategy that can provide additional opportunities for participants and employers in both finding high-quality work and in developing a high-quality workforce. Customized training, On-the-Job Training (OJT), incumbent worker training, and Registered Apprenticeships are all identified as work-based training services. Each of these work-based training models can be effectively used to target different job seekers and employer needs. In addition, these models can be combined or modified to address trends or new opportunities in the labor market.

The WIOA State Workforce Development Board is in the process of approving a Work-based Training Policy at state level. Development banks with reduced mobility are required to have a local policy that includes a strategy for the provision of on-the-job training services. Local training policies and contracts are reviewed during WIOA programmatic reviews.

Customized Training: Customized training is designed to provide local areas with the flexibility to ensure that training meets the unique needs of job seekers and employers or groups of employers. Customized training is to be used to meet the unique requirements of an employer or group of employers and conducted with a commitment by the employer to employ all individuals upon successful completion of training.

Employers pay a significant portion of the training costs, as determined by the local board, considering the size of the employer and other factors that may include the number of employees participating in training; the wage and benefit levels of the employees (at present and anticipated upon completion of the training); the relation of the training to the competitiveness of the participant; and other employer-provided training and advancement opportunities.

The training must incorporate innovative technologies, processes, or procedures, skills upgrades, workplace literacy, or other appropriate purposes as identified by the local board.

The LWDBSs are required to have a local customized training policy for the execution of customized training contracts. Since “significant portion of the training costs” is not identified under the WIOA, the LWDBs will be allowed to locally define “significant portion” as part of their local customized training policy.

On-the-Job Training: The OJT is a fundamental tool that is primarily designed to hire the participant first and provide the knowledge and skills necessary for the full performance of the job. The term "on-the-job training" means training by an employer to a paid participant while performing productive work in a job that:

- Provides knowledge or skills essential to the full and adequate performance of the job.
- Provides reimbursement to the employer of up to a percentage of the wage rate of the participant for the extraordinary costs of providing the training and additional supervision related to the training.
- Is limited in duration as appropriate to the occupation for which the participant is being trained, considering the content of the training, the prior work experience of the participant, and the service strategy of the participant, as appropriate.

The LWDBs are required to have a local OJT policy for the execution of OJT contracts. Local OJT policies and contracts will continue to be reviewed during the WIOA Programmatic Reviews.

Before approving an OJT, the local area must screen the potential participant to ensure the training service. The assessment, at a minimum, shall include the specific skill requirements of the applicable occupation, the participant's academic and occupational skill level, previous work experience, and the Individual Employment Plan (IEP) or Individual Service Strategy (ISS). The IEP should reference the lack of skills and the need for OJT.

Prior to entering into an OJT agreement with an employer, the local LWDBs shall conduct a pre-screening to ensure that the employer meets the minimum standards and can provide both training and long-term employment to an OJT participant.

Local areas should target priority industries identified by Local Workforce Development Boards consistent with a demand-driven workforce system. Occupations targeted for OJT should be defined in the local OJT policy and should align and support the State Workforce Development Board. Targeted outreach should then occur within those industries.

Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) Programs: The IWT is designed to ensure that employees of a company can acquire the skills necessary to retain employment and advance within the company. In addition to provide the skills necessary to avert a layoff and must increase both the participant's and a company's competitiveness. An ideal IWT is one where a participant acquires new skills allowing the participant to move into a higher skilled and higher paid job within the company, thus allowing the company to hire a job seeker to backfill the incumbent worker's position. The training should, whenever possible, allow the participant to gain industry-recognized training experience and ultimately, should lead to an increase in wages.

The IWT is designed to meet the unique requirements of an employer (including a group of employers in partnership with other entities) to retain a skilled workforce, or to avert the need to lay off employees by assisting the workers in obtaining the skills necessary to retain employment. The IWT is conducted with a commitment by the employer to retain or avert the layoffs of the incumbent workers being trained.

Local areas may use up to 20 percent of their local Adult and Dislocated Worker funds for IWT. The employer, or group of employers, must pay for a portion of the cost of providing the training to incumbent workers. The portion of the training cost is the non-federal share of the cost of providing the training.

The LWDBs utilizing IWT are required to have a local IWT policy in place. The local policy must include a description of local and/or regional layoff aversion strategy being utilized.

Employers are required to contribute their share (the non-federal share) of the training costs, using a sliding scale approved by the LWDB.

Local policies and contracts for IWT will be reviewed during the WIOA Programmatic Reviews.

(b)Registered Apprenticeship. Describe how the State will incorporate Registered Apprenticeship into its strategy for service design and delivery (e.g., outreach to sponsors and prospective sponsors, identifying potential participants, and connecting them to apprenticeship opportunities).

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

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

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

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

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

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

The State Apprenticeship Expansion Formula (SAEF) Grant was awarded to the Puerto Rico Department of Economic Development and Commerce to continue developing, expanding, and modernizing the Registered Apprenticeship Program in Puerto Rico. The use of this grant will be focused on increasing participation of traditionally underrepresented populations through diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in targeted and emerging industries such as: healthcare, hospitality, energy, and education, among others. The performance period ends on June 30, 2024.

By mid-January 2024, Puerto Rico has 50 Registered Apprenticeship Programs. The total number of active apprentices surpass 1,000.

(c) Describe how the State will implement and monitor the Adult Priority of Service requirement in WIOA section 134 (c)(3)(E), which requires American Job Center staff when using WIOA Adult program funds to provide individualized career services and

training services, to give priority to recipients of public assistance, low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient (including English language learners).

The State Board recognizes that it must develop a uniform public policy that establishes the priority of services for individuals most in need, as required for the youth, adults, and displaced workers programs. The publication of TEGl 7-20, which extends the priority for adult services that meet the criteria of most in need, makes the development of this public policy pertinent.

Planning guidelines are the state board's primary source for setting public policy for the use of funds and service delivery in AJCs. Through this guide, local areas must establish the criteria and the process by which priority of service will be applied. Priority for individualized career and training services must be given to recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and/or individuals who are basic skills deficient. It is not necessary to determine that an adult is eligible in accordance with the priority of service until it is determined that the individual needs individualized career or training services. Veterans and eligible spouses continue to receive priority of service.

Local areas must establish the criteria and the process by which priority of service will be applied. Priority for individualized career and training services must be given to recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and/or individuals who are basic skills deficient. It is not necessary to determine that an adult is eligible in accordance with the priority of service until it is determined that the individual needs individualized career or training services. Veterans and eligible spouses continue to receive priority of service.

When programs are statutorily required to provide priority for a particular group of individuals, priority must be provided in the following order:

- First, to veterans and eligible spouses who are also funded in the groups given statutory priority for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Adult formula funds. This means that veterans and eligible spouses who are also recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, or individuals who are basic skills

deficient would receive priority for services funded with the WIOA Adult formula funds for individualized career services and training services.

- Second, to non-covered persons (that is, individuals who are not veterans or eligible spouses) who are included in the WIOA's priority groups.
- Third, to veterans and eligible spouses who are not included in the WIOA's priority groups.
- Fourth, to priority populations established by the Governor and/or the local Workforce Development Board.
- Last, to non-covered persons outside the groups given priority under the WIOA.

TEGL 7-20 -Priority of Service Provisions Adult Program

Planning guidelines is the state board's primary source for setting public policy for the use of funds and service delivery in AJCs. This guide is updated annually to temper with public policies issued by ETA, the state board, and state policies issued by the governor. The state board must develop, as soon as in PY 2022, a uniform public policy to establish the priority of services required in youth, adult, and dislocated worker programs. Once the state board completes this policy, then local boards must review and update their policies and procedures, including the monitoring of the implementation of these policies and procedures in AJCs, according with the state policy.

However, the WDP will include in advance, instructions in the guide for the fulfillment of this priority established in the **TEGL 7-20, Effective Implementation of Priority of Service Provisions for Most in Need Individuals in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Adult Program**. TEGl summary will include the following items:

- WIOA requires states to develop criteria, policies, and procedures for applying this priority, including monitoring local areas' compliance with this priority provision as stated in 20 CFR 680.600 and TEGl 19-16. These priorities are in addition to the requirements in the WIOA regulations at 20 CFR 680.650 those veterans and their

eligible spouses receive priority of service for all Department of Labor (DOL)- funded job training programs, including the WIOA Adult program.

- TEGL 7-20 convey ETA vision to priority of service provisions in the WIOA Adult program, to enhance workforce development services to recipients of public assistance, low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient. When using WIOA Adult program funds to provide individualized career services and training services, must give priority of service to recipients of public assistance, low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient (including English language learners). AJC staff must always prioritize services to these populations, regardless of the amount of funds available to provide services in the local area.
- ETA envisions that giving priority of service to these individuals means ensuring that at least 75 percent of a state's participants receiving individualized career and training services in the adult program are from at least one of the priority groups mentioned above and expects this rate will be no lower than 50.1 percent in any state.
- States and local WDBs to take the following actions, as appropriate, to improve efforts to serve individuals from these priority groups.

Establish Policies and Procedures for Provision of WIOA Adult Priority of Service

Priority must be provided in the following order:

1. First, to veterans and eligible spouses who are included in the groups given statutory priority for WIOA Adult formula funding. This means that veterans and eligible spouses who are also recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, or individuals who are basic skills deficient receive priority for services with WIOA Adult formula funds for individualized career services and training services.
2. Second, to non-covered persons (that is, individuals who are not veterans or eligible spouses) who are included in the groups given priority for WIOA adult formula funds.

3. Third, to veterans and eligible spouses who are not included in WIOA's priority groups.
4. Fourth, priority populations should be established by the Governor and/or Local WDB.
5. Last, to non-covered persons outside the groups given priority under WIOA.

State board and local board will establish outcomes to measure the implementation of the policy, like the percentage of individuals in individualized career or training services from at least one priority group, or the percentage of individuals from at least one priority group receiving individualized career or training services.

Integrate Service Delivery to Support Priority Populations

1. Coordination with AJC partner programs is expected to maximize resources and align services for these priority populations.
2. AJC partners can work together as follows:
 - a. Develop cross-training among AJC partner programs to broaden understanding between programs and share expertise on the needs of specific populations, including those most in need.
 - b. Staff the center with career counselors skilled in advising job seekers of their options, who are knowledgeable about local labor market dynamics, aware of available services inside and outside the AJC, and skilled in developing customers' skills for employment success.
 - c. Develop and implement operational policies aimed at establishing an integrated case management system, using technology to achieve alignment in the provision of services that meets the needs of clients.
 - d. Create partnerships through programs, including community-based and philanthropic organizations, to maximize services, including support services.

- e. Develop strategies for dissemination and search for candidates integrated with the partner programs of the AJC, to identify and provide services to those most in need. Candidate search strategies should include the alternative of identifying those most in need through referral to federal, state, local, community, and philanthropic organizations, including those that provide support services.
- f. Encourage, develop, and implement the use of career pathways for those most in need. For more information and technical assistance on career pathways, please visit the following resources:
 - i. Career Pathways Community (WorkforceGPS):
<https://careerpathways.workforcegps.org/>
 - ii. Career Pathways Toolkit:
https://careerpathways.workforcegps.org/resources/2016/10/20/10/11/EnhancedCareer_Pathways_Toolkit
- g. TEGL 7-20 presents examples of how AJC partner programs such as WIOA youth programs, *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)*, *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)*, *Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA)*, *Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)*, *Community Service Block Grant*, *HUD's Continuum of Care (CoC) Program*, among others, can be integrated to offer integrated services to this population of most in need.
- h. **Report accurate service data**
 - i. The state and local level, through the elements of the PIRL, must report on the provision of services to the population most in need. Section 116 of WIOA requires States to accurately report data on the characteristics of participants, services received, and results obtained. DOLETA will analyze the data sent by the State to identify compliance with the rate of 50.1% of its total adult participants, who receive individualized

career services and / or training are part of one or more of the priority groups. ETA will provide technical assistance to states, as needed.

i. Collaborate with ETA in the implementation at the state level

ETA will be evaluating the implementation of the priority for adults, through the following activities:

Review states' Priority of Service policy implementation and monitoring;

1. Identify and share promising practices and facilitate peer-to-peer assistance among states and local areas;
2. Monitor the numbers of individuals from priority groups that are enrolled in individualized career services and training services, as well as the policies and practices that support these services;
3. Monitor state and local area implementation of priority of service;
4. Work with states to identify and solve data reporting issues, including data validation and data integrity efforts like the Quarterly Report Analysis (QRA) process ETA is currently piloting.

Technical Assistance Resources

1. ETA has technical assistance tools, resources and events that highlight best practices and lessons learned in the implementation of this policy. These resources are available through the following links:
 - a. WorkforceGPS.org
 - b. Innovation and Opportunity Network (ION) or Performance Reporting
 - i. "Adult and Dislocated Worker Key Resources - Special Populations" page(https://ion.workforcegps.org/resources/2017/03/09/11/25/Special_Populations_-_Adult_and_Dislocated_Worker_Populations) or

- ii. “Performance Reporting for WIOA Adult Priority Populations” Desk Reference
(<https://performancereporting.workforcegps.org/resources/2019/11/08/19/53/Performance-Reporting-for-WIOA-Adult-Priority-Populations-Desk-Reference>).
- iii. Department of Labor’s Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research at <https://clear.dol.gov/topic-area/low-income-adults>;
- iv. HHS Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse
<https://pathwaystowork.acf.hhs.gov/>.

Monitoring

The statutory requirement applies to Adult program funds for individualized career and training services. Funds allocated for the Dislocated Worker program are not subject to this requirement. The State Board will be reviewing and approving a policy to provide the framework for the local boards. Priority of Service is monitored as part of the state’s WIOA programmatic reviews. The goal of programmatic reviews is to provide technical assistance, as appropriate, and ensure that established policies, procedures, and systems achieves quality program outcomes that meet the requirements and objectives of the WIOA and federal and state regulations.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires priority to be given to public assistance recipients, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient, when providing individualized career services and training services using WIOA Title I Adult program funds. WIOA provides a focus on serving individuals with barriers to employment, and this priority in the law intends to ensure access to these populations on a priority basis across all titles. In the initial evaluation process for WIOA participants, they are asked to report whether they are receiving public assistance, whether the participant has a low-income level, and whether they have deficient basic skills level through assessment tests conducted by AJC staff. The follow-up process for these participants is conducted to ensure that the service priority is met. The DEDC is in the process of doing the monitoring

instrument to ensure compliance with the priority of service policy for eligible participants. The tool will provide a review of overall eligibility as well as the priority of service based on the requirements of the state policy. Also, the monitoring instrument will verify that all local areas have established written policies and procedures to ensure that priority of service to participants is met. Currently, AJC staff in Puerto Rico keep the eligibility document for priority services in the participant's file.

b Describe the State's criteria regarding the local area transfer of funds between adult and dislocated worker programs.

The Planning Guidelines is also the official document that sets the public policy and requirements for local area funds allocation regarding the Youth, Adult and Dislocated Workers programs. Section VIII of the guidelines establishes the public policy for transfer of funds between the adult and dislocated worker programs in accordance with section 133(b)(4) of WIOA allows for the transfer of 100 percent of funds between adults and dislocated workers programs, subject to the approval of the Governor. The local area's transfer requests are evaluated according to the need of each local area. To request transfers between programs, local areas must present to the State a transfer application that include:

- Transfer application signed by the president of the Board of Mayors and the president of the Local Board
- Certification of the Local Board in quorum, with the presentation of the minutes of the meeting in which are discussed the scope of the transfer of funds, together with the vote held to authorize it
- Statistical data of the closures of business, industries, or employers, as well as the dislocated workers or adults with need, which justify and evidence the need for increase services in the program which funds will be transferred (applications received without this information will not be considered for evaluation)
- Measures to be implemented to avoid any adverse impacts on the services of the program from which funds were transferred or reduced

- Two Budget Information Summaries (BIS), one including the transferred amount to maintain the identity of the program where it is transferred, and another reflecting the reduction of the program from which the transfer takes place

Transfer of funds will be made only after completing a thorough analysis of the impacts on the service in the affected programs. The Local Board in charge of establishing the priorities and outcomes of the local areas will consider the impact of the service delivery at the One Stop Centers prior to completing a transfer of funds.

(c) Describe the State's policy on WIOA and TAA co-enrollment and whether and how often this policy is disseminated to the local workforce development boards and required one-stop partners. Trade Act, Sec. 239(f), Sec. 235, 20 CFR 618.325, 20 CFR 618.824(a)(3)(i).

The Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Program was established by the modified Trade Act of 1974 to assist people who lost their jobs due to an increase in imports in finding new, acceptable jobs. For those who qualify, the TAA program offers reemployment programs and reimbursements. Acquiring marketable skills for a participant's return to appropriate employment is the aim of TAA training. The expectations, criteria, and justification needed to support and approve TAA training are provided under the policy signed on October 20, 2020, by the Department of Economic Development and Trade. This policy establishes strict compliance with the following six requirements, which are as follows:

- 1. There is no suitable employment available for the trade-affected worker.**
 - A. The worker desires to migrate, but there is no reasonable chance that suitable employment will become available anytime soon, and there is no acceptable job available for the individual, either inside or beyond the commuter region.
 - B. Documentation of relevant employment availability using traditional and real-time labor market information is required if a training program or application is rejected.
- 2. The trade-affected worker would benefit from appropriate training.**

- A. In situations where training, skill development, or remedial education would improve the employee's chances of landing a job, the worker would profit by receiving the proper training.
 - B. Proper training ought to increase an individual's chances of landing a job at a greater salary than they would have in the absence of it or set them up for success in doing so.
 - C. The employee must also possess the knowledge, abilities, and skills necessary to start the training program, advance through it, and finish it.
3. **There is a reasonable expectation of employment following completion of training.**
- A. After completing the training program, the worker does not necessarily need to find a job right away to have a reasonable expectation of employment.
 - B. Labor market data must be used to measure the projected employment market circumstances (whether inside or outside the commuting area), and the results must be recorded in the worker's case file.
 - C. When a restricted demand occupation exists, either inside or outside the worker's commute, it is also necessary to evaluate other options for finding work. Before enrolling more people, it is also important to consider how many people are already enrolled in training who are likely to satisfy the limited demand. The worker's case file must have documentation of these attempts.
 - D. Training programs that include a full or partial On-the-Job Training (OJT) component cannot be approved if it is not anticipated that the participant would find suitable employment with the OJT provider.
4. **Training is reasonably available to the trade-affected worker.**

- A. Unless there are none available now, the worker's local training options for commuting must be given priority.
 - B. The cost of the training must be affordable.
5. **The trade-affected worker is qualified to undertake and complete the training.**
- A. The employee's knowledge, skills, and abilities as well as their educational background, work experience, and financial resources must all be considered.
 - B. To assist the worker's capacity to participate in and finish the training, all preliminary assessments, thorough and specialized assessments, and created IEPs must be examined.
 - C. The length of the training program must match or surpass the individual's remaining weeks of eligibility for Trade Readjustment Assistance (TRA) and Unemployment Insurance (UI). If not, the employee ought to have enough cash on hand to support finishing it.
 - D. It must be established whether the participant has personal or family resources available to finish the training if the weekly benefits run out before the program concludes.
 - E. If sufficient funding is not available to finish the training program, the training cannot be approved; instead, the person should be offered consideration for other training options.
 - F. Documentation concerning the financial resources that are available must be included in the participant case file.
6. **The training being considered is suitable for the worker and available at a reasonable cost.**
- A. Given criterion 5 and the individual's knowledge, skills, and abilities, history, and experience in relation to the worker's employment goal, case managers must show that the training is appropriate for the worker.
 - B. Tuition and associated costs (e.g., books, tools, computers and other electronic devices, internet access, uniforms and other training-related clothing like goggles

- and work boots, laboratory fees and other academic fees required as part of the approved training program) as well as supplemental assistance (subsistence and transportation expenses) are some examples of the costs associated with a training program.
- C. Where initial licensure and certification exams and fees are necessary for employment, states are obligated to cover the associated costs.
 - D. The reasonableness of the training program's costs must be proved by looking up the costs of comparable training programs.
 - E. Before investing in equipment or related materials, it is advisable to consider other choices. Related expenses must be required for the worker to finish the training program.
 - F. Training must be allowed at a reasonable cost if it can be received from another provider in a comparable amount of time for a lower total cost and better or comparable training.
 - G. When the cost of training is excessively high in comparison to the typical cost of training other workers in comparable occupations at other providers, the training cannot be approved.
 - H. Expensive training may be authorized if it is logically anticipated to increase a worker's chances of finding work, keeping a job, earning more money, or getting back to work in a lot less time.

(c) Describe the State's formal strategy to ensure that WIOA and TAA co-enrolled participants receive the necessary funding benefits and services. Trade Act, Sec. 239(f), Sec. 235, 20 CFR 618.816(c).

Training that is wholly paid by TAA or funded in part by TAA and other partner programs, including WIOA Title I, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Veterans Education Benefits, among others, may be approved by the case manager. It is also possible to use funds set up by other private people or groups to support participants as they transition to finding new jobs. The case manager is responsible for recording all funding sources, including amounts, dates, and specifics, in the case management file. Furthermore, even though TAA does not mandate that

participants apply for Federal Financial Aid, case managers ought to let participants know about this possible source of money if TAA funding becomes unavailable down the road.

If the worker has reasonable access to additional public or private funding to reduce program costs, such information may be considered when calculating the reasonable cost of training for that person. Participants cannot, however, be made to obtain these monies for their training to be approved. According to Section 236(a)(9)(B)(ii) of the 2015 Act, workers who willingly agree to use public or private funds to cover a portion of the costs of training may have training programs that would not otherwise be approved under the TAA due to cost approved.

Grants are one type of private funding (apart from the specific student financial aid listed below).

- A. Awards for scholarships.
- B. Employer-provided funds.
- C. The individual has access to other non-personal sources.

As previously stated, when assessing a person's need or eligibility for benefits or assistance, or the number of benefits or assistance provided under any Federal program, certain forms of student financial assistance (such as Pell Grants, benefits under Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, Federal educational loan programs, Presidential Access Scholarships, and Federal student work-study programs) cannot be taken into consideration. Consequently, to authorize training, the Workforce Development Program will not take the student's financial aid into account. This enables a person to use student financial aid for living expenses rather than tuition, supporting the worker's income during extended training.

Supplemental Assistance

Training programs that are conducted outside of the worker's commuter region must account for the expenses of essential lodging and food as well as transportation. If an

Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is available for the trade affected worker, it must be used to document the necessity for this accommodation in the worker's case file.

The following must be considered and recorded by TAA personnel for determining subsistence expenses:

- A. If the employee receives payment for their costs from another source, reimbursement cannot be granted.
- B. Unauthorized absences must not be reimbursed with payments.
- C. Before the participant can submit any expenditure claims, the allowance needs to be approved.
- D. Payment of subsistence allowances is contingent upon the worker completing a training week, unless otherwise specified.
- E. The participants' allowances must only cover the days that they attend training.

Transportation Allowances

When determining the cost of transportation, TAA employees need to consider and record the following:

- A. If the worker's expenses are arranged and paid by the State, covered by another law, or covered by another source, reimbursement cannot be allowed.
- B. Reimbursement must be computed round-trip, starting from the first mile outside the commuting region and ending at the training site.
- C. If the person lived in the training region temporarily, the daily transportation payment could not be more than the daily subsistence payment.
- D. Unless specified otherwise, transportation allowances must be paid at least once a month after a worker completes a week of training.

Tools, Equipment and Supplies

To acquire tools, equipment, supplies, or other materials is necessary for the TAA training program, the case manager may authorize the purchase. These need to be confirmed by the training organization (training teacher, training catalog, etc.) and recorded in the participant case file.

All equipment provided to the participants during the course will be their responsibility. The tools must be returned to the case manager by the participant if they do not finish the course; otherwise, an overpayment for the entire purchase price will be made. A list of every item in the person's case file needs to be kept up to date by the case manager.

When it comes to purchasing tools, equipment, supplies, or other materials, case managers can employ a cost-effective strategy by following the policies and procedures of the Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DEDC). This allows them to select reputable suppliers and vendors and ensure that the purchase meets the participant's needs. When obtaining materials, case managers are required to adhere to DEDC policies and obtain three bids from the participant whenever feasible.

Employees are also required to adhere to the TAA program processes, which are based on DEDC policy, and the general procurement guidelines set forth in the Federal Office of Management and Budget Uniform Guidance 2 CFR 200.318. Maintaining case management records and documentation that explains the acquisition process and history of items as well as the reasoning behind the procurement method, the item selected, and the reasons behind accepting or rejecting the item cost is crucial. If case managers follow the previous instruction but decide a more expensive purchase is necessary, documented case management documentation must be provided to back up the ultimate purchase.

(c)Describe the State’s process of familiarizing one-stop staff with the TAA program. 20 CFR 618.804(j), 20 CFR 618.305.

The case manager must record that the participant satisfies the six requirements for training approval as stated above before training can be approved. Training approval ought to take

the following into account:

- A. If another provider offers comparable or superior training considering quality, substance, and outcomes at a lower cost and in a comparable amount of time, it should not be authorized for use at that provider.
- B. If the expenses of the training are excessively high when compared to the typical costs of training in comparable occupations with other providers, then the program shouldn't be approved.
- C. An exception to this rule is that more expensive training can be authorized if it is anticipated to increase a worker's chances of finding work, keeping a job longer, earning more money, or getting back to work considerably faster.
- D. Only the time required for the employee to acquire the needed abilities in the least amount of time may be approved by the case manager.
- E. The worker's status (full-time or part-time), the number of training weeks, and the availability of funds should all be considered when determining the duration of training.
- F. Training should not last longer than 130 weeks, except for OJT, apprenticeship, and some employees who are in the US armed forces.
- G. Within the parameters of the authorized training plan and the occupational goal noted in the case management file, the participant needs to be ready to finish it.
- H. The participant must enroll in the TAA-approved training within 26 weeks after the petition certification date or the date of separation, whichever comes first. If not, the participant needs a waiver to attend training (see this policy's section D).
- I. The instruction needs to take place in the US.

The case manager must get in touch with the participant on a frequent basis no more than every 60 days and record in the state case management system that the participant is

progressing satisfactorily while they are enrolled in TAA approved training. Benchmarks, grades, and schedule copies need to be kept up to date in the participant's file.

Assessments

All TAA participants must undergo initial and thorough examinations. These will assist in identifying employees who meet the skill requirements of nearby firms or who require further assistance.

A. Initial Assessment

Which TAA benefits and services will be most advantageous for the worker will be determined in part by the results of the initial assessment. This evaluation ought to have the following into consideration:

- A. The details of the labor market as it exists right now in the area.
- B. The employee's knowledge, skills, and abilities from their training and prior jobs.
- C. Any transferrable skills that local employers would find useful.
- D. An assessment of the person's aptitudes, skills, needs for supported services, and any obstacles to finding new work.

B. Comprehensive and Specialized Assessments

The TAA participant's potential careers will be identified with the aid of the complete specialized career assessment, which will also function as a roadmap for creating the participant's training program. One of the main goals of specialized profession assessments is to prove to participants that they possess the skills and credentials needed to be successful in a particular training program. Specialized career assessments are thorough analyses of the participant's credentials, abilities, and skills. They should also investigate any pertinent aspects that could have a negative effect on the plan's likelihood of success.

- A. The assessment may use tools, instruments, and interviews to collect the following: educational background; employment history;

information about basic literacy; occupational skill levels; transferable skills; language proficiency; interests; aptitudes; family and financial situation; emotional and physical health, including disabilities; attitudes toward work; motivation; and supportive service needs.

- B. If a co-enrollment partner has already completed a specialized career assessment, the case manager can evaluate any components that are lacking by using the results of that assessment or by conducting a new one.
- C. All TAA participants must undergo initial and thorough examinations.

C. Documents Required

Starting with the initial evaluation and ending when the program ends, documentation will be done. The procedure ought to consider the following:

- A. All evaluations, decisions, and reviews must be recorded using the case management system in the employee's case file.
- B. To enable the evaluation of the participant's progress, support early intervention, and permit training plan modifications, the TAA case manager must set and record training benchmarks.
- C. Every sixty days or less, the TAA case manager is required to assess the case's satisfactory progress in comparison to the predetermined benchmarks.
- D. Grades, transcripts, letters, emails, and recorded phone calls with the employee or training provider are examples of progress documentation, albeit they are not the only ones.
- E. Sensitive personal and confidential information, including details about the participant's health conditions, shouldn't be included in the case file.

(c) Youth Program Requirements. With respect to youth workforce investment activities authorized in Section 129 of the WIOA, States should describe their strategies that will support the implementation of youth activities under the WIOA. State's must-

a Identify the State-developed criteria to be used by local boards in awarding grants or contracts for youth workforce investment activities and

describe how the local boards will consider the ability of the providers to meet performance accountability measures based on primary indicators of performance for the youth program, as described in Section 116(b)(2)(A)(ii) of WIOA.⁸ Further, include a description of how the State assists local areas in determining whether to contract for services or to provide some or all of the program elements directly.

As provided in sec. 123 of WIOA, local boards must identify eligible providers of youth workforce development activities in the local area by awarding grants or contracts on a competitive basis based on the recommendation of the youth standing committee, whose establishment will be encouraged by the State Board.

The Local Boards must include the State plan criteria used to identify youth providers, taking into consideration the ability of the provider to meet performance accountability measures based on the primary indicators of performance for the youth programs. Also, must conduct a full and open competition to ensure that the selection of youth service providers is made in accordance with federal procurement guidelines in 2 CFR parts 200, in addition to applicable State and local procurement laws.

- WIOA-03-20 - Policy for the Competitive Selection of Eligible Youth Service Providers
- DDEC-WIOA-02-20 - Technical Assistance Guidelines to 14 elements of youth program - Guide to define concepts, eligibility, and other aspects related to the youth program

Where the Local Board determines there is an insufficient number of eligible providers of youth workforce development activities in the local area, such as might be the case in a rural area, the Local Board might opt to award grants or contracts on a sole source basis (WIOA sec. 123(b)).

Local youth programs must be designed to provide for an objective assessment of each youth participant that meets the requirements of WIOA Section 129(c)(1)(A) and include a review of the academic and occupational skill levels, as well as the service needs, of each youth for the purpose of identifying appropriate services and career pathways for participants and

⁸ Sec. 102(b)(2)(D)(i)(V)

informing the individual service strategy. Also, to develop and update, as needed, an individual service strategy for each youth participant and provide case management to youth participants, including follow-up services. Local areas must ensure that WIOA youth service providers meet the referral requirements established in sec. 129(c)(3)(A) of WIOA for all youth participants.

According to sec. 129(c)(2) of WIOA, local areas must make each of the required 14 youth elements available to youth participants. According to WIOA sec. 129(c)(3)(C), the local areas must ensure that parents, youth participants, and other members of the community with experience relating to youth programs are actively involved in both the design and implementation of its youth programs. A minimum of 75% of State and local youth funding is to be used by local areas for out-of-school youth (OSY). At least 20% of local Youth formula funds must be used for work experiences, such as summer and year-round employment, pre-apprenticeship, OJT, internships, or job shadowing.

Youth program providers must provide a detailed description of each program element with youth performance information (for WIOA youth providers). Performance information for each training program will include a detailed description of the provider partnerships with business partners, and a provider must not be found in fault in criminal, civil, or administrative proceeding related to its performance as a training or educational institution and must not be included in any Federal, State, or local debarment and suspension lists.

For the fulfillment of these principles, the procurement process, and the provision of 14 elements of the youth program, the state board issued the following public policies:

- DDEC-WIOA-08-20 - Case Management and Record-Keeping Policy
- DDEC-WIOA-07-20 - Procedure for the follow-up service required by WIOA for participants of the Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Programs
- WIOA-03-20 - Policy for the Competitive Selection of Eligible Youth Service Providers

- DDEC-WIOA-02-20 - Technical Assistance Guidelines to 14 elements of youth program
- Guide to define concepts, eligibility, and other aspects related to the youth program.

b Explain how the State assists local workforce boards in achieving equitable results for out-of-school and in-school youth. Describe promising practices or partnership models that local areas are implementing and the state's role in supporting and scaling those models within the state for both in-school and out-of-school youth.

Out of school youth are one of the most difficult populations to serve because their primary interest lies in attaining self-sufficiency. Local Areas received youth facing diverse economic and social barriers to achieve their academic or employment goals. Among these: below average academic and reading levels; risks of becoming dropouts, homeless, runaway, foster child, pregnant or parents, offenders; or in need of additional assistance to obtain and maintain employment. To improve the out of school youth outcomes the State will pursue the following strategies:

- Implementation of the Registered Apprenticeship. Registered Apprenticeship will be implemented as a useful strategy to increase youth attainment of industry-recognized credentials, as well as to improve youth outcomes.
- Puerto Rico Office of Apprenticeship will partner with the PRDE, community colleges, universities, and community partners to increase the opportunities for youth to transition from high schools into an apprenticeship or pre-apprenticeship program.
- Foster a structured approach for out of school youth emphasizing the importance of a youth program design that includes meaningful work experiences that integrate work-based learning and academic classroom learning, as a strategy to strengthen services to out of school youth. Local areas will be encouraged to design this activity by providing a greater number of hours of work experience combined with alternative secondary school, support service and academic learning for the out of school youth.

- **Strengthening Employer Collaboration.** Increase partnerships with employers to foster economic development and high-growth opportunities for out of school youth. The WIOA system has the mission to prepare and train workers, and to help businesses find qualified workers to meet their present and future workforce needs. Local areas will be encouraged to integrate employers to help define and support new strategies designed to better educate, train, and prepare out of school youth and to provide critical leadership in the creation of these pipeline strategies.
- Also, employers can help the workforce system by identifying the skills and competencies needed in the industry, particularly for entry-level positions; developing industry certification; collaborating with training institutions in occupational-skills curriculum development; creating student internships and work experience opportunities; providing formal mentoring programs and partnerships that support youth in their interest to pursue careers in high-growth and high-demand industries; and acquiring employer and industry commitments to hire youth. Also, under WIOA, employers are the main partner in the implementation of Apprenticeship training opportunities and credentials.

When designing youth employment and training programming, State and local areas should consider the following design elements; promotion and increase of meaningful work experience opportunities as set forth in section 129(c)(2)(c) of WIOA, particularly for out of school youth; increase of service delivery for youth with disabilities; need to address the issues impacting service delivery for out of school youth; need to ensure quality case management through the monitoring process; and provision of effective follow-up services.

The state level will provide technical assistance to local areas for conducting the necessary activities to improve the outcomes for out of school youth as described in section 129(a)(1)(B).

© Describe how the State assists local workforce boards in implementing innovative models for delivering youth workforce investment activities, including effective ways local workforce boards can make available the 14 program elements described in

WIOA section 129(c)(2), and explain how local areas can ensure that work experience, including quality pre-apprenticeship and registered apprenticeship, is prioritized as a key element within a broader career pathway strategy.

The state board approved the public policies WIOA-03-20 and WIOA -02-20, which establish the parameters to be followed by local areas in the design of the youth program. The first requires the fulfillment of a procurement and open competence process in the selection of eligible providers, and the second helps to define the theoretical framework for the design of the 14 elements, establishing the allowable, not allowable activities, as well as examples of service delivery activities for this clientele. The WDP conducted several technical assistance sections for both policies.

WIOA eligible youth are individuals between the ages of 14 and 24 that are either Out of School Youth or In School Youth as defined by WIOA's section 129(a)(1). These must also meet one of the following additional conditions: being basic skills deficient; be an English language learner; an offender; homeless, runaway, in foster care or aged out of the foster care system; pregnant or parenting; an individual with a disability; or a person who requires additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program or to secure and hold employment.

Services are provided to eligible youth participants through a network of youth service providers, which are competitively procured. The Youth program is committed to providing, through local areas, the following required youth elements:

- Tutoring, study skills training, instruction, and evidence-based drop-out prevention and recovery strategies;
- Alternative secondary school services or drop-out recovery services;
- Paid and unpaid work experiences;
- Occupational skills training;

- Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation;
- Leadership development;
- Supportive services;
- Adult mentoring;
- Comprehensive guidance and counseling;
- Financial literacy education;
- Entrepreneurial skills training;
- Labor market and employment information services;
- Activities that prepare for transition to post-secondary education and training; and
- Follow-up services.

To become an eligible Youth training provider, the entity must first contact the local area to apply. The area will conduct a competitive bidding process to award locally procured youth contracts. The statewide youth eligible provider list is a comprehensive list of those locally procured youth contracts. Once the entity has successfully completed the application process dictated in the local area policy, the application is then referred to the State program to be included on the statewide youth provider list.

Provide the language contained in the State policy for “requiring additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program, or to secure and hold employment” criterion for out-of-school youth specified in WIOA section 129(a)(1)(B)(iii)(VIII) and for “requiring additional assistance to complete an education program, or to secure and hold employment” criterion for in-school youth specified in WIOA section 129(a)(1)(C)(iv)(VII). If the state does not have a policy, describe how it will ensure that local areas will have a policy for these criteria.

State policy defers to local policy on the definition of “requires additional assistance to complete and educational program, or to secure and hold employment.”

(d) **Single-area State Requirements.** In States with only one local workforce investment area, the governor serves as both the State and the local chief elected official. In such cases, the State must submit any information required in the local plan (WIOA Section 106(d)(2)). States with a single workforce area must include—

A: Any comments from the public comment period that represent disagreement with the Plan. (WIOA section 108(d)(3).) -

Not applicable.

B: The entity responsible for the disbursement of grant funds, as determined by the governor, is different from that of the State. (WIOA section 108(b)(15).)

Not applicable.

C: A description of the type and availability of WIOA title I Youth activities and successful models, including for youth with disabilities. (WIOA section 108(b)(9).)

Not applicable.

D: A description of the roles and resource contributions of one-stop partners.

Not applicable.

E: Competitive process used to award subgrants and contracts for title I activities.

Not applicable.

F: How will the training services outlined in Section 134 be provided through individual training accounts and/or contracts and how will such training approaches be coordinated? Describe how the State meets informed customer choice requirements, regardless of the training approach.

Not applicable.

G: How the State Board, in fulfilling Local Board functions, will coordinate title I activities with those activities under title II. Describe how the State Board will conduct a review of local applications submitted under title II, consistent with WIOA Secs. 107(d)(11)(A) and (B)(i), and WIOA Sec. 232.

Not applicable.

H: Copies of executed cooperative agreements define how all local service providers will meet the requirements for integration and access to the complete set of services available in the one-stop delivery system, including cooperative agreements with entities administering Rehabilitation Act programs and services.

Not applicable.

(e) **Waiver Requests (optional)**. States wanting to request waivers as part of their title I-B Operational Plan must include a waiver plan that includes the following information for each waiver requested:

a **Identifies the statutory or regulatory requirements for which a waiver is requested and the goals that the State or local area, as appropriate, intends to achieve because of the waiver and how those goals relate to the Unified or Combined State Plan.**

WIOA regulations require states to have an approved four-year strategic plan to receive the allocation of WIOA funds. States have the option of submitting a consolidated plan with all required system programs partners, or a unified plan with just the four core programs; Vocational Rehabilitation; Wagner Peyser; WIOA Title II and WIOA Title I which includes youth, adult, and displaced worker programs.

Puerto Rico submits to the U.S. Department of Labor a unified plan with the four core programs. As part of the plan, the regulations allow for the submission of a waiver request to different sections of the law, to make the provision of services and the use of funds more flexible.

PR currently has three waivers approved through June 30, 2024:

1. Waiver of WIOA Section 134(c)(3)(H)(i) and 20 CFR 680.720 (b) to increase the On-the-Job Training (OJT) employer reimbursement up to 90 percent.
2. Waiver of the requirement under WIOA 129(a)(4), and consistent with 20 CFR 681.410, that states and local areas must expend a minimum of 75 percent of their Youth formula funds on youth workforce activities for out-of-school youth (OSY).

3. Waiver to allow flexibility in the use of funds reserved by the Governor to provide statewide rapid response activities to instead provide statewide employment and training activities, including disaster relief employment to affected areas.

The DEDC is in the process of submitting the new unified plan for 2024-27, which includes the request for the extension of the three current waivers. For this reason, the draft application to be included in the unified plan is submitted for evaluation and public comment. The public review process follows the same steps as outlined for the evaluation of the unified plan, so any feedback should be through the instructions issued for the unified plan.

WIOA Section 134(c) (3)(H)(ii)(II), and the accompanying regulations as promulgated at **20 CFR 680.720 (b)**, state that employers may be reimbursed up to 50 percent of the wage rate of an OJT participant for the extraordinary costs of providing the training and additional supervision related to the OJT.

State Law 62-2014, *Ley de Apoyo a la Microempresa, al Pequeño y Mediano Comerciante*; defines microbusiness (PYMES by its Spanish Acronym) as a business that generates a gross income of less than \$500,000 annually, with seven employees or less, and small merchant as someone who generates less than \$3 million gross per year and employs 25 people or less. Also defined are the medium-sized business those that generate an annual gross revenue of less than \$10 million and employs fifty or fewer employees.

According to the Center for Economic Research of the Economic Development Bank for Puerto Rico (BDE), when compared to 2021, in 2022 there was an increase of 4% of small and medium-sized business (SMEs) in the Puerto Rican economy. On average, each SME in 2022 generated 12 jobs, which added 715,998 workers in the private sector, and of this total, 43.4% correspond to people who work in establishments with fewer than 50 employees, and 56.6% work in private companies with a payroll of 50 employees or more, according to BDE data. (**Source:** El Vocero de PR; October 22, 2022; [Hay más pequeñas y medianas empresas en la Isla](#); Banco de Desarrollo Económico para Puerto Rico (BDE))

According with BDE, the five industries with the most non-governmental business operating with fewer than 50 employees are:

- retail trade, with 8,408 establishments;
- health and social assistance services, with 7,380;
- professional, scientific, and technical services, with 5,142;
- accommodation and food services, with 4,671;
- other services with 3,349 businesses.
- and construction came in sixth place, with 2,233 establishments.

The PYMES have a significant impact on the island's economy and on job opening and is the state's public policy to promote the creation and strengthening of these businesses. Puerto Rico is requesting a waiver to the current allowable employer reimbursement rate of up to 50 percent of the wage rate of an On-the-Job-Training (OJT) participant for the extraordinary costs of providing training and additional supervision related to the OJT as described in the WIOA Section 134(c)(3)(H)(ii)(II). The waiver request has been developed following the WIOA guidelines in Section 189(i)(3)(B) and the WIOA Federal regulation at 20 CFR 680.720(6).

Puerto Rico is proposing a sliding scale of reimbursement to the employer based on its size and capability. Under this waiver, the following scale will be implemented:

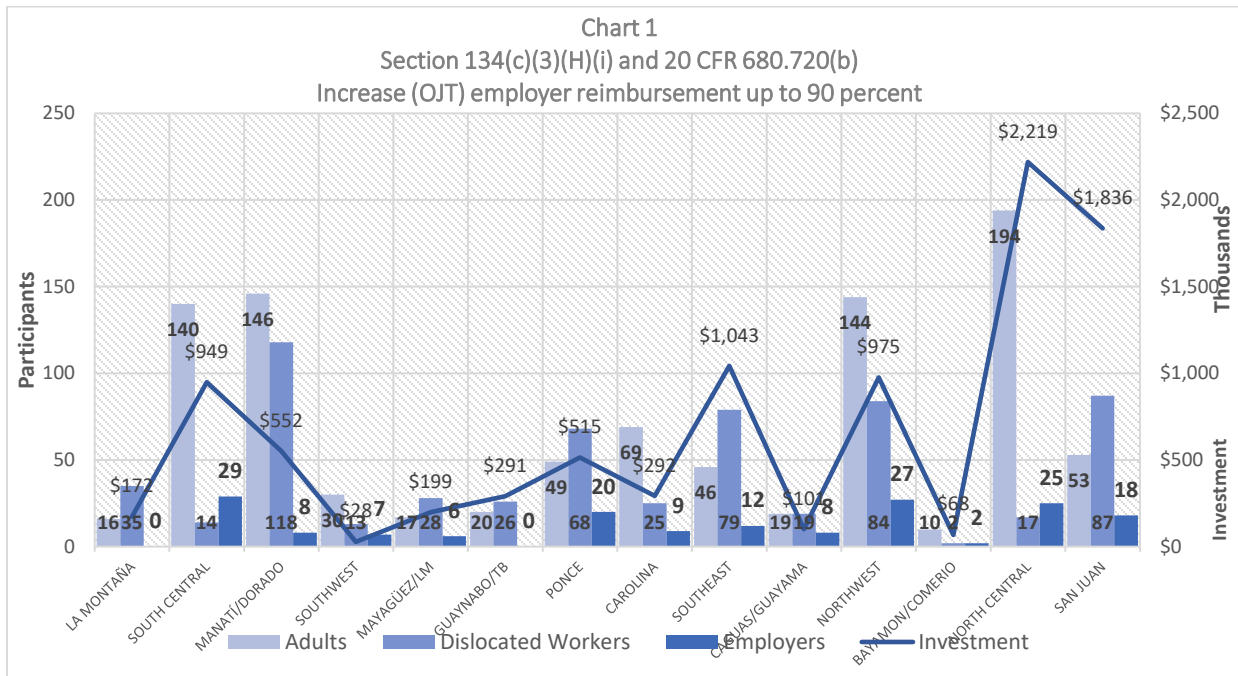
- up to 90% reimbursement for employers with 50 or less employees;
- up to 75% reimbursement for employers with a workforce between 51 and 250 employees.
- For employers with 251 employees or more, the statutorily defined 50% limit will continue to apply.

The waiver is requested to be used with all WIOA formula funds: Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, National Dislocated Worker Grants, as well as other Discretionary grants, as appropriate.

This waiver was approved by USDOL on June 7, 2022, and it will be valid until June 30, 2024. The waiver allows Puerto Rico's businesses to rapidly adapt to technological and general marketplace changes by improving their capacity to expand and remain competitive with affordable OJT options uniquely designed to achieve their specific development goals. The reduced match requirement for employers, particularly new start-ups and small to medium-sized businesses, provide an attractive and cost-effective financial incentive, increasing the opportunity to utilize the OJT model for hiring and training new workers. From an economic development standpoint, increasing the number and quality of the labor force stimulates the competence and competitiveness of Puerto Rico's economy.

This waiver has been a great tool to help LWDA's to attract new employees to the workforce system. For example, during PY22 this waiver was used by fourteen (14) LWDA's with a participation of 171 employers and 1,568 employees, 953 adults, and 615 dislocated workers, with a total expenditure of \$9,239,516. The waiver has been responsible for increasing employee and employer participation. As shown in chart 1, the LWDA's had an extremely satisfactory performance.

Graph 19. Section 134(c)(3)(H)(i) and 20 CFR 680.720(b); Increase (OJT) employer reimbursement up to 90 percent:



Source: Puerto Rico Annual Report (2022)

The state board developed the public policy **WIOA-PP-04-22, Requirements for Workbase Training Activities** targeting that in On-the-Job Training activities, priority is given to training aimed at companies committed to the registered apprenticeship program (RAP). The Puerto Rico Apprenticeship Team has been working hard to involve the LWDBs in the expansion of the apprenticeship programs. In PY 22-23, forty-three (43) technical assistance sessions were conducted on ten of the fifteen local boards. As a result, five boards invested WIOA formula funds in seven programs to conduct the On-the-Job Learning. In addition, the AJC staff provide case management and supportive services to eligible apprentices.

The waiver allows Puerto Rico's businesses to rapidly adapt to technological and general marketplace changes by improving their capacity to expand and remain competitive with affordable OJT options uniquely designed to achieve their specific development goals. The reduced match requirement for employers, particularly new start-ups and small to medium-sized businesses, provide an attractive and cost-effective financial incentive, increasing the opportunity to utilize the OJT model for hiring and training new workers. From an economic

development standpoint, increasing the number and quality of the labor force stimulates the competence and competitiveness of Puerto Rico's economy.

The LWDA's that benefited most from the waiver according to the information provided on their expenditures are North Central (\$2,218,758), San Juan (\$1,836,160) and Southeast (\$1,042,524). Based on the labor and business sector background in Puerto Rico, the impact of the waiver is increasing the opportunity to promote job skills improvement, job creation, and business sustainability of various economic regions of Puerto Rico. As a result, with the data provided by the LDWA's, we expect an increase in the participation of employers, adults, displaced workers, and youth, as well as in the investment of funds for PY 2023.

- Discuss the implementation of this waiver in previous years

The data presented is the official data registered in the Participant Record Information System (PRIS).

- The following tables show the official data for the delivery of training services in the period 2020-2022, both at the state level and in 15 local areas. It also includes the number of participants entering employment for the second and retained in the fourth quarter.
- In PY 2020, 8% of the training delivered at the state level was OJT. In the second quarter, 68% of participants with programmatic exit were employed, and 76% were retained in employment for the fourth quarter.

Table 40. Training Services PY 2020-2022 & Projected 2025

PY	Receive Training	OJT	%	Employment		Retention	
				Exit 2Q	%	4Q	%

2020	5,480	439	8%	300	68%	228	76%
2021	7,130	784	11%	521	66%	346	66%
2022	5,298	522	10%	208	40%	10	5%

Projected							
2023	5,787	998	17%	251	25%		
2024	5,696	1040	18%	205	20%		
2025	5,025	1146	23%	159	14%		

- In PY 2021, 10% of training offered were OJT, with 66% employed in the second quarter and 66% with retention in the fourth quarter.
- For PY 2022, 522 on-the-job training were offered, with a placement of 39% in employment in the second quarter and a retention rate of 4% in the fourth quarter.
- In PY 2023, the approved planning by the WDP to local areas shows that the 15 LWDAs planned to deliver 998 OJTs, with 270 for adults and 728 for dislocated workers. The estimated investment would be approximately \$9.7 million, as shown in Table 3.

Applying a simple linear forecasting formula, it is projected that for the PY 2024 and 2025, 2,186 OJTs will be delivered with a job placement in the second quarter of 364 exiters, as shown in Table 2.

Table 41. Projected Participants OJT PY 2023

PY 2023-24				
LWDA	Adults	Allocation	DW	Allocation
Bayamón	16	\$64,392	50	\$250,000
Caguas	16	\$95,760	96	\$574,560
Carolina	44	\$333,710	39	\$284,453
GTB	10	\$60,000	15	\$112,500
LM	2	\$20,000	9	\$90,000
Manatí	82	\$351,469	32	\$736,000
Mayagüez/LM	8	\$54,981	30	\$280,500
Noreste	-	-	12	\$159,890
Noroeste	50	\$90,000	80	\$290,000
Norte Central	5	\$28,500	14	\$98,000
Ponce	10	\$14,000	56	\$957,600
San Juan	7	\$122,385	241	\$3,753,000
Sur Central	12	\$96,000	21	\$168,000

Sureste	5	\$50,000	30	\$544,481
Suroeste	3	\$18,468	3	\$18,468
Total	270	\$1,399,665	728	\$8,317,452

(b) Describes the actions that the State or local area, as appropriate, has undertaken to remove State, local statutory, or regulatory barriers.

There is no state or local statutory or regulatory barrier to implement the proposed waiver.

(1) Describes the goals of the waiver and the expected programmatic outcomes if the request is granted.

This waiver request is consistent with national policy to develop a workforce system that is responsive to the demands of both individual and employer customers. The Commonwealth anticipates the following goals will be achieved with the waiver's approval:

- Maximize the flexibility needed to impact local economic vitality and direct resources where demand for services is greatest by assisting local areas in marketing the OJT as a vehicle to engage employers, particularly in targeted sectors, to hire and provide training to new workers.
- This flexibility will build the capacity and future viability of both the workforce and the industries themselves. Assist with the transformation of the current workforce system to a demand-driven, sector-based, and regionally driven talent development pipeline.
- Increase training and transitional employment for unemployed workers and hard-to-serve youth and adults.

- Equip individuals with relevant job training and transferable skills in high-skill, high-wage, high-demand occupation, and industries.
- Increase business usage of the local workforce system by providing added incentives to hire and train new workers.
- Provide discrete and measurable outcomes that the state projects will result from the implementation of this waiver

Taking as a parameter the statistics from de PRIS database and the forecasting presented in table 2, the following outcomes are projected for 2023-2025:

Table 42. Waiver Outcomes 2023-2025

PY	Adults	DW	Total
2023	270	728	998
2024	281	759	1,040
2025	309	836.58	1,146
TOTAL	860	2,324	3,184

- The OJT waiver will be extended to all 15 LWDBs, considering the relevance to increasing services to employers and improving the post-COVID-19 economy.

(2) Describes how the waiver will align with the Department’s policy priorities, such as:

(A) supporting employer engagement;

(B) connecting education and training strategies;

(C) supporting work-based learning;

(D) improving job and career results, and

(E) other guidance issued by the Department.

(3) Describes the individuals affected by the waiver, including how the waiver will impact services for disadvantaged populations or individuals with multiple barriers to employment; and

Individuals, groups, or populations benefiting, or otherwise impacted by the waiver from the waiver.

The need for training is especially acute for those workers most in need: dislocated workers transitioning to new occupations and industries, long-term unemployed individuals in need of advancing outmoded skills in order to catch up with emerging technologies, and low-income and entry-level workers seeking to start their careers in a weak economic climate. Approval of the waiver will increase training options for WIOA-eligible job seekers.

The reduced match requirement for employers, particularly new start-ups and other small to medium-sized businesses, will provide an attractive and cost-effective financial incentive, increasing the opportunity to utilize the OJT model to hire and train new workers. This waiver will allow Puerto Rico's businesses to adapt to both technological and general marketplace changes more rapidly by improving their capacity to expand and remain competitive with affordable OJT options uniquely designed to achieve their specific development goals.

(4) Describes the processes used to:

(A) Monitoring progress in implementing the waiver.

The WDP of PRDEDC will monitor progress under this waiver and work with the fifteen (15) local workforce development boards to implement the appropriate state and local policies.

The Monitoring Unit will be adding the monitoring of waivers to its monitoring processes to ensure compliance with waiver guidelines.

The Monitoring and Compliance Division of DEDC assesses the Operational, Administrative, and Fiscal Systems using the DEDC Monitoring Rule and the Resolution of Audit Reports of WIOA grants and other funds allocated by USDOL. The DEDC rule defines monitoring as a continuous process of structured assessment of the operations of local areas and sub-recipients to identify at an early stage those inappropriate practices that may result in non-compliance with the purposes of the act and the 20 CFR.

Some of the objectives established in the State Monitoring System, as instituted in the current rule, are:

- Conduct annual on-site monitoring reviews of local areas' compliance with 2 CFR part 200, as required by sec. 184(a)(3) of WIOA.
- Verify expenditures have been made against the proper cost categories and within the cost limitations specified in WIOA and the regulations.
- Determine the compliance with WIOA regulations and other applicable laws.
- Verify that services to participants qualify for Title I programs and as specified in the Local Plan and annual funding allocation plan.
- Evaluate the internal control structure with respect to these objectives to determine the risk of illegal acts or violations of the Allocation Contract, Applicable Laws, or Regulations.
- Expand the analysis conducted by DEDC units regarding financial reports, identify any deviation or unexpected result reflected in the reports, and corrective actions implemented at the local level.

In summary, the implementation of waivers is one of the areas to be evaluated as part of fiscal and program monitoring. This is even stated in the monitoring guide and in the worksheets

used during the review process. In addition to monitoring, we have personnel who are continuously verifying the efficiency and effectiveness of the LWDB.

(B) Provide notice to any local board affected by the waiver.

(C) Provide any local board affected by the waiver with the opportunity to comment on the request.

(D) Ensure meaningful public comments, including comments by business and organized labor, on the waiver.

(E) Collect and report information about waiver outcomes in the State's WIOA Annual Report.

(5) The most recent data available regarding the results and outcomes observed through the implementation of the existing waiver in cases where the State seeks renewal of a previously approved waiver.

a. **Process for Notice of Local Boards and Opportunity to Comment:**

The unified plan and the waiver request were published for a period of four (4) weeks on the PRDEDC website, allowing for public comment on its content and potential impact. In addition, copies of workforce system waivers will be provided to the Major's boards, Local Boards and LDWA's.

The following is the public comment process to the approval of the PR Unified State Plan 2024-2027:

- The Puerto Rico Unified State Plan 2024-2027 draft is published on the DEDC website for review and public comments for a period of four (4) weeks, beginning on January 22, 2024, until February 21, 2024.
- In addition, the draft plan is sent to all members of the State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) for review and comment.

- Also, the WDP sent the draft to all the presidents of the Local Boards, Chief Elected Officials, and Deputy Directors of the LWDAs, for local dissemination and public comments. The Plan draft must be available at the AJC so that the citizens, participants, partners, and services providers could review and evaluate it. The AJC staff must collect recommendations or comments and send them to the WDP.
- WDP must evaluate all the public comments and recommendations to assess the pertinence with WIOA rule and state policies, objectives, strategic and priorities for the workforce development system.
- The Planning and Executive Committees of the State Board must meet to evaluate the proposed plan and submit their recommendations to the board quorum. The committee must convene all the members for an ordinary meeting for the approval of the Plan.
- A second assessment process will be taken by the state board to submit their comments and recommendations.
- The WDP will assess the state board input and upgrades or change the unified plan according to the state board feedback. The process will be repeated until the board approval of the board.
- The WDP will host an open online seminar to discuss the proposed Unified Plan 2024-27, with the presidents of the Local Boards, CEOs, deputy directors, and AJC staff.
- WDP will make a presentation summarizing the plan, including the strategic objectives for the implementation of the Plan and the most significant strategies. Also, include a summary of the waiver's application included in the Plan.

b. Waiver Impact:

The Workforce Development Program will require the local areas to submit quarterly reports regarding the use of all the approved waivers. The report includes the number of participants, funds allocation and information related to any situation that would affect the

waiver implementation. PRDEDC will report on the impact and outcomes of its approved waivers in the WIOA Annual Report.

The State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) approved the public policy **WIOA-PP-04-22, Requirements for Workbase Training Activities** to provide guidelines for the following WBT activities: On the Job Training (OJT), Customized Training, Incumbent Workers Training, and Registered Apprenticeship. The policy includes a section dedicated to the implementation of the waiver of WIOA Section 134(c)(3)(H)(i) and 20 CFR 680.720(b) to increase on-the-job training (OJT) employer reimbursement up to 90 percent using a sliding scale based on employer size. In addition, it establishes that On-the-Job Learning (OJL) activities with Related Instruction (RI) of the Registered Apprenticeship Program are considered as the first alternative when offering Training Services.

Other policies approved by the State Board related to the delivery of services, including the OJT services, are:

- **WIOA-PP-02-2023 - WIOA Title I Adult Program Priority of Services**
- **DDEC-WIOA-PP-01-2023 - Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility**
- **WIOA-PP-03-2023 – Support Services and Needs Related Payments (NRP)**
- **WIOA-PP-07-2023 - Transfer of Funds between Adult and Dislocated Workers Programs**
- **DDEC-WIOA-05-2022 - Applicability of State Law No. 47 of 2021, on Minimum Wage to Municipal Consortia and Program Participants under the WIOA**
- **DDEC-WIOA-03-2022 - Guidelines Regarding Allowable and Non-Allowable Costs with WIOA Funds**
- **DDEC-WIOA-004-2022 - Applicability of 29CFR38 and 29USC3248 (WIOA) to the provision of services in One-Stop or One-Stop Partners, statutes, and prohibition of discrimination based on race, color, national origin, religion, age,**

disability, gender, place of residence, political affiliation, or belief, in the provision of service

- DEDC- WIOA- 01- 2021 - **Policy to comply with the Sunshine Provision for Local Board activities under the Workforce Opportunity and Innovation Act WIOA**
- DDEC-WIOA-07-2020 - **Procedure for the follow-up service required by WIOA for participants of the Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Programs**
- DEDC WIOA 08-2020 - **Case Management and Record-Keeping Policy** - Provide guidance for conducting case management interventions (eligibility, referrals, training activities, employment, etc.) and record-keeping.
- DDEC-WIOA-09-2020 - **Cost allocation and fund reimbursement**
- DDEC-WIOA-11-2020 - **Payroll Cost Allocation Policy - Guidelines and procedures for payroll based on budget.**
- Policy to establish the procedure for the determination of WIOA rules violations and the imposition of state board sanctions.

Waiver of the requirement under WIOA 129(a)(4), and consistent with 20 CFR 681.410, that states and local areas must expend a minimum of 75 percent of their Youth formula funds on youth workforce activities for out-of-school youth (OSY).

1. Statutory and/or regulatory requirements to be waived:

Indicate which part of the WIOA or the regulations the state would like to waive.

PRDEDC requests a waiver of the requirement under WIOA §129(a)(4), and consistent with 20 CFR 681.410, that States and local areas must expend a minimum of 75 percent of their youth formula funds on youth workforce activities for out-of-school youth (OSY).

The use of this waiver is limited to emergency, disaster-related needs only. Puerto Rico is exposed to the onslaught of natural disasters like hurricanes, earthquakes, pandemic like

COVID -19, causing the shutdown of economic activity and the loss of thousands of jobs throughout the recovery process. Local economists forecast that Puerto Rico will face an economic contraction that can extend for the next ten years. After a disaster, the Local Areas will be facing an increase in the demand for jobs, due a lot of job sites are destroyed or will not be able to restart operations because of the instability of infrastructure, lack of financial resources or the decrease in product production.

This situation directly impacts OSY and ISY. The OSY is a hard to serve population, given that they require a combination of educational and employment services that are not available every time the island is facing an emergency scenario. It is reasonable to expect that many youth service providers are unable to provide services due to the damage suffered in their infrastructure, loss of employees or permanent closures. OYS are also competing for jobs opportunities with unemployed adults and dislocated workers, during the recovery process. These two factors make it difficult for the workforce system to reach the WIOA requirement to meet the 75% OSY during a national emergency like hurricanes, earthquakes, or worldwide diseases.

On the other hand, demand for services for ISY increases considerably in the face of emergencies, as schools must close during and after hurricanes, others have been destroyed by earthquakes and a substantial number become obsolete due to damage in its structure. In the case of pandemics, all schools have been forced to a full lockout. In these events ISYs will experience an increase in the need for services to meet their needs. The elements of the youth program are an alternative to support ISYs in receiving educational services in an emergency.

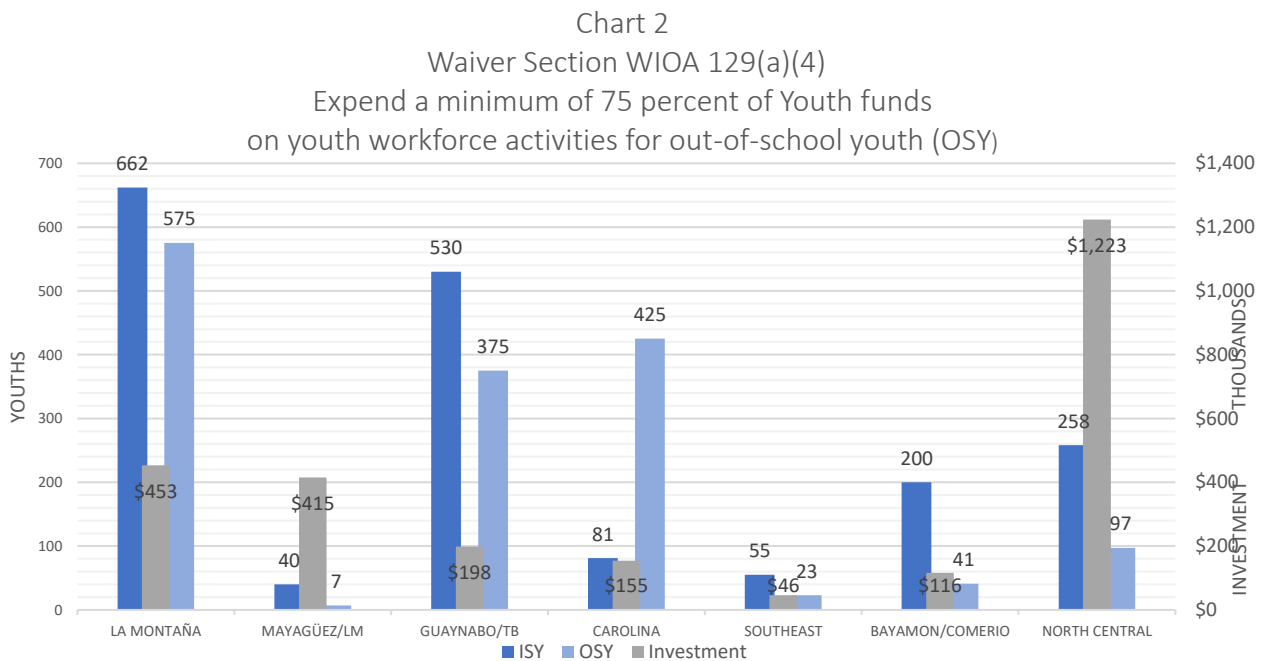
Nonetheless, Puerto Rico continues its efforts to provide employment and education services for out-of-school youth (OSY). Is necessary to promote the holistic development of youth to foster their economic self-sufficiency to the extent that barriers to employment and access to education are broken down, including OSY and ISY population.

This waiver was approved on June 7, 2022, and is currently valid until June 30, 2024. The chart below details the use of the same by the participating LWDA's. Puerto Rico continues its efforts to provide employment and education services for out-of-school youth (OSY).

Given the economic rising that the island is experiencing, it is necessary to promote the holistic development of youth to foster their economic self-sufficiency to the extent that barriers to employment and access to education to OSY and ISY population.

The chart below shows the participation of OSY and ISY for the PY22, as presented in the Annual Report Narrative 2022. The approval of waivers in previous years had a significant effect in increasing ISY participation. The seven (7) local areas that used the waiver in the total reported expenditures of \$2.6 million during the PY22. The LWDA of North Central reported the highest expenditures and La Montaña the largest number of participants. The chart shows the relationship between participation and expenditures in the WIOA Youth Program. It should be noted that the participating LWDA's continued to provide services to OSY, and the data reflects that the provided OSY services did not decrease. In simpler words, the number of OSY is approximately near than ISY, with 1,543 OSY and 1,826 ISY, as shown in chart 2.

Graph 20. Waiver Section WIOA 129(a)(4); Expend a minimum of 75 percent of youth workforce activities for out-of-school youth (OSY):



Source: PR Annual Report PY 2022

- **Actions undertaken to remove state or local barriers:**

Describe the actions undertaken to remove state or local barriers.

There are no State or local statutory or regulatory barriers for the implementation of the proposed waiver.

(E) Goals and expected programmatic outcomes of waiver:

Describe and specify how the waiver will help the state achieve an identified strategic goal or set of goals that it has outlined in its State Plan. If possible and appropriate the type of waiver requested, provide quantifiable projections for programmatic outcomes that will result from the waiver.

This waiver will provide Local Boards the necessary flexibility to use Youth formula funds, when appropriate, to meet the individual training and employment needs of all youth affected by an emergency.

The expected outcomes are as follows:

- Improve the ability of LWDAs to develop workforce strategies that align with economic realities within their workforce area;
- Improve the ability for LWDAs to design programs in response to the needs of their customers.
- Provides In-School Youth more choice opportunities to enter post-secondary education, vocational training or a “learn and earn” opportunity through Pre-Apprenticeship Programs for them to increase math, literacy, vocational and pre-vocational skills needed to enter a Registered Apprenticeship Program.
- Provide specific, numeric programmatic projected outcomes resulting from the implementation of this waiver.

The waiver to WIOA section 129(a)(4) was approved to PR on June 7, 2022, and is valid until June 30, 2024. Table 1 shows the registered youth in the database Participants Record Information System (PRIS), from 2018, until the current program year. This waiver increases the number of In-School Youth (ISYs) that receive services in the AJC, with over 50% of in-school youth.

Table 43. Youth Registration in PRIS 2018-2023

PY	OSY	%	ISY	%	TOTAL	% OSY Expenditure
2018	3,388	53%	3,023	47%	6,411	69%
2019	2,437	50%	2,423	50%	4,860	66%
2020	1,527	45%	1,866	55%	3,393	69%
2021	1,120	40%	1,682	60%	2,802	59%
2022	2242	45%	2707	55%	4,949	
2023*	498	46%	572	54%	1,070	

*Data until Q1 - Q2

Services for out-of-school youth (OSY), are more expensive because OSY needs a comprehensive service strategy that includes education, training, employment, and support services, among others.

The data from the annual narrative report presents the data of the youth served by the local boards who requested the use of this waiver. Based on the quarterly report data gathered by the WDP, a simple linear projection was made for the PY 2023-2025.

The following table shows a forecasting of the youth expected to be served under this waiver. The expected outcomes are more than three thousand youth delivery of service under the waiver in the three program years, in an average of 8 local areas that will request the use of it.

	Actual					Projected		
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
ISY	1,588	1,835	1,436	1,148	2,124	1,742	1,807	2,052
OSY	2,160	1,625	1,503	926	1,145	1,492	1,377	1,361
Total	3,748	3,460	2,939	2,074	3,269	3,234	3,185	3,414

(F) Department of Labor’s policy priorities:

Describe how the waiver will align with the Department’s policy priorities, such as: Supporting employer engagement; Connecting education and training strategies; Supporting work-based learning; Improving job and career results; and other priorities as articulated in guidance.

- Maximize the flexibility needed to ensure speedy implementation of work-based learning opportunities that WIOA encourages for both formula and discretionary grants;
- Increase business usage of the workforce system and thereby achieve greater access to employment opportunities for youth;
- Provide greater incentives for employers to retain and retrain current employees to avoid layoffs and to create new jobs;
- Create additional opportunities for new workers, and for unemployed and underemployed workers to speed up their return to full-time employment; and

- Support Puerto Rico's small and medium-sized businesses and the entrepreneurial start-up economy.

Individuals impacted by the waiver:

Describe which populations the waiver will benefit, including how the waiver will impact services for disadvantaged populations or individuals with multiple barriers to employment.

This waiver applies to the fifteen (15) LWDAs that compose Puerto Rico's Workforce Delivery System. All fifteen (15) LWDAs provide services to both out of school, and in-school youth.

Process for monitoring progress in implementation:

The Monitoring and Compliance Division of DEDC assesses the Operational, Administrative, and Fiscal Systems using the DEDC Monitoring Rule and the Resolution of Audit Reports of WIOA grants and other funds allocated by USDOL. The DEDC rule defines monitoring as a continuous process of structured assessment of the operations of local areas and sub-recipients to identify at an early stage those inappropriate practices that may result in non-compliance with the purposes of the act and the 20 CFR.

Some of the objectives established in the State Monitoring System, as instituted in the current rule, are:

- Conduct annual on-site monitoring reviews of local areas' compliance with 2 CFR part 200, as required by sec. 184(a)(3) of WIOA.
- Verify expenditures have been made against the proper cost categories and within the cost limitations specified in WIOA and the regulations.
- Determine the compliance with WIOA regulations and other applicable laws.
- Verify that services to participants qualify for Title I programs and as specified in the Local Plan and annual funding allocation plan.

- Evaluate the internal control structure with respect to these objectives to determine the risk of illegal acts or violations of the Allocation Contract, Applicable Laws, or Regulations.
- Expand the analysis conducted by DEDC units regarding financial reports, identify any deviation or unexpected result reflected in the reports, and corrective actions implemented at the local level.

In summary, the implementation of waivers is one of the areas to be evaluated as part of fiscal and program monitoring. This is even stated in the monitoring guide and in the worksheets used during the review process. In addition to monitoring, we have personnel who are continuously verifying the efficiency and effectiveness of the LWDB

Process for Notice of Local Boards and Opportunity to Comment:

The following is the public comment process to the approval of the PR Unified State Plan 2024-2027:

- The Puerto Rico Unified State Plan 2024-2027 draft is published on the DEDC website for review and public comments for a period of four (4) week, beginning on January 22, 2024, until February 21, 2024.
- In addition, the draft plan is sent to all members of the State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) for review and comment.
- Also, the WDP sent the draft to all the presidents of the Local Boards, Chief Elected Officials, and Deputy Directors of the LWDAs, for local dissemination and public comments. The Plan draft must be available at the AJC so that the citizens, participants, partners, and services providers could review and evaluate it. The AJC staff must collect recommendations or comments and send them to the WDP.
- WDP must evaluate all the public comments and recommendations to assess the pertinence with WIOA rule and state policies, objectives, strategic and priorities for the workforce development system.

- The Planning and Executive Committees of the State Board must meet to evaluate the proposed plan and submit their recommendations to the board quorum. The committee must convene all the members for an ordinary meeting for the approval of the Plan.
- A second assessment process will be taken by the state board to submit their comments and recommendations.
- The WDP will assess the state board input and upgrades or change the unified plan according to the state board feedback. The process will be repeated until the board approval of the board.
- The WDP will host an open webinar to discuss the proposed Unified Plan 2024-27, with the presidents of the Local Boards, CEOs, deputy directors, and AJC staff.
- WDP will make a presentation summarizing the plan, including the strategic objectives for the implementation of the Plan and the most significant strategies. Also, include a summary of the waiver's application included in the Plan.

Waiver Impact:

Collect and report information about waiver outcomes in the State's WIOA Annual Report. The Secretary may require that States provide the most recent data available about the outcomes of the existing waiver in cases where the State seeks renewal of a previously approved waiver.

The Workforce Development Program will require the local areas to submit quarterly reports regarding the use of all the approved waivers. The report includes the number of participants, funds allocation and information related to any situation that would affect the waiver implementation. PRDEDC will *report* on the impact and outcomes of its approved waivers in the *WIOA Annual Report*.

Waiver to allow flexibility in the use of funds reserved by the Governor to provide statewide rapid response activities to instead provide statewide employment and training activities, including disaster relief employment to affected areas

a. Statutory and/or regulatory requirements to be waived:

The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, through the Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DEDC), the WIOA Title I-B grantee, seeks a waiver allowance of WIOA section 134(a)(2)(A), (2)(B) and (3) to allow flexibility in the use of the funds reserved by the Governor for use to provide statewide rapid response activities (i.e. WIOA section 134(a)(2)(A)), and for use to provide statewide employment and training activities (i.e. WIOA section 134(a)(2)(B) and (3)) to provide disaster recovery assistance to affected areas as describe in WIOA 170(d) and 20 CFR 687.100(b), for program years 2024 and 2025, in case then PR face any disaster qualifying event by FEMA..

The set of Governor's reserved statewide funds shall be described in this waiver allowance request as "WIOA statewide funds." Under this waiver allowance the funds described at WIOA section 134(a)(2) and (3) may be used interchangeably.

Under this waiver allowance, permitted WIOA statewide fund use includes, but is not limited to:

- Provide disaster relief services immediately upon the event, maximizing the use of funds available from the state's reserve of the dislocated workers program, before applying for funds from the National Dislocated Workers Grant (NDWG).
- Expeditious allocation of funds to a local workforce development board, or local board, so they may respond quickly to a disaster, emergency, or other qualifying event as described at 20 CFR 687.100(b). Only those events, and cascading events caused by a qualifying event, that have been declared as an emergency or disaster by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), by the chief official of a Federal Agency with jurisdiction over the Federal response to a disaster with potential significant loss of

employment, or the Governor of Puerto Rico qualify for the use of WIOA statewide funds.

- To alleviate the effects that a qualifying event causes within affected local area(s), and/or planning regions, WIOA statewide funds will allow comprehensive disaster relief employment and employment and training activities, and the provision of needed humanitarian resources and services, including other services or resources deemed necessary as described at 20 CFR 687.180(b)(1).
- An individual's disaster relief employment is limited to 12 months or 2,080 hours for work related to recovery from a single emergency or disaster. The Workforce Development Program (WDP) of the DEDC may extend an individual's disaster relief employment for up to an additional 12 months or 2,080 hours if requested and sufficiently justified by the local board.
- Supportive services may be provided to enable individuals to participate in disaster relief employment, and employment and training activities, including such costs as transportation, childcare, and personal safety equipment and clothing consistent with local policies.
- Individuals shall be eligible to be offered disaster relief employment and employment and training services if such individual is a dislocated worker; is a long-term unemployed individual as defined by the State; is temporarily or permanently laid off because of the emergency or disaster; or in the case of an individual who is self-employed, becomes unemployed or significantly underemployed because of the emergency or disaster.

b. Actions undertaken to remove state or local barriers:

The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico established the Puerto Rico State Agency for Emergency and Disaster Management —Spanish: Agencia Estatal para el Manejo de Emergencias y Administración de Desastres (AEMEAD)— as the agency that oversees all emergency activities that occur in Puerto Rico. Within all local workforce development areas, or local

areas, there are responsible entities marshalled by local government, or its agents, should a qualifying event occur. The AEMEAD works in concert with these entities to provide resources and expertise.

The Government of Puerto Rico will apply for National Dislocated Worker Grants (NDWG), consistent with WIOA Sec. 170 and its corresponding regulatory requirements. The NDWG grants are helpful once allocated, but in the time between the event and allocation, aid is urgently needed and there is much work to be done. If months pass before the NDWG allocation occurs, damage can be exacerbated, and work is not completed. The Government is mindful of this time gap and strives to apply as soon as the state is eligible for NDWG funding assistance, as appropriate. The efficient use of time right after a qualifying event occurs is a critical variable in how well recovery is measured.

c. Description of State Strategic Goals

This waiver will allow the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico to respond to disasters efficiently and effectively by aligning the program requirements of a disaster recovery project regardless of if they are funded with WIOA Statewide Rapid Response funds or the National Dislocated Worker Grant Program. In the case of a qualifying event, the State intends to use WIOA statewide funds so that relevant workforce development responses are provided in a timely manner. WIOA statewide funds may be provided to local areas deemed in need of financial resources because of being affected by a qualifying event.

The use of WIOA statewide funds associated with this waiver supports the state's goal of local WIOA based programs and activities that better serve targeted groups of workforce development system customers. The use of WIOA statewide funds offers greater flexibility so that the state and local governing entities can expand their ability to coordinate resources, services and activities for individual, workers and employers affected by the qualifying emergency and/or disaster event. The state will use WIOA statewide funds to ensure that critical, time-sensitive work can be performed, and the potential participant pool is widened. The waiver flexibility permits local areas the latitude to marshal available labor, conduct appropriate training, enable required resources to be requisitioned quickly, and provide

immediate and comprehensive disaster recovery assistance, including efforts to minimize further disaster impacts.

- d. Describe how the waiver will align with the Department’s policy priorities, such as: Supporting employer engagement; Connecting education and training strategies; Supporting work-based learning; Improving job and career results; and other priorities as articulated in guidance.**

This waiver aligns with not only the Department of Labor’s priorities. This will allow the state to temporarily expand service capacity at the local level through time-limited funding assistance in response to significant disasters.

Expanding the ability for the state to provide disaster related employment opportunities through statewide funding allows participants to develop skills that will better prepare them to obtain permanent employment.

- e. Quantifiable projected programmatic outcomes resulting from implementation of the waiver**

The waiver to WIOA section 134(a)(2)(A), (2)(B) and (3) was approved to PR on October 6, 2022, and is valid until June 30, 2024. During the validity of the waiver, the DEDC attended two disaster events using the flexibility in the use of the funds, the attention to dislocated workers by Hurricane Fiona in September 2022, as well as those dislocated by COVID -19.

Temporary Jobs Hurricane FIONA

Temporary employment activities were carried out in 12 local areas to address emergency needs, with functions such as cleaning and disinfection of common areas in municipal and recreational offices, maintenance of green areas, streets, roads, debris collection, assistance in the distribution of essential materials to the population, collect and dispose of food, provide detailed guidance on safety protocols, support the call center related to emergency management, conduct phone interviews, emails, in-person, or other methods for disaster-related requests for information. **The total number of impacted participants was 775 with an investment of \$4,160,258.26.**

Home Care Aides Project

This project, developed with funds from the state reserve of the dislocated workers program, has the purpose of providing a credential for Home Care Aides, for out-of-school youth affected by the pandemic, people with long-term unemployment and displaced by the COVID-19 pandemic. This initiative is in the process of being implemented and is expected to be completed in PY 2023, with 100% colocation in employment.

The outcomes of this project are presented in the following table:

Table 44. Home Care Aides:

<i>LWDA</i>	<i>OSY</i>	<i>DW</i>	<i>Total Participants</i>	<i>Allocation OSY</i>	<i>Allocation DW</i>	<i>Total Allocation</i>
Guaynabo- Toa Baja	10	40	50	\$145,260	\$581,040	\$726,300
La Montaña	25	110	135	\$363,150	\$1,597,860	\$1,961,010
Mayaguez- Las Marias	10	60	70	\$145,260	\$871,560	\$1,016,820
Noreste	45	180	225	\$653,670	\$2,614,680	\$3,268,350
Norte Central	40	160	200	\$581,040	\$2,324,160	\$2,905,200
Noroeste	35	140	175	\$508,410	\$2,033,640	\$2,542,050
Ponce	5	20	25	\$72,630	\$290,520	\$363,150
Sur Central	25	100	125	\$363,150	\$1,452,600	\$1,815,750
Sureste	35	140	175	\$508,410	\$2,033,640	\$2,542,050

Suroeste	50	200	250	\$726,300	\$2,905,200	\$3,631,500
Caguas-Guayama	40	160	200	\$581,040	\$2,324,160	\$2,905,200
Total	320	1,310	1,630	\$4,648,320	\$19,029,060	\$23,677,380

The state estimates that the waiver will improve outcomes and provide other tangible benefits in the following ways:

- Increase statewide and local area workforce development response times to a qualifying event;
- Increase public safety and help support humanitarian activities;
- Availability of disaster relief employment will provide grant participants with access to employment and training activities;
- Increasing of eligible grant participant's employment and training activities will lead towards a higher probability of securing unsubsidized employment; and
- Alignment with Department of Labor's policy priorities

After hurricanes Irma and María in 2017 approximately 2,200 dislocated workers participated from temporary workers. For COVID-19 Pandemic we impacted 1,518 dislocated workers who helped with the cleaning and disinfection of shared areas, but also supported the delivery of supplies and other humanitarian aid. For hurricane Fiona disaster were served 775 participants.

Based on the outcomes of the participants during the emergencies of Hurricanes Irma, Maria and Fiona, earthquakes, and pandemics, it is estimated that the implementation of this

waiver in the event of a possible natural disaster, the following participants can be delivered in temporary by local Area:

Table 45. Temporary Workers due to Emergencies such as Hurricanes Irma and María and Covid-19 Pandemic:

Local Area	Participants	
Bayamón-Comerío	50	Clean-up, Emergency and Humanity Services
Caguas-Guayama	75	Clean-up, Emergency and Humanity Services
Carolina	25	Clean-up, Emergency and Humanity Services
Guaynabo- Toa Baja	75	Clean-up, Emergency and Humanity Services
La Montaña	75	Clean-up, Emergency and Humanity Services
Manatí-Dorado	125	Clean-up, Emergency and Humanity Services
Mayaguez-LM	150	Clean-up, Emergency and Humanity Services
North Central Arecibo	250	Clean-up, Emergency and Humanity Services
Northeast	75	Clean-up, Emergency and Humanity Services
Northwest	200	Clean-up, Emergency and Humanity Services
Ponce	150	Clean-up, Emergency and Humanity Services
San Juan	50	Clean-up, Emergency and Humanity Services

South Central	200	Clean-up, Emergency and Humanity Services
Southeast	150	Clean-up, Emergency and Humanity Services
Southwest	350	Clean-up, Emergency and Humanity Services
Total	2,000	

Individuals, groups, or populations benefitting, or otherwise impacted by the waiver from the waiver

The waiver will positively impact:

- All eligible participants as identified at WIOA section 170 and 20 CFR 687.170 which include dislocated workers, long-term unemployed individuals as defined by the State, temporarily or permanently laid off workers as a consequence of the emergency or disaster, or in the case of an individual who is self-employed, becomes unemployed or significantly underemployed as a result of the emergency or disaster; and
- Non-WIOA eligible recipients include affected businesses and employers, residents and other individuals that benefit from the qualifying event clean-up, restoration and humanitarian activities, and resources provided.

f. State plans for monitoring waiver implementation, including collection of waiver outcome information.

The state will use the following approach for monitoring progress in implementation:

Workforce Development Program (WDP) leadership will determine if the qualifying event requires the use of WIOA statewide funds and will approve parameters for the project and be the operational lead. Applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, policies, and procedures will be used to ensure fiscal accountability. Unless otherwise authorized in this

waiver, the financial and administrative rules contained in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act; Final Rule (i.e., 20 CFR 683) will apply.

- Completed Request for Funds form with local board signatory authorizing request;
 - Official declaration documenting the emergency and/or disaster event;
 - Narrative will include, at a minimum, summary of the event, preliminary assessment of the cleanup, humanitarian needs of the affected areas, and will demonstrate whether there is a sufficient population of eligible individuals to conduct the planned work;
 - Budget and budget justification; and
 - Completed worksite summary.

The WDP will receive monthly project status reports and will host teleconferences with project stakeholders as necessary to monitor project status. At a minimum, funding recipients will provide the WDP with the following information for review:

- Revised narrative and associated attachments when a modification is required;
- Monthly Financial Status Reports;
- Monthly project status report of project activities; and
- Data entry for all participant service in the state system of PIRL system.

Only local boards will be the recipient of WIOA statewide funding for qualifying events. If a qualifying event occurs in a local area, the state requires the respective local board to collaborate with local governments and other recognized entities to determine whether workforce development-oriented services and activities are warranted. Local boards may work with their respective local area fiscal agents to complete and submit the funding request to WDP. Local boards will work with one-stop operator(s) to communicate the

funding parameters to workforce development system partners and other service providers. Participant activity is to be recorded in the state system of record.

All funds obligated will be accounted for in the financial management system, the MIP. Case management and related source documentation associated with the emergency and/or disaster must include the qualifying event as a point of reference.

State staff who administer programming will provide ongoing technical assistance and oversight as it relates to the appropriateness and the effectiveness of this waiver.

Annual WIOA on-site programmatic reviews will include an evaluation of the impact the waivers have on programmatic goals and outcomes.

Additionally, the Monitoring and Compliance Division of DEDC assesses the Operational, Administrative, and Fiscal Systems using the DEDC Monitoring Rule and the Resolution of Audit Reports of WIOA grants and other funds allocated by USDOL. The DEDC rule defines monitoring as a continuous process of structured assessment of the operations of local areas and sub-recipients to identify at an early stage those inappropriate practices that may result in non-compliance with the purposes of the act and the 20 CFR.

Some of the objectives established in the State Monitoring System, as instituted in the current rule, are:

- Conduct annual on-site monitoring reviews of local areas' compliance with 2 CFR part 200, as required by sec. 184(a)(3) of WIOA
- Verify expenditures have been made against the proper cost categories and within the cost limitations specified in WIOA and the regulations
- Determine the compliance with WIOA regulations and other applicable laws
- Verify that services to participants qualify for Title I programs and as specified in the Local Plan and annual funding allocation plan.

- Evaluate the internal control structure with respect to these objectives to determine the risk of illegal acts or violations of the Allocation Contract, Applicable Laws, or Regulations.
- Expand the analysis conducted by DEDC units regarding financial reports, identify any deviation or unexpected result reflected in the reports, and corrective actions implemented at the local level.

In summary, the implementation of waivers is one of the areas to be evaluated as part of fiscal and program monitoring. This is even stated in the monitoring guide and in the worksheets used during the review process. In addition to monitoring, we have personnel who are continuously verifying the efficiency and effectiveness of the LWDB.

g. Assurance of state posting of the request for public comment (including the dates that the state made the draft request available for public comment) and notification to affected local workforce development boards.

The following is the public comment process to the approval of the PR Unified State Plan 2024-2027:

- The Puerto Rico Unified State Plan 2024-2027 draft is published on the DEDC website for review and public comments for a period of four (4) weeks, beginning on January 22, 2024, until February 21, 2024.
- In addition, the draft plan is sent to all members of the State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) for review and comment.
- Also, the WDP sent the draft to all the presidents of the Local Boards, Chief Elected Officials, and Deputy Directors of the LWDAs, for local dissemination and public comments. The Plan draft must be available at the AJC so that the citizens, participants, partners, and services providers could review and evaluate it. The AJC staff must collect recommendations or comments and send them to the WDP.

- WDP must evaluate all the public comments and recommendations to assess the pertinence with WIOA rule and state policies, objectives, strategic and priorities for the workforce development system.
- The Planning and Executive Committees of the State Board must meet to evaluate the proposed plan and submit their recommendations to the board quorum. The committee must convene all the members for an ordinary meeting for the approval of the Plan.
- A second assessment process will be taken by the state board to submit their comments and recommendations.
- The WDP will assess the state board input and upgrades or change the unified plan according to the state board feedback. The process will be repeated until the board approval of the board.
- The WDP will host an open webinar to discuss the proposed Unified Plan 2024-27, with the presidents of the Local Boards, CEOS, deputy directors, and AJC staff.
- WDP will make a presentation summarizing the plan, including the strategic objectives for the implementation of the Plan and the most significant strategies. Also, include a summary of the waiver's application included in the Plan.
- The waiver request will be published for a period of four (4) weeks on the PRDEDC website, allowing for public comments on its content and potential impact. In addition, this request will be emailed to Major's board, Local Workforce Development Boards and Local Area staff.

TITLE I-B ASSURANCES

Table 46. State Plan’s Requirements under Title I-B:

The State Plan must include assurances that:

The State Plan must include	Included
1. The State has implemented a policy to ensure Adult program funds provide a priority in the delivery of training services and individualized career services to individuals who are low income, public assistance recipients and basic skills deficient;	Yes
2. The State has implemented a policy to ensure local areas have a process in place for referring veterans with significant barriers to employment to career services provided by the JVSG program’s Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist;	Yes
3. The State established a written policy and procedure that set forth criteria to be used by chief elected officials for the appointment of local workforce investment board members;	Yes
4. The State established written policy and procedures to ensure local workforce investment boards are certified by the governor every two years in accordance with WIOA section 107(c)(2);	Yes
5. Where an alternative entity takes the place of a State Board, the State has written policy and procedures to ensure the alternative entity meets the definition under WIOA section 101(e) and the legal requirements for membership;	Yes

The State Plan must include	Included
6. The State established a written policy and procedure for how the individuals and entities represented on the State Workforce Development Board help to determine the methods and factors of distribution, and how the State consults with chief elected officials in local areas throughout the State in determining the distributions;	Yes
7. The State will not use funds received under WIOA Title I to assist, promote, or deter union organizing in accordance with WIOA section 181(b)(7);	Yes
8. The State distributes adult and youth funds received under WIOA equitably throughout the State, and no local area suffers significant shifts in funding from year-to-year during the period covered by this plan;	Yes
9. If a State Workforce Development Board, department, or agency administers State laws for vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, that board, department, or agency cooperates with the agency that administers Wagner-Peyser services, Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and Youth Programs under Title I;	Yes
10. The State agrees to report on the impact and outcomes of its approved waivers in its WIOA Annual Report.	Yes
11. The State has taken appropriate action to secure compliance with the Uniform Guidance at 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 2900, including that the State will annually monitor local areas to ensure compliance and otherwise take	Yes

The State Plan must include	Included
appropriate action to secure compliance with the Uniform Guidance under section WIOA 184(a)(3);	

Wagner-Peyser Act Program (Employment Services)

(A) Employment Service Staff

- (1) Describe how the State will staff the provision of labor exchange services under the Wagner-Peyser Act, such as through State employees, including but not limited to state merit staff employees, staff of a subrecipient, or some combination thereof.**

The Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources (PRDOL) is steadfast in its commitment to providing high-quality labor exchange services under the Wagner-Peyser Act (WP), adhering to recent amendments in regulations. Recognizing the pivotal role of qualified, nonpartisan personnel in ensuring effective service delivery, the Department is strategically leveraging State merit staff employees as the primary workforce for Employment Services (ES).

This strategic decision aligns with the objective of ensuring that labor exchange services are administered by professionals who meet specific and objective qualifications. State merit staff members will undergo comprehensive training to bolster their competence in delivering high-quality services. Furthermore, these professionals will be held to transparent performance standards, contributing significantly to the overall effectiveness and integrity of labor exchange services.

It is worth noting that PRDOL has embraced the 12 competencies developed by the National Employment Counselor Association as a framework for guiding the delivery of ES services. These competencies serve as a solid foundation for the professional

development and training of State merit staff, ensuring their proficiency in addressing the diverse needs of individuals seeking reemployment services.

Moving forward, Employment Services under the Wagner-Peyser Act will primarily be facilitated through merit-based state employees. The PRDOL takes pride in its existing pool of human capital distinguished by excellence in knowledge, leadership, and high-quality management, aligning seamlessly with global trends and sectoral needs. The ongoing objective is to persist in recruiting and training talent endowed with exceptional knowledge and leadership capabilities.

Actively recruiting new personnel under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is vital for providing mandated services and meeting the overarching responsibilities of the WP. Equally crucial is the continuous training of existing personnel providing direct services to federally designated high-priority populations, such as veterans and eligible spouses, UI applicants with a higher likelihood of exhausting their benefits (including UCX), and other special target populations identified as in need of career services, such as Migrant and Seasonal Farm Workers (MSFW). This involves equipping them with the skills and tools necessary to deliver these services effectively.

Our commitment to continuous education and training extends to our staff, ensuring they stay updated on essential topics for effective case management with clients. We will persist in providing talent retraining on our island, staying aligned with global trends. This commitment ensures that our personnel remain highly skilled, demonstrating sensitivity and empathy in assisting clients to identify appropriate assistance tailored to their needs. This, in turn, facilitates stable employment and promotes community economic well-being and an enhanced quality of life.

Furthermore, our experienced staff and supervisors continue their training initiatives, actively sharing their knowledge with newly recruited personnel. This aligns with the overarching goal of expanding the knowledge base across all the service programs we offer. Leveraging digital technology, our staff undergoes online training from external entities and other government agencies. This collaborative approach, facilitated through interagency agreements, consistently results in a highly qualified workforce.

(2) Describe how the State will utilize professional development activities for Employment Service staff to ensure staff is able to provide high quality services to both jobseekers and employers.

In the realm of workforce development, the significance of possessing the latest competencies and knowledge cannot be overstated. The commitment to providing high-quality services to both job seekers and employers is at the core of the State's approach within the Employment Services. Central to this commitment is the recognition that the WP staff plays a pivotal role in the success of the workforce system. As articulated in our strategy, we emphasize the imperative of equipping WP staff with the necessary competencies and skills through diverse and effective approaches.

Skills-based training stands out as a foundational element in our approach. By delivering targeted and effective training, we ensure that staff not only acquire conceptual knowledge but also practice new behaviors and receives valuable feedback on their performance. This ensures a practical understanding of the information and behaviors crucial for delivering high-quality services.

Job assignments are another integral facet of our strategy, providing WP staff with real-world challenges and responsibilities to promote the seamless integration of innovative ideas into their existing roles. This hands-on approach enhances adaptability and problem-solving skills.

Building relationships is recognized as a crucial avenue for learning and development. Through interaction with others, WP staff gains insights and perspectives that contribute to their professional growth. The state is committed to investing necessary and eligible funds in consistent, ongoing, and strategic training, aiming to motivate staff and align their efforts with the goals of the workforce system.

Continuous professional development is not merely a pursuit of competence; it is a commitment to excellence. Actively seeking professional development ensures that knowledge and skills remain relevant and up to date, making WP staff more attuned to the ever-changing trends in the workforce system.

PRDOLHR has invested time and effort in implementing technological changes by integrating new platforms to enhance its services. In this regard, the PRDOLHR has adopted the United States government's Executive Order 13985, "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities through the Federal Government." This order establishes that promoting affirmative equity, civil rights, racial justice, and equal opportunities is the responsibility of the entire country. To address the need for equitable services and equal employment opportunities, funds have been allocated to integrate sign language interpretation services through technology.

Furthermore, our commitment to professional development extends to the training of WP staff on the provisions outlined in the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. This initiative aims to promote both physical and programmatic accessibility, ensuring that our services are accessible to individuals with disabilities. To support this commitment, eligible funds will be allocated for specialized training, including sign language, with the goal of enhancing our services to the deaf community. This underscores our unwavering dedication to inclusivity.

Additionally, our supervisors undergo real-time training using the ASLS VRI APP online platform. This platform addresses the need to effectively communicate with individuals who are audio-impaired and receiving unemployment insurance, facilitating their access to employment services. This training equips supervisors with the skills necessary to provide personalized services to the deaf community, enabling seamless connections with individuals through online interpreters and further enhancing our ability to meet the unique needs of this community. Through the PRIS system, statistical data will be collected to identify people with disabilities, providing valuable information to integrate new services tailored to their needs.

Since the inception of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), workforce counseling through American Job Centers has remained a top priority. This collaborative process between WP workforce professionals and job seekers, whether conducted in groups or individual activities, empowers job seekers with insights into the labor market, realistic career perspectives, and adaptive career choices.

The responsibilities of WP staff extend to delivering direct services to high-priority populations, including veterans, eligible spouses, and UI applicants at a higher risk of benefit exhaustion. As the landscape of professional services evolves, our commitment to continuous learning and development ensures that WP staff remains at the forefront of excellence in workforce counseling, contributing to the overall success of the workforce system. To meet this responsibility, WP staff will receive specialized training focused on the minimum competencies required to effectively provide all professional services according to WIOA:

1. Individual Counseling (one to one): Refers to a private session (face to face) between an employment specialist and a job seeker. The main objective is to help the job seeker to explore his current situation regarding the selection or changing job or occupation.
2. Group Counseling: Refers to the process by which an employment specialist uses the principles and techniques of group dynamics and leadership roles in a continuous and meaningful way to help a job seeker who have trouble getting or keeping a job due to work-related attitudes, behaviors, or habits. Usually, these group interventions focus on the discussion of a common theme within the rest of the group.
3. Counseling Skills: Refers to the ability to establish a relationship of trust, open and useful to each client, accurately interpreting the feelings as well as verbal and nonverbal expressions, and convey that understanding to the client and any other relevant information and necessary assistance. The employment specialist must have the awareness and knowledge of career development theory and the ability to support the job seeker through transitions and facilitate decision-making and goal setting. Must have the ability to recognize the need to refer the job seeker to appropriate resources to eliminate barriers to employment and the ability to obtaining (intake) the necessary and effective information to ensure that the job seeker is fit and able to benefit from the programs available in within the One-Stop Centers.

4. Individual and Group Skills Assessment: Refers to the ability to provide a continuous assessment using individual skills and group evaluation and use of formal and informal assessment methods that comply with the regulations of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC); the ability to provide continuous assessment, individual and group settings, involving the assessment and measurement of customer needs, characteristics, potential, individual differences and self-evaluation; and the ability to recognize the needs and special features of all kinds, for example, minorities, women seeking non-traditional and culturally different occupations, immigrants, the disabled, older workers and people with AIDS.
5. Market Information Utilization: Refers to the ability to access, understand and interpret the labor market information and job market trends; the ability to develop and use educational, occupational, and labor market information to help job seekers in their decision-making process and the formulation of employment and career objectives that lead to self-sufficiency; and the ability to develop and use skills standards.
6. Computer Skills: Refers to the ability to apply the principles of employment counseling to the use of the Internet and other online services, including but not limited to testing, job banks (PR.JOBS), job search, preparing and distributing resumes, reports, case management, counseling and maintaining confidentiality of customer data.
7. Individual Employment Plan and Case Management: Refers to the ability to help job seekers to develop and implement an appropriate individual employability plan to help them move from their current situation through any necessary service to improve their employability, including training and supporting services into a suitable job. It involves the knowledge of educational resources and training, sources for financial support, community resources and requirements of the local labor market; and the ability to manage cases through placement and retention.

8. Placement Skills: Refers to the ability to identify and communicate an understanding of employers staffing needs to develop effective job development contacts and help the job seeker to present his/her qualifications in relation to the employer's needs; the ability to teach job search skills and for job development; the ability to help the job seeker in making decisions related to the work environment in which he/she could be more successful; and the ability to advocate for employment and career development of special target groups.
9. Community Relations Skills: Refers to the ability to help job seekers to get the services needed to address their employment barriers that may interfere with the successful employment and their career goals; the ability to make presentations to community groups and to participate in the working teams of such community groups; the ability to develop information packages; and the ability to associate and establish staff resources with other agencies within the One-Stop Centers.
10. Workload Management and Inter-Personal Relationship Skills: Refers to the ability to coordinate all aspects of the Employment Counseling Program as part of a team effort, resulting in a continuous and significant sequence of client services, agency staff, employers, and the community; and the ability to operate a comprehensive employment resource center.
11. Professional Development Skills: Refers to the ability to develop skills on an individual basis and within the position or profession and demonstrate by example the performance and standards expected of a professional Employment Specialist.
12. Ethical and Legal Aspects: Refers to the ability to meet ethical standards, knowledge of regulations and legislation affecting training and employment, employment services and social reform, such as the EEOC, the Americans with Disabilities Act, professional testing standards, Multicultural Affairs, Family Affairs and one Stop Centers.

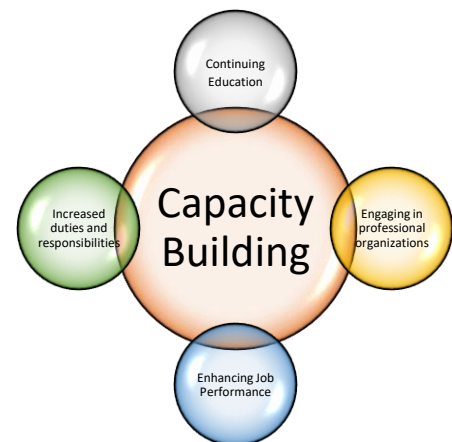
Our goal is to have a comprehensive curriculum aligned with these competencies to equip staff with the necessary tools to provide high-quality services to both job seekers and employers. This includes intensive interview techniques, professional assessment administration, labor market information access and interpretation, personalized service strategies, identification of interpersonal skills training needs, partnership development with the workforce, and awareness of available support services.

Additionally, ongoing staff development activities may include:

- a) Comprehensive online resources on the Employment Service's Intranet using MS SharePoint.
- b) Comprehensive training on external online resources such as mynextstep.org and myskillsmyfuture.org.
- c) On-the-job training for new staff in state and local offices.
- d) Continuous assessment of training needs by local Employment Service Managers and partners.
- e) Participation in Local Boards to stay informed about local, state, and national issues.

Our commitment is to continue training our staff, providing them with the necessary competencies and skills for professional service delivery, integrating advanced technology in education with digital tools that foster online learning. This involves:

1. **Continuing Education:** Offering In-person and virtual courses and workshops, certificates, accreditations, or other credentials through educational programs.
2. **Engaging in Professional Organizations:** Attending local, regional, national, and international meetings, conferences, and workshops sponsored by professional organizations; serving as an official, board



member, or committee member; coordinating events sponsored by the Employment Service and/or the American Job Center.

3. **Enhancing Job Performance:** Receiving innovative training on new technological platforms, systems, and processes.
4. **Increased Duties and Responsibilities:** Taking on new challenges in the current position, short and long-term assignments.

The staff at American Job Centers under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) plays a pivotal role in supporting job seekers, and their effectiveness is crucial to the success of WIOA. To enhance the professional services provided, we have actively sought input from the WP staff through feedback mechanisms such as focus groups. This cooperative approach guarantees that the knowledge and experiences of the staff are effectively captured and disseminated through comprehensive training programs.

The feedback received has been instrumental in identifying key areas for inclusion in staff training. These encompass a range of topics essential for professional development, including HR practices, general skills, and supervisor-specific subjects. Noteworthy among the suggested topics are:

- Discrimination in Employment
- Diversity and Human Relations in the Workplace
- Documentation and Confidentiality: The Healthy Management of Information
- Empowerment and Development of a High-Performance Work Team
- Conversational English (Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced Levels)
- Conflict Mediation: Essential Tools for Today's Supervisor
- Results-Oriented Work Plans
- Strategic Planning in Public Relations

To facilitate the delivery of these training modules, we are establishing collaboration agreements with other government agencies that offer educational courses. The interagency training approach ensures a comprehensive and diverse learning experience for the WP staff, fostering continuous improvement and professional growth.

In summary, the proactive integration of staff insights and the incorporation of a wide array of relevant topics in training programs underscore our commitment to providing high-quality professional services to job seekers under WIOA. Through collaboration and ongoing learning, we aim to equip our staff with the knowledge and skills necessary for success in their roles.

(3) Describe strategies developed to support training and awareness across core programs and the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program and the training provided for Employment Service and WIOA staff on identification of UI eligibility issues and referral to UI staff for adjudication.

In order to provide supportive guidance to the staff of the Employment Service Division, the Unemployment Insurance (UI) Division, responsible for administering the Federal Unemployment Insurance Program (UI), and the Operators of the American Job Centers, for the implementation of the provisions of the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) regarding UI Programs, a system has been integrated to share training with all personnel from various programs aligned to assist individuals in job search, access employment, education, training services, and support services to succeed in the labor market and to align employers with skilled workers needed to compete in the global economy.

Cross Training

The UI provides training, technical assistance, and support to all personnel from key partners serving job seekers and local employers to ensure that program partners are highly engaged in local and state workforce partnerships that allow for constant exchange of information on core programs, UI legislation, and available programs. This integration is designed to flow seamlessly within the One-Stop Centers.

Leveraging virtual platforms, training webinars have been integrated for staff with outstanding academic qualifications and extensive experience, qualifying them as internal educators who will continue to provide ongoing education to merit staff. These training sessions will be recorded and shared across each service program to keep staff updated with new information.

Our commitment is to continue providing cross-training on WP services to veterans, UI applicants, MSFW, and general job seekers. Additionally, training integration will cover areas such as the WP Complaint System, Agricultural Recruitment System (ARS), the refocusing of State Jobs for Veterans Grants (JVSG), and its impact on service delivery by WIOA partners, Reemployment Services, and Eligibility Assessment Program (RESEA), UI policies, rules, procedures, screening, and resolution of UI eligibility issues.

Identification of Unemployment Insurance (UI) Eligibility Issues

To meet the requirement of providing necessary information related to UI eligibility, the Employment Service Division coordinates with the Unemployment Insurance Division to ensure that:

1. An effective feedback system is in place to notify UI staff if the claimant reported as indicated, and participated in eligibility assessment and/or services, as applicable;
2. The feedback system is established for all reemployment services the UI claimant is required to participate in, including a process to refer any eligibility issues identified during the eligibility review to a UI adjudicator;
3. Employment Service staff are properly trained to conduct a comprehensive eligibility assessment and identify potential eligibility issues, referring them to a UI adjudicator;
4. Employment Service staff are adequately trained to document information for use by UI staff to adjudicate any UI eligibility issues, as applicable;
5. Only merit-based UI staff have the authority to resolve UI eligibility issues.

In accordance with the grant requirements for the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) Program, a comprehensive review of UI eligibility is conducted under

the Eligibility Review Program (ERP). Section 303(a)(1) of the Social Security Act (SSA) requires "methods of management... as the United States Secretary of Labor determines are reasonably calculated to ensure full payment of unemployment compensation when due." This necessitates the implementation of procedures and policies for UI eligibility information by ES and/or WIOA staff to promptly identify UI eligibility issues and refer them to UI staff for proper adjudication according to state UI law.

To ensure ES meets the needs of UI, there are policies and procedures to define and timely provide required information related to the participation or availability requirements of a claimant. UI applicants referred to RESEA will be subject to this eligibility review as part of their participation in RESEA. However, all UI applicants not referred to RESEA and receiving employment services will be subject to the same eligibility review by WP staff as part of the initial assessment. These services will be provided by merit-based WP state staff. WP/RESEA staff will review WP/RESEA participants who have completed assessment interviews and refer them to UI for adjudication, as appropriate.

(b) Explain how the State will provide information and meaningful assistance to individuals requesting assistance in filing a claim for unemployment compensation through AJCs, as required by WIOA as a career service.

Consistent with the Employment Service policies and procedures which require an integrated approach to its reemployment strategy to strategically coordinate resources and activities serving the unemployed community, policies and procedures are in place to address the provision of services to UI claimants regarding assistance to individuals filing a claim for UI through the American Job Centers.

This operational guide established the guidelines, policies, and procedures to be followed by the WP and UI staff (responsible for the administration of the Federal Unemployment Insurance Program (UI)), in the implementation of the provisions of the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) with relation to UI Programs, and to:

- 1) Recommend the Division of Unemployment Insurance to continue working with other partners in the Workforce System, in the development and implementation of strategies that support WIOA's vision, as described in the Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 19-14.

- 2) Urge the Division of Unemployment Insurance and the Division of Employment Service to coordinate with State Boards and Local Boards on how best to most efficiently use UI programs including the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA), as they develop integrated strategies for service delivery through American Job Centers under WIOA.

Career Services under WIOA Include the Provision of "Information and Assistance" in Connection with the Filing of a UI Claim.

The integrated workforce system established by WIOA is intended to provide participants with a unique and comprehensive experience that includes a professional level of service provided in a timely manner. WIOA requires, as part of its career services, the provision of information and assistance to individuals in connection with the filing of a UI claim (WIOA Section 134(c)(2)(A)(x)), WIOA 20 CFR 678.430(a)(10)).

To provide this access and the meaningful assistance to individuals requesting assistance in filing a claim for unemployment compensation through the One-Stop Centers, assistance will be available through:

- UI orientation provided to every new claimant explaining the full range of workforce services available to help them return to work by Wagner-Peyser merit staff and/or duly trained WIOA staff.
- Online access via <https://desempleo.trabajo.pr.gov/reclamantes/> where customers can file electronically from career centers, home, libraries, or any other Internet portal.
- Fully staffed resource centers at all career centers, including Internet access, copies, phones, fax, and resource libraries as permitted due to COVID-19 pandemic.
- Access points at One-Stop Centers and career centers across the State.

- An opportunity for each claimant to access in-person reemployment services as they come to career centers and One-Stop Centers to complete the UI filing process.
- Access to professional and experienced staff for the preparation of resumes, registration in ES as a requirement for claimants and job matching services.
- The availability of staff, technology, and written materials in a variety of languages to meet the needs of all customers.
- Fully accessible services, online and in person, to serve any customer with a disability.
- Joint participation of UI staff with other workforce partners in large layoff events.
- Daily referrals of customers from workforce partners to UI specialists to ensure that customers have access to all benefits to which they are entitled.

People who directly seek career services from the One-Stop Career System should receive services beyond what they could get on their own using self-service tools, such as public Internet portals and telephone services. The goal is for individuals to be able to receive more robust or "meaningful" staff-assisted services, as needed.

As set forth in 20 CFR 678.305(d), access to each partner's programs and services means:

- Have a representative of this program physically present in the American Job Centers.
- Have a representative of a different partner program, physically present at the American Job Center properly trained to provide information to clients about the programs, services, and activities available through all partner programs; or
- Have a direct link available, using technology, to a representative of a partner program who can provide meaningful information or services.

The methods or means of providing access to the different partner programs are contained in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). These have been coordinated with the Local Boards and the Operators of the One-Stop Career System.

In the context of providing assistance to UI's claimants, "significant assistance" means *having staff in the American Job Centers properly trained in the filing of a UI claim, and in the rights and responsibilities of the claimants*. Employment Service staff is responsible for providing the necessary assistance in filing UI's claims, if requested, or if the individual is identified as needing the service due to barriers such as limited Spanish proficiency, disabilities, or other barriers. The staff who provide this assistance may come from UI, Wagner-Peyser, or other AJC staff who have been duly trained to provide assistance and service in the taking of claims thus facilitating the daily acceptance of information. Costs associated with providing this information and assistance to individuals filing UI claims may be met with administrative funds from UI's grant under Title III of the Social Security Act or through a combination of funds from other programs that are consistent with the language authorizing such programs and Federal cost principles.

The provision of meaningful information or services is carried out using technology or direct liaison to an appropriate representative of a partner program. As described in 20 CFR 678.305(d)(3)(i), a "direct link" means providing a direct connection at an American Job Center within a reasonable time, by telephone, or through real-time Internet communication, with a representative of a partner program who may provide program information or services to the customer.

The level and timeliness of the remote service is comparable to the assistance the person would receive if staff were assisting such an individual in person at the AJC. This means that, if an individual in an AJC is directed to a telephone for assistance regarding an UI claim, there must be a dedicated telephone line to serve the customer in a timely manner (20 CFR 20 CFR 678.305(d)(3)(i)). Individuals should not simply be directed to a general information line or dial-up line with UI Call Center, where the individual is placed on hold along with all other claimants who have called for service. Providing only a telephone number, link to a web page, information, pamphlets, or other resources and materials does not constitute a "direct link" (20 CFR 20 CFR 678.305(d)(3)(i)). ES must ensure that, if assistance is provided remotely using technology, it should be one that allows trained staff to provide assistance in a timely manner.

It is important to emphasize that UI eligibility determinations must be made by UI merit staff who are responsible for carrying out this activity. As set out in UIPL 12-01, *Outsourcing of Unemployment Compensation Administrative Functions*, and explained in more detail in UIPL 12-01, Change 1, *Outsourcing Unemployment Compensation Administrative Functions – Claim Taking*, only merit staff (state employee) will ask, either in person at the AJC, or remotely, answer questions, provide advice or make decisions that may affect UI eligibility of claimants. For example, for assistance in completing a UI claim, only UI merit staff may provide specific advice to the individual, including an indication of the possible effects on UI eligibility based on the individual's specific circumstances or actions. And, in relation to services to claimants, only UI merit staff can adjudicate UI issues that may arise and that may include the search for data by all parties (partners).

Some of the areas of opportunity that have been implemented to improve the integration of UI into the Single Management System include, but are not limited to:

- Access by UI claimants to the full range of services available at the AJCs.
- Referral of UI claimants to reemployment services through the Worker Profiling and Reemployment Services (WPRS) and/or the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment Program (RESEA).
- Ensure that claimants meet eligibility requirements (such as, job search, register with the Employment Service as provided by state law, participate in reemployment services as required under the RESEA and WPRS programs), and ensure that there is a feedback loop to provide UI Program staff with information about any potential eligibility issues.
- Ensure that claimants are fully notified of the deadlines and eligibility requirements associated with TRA, the Alternative Trade Adjustment Assistance (ATAA) Program, and the Reemployment Trade Adjustment Assistance (RTAA) Programs, and that communication with the case managers of TAA participants is an enabler.
- Coordination with the Rapid Response teams to provide services to employers and workers in situations of mass dismissal and carry out activities to file a UI

claim to receive UI compensation benefits.

(c) Describe the State’s strategy for providing reemployment assistance to UI claimants and other unemployed individuals.

In a collaborative effort, Governor Pedro R. Pierluisi and Secretary Gabriel Maldonado-González of the Department of Labor and Human Resources (DTRH) have introduced the groundbreaking advertising campaign, **“Puerto Rico está Faja’o.”** As a pivotal component of the governor’s public policy, this initiative seeks to celebrate and highlight the workforce while also serving as an inspiration for diverse populations. These include older adults, youth, women, beneficiaries of government assistance programs justice involved individuals, and those with functional diversity. The campaign aims to foster a cultural transformation in how citizens view and engage with work. The rallying cry for this initiative is **“Puerto Rico está Faja’o”**. The campaign aims to engage different demographics: it encourages university students to enter the workforce while continuing their studies, motivates part-time workers to shift to full-time positions, and inspires retirees to remain active contributors. The overarching goal is to foster enthusiasm among all individuals, whether outside the formal economy or currently working part-time, to transition into full-time employment.

This comprehensive advertising campaign encompasses several initiatives, including the **“Faja’o en la Calle Tour”** job fairs, the **“Vestido al éxito”** project (which provides interview attire), and **“Universitarios Faja’os”**—a program that forges partnerships with educational institutions to directly offer employment services, training, and guidance to university communities. Despite the current **unemployment rate of 5.7%**, all economic sectors recognize the need for additional manpower, underscoring the challenges in recruitment and talent retention. The campaign aligns with broader efforts to enhance quality of life through strategies centered around diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace.

The overarching goal of this campaign extends beyond merely acknowledging the contributions of Puerto Rico’s workforce. It also aims to inspire others to participate in historical increases in employment rates. By advocating for a cultural shift in citizens’ perspectives on work, the campaign promotes a labor environment that respects workers’

rights, values their contributions, and strengthens the connection between employers and employees. This harmonious collaboration drives progress on the island.

Aligned with PPropósito, Puerto Rico boasts the most qualified and prepared human capital in the Caribbean, envisioning employment opportunities and entrepreneurship for every Puerto Rican. The initiative champions diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace, offering increased employment opportunities for all seeking to contribute their talents to the workforce. The integration of workforce talent, government infrastructure investment, and private sector support are expected to generate renewed interest from local and foreign businesses, encouraging expansion and investment in Puerto Rico.

The campaign reflects a vision to propel economic growth through collaboration between employers and employees across industries and diverse segments of the Puerto Rican population. Addressing the challenge of 1.5 million individuals outside the labor force, the government's initiative targets specific segments, including older adults, youth, women, individuals with functional diversity, and beneficiaries of government assistance programs. The campaign, disseminated through various media channels and complemented by job fairs, extends a call to action to recipients of government aid, urging them to enter the workforce without losing benefits. The comprehensive approach, including initiatives for interview readiness and collaboration with educational institutions, signifies a strategic effort to elevate workforce participation and drive socio-economic development.

Reemployment Services to UI Claimants:

In March 2023, the Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources (PRDOLHR) contracted with The Policy & Research Group (PRG) to conduct an impact and lessons-learned evaluation of its Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program. The goal of this effort is to ensure that PRDOLHR meets the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) tiered-evidence requirements for RESEA, while contributing to the evidence base on reemployment strategies.

Since 2010, PRDOLHR has operated the Reemployment Eligibility and Assessment (REA) program and its successor, the RESEA program. RESEA "remain a high priority" for DOL

because there is “strong evidence that these types of reemployment programs and service delivery strategies are effective.”

On February 9, 2018, amendments to the Social Security Act permanently authorized the RESEA program. The program is guided by four goals:

- (1) To improve employment outcomes of Unemployment Compensation (UC) recipients and to reduce the average duration of UC receipt through employment.
- (2) To strengthen program integrity and reduce improper UC payments through the detection and prevention of such payments to ineligible individuals.
- (3) To promote alignment with the broader vision of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of increased program integration and service delivery for job seekers, including UC claimants.
- (4) To establish reemployment services and eligibility assessment as an entry point for claimants into other workforce system partner programs.

The foundational element of the RESEA program is an in-person orientation and one-on-one meeting (initial RESEA) between the claimant and a RESEA/Wagner-Peyser (WP) merit staff. The following core components are required by RESEA:

- (1) A UC eligibility review.
- (2) Provision of customized labor market and career information.
- (3) Co-enrollment in the Wagner-Peyser Act-funded Employment Service program.
- (4) Support with an Individual Reemployment Plan.
- (5) Referrals and information provided for additional reemployment services and other AJC services, resources, and trainings, as appropriate.

Primarily, RESEA activities are individual one-on-one appointments between the claimant and an RESEA career specialist. In Puerto Rico, all claimants are assigned to in-person services at an AJC serving the municipality in which they live. PRDOLHR allows claimants to participate virtually, however, on a case by-case basis. This may involve meetings over Microsoft Teams, over the phone, or other virtual platforms deemed appropriate for the case.

Although we have the flexibility to provide Reemployment services virtually, the priority is to provide services in person.

By providing comprehensive reemployment services that are targeted to priority populations, specifically those most likely to exhaust their UI benefits, the goal of the RESEA program in Puerto Rico is to increase employment, retention, and earnings of unemployment benefit recipients, and in doing so, improve the quality of the workforce to sustain economic growth and enhance productivity and competitiveness.

All RESEA participants attend an orientation during their initial RESEA visit. Orientations are conducted weekly at all AJCs that have RESEA service capacity. In most cases the orientation is an individual session, though local staff have the flexibility to schedule a group orientation if preferred. During the orientation presentation, claimants are introduced to the RESEA program. They are further provided with an overview of services available at the AJC and re-employment services available through WagnerPeysner and other partner programs. Claimants are also informed during orientation of the requirements for RESEA participation and of the adverse effects on their eligibility to continue receiving UI benefits if they do not fulfill these requirements. These include the requirement for the number of RESEA meetings required. The orientation is followed by the initial RESEA one-on-one appointment.

All UI claimants referred to RESEA must attend an initial RESEA appointment. During the initial RESEA, claimants undergo an unemployment benefits eligibility assessment, complete an initial evaluation with RESEA career coaches, create an Individual Reemployment Plan, and receive referrals to additional reemployment services as needed. In Table 1, we provide details of the initial RESEA content.

Subsequent RESEA sessions are provided if recommended by the RESEA coordinator. In practice, however, all claimants are scheduled for subsequent sessions if they are not reemployed by the time, he/she is scheduled for a subsequent .26 There are no limits on the number of subsequent sessions that can be provided under the current RESEA program. Each subsequent session includes an eligibility review, review of the claimant's job search activities, and any additional reemployment services offered in the local area.

Table 1. *Initial RESEA Overview*

Topic	Content
Unemployment Benefits Eligibility Assessment	<p>At each RESEA meeting, the RESEA representative conducts an eligibility review. The eligibility review is completed in a one-on-one setting by the RESEA representative using Microsoft Forms or on the identical paper form. The claimant's responses are recorded and then examined by RESEA staff, who determine if there are concerns that should be referred to the UI adjudications section for investigation. UI claimants in Puerto Rico are required to make at least three contacts per week with employers to demonstrate that they are actively searching for a job. The claimant is responsible for keeping a record of their job search activities and presenting this information during the eligibility assessment. If the claimant fails to present evidence of their job search efforts, the RESEA coordinator will notify the UI adjudications unit. The consequences of not meeting the job search requirement may include a temporary stop in UI payments or total disqualification of UI benefits.</p>
RESEA Initial Evaluation	<p>The initial RESEA evaluation focuses on reemployment services. The first step of the evaluation process includes an initial assessment to determine if the claimant is job ready using various assessment tools including the <i>Self-Assessment Form</i>, the <i>Job Search Skills Assessment Form</i>, and the <i>Job Search Activity Log Form</i>. The claimant reviews completed forms with an RESEA representative and/or career counselor alongside a review of the claimant's</p>

employment history and educational level to determine their job prospects. As part of this step, the RESEA representative provides the claimant with LMI to assist in their job search. The evaluation process may also include the use of tools such as MiProximoPaso.org and MySkillsMyFuture.org, which are free and available to claimants at all AJCs through the Resource Center or online from their mobile devices, tablets, and computers. Following this step, an RESEA occupational counselor conducts a deeper review of the claimant's skills, knowledge, and abilities to identify the minimum acceptable skills necessary for the claimant to improve their chances of reemployment. These two reviews serve as the basis for preparing the PIR.

Development of Individual
Reemployment Plan (*Plan
Individual de Reempleo* – PIR)

An RESEA representative works with each claimant to help them to create a PIR. The PIR contains specific steps, agreed upon between the claimant and the representative, that have been determined to be most appropriate to achieve their reemployment. The cooperative creation of a PIR focuses on the claimant's unique goals, relevant experience, and barriers to employment.²⁸ The PIR includes reemployment services and job search activities (e.g., resume workshop, interview skills training) that the claimant should undertake, and any AJC services, approved training program, or other referrals that may benefit them. Scheduled reemployment services must be documented in the PIR, as well as details to reflect which party (i.e., claimant or staff) is responsible for each action. During development of the PIR, the claimant receives LMI specific

to their individual skills and interests to assist in planning their job search activities. Staff review the PIR Responsibility Statement with the participant to clarify program responsibilities, and each party signs the document. A copy of the PIR is provided to the claimant for implementation, and any proposed changes to the plan are made jointly with the claimant and documented in the plan.

Referrals to Reemployment Services

As needed, claimants are referred to reemployment services. Each reemployment service provided must be electronically documented in the Participant Record Information System (PRIS) in accordance with the policies and procedures established in the *Puerto Rico Servicio de Empleo* 4-14, Protocol for Referral to Career Services. The RESEA representative, Wagner-Peyser staff, AJC staff, or other WIOA partners may offer any number of career services to claimants; these services are authorized under the WIOA Act of 2014. The RESEA representative reminds the claimant that they may be subject to disqualification of their benefits if they do not attend any reemployment services to which they are referred.

Reemployment Services to Other Unemployed Individuals:

Wagner-Peyser, along with other partner's staff, is responsible for the provision of comprehensive employment and placement services to jobseekers who are most in need and face multiple barriers to reemployment. This employment and placement services are available to job seekers thorough the American Job Centers on a customer-centric approach for the deliverance of services, aligned with WIOA, for providing reemployment assistance to UI claimants and other unemployed individuals (job seekers) as long they are eligible to work in the United States including, but not limited to:

- Providing the job seeker, not only job search assistance, but information on the AJC services.
- Encouraging job seekers to attend an AJC orientation and refer them to subsequent services, as appropriate.
- Detailed labor market information related to growth occupations and industries, and wage surveys to assist with decision making in the selection of a better career opportunity or looking for a new job.
- An orientation about the services available through the AJC with emphasis on access to information available on the labor market and careers, delivery of labor market information unique to the experience, skills, and desired occupation of the claimant.
- Assistance in the use of basic services available and self-help offered within the AJC through the use resources room or virtually (Internet).
- An initial assessment of skills relative to available jobs preferably with an Employment Counselor to identify strengths, weaknesses and barriers after the claimant receives the initial orientation by the ES/RESEA staff.
- Referrals to appropriate services offered by other partners within the AJC such as self-assessment, information on education and training, interviewing techniques, networking, occupational exploration, and online resources, among other services.
- Development of an Individual Reemployment Plan which should include job search activities, appropriate topics such as preparing resumes and strategies workshops, job search and/or authorized training.
- Workshops on effective job search.
- Interviewing techniques and resume development.
- An overview of multiple self-service employment resources.

- Direct referrals to job training, educational and supportive service opportunities in the community.

The provision of reemployment services is of high relevance during recessions and high unemployment periods. As a result, Wagner-Peyser will continue focusing its attention and resources to continue better integration and service connection with the services provided through the AJCs under WIOA. The goal is to ensure that jobseekers have access to the full range of employment services and training through the AJCs. Most of the employment and placement services are done through staff assisted services. Nevertheless, jobseekers have access to the whole range of services provided by the AJCs such as self-assisted services, group presentation and customized one-on-one assistance. Jobseekers who need more specialized services according to their needs (e.g., veterans, migrant and seasonal farmworkers, UI claimants) receive more in-depth career services to further their career goals through the respective programs.

(d) Describe how the State will use W-P funds to support UI claimants, and the communication between W-P and UI, as appropriate including the following:

(1) Coordination of and provision of labor exchange services for UI claimants as required by the Wagner-Peyser Act.

The PRDOLHR administers the WP Labor Exchange System. During PY22, the Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources implemented several initiatives and strategies utilizing the 10% Wagner-Peyser governor's reserve. Notably, one of these initiatives is Talento Infinito.

The Talento Infinito program was initiated by the Department of Labor and Human Resources in May 2023 with the aim of enhancing the employability of individuals with functional diversity in Puerto Rico. The program comprises various components:

a) Talent Education Program

The Talento Infinito program was tailored to the specific needs of its registered members, providing them with the essential employability skills required to succeed in the job market. The program covered a range of topics, including Growth

Mindset, Resume & LinkedIn Preparation, Basic Knowledge of My Rights, Managing Anxiety and My Emotions, Job Interviews & Job Search Tools, and Assertive Communication.


b) Service Provider Education Program

Education service providers were certified to create a sustainable employability ecosystem for talent. It is crucial for them to understand the labor market's needs, job offers, and employers' requirements. The program covered various topics, including the most in-demand technical and essential skills, the latest trends in resumes, interviews, and job search platforms, as well as training on the exclusive Radiography Talento Infinito tool, which aims to align talent effectively with the demanded positions in the labor market.

c) Employer Education Program

As part of the program, participating companies were certified as Inclusive Companies of Talento Infinito. The program covered legal aspects of employability in infinite talent, recruiting infinite talent, and integrating infinite talent.

d) Talento Infinito Integrated Services Center



The Talento Infinito Service Center is responsible for coordinating and facilitating various services for talent, companies, and educational service providers. These services include x-rays, resume creation or revision, interview internships, career coaching, professional photography, job search assistance, and job application support, among others.

In addition, by 2024, the PRDOLHR will implement a new Labor Exchange System powered by leading technology based on AI to improve the lives and careers of its citizens known as Portal de Empleo y Reclutamiento para Facilitar la Integración Laboral (PERFIL). Through this effort, Puerto Rico will be able to create family-sustaining career opportunities for jobseekers and connect employers to the skillsets they need to thrive. The platform may allow jobseekers to register and create their online professional profile. Everyone can access through www.perfil.trabajo.pr.gov.

With this leading technology:

- **Employers will have faster access to qualified candidates:** Easily source with high quality candidate pipelines, deep understanding of candidates' skills and broad outreach through campaigns and access to diverse talent.
- **Job seekers have a consumer-like self-service experience:** Career planner, recommended jobs, personalized resumes, mentoring, and mobile device support.
- **Matching talent at scale with AI:** Match candidates to specialized training and career development opportunities. Build faster time to value as a strategic service provider.
- **Centralized marketplace for employers and job seekers:** Manage employers, job posting and job seeker application workflows in one centralized marketplace.

From a job seeker's point of view, the platform provides the ability to:

- **Make Job Searches a Thing of the Past:** Explainable AI-matching empowers candidates to discover the best fit roles for them.
- **Intelligently Personalize Engagement:** Tailor messages over the channel of their choice, all for specific candidates or an entire talent pool.
- **Reduce Hiring Friction:** Use intelligence and automation throughout the entire hiring process to keep candidates engaged.

From an employer's perspective, the platform provides the ability to:

- **Access top candidates matched by AI:** See high quality pipeline of candidates coming to the employer through AI matching.
- **Interact with Job Seekers:** Contact Job Seekers through email, invite the best ones to apply, and manage the best prospects efficiently.
- **Calibrate positions to fine tune AI:** Define the skills, experience, ideal candidates, and target companies for your positions.

The platform is Internet based therefore job seekers may access it through AJCs resource centers where job seekers can conduct job search and resume creation activities by using resources such as computers and phones, respond to employment opportunities. In addition to self-service options, claimants can also receive staff-assisted services, such as job search workshops, assistance with access and navigating the new platform, individualized labor market information, referral to veteran services, and referral to education, training, and supportive services, including Federal electronic tools such as MyNextMove and MySkillsMyFuture and use of fax and copier machines, telephone, resume writing and development, career exploration, among other services. These services are available to all job seekers including UI claimants. Both UI and WP program representatives are party to the MOU with other local area partners to identify the service delivery. The PRDOLHR programs, including UI, are committed to their roles as partners within the AJCs and consistently collaborate internally and with the local areas to further support the spirit of WIOA. These two partners are also coordinating internally within the PRDOLHR as this agency administers both programs.

In summary, PRDOLHR will use WP funding to support the reemployment and related services to UI claimants. ES continues providing labor exchange services as required by 20 CFR 652.3.

(2) Registration of UI claimants with the State's employment service if required by State law.

UI claimants are mandated by state law to register with the employment service (WP) as a prerequisite for eligibility to receive UI compensation. After filing their UI claim online, claimants must visit the nearest career center to complete their registration with WP.

Beginning around the end of the first quarter in 2024, the new UI platform system, Geographic Unemployment System (GUS), will initiate a request to the WIOA State Management Information System (PRIS). This request aims to verify if a claimant is registered within the system as a WP participant, as mandated by law. GUS will transmit a daily file to PRIS containing information about all claimants in the system.

Subsequently, PRIS will respond to GUS, confirming whether the listed claimants are registered WP participants. Claimants reported as not registered will experience a suspension of their UI benefits until PRIS verifies their WP registration status.

(3) Administration of the work test for the State unemployment compensation system, including making eligibility assessments (for referral to UI adjudication, if needed), and providing job finding and placement services for UI claimants; and

UI claimants in Puerto Rico receiving UI benefits must be able and available to work as required by law and be actively seeking full-time work. Amendments to the UI law in Puerto Rico in 2012, established that if an individual earned most wages in the base period used to establish the claim from part-time work, the individual would be allowed to restrict their work search part-time and can reject a full-time job offer. The only exceptions to the work search requirements in Puerto Rico are for the following:

- Individuals with a job attachment, which would include individuals for whom their employer has filed a “partial” unemployment claim for them or those individuals with a definite recall to work (the law does not establish a predetermined period to return to work).
- Union members in good standing.
- Individuals who are approved and enrolled in an approved training program by the Director of the Bureau of Employment Security.

The primary work test is done through the UI benefit certification Form 566, which includes a question about whether the individuals can be available and actively seeking employment. A negative response places an issue on the certification, which cannot be removed until a statement is obtained regarding availability. If an issue is determined, a benefits eligibility review is performed by the UI benefits interview specialist or claims examiner and a determination released, if in order. During the initial claims filing application, individuals are asked questions regarding their availability. Negative responses require adjudication of the potential availability issue by a UI claim examiner or service specialist.

Administration of the work test is also performed through the RESEA. During the in-person appointments, a UI eligibility review is performed, and the RESEA staff interview the claimant about been able and available for work and any barriers to employment they may be facing. During this work test staff review the individual's work search, discuss the individual's availability, and any barriers to work. WP Placement Officer staff have regular contact with employers and receive notice when individuals fail to report to an interview or refuse work – resulting in an issue on the individual's claim. This can include employers reporting individuals who do not report for interviews, individuals who are incarcerated, or are otherwise not able, available, and/or actively seeking work. In the event a potential issue is discovered from any source, an unemployment benefits interview is scheduled with a claim examiner. If the individual is not able, available, and actively seeking work (and is not exempted from work search), an appropriate determination regarding UI benefits is released.

The other work test is done through WP at the one-stop-centers. If a UI claimant walk-in into an AJC for employment and/or placement services, WP staff will perform the work test and contact the UI adjudication unit when they become aware of UI claimant's refusal of suitable employment or failure to attend scheduled interviews.

(4) Provision of referrals to and application assistance for training and education programs and resources.

The integration of WP within the American Job Centers in Puerto Rico allows for the orderly provision of services to job seekers and the provision of referral to and application assistance for training and educational programs and resources. It is of utmost importance to WP to coordinate the integration of these services, which is a primary goal under WIOA. This brings together the core programs to provide the whole range of services seamlessly and coordinated to individuals seeking services at the career centers providing information to job seekers on community resources, labor market information, GED, occupational training, OJT, and support services that make training possible to enhance an individual's ability to return to work. The network works as the "front door" to the workforce system. WP staff from roles are inserted in the workflow with the responsibility of identifying job seekers' needs, assist them with UI, employment and reemployment assistance, trade services,

automated resources, workshops, and referrals to more intensive services such as training, which are provided by WIOA through local boards, and other partners.

RESEA participants are referred to the Dislocated Workers program for eligibility and leverage of resources for other services not provided by WP. This will serve as an access point to inform UI customers about other WIOA Title I and other partner programs and services. This collaborative partnership facilitates a streamlined referral process for UI customers to WIOA programs and services within the AJC system.

Assurances

Wagner-Peyser Assurances. The State Plan must include assurances that:

1. The Wagner-Peyser Employment Service is co-located with One-Stop Centers, or a plan and timeline has been developed to comply with this requirement within a reasonable amount of time. (Sec 121(e)(3))

As of the date of this State plan, all Wagner-Peyser Employment Service Local Offices are co-located with One-Stop Centers and is in full compliance with the requirement set forth in Sec. 121(e)(3).

2. The State agency is complying with the requirements under 20 CFR 653.111 (State agency staffing requirements) if the State has significant MSFW One-Stop Centers.

The PRDLHR is committed to comply with 20 CFR 653.111. As of the date of this State Plan four Outreach Worker positions are vacant in significant MSFW One-Stop Centers (Southeast Local Area, AMSI Guayama, Mayaguez/Las Marías, and North Central local areas. Efforts to fill the vacant positions are underway. We expect to have these vacancies filled on or before March 31, 2024.

3. If a State Workforce Development Board, department, or agency administers State laws for vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, that board, department, or agency cooperates with the agency that administers Wagner-Peyser services, Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and Youth Programs under Title I; and

State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency is a workforce system partner and as such it has presence in the American Job Centers. The VR staff is cooperative with all workforce

system partners at the American Job Centers providing services to individuals with disabilities referred by other core partners in the Center.

4. State agency merit-based public employees provide Wagner-Peyser Act-funded labor exchange activities in accordance with Department of Labor regulations.

We ensure that WP staff provide labor exchange activities in accordance with the USDOL regulations as contained in 20 CFR 103

(e) Agricultural Outreach Plan (AOP). Each State agency must develop an AOP every four years as part of the Unified State Plan required under sections 102 or 103 of WIOA. This AOP must include an assessment of needs.

The Agricultural Outreach Plan (AOP) is a crucial component mandated under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) for each State agency, requiring a comprehensive update every four years as part of the Unified State Plan outlined in sections 102 or 103 of WIOA. The primary objective of the AOP is to conduct a needs assessment. In alignment with the amendments introduced by WIOA, the Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources (PRDOLHR) assumes responsibility for delivering services to Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers (MSFW) in a manner that is both qualitatively equivalent and quantitatively proportionate to services offered to non-MSFWs. Recognizing the considerable challenges faced by MSFWs in achieving basic educational goals and securing sustainable employment, the PRDOLHR addresses impediments such as transportation issues, language barriers, and workplace hazards. Efforts are directed at overcoming these challenges, with the PRDOLHR ensuring transportation for MSFWs through their employers. A range of services, including job search assistance, counseling, testing, and referral services, along with various training programs available under WIOA and the National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP), is extended to all MSFWs. Outreach activities involve in-site visits to MSFWs, offering orientation and counseling services. To mitigate exposure to workplace hazards, the PRDOLHR employs a housing checklist compliant with safety and security regulations. According to WP regulations (20 CFR 653.107), an Agricultural Annual Outreach Plan (AOP) must be submitted annually. As part of the Unified State Plan mandated by WIOA, the AOP for Program Year (PY) 2024 is included, outlining strategies for serving domestic MSFWs and H-2A foreign guest workers

not reached by standard intake activities. This plan spans from July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2027.

The Wagner-Peyser Act, amended by WIOA, emphasizes that the full spectrum of employment and training services for the agricultural community, encompassing both MSFWs and agricultural employers, must be provided within the One-Stop Centers network. This commitment ensures equitable access to a comprehensive array of services for MSFWs, aligning with the Charles R. Richey Order of 1973 addressing civil rights violations against MSFWs.

Puerto Rico holds historical significance as a designated MSFW State reflecting a high number concentration of MSFW in the following local areas: Southwest, Mayaguez, North Central, Southeast, Guayama, and South Central.

(1) Assessment of Need. Provide an assessment of the unique needs of farmworkers in the area based on past and projected agricultural and farmworker activity in the State. Such needs may include but are not limited to employment, training, and housing.

The Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources (PRDOLHR) recognizes the unique needs of farmworkers in the region. To address these needs comprehensively, the department has implemented the Agricultural Outreach Plan (AOP) and associated outreach initiatives, aligning with the requirements of the 2023-2027 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) State Unified Plan.

A Comprehensive Assessment:

The Agricultural Outreach Plan (AOP) mandates a thorough assessment of the specific requirements of farmworkers, encompassing employment, training, and housing. This assessment is grounded in historical and anticipated agricultural and farmworker activities within the state. The AOP serves as a guide for the 20 CFR 653.107(i-p) requirement, directing the PRDOLHR to operate an Outreach Program targeting MSFWs who may not typically engage with local Employment Service offices.

Geographical Focus:

The PRDOLHR has strategically established six significant career centers in agriculturally significant areas across the state. These centers play a crucial role in serving MSFWs by providing a range of employment-related services.

These needs will be a priority for the following six significant career centers:

Table 47: Career Service Servicing Areas serving MSFW

Career Center Locations	Municipalities served
North Central Region	Quebradillas, Camuy, Hatillo, Arecibo, Lares, Utuado, Jayuya, Adjuntas
Southeast Region	Humacao, San Lorenzo, Juncos, Las Piedras, Maunabo, Patillas, Yabucoa
AMSI Guayama Region	Guayama, Arroyo
South Central Region	Coamo, Villalba, Juana Díaz, Santa Isabel, Salinas,
Southwest Region	San Germán, Cabo Rojo, Hormigueros, Lajas, Sabana Grande, Maricao, Yauco, Guayanilla, Peñuelas, Guánica
Mayaguez/Las Marías Region	Mayagüez, Las Marías

Source: PRDOLHR.

By positioning these centers strategically, the PRDOLHR ensures a proactive approach to meeting the employment-related needs of MSFWs in various localities.

Outreach Initiatives:

The Outreach Program delineates activities designed to furnish an extensive array of employment and training services to the farmworker community, coupled with outreach initiatives targeting Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers (MSFW):

- Provide the full range of services available at the Unified Management Center to MSFWs who, for various reasons, do not reach the Center
- Referrals to job opportunities
- Referrals to the National Farmworkers Jobs Program (PathStone)

- Information about the labor market
- Orientation on the right of MSFWs and assistance in filling complaints These efforts aim to bridge the gap and engage farmworkers who might otherwise be underserved.

In compliance with the Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by WIOA, the Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources (PRDOLHR) is committed to ensure that Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers (MSFW) receive services through American Job Centers that are both quantitatively proportional and qualitatively equivalent to those provided to non-MSFWs. Furthermore, the Wagner-Peyser Act is committed to ensuring that H-2A foreign guest workers and domestic farmworkers are well-informed about their rights and acquainted with labor laws designed to protect them.

Puerto Rico retains its designation as a significant MSFW State, driven by special circumstances such as the estimated high number of MSFWs in the service area. Despite the absence of One-Stop Career Center MSFW data in PY2022, Significant MSFW One-Stop Career Center designations for PY2023 remain unchanged. Puerto Rico continues to serve as a supplier state for various entities in the Eastern Region of the United States.

Nevertheless, the significant barriers faced by MSFWs in securing agricultural employment in the U.S., exacerbated by discriminatory practices of some H-2A employers in the mainland U.S.A., demanding increased job experience, have led to a substantial decrease in the number of MSFWs seeking agricultural jobs on the mainland. This trend not only impedes local workers from applying for these positions but also creates opportunities for employers to hire non-U.S. citizen workers.

Table 48: MSFWs Referred to USA Agricultural Jobs

	PY15	PY16	PY17	PY18	PY19	PY20	PY21	PY22	PY23
Total MSFWs Referred	1003	435	142	60	14	14	13	12	13
Total MSFWs Interviewed	451	134	26	13	8	4	3	1	4
Total MSFWs Hired	347	89	27	43	5	6	9	9	8

The State Monitor Advocate is actively engaged in advocating for MSFWs, coordinating efforts with various federal agencies to identify unscrupulous H-2A employers who consistently violate H-2A, Wagner-Peyser, and labor-related laws.

The subsequent enumeration outlines some prevalent needs within the MSFW population, accompanied by strategies employed by PRDOLRH to address them:

NEEDS	STRATEGY
Lack of flexibility in their work schedules prevents them from accessing basic services, as agricultural work hours do not coincide with typical business hours.	The PRDOLRH provide services to MSFWs by means of Outreach Workers, including their family members, and coordinate referrals to supportive services, assistance in arranging appointments and transportation for individual MSFW or a member of their family to and from American Job Centers or other appropriate agencies.
Poor access and/or assistance with transportation not only to their workplace but also to basic services such as health, legal advice, and education. Limited or poorly	MSFWs lack of transportation is provided by means of available transportation in the area provided by collective transportation or other means provided by the municipality or other community-based organizations in the area.

<p>equipped housing facilities near your workplace.</p>	
<p>Lack of coordination of assistance to access educational development opportunities, as many appear to lack basic skills such as low educational level, some totally illiterate.</p>	<p>Most MSFWs lacks basic skills which impede them from being competitive in the labor market, amid that transportation issues aggravate the situation. Outreach workers are essential in addressing these needs by providing MSFWs with career pathway information and making referrals to other partners to address these barriers. AJCs may provide transportation to and from the Center to receive appropriate educational and training services to overcome these barriers.</p>
<p>The lack of young farmworkers sinc” 65%’of the island’s agricultural workforce is over 55 years old. The decline in new farmworkers will have significant negative effects on the island’s agriculture in the coming decades.</p>	<p>Puerto Rico has some municipalities that have implemented strategies to address this need by enabling disused schools to develop training and tree nurseries training, in planting coffee, banana, oranges, bread fruit, guanabana. In addition, the municipality of Utuado has integrated the participation of youth people in agriculture through its Agriculture Program at the University of Puerto Rico. Also, the PRDOLRH considers evaluating whether students who receive assistance from the HEP/CAMP Program can be recruited to meet this need.</p>

<p>Lack of knowledge and adequate training to protect oneself from occupational risks.</p>	<p>The National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP), operated by PathStone, provides MSFWs with safety training in the use of pesticides and other chemicals used for crops. This includes the use of safety equipment such as gloves and masks when required.</p>
<p>Discriminatory practices in the hiring process reduce your chances of obtaining employment.</p>	<p>MSFWs have experienced discriminatory treatment in the past from employers on the mainland. This trend continues to date. However, the stream of local MSFWs to mainland farms has been extensively reduced to a point where only a small handful of workers migrate to USA farms. There is no expectation that this despair treatment will disappear in the long term. The PRDOLHR provides assistance to MSFWs, if needed, to complete and submit a complaint if the need arises.</p>

PRDOLHR will continue its commitment to helping MSFWs overcome these barriers by ensuring that WP services, such as job search assistance, counseling, testing, and referral services, including the wide range of training services available under WIOA and the National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) are made easily available to them.

(2) Provide an assessment of the agricultural activity in the State: 1) identifying the top five labor-intensive crops, the months of heavy activity, and the geographic area of prime activity; 2) Summarize the agricultural employers' needs in the State (i.e. are they predominantly hiring local or foreign workers, are they expressing that there is a scarcity in the agricultural workforce); and 3) Identifying any economic, natural, or other factors that are affecting agriculture in the State or any projected factors that will affect agriculture in the State.

In 2020, the agriculture industry in Puerto Rico constituted over \$800 million (0.62%) of the island's gross domestic product. This sector constitutes 15% of the food consumed locally. It is expected that these crops could cover approximately 30% of local demand, especially for smaller vegetables such as tomatoes, lettuce, and different types of tubers that are currently being imported. The existence of a prosperous agricultural economy has been hindered due to a heavy focus on industrialization, bureaucratization, poor land management, lack of alternative methods and a poor workforce. Its geographic location within the Caribbean exacerbates these issues, causing already scarce crops to suffer the devastating effects of hurricanes.

Puerto Rico has 487,775 acres of cropland, with a total value of agriculture sales of \$485,053,483. Agriculture is Puerto Rico's oldest industry and will continue to be a significant economic driver for the next four years in most of the Island's regions. According to the 2017 USDA Agricultural Census for Puerto Rico, the agriculture industry in Puerto Rico is responsible for approximately 21,029 jobs on a permanent or temporary basis which represents an increase when compared to 2022 (30,122).⁹

As of December 2023, the total number of workers (not seasonal adjusted) was 18,000,

⁹ In preparing the Agricultura Outreach Plan for 2023-2027, we faced the lack of statistics and data from governmental agencies responsible for keeping track of agricultural activities in Puerto Rico. Even the most Federal Agricultural Census for 2020, is still not been published by the US Department of Agriculture. This poses a big challenge to provide up to date data for the AOP.

according to PRDOLHR’s statistics for this worker group, experiencing an increase in total workers with respect to October 2023 (16,000) of 2,000 workers. In June 2023, the government increased the Puerto Rico minimum wage to \$9.50. The agricultural industry is exempt from the state minimum wage. Nevertheless, agricultural employers are paying between \$8.50 and \$9.50 in an attempt to attract a workforce and to retain the current one.

According to the Puerto Rico Statistics Institute for 2019, we can pinpoint the top five labor intensive crops as follows based on the quantity harvested:

Gross Income of Agriculture in Puerto Rico

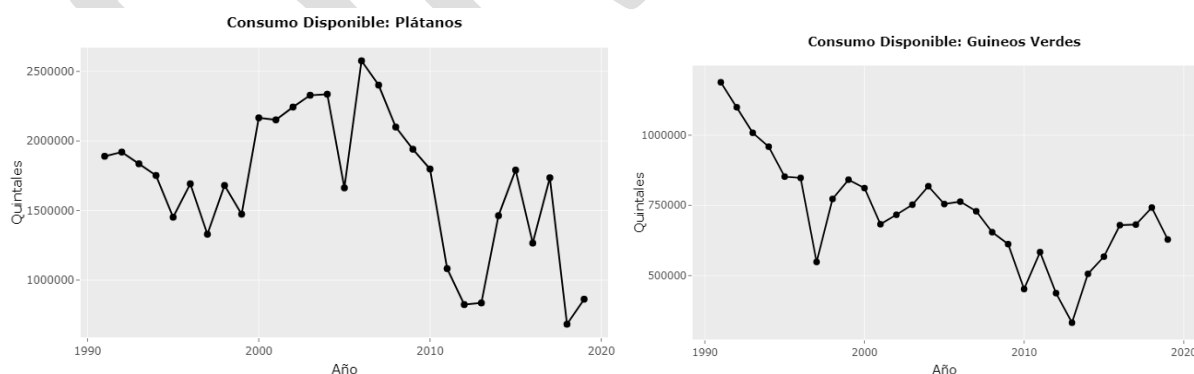
Table 49: Statistics of Department of Agriculture

Crops	Unit	2019/2020	2020/2021
Traditional			
Coffee	quintal	28,943	20,768
Starchy			
Bananas	thousand	253,748	239,865
Plantain	thousand	179,067	197,190
Yams	quintal	67,496	75,102
Taro	quintal	18,962	81,021
Cassava	quintal	14,324	15,938
Fruits			
Watermelons	quintal	75,595	83,670
Papayas	quintal	67,596	60,748
Variety Mango**	tons	12,818	13,345
Oranges	thousand	10,905	11,353
Big and Mayaguez Mango	thousand	9,037	9,408
Vegetables and Legume			
Local Lettuces	dozen/bunches	325,201	380,397
Squashes	quintal	200,747	206,206

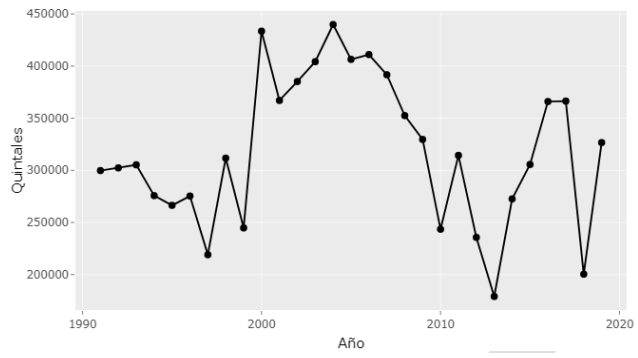
Tomatoes	quintal	154,735	150,167
Cilantro	quintal	41,287	40,322
Cucumber	quintal	36,968	44,302

Additionally, the plantain and banana industry remain among the top five crops that require the most labor. In the fruit category, watermelons and papayas have surpassed the list of most harvested products. Regarding the group of vegetables and legumes, country-grown lettuce tops the list, followed by pumpkin, with tomatoes ranking third. Coffee cultivation represents one of the significant contributors to Puerto Rico's economy, serving as a primary business and way of life for a large part of the population in the central area of the island. According to the 2017 USDA Census, there are approximately 1,251 coffee farms, with the majority being small to medium-sized producers. Coffee farms are primarily located in the central and western regions of Puerto Rico, although the 2017 Agricultural Census indicates the presence of other small farms in the Caguas region. The largest coffee harvests were recorded in the regions of Utuado, Lares, and San Germán, comprising 15 municipalities in the central and western region. The peak months of activity for this cultivation are September, October, and November.

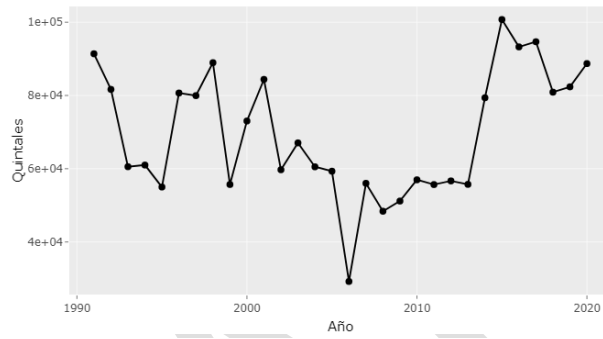
Graph 21: Consumption of Puerto Rico's main crops in the last 30 years



Consumo Disponible: Guineos Maduros



Consumo Disponible: Mangos



Consumo Disponible: Tomates

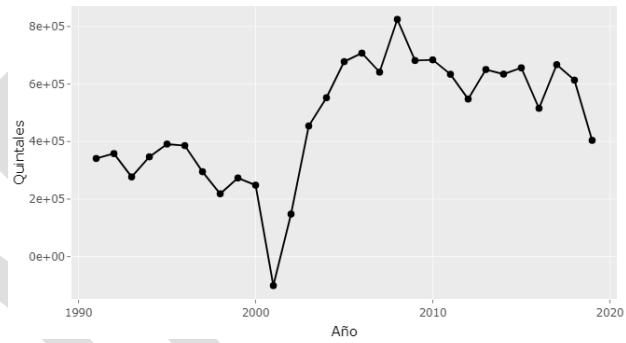
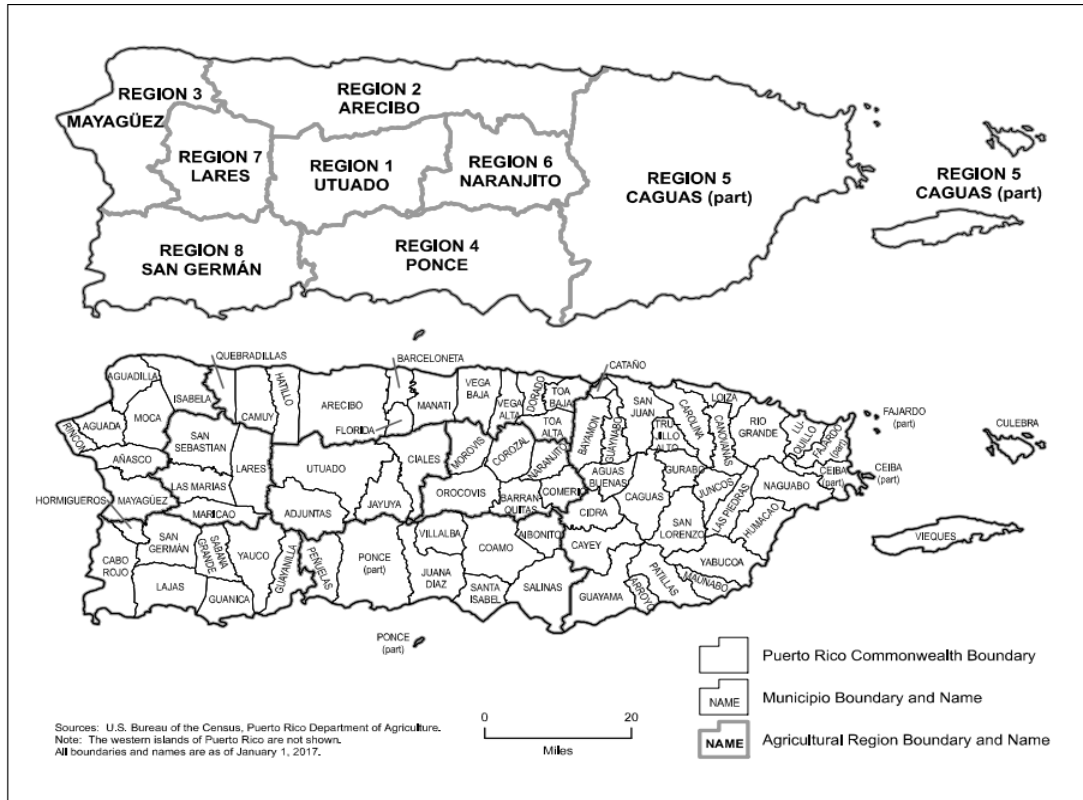


Figure 11. Agricultural Regions



The Ponce region is the major producer of vegetables accountable for approximately 46,302,725 pounds of harvested vegetables with approximately 104 farms and 2,201 acres harvested.

Plantains and bananas are one of the most economically important crops in Puerto Rico. In 2018 it contributed \$53.2 million combined to the Gross Agricultural Income (2018 Agricultural Census). These industries are a source of income and jobs in the central area and in the coastal plains. Mayaguez, Ponce, Caguas, Naranjito and Lares regions are the major producers of plantains in Puerto Rico accountable for approximately 2,035 farms with an aggregate harvested of 10,624 acres which produces a total aggregate of 169,073 (thousands) plantains.

Plantains and bananas are usually ready for harvest anywhere from 14 to 20 months depending on the climate and other factors. Flowering usually happens within 10-15 months, while an additional 4-8 months is needed for fruit it develops and ripen.

Public Agricultural Land

The 85,798 acres of the Land Authority are distributed in 31 lines. As of May 2020, there were some 5,439 acres available, and 2,544 acres that could not be rented due to their conditions.



Table 46. Plantains Harvested for Sale: 2018

[Harvested and planted cuerdas were assumed to be the same. For meaning of abbreviations and symbols, see introductory text.]

Geographic area	Plantains						Quantity harvested (thousands)
	Farms	Cuerdas	Trees				
			Total	Nonbearing age	Bearing age		
Puerto Rico	2,035	10,624	10,352,963	4,079,341	6,273,622	169,073	
Region 1 - Utuado	489	1,191	979,106	482,588	496,518	7,543	
Region 2 - Arecibo	90	286	297,440	143,280	154,160	3,465	
Region 3 - Mayagüez	196	1,617	1,570,790	714,700	856,090	17,728	
Region 4 - Ponce	137	1,257	1,228,878	469,128	759,750	19,161	
Region 5 - Caguas	284	1,971	2,094,120	770,195	1,323,925	29,263	
Region 6 - Naranjito	279	1,934	1,953,720	680,231	1,273,489	58,918	
Region 7 - Lares	438	1,828	1,773,539	718,292	1,055,247	26,824	
Region 8 - San Germán	122	542	455,370	100,927	354,443	6,171	

Table 47. Bananas Harvested for Sale: 2018

[Harvested and planted cuerdas were assumed to be the same. For meaning of abbreviations and symbols, see introductory text.]

Geographic area	Bananas						Quantity harvested (thousands)
	Farms	Cuerdas	Trees				
			Total	Nonbearing age	Bearing age		
Puerto Rico	1,157	5,207	4,300,538	1,229,234	3,071,304	226,981	
Region 1 - Utuado	350	1,362	1,294,764	515,964	778,800	33,576	
Region 2 - Arecibo	48	90	56,264	12,060	44,204	3,283	
Region 3 - Mayagüez	52	110	65,632	10,466	55,166	1,057	
Region 4 - Ponce	57	933	755,688	72,768	682,920	109,442	
Region 5 - Caguas	74	187	150,531	35,151	115,380	6,002	
Region 6 - Naranjito	101	355	305,616	56,400	249,216	12,173	
Region 7 - Lares	341	1,234	962,723	235,922	726,801	22,565	
Region 8 - San Germán	134	936	709,320	290,503	418,817	38,883	

In Puerto Rico, we can see pineapple crops in the municipalities of Lajas, Manatí, Santa Isabel, Guayanilla and Guánica. According to one grower, the varieties that are usually produced on the island are cabezona, Pan de Azúcar and MD-2. The latter turns out to be the most cultivated for commercial purposes since it can produce more than once per season. The good thing about this variety is that you can have several cycles in a single season. Through a good fertilization plan a grower can have several harvests a year. Naturally, the main harvest lasts about six months.

Pineapple crops have contributed \$3 million to the Gross Agricultural Income in past years. This industry, along with the ones described above are a source of income and jobs in the valleys and coastal plains. Ponce, Lares, and San Germán regions are the major producers of Pineapple in Puerto Rico. They account for 90 farms for a total of 497 acres harvested.

Table 45. Pineapples Harvested for Sale: 2018
[Harvested and planted cuerdas were assumed to be the same. For meaning of abbreviations and symbols, see introductory text.]

Geographic area	Pineapples						Quantity harvested (tons)
	Farms	Cuerdas	Plants				
			Total	Nonbearing age	Bearing age		
Puerto Rico	131	652	8,517,292	3,847,466	4,669,826	4,725	
Region 1 - Utuado	6	(D)	10,202	(D)	(D)	(D)	
Region 2 - Arecibo	7	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	
Region 3 - Mayagüez	16	50	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	
Region 4 - Ponce	7	199	2,018,500	1,273,900	744,600	563	
Region 5 - Caguas	6	3	4,700	3,740	960	8	
Region 6 - Naranjito	6	11	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	
Region 7 - Lares	62	118	2,292,362	1,077,956	1,214,406	1,923	
Region 8 - San Germán	21	180	2,004,782	1,192,376	812,406	581	

Agricultural employers are facing a shortage of workers, which is affecting the agricultural industry. According to one agricultural employer, the number of social aids provided by the federal government to low-income persons such as food stamps is the main reason why people refuse to work not only in agriculture but also in non-agricultural jobs. Other reasons for the shortage of workers can be attributed to the low wages paid in agriculture when compared with other non-agricultural industries that increase their minimum wage up to **\$9.50/hour**. In June 2023, the Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR) increased to \$9.70. This increase is applicable only if the employer hires foreign workers.

Data from the Office of Agricultural Statistics of the Department of Agriculture indicate that about 85% of the food consumed in the Puerto Rican archipelago comes from abroad and that local foods have higher sales prices than imported foods. These high prices reflect the struggles farmers face in their profession. According to the statistics of the Department of Agriculture, we can pinpoint some of the reasons for this:

- Labor – One of the reasons is due to higher production costs. While labor in countries that export food to Puerto Rico is cheaper, in many Latin American countries, agricultural workers sometimes receive less than \$2.00 an hour. Puerto Rico must comply with a minimum wage for agricultural workers that amounts to \$7.25 an hour; sometimes more.
- Expensive machinery and increase in fuel - Many farmers in the archipelago have chosen to mechanize their agricultural operation. To achieve this, many farmers purchase imported machinery, which in turn must comply with federal regulations, such as compliance with the EPA's gas emissions limit. Added to this are the costs of fuel, which are 100% imported because Puerto Rico does not have oil sources. On the other hand, the salaries of machinery operators also contribute to higher costs since they exceed \$15 per hour.
- Rises in temperatures - According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Puerto Rico is in a region where the manifestations of climate change can be observed more intensely. In recent years, the average temperature has risen, which affects agricultural production. For example, in the dairy sector, heat stress in cows in Puerto Rico is greater than in most regions of the United States, which reduces milk production in these animals.
- High costs of water and electricity - The costs associated with utilities, such as electricity and drinking water, are costly in Puerto Rico, and agricultural rates are even higher. In fact, the cost of electricity and drinking water in Puerto Rico is one of the highest in Latin America and the United States.

According to the United States Energy Information Administration, by 2022, in Puerto Rico an average of 29.4 cents per kilowatt hour was paid, which represented more than double the US average, which is 12.9 cents per kilowatt. These costs reduce farmers' profits, forcing them to sell their products at higher prices.

Other problems persist, as Dr. Orville M. Disdier Flores, executive director of the Puerto Rico Statistics Institute, performed a series of electronic surveys to farmers throughout Puerto Rico. Some of the issues farm owners mentioned were as follows:

- During the 2020-2021, 73% of the farmers interviewed indicated that the biggest

barrier they had in their business was the high costs of materials.

- Additionally, 59% indicated that they faced problems with a lack of employees.
- On the other hand, 54% indicated they had problems due to weather events.
- Furthermore, 64% of farmers indicated that the greatest cause of their losses due to weather events was hurricanes.
- 50% of farmers indicated having had to change crops in the last 5 years due to production problems.
- Similarly, 47% of farmers indicated having had to change the cycle or season to plant in the last 5 years.

As a result of the backdrop described above, agricultural employers began to turn their view to the H-2A Program for the first time in Puerto Rico.

The already difficult situation of a severe lack of workers turned into a real crisis forcing many agricultural employees, including coffee, banana, and vegetable growers, to go to social media to implore people for help to save their crops. To overcome this situation, some agricultural workers had to recur to the H-2A program. According to the Puerto Rico Employment Service Foreign Labor Certification Unit a total of 83 agricultural employers have submitted a total of 140 Agricultural Job Orders (ETA-790) associated to an H-2A Visa application requesting 1,166 H-2A visas to bring foreign worker to work in the different crops in Puerto Rico. From this CNPC has approved 123 Job Orders. As of the time of this annual plan, 720 foreign workers were hired by agricultural employers in Puerto Rico from October 2019 to December 31, 2023.

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Employers	2	17	29	27	8	83
H-2A Job Orders Received	2	22	35	56	25	140
H-2A Job Orders Approved by CNPC	2	20	30	51	20	123
H-2A Visas Requested	14	177	266	491	218	1,166

Another element to consider in the present volatile employment environment of the MSFWs in Puerto Rico is Public Law #87, approved on June 22, 1962 (Public Law #87). It allows

employers to conduct active recruitment in Puerto Rico to perform work in the U.S. mainland. These job offers are typically not for agricultural employment although every so often there are farming jobs and offers for landscaping, processing plants and food packagers. The job offers promoted under this law could be temporary or permanent in nature. The increase in this type of employment offers have significantly impacted the MSFWs in Puerto Rico because they are gravitating towards these jobs with better chance of permanency, much better salaries, and the possibility of permanent relocation rather than pursuing the regular Interstate Job offers that are posted from other states under the ARS.

There is a need for educational opportunities and incentives for these new farmers, farmers looking to shift to new crops or alternative farming methods, and MSFWs interested in becoming entrepreneurs. Directing more efforts and resources to these needs will promote the development of new agricultural employers and increase the employability of the MSFWs of Puerto Rico. In addition to these challenges, the agricultural community does not have up to date agricultural data. The lack of agriculture statistics is forcing farmers, private entities, and government agencies to plan without adequate information on the status of the agricultural industry. The PRDOLHR, with the assistance of the SMA, will explore the possibilities of joining efforts with partners and organizations such as PathStone, the Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE), the University of Puerto Rico Agricultural Extension, Puerto Rico Farm Bureau, the PRDOA and others, to create a series of orientation sessions to be offered in every region to promote existing and upcoming educational opportunities and incentives aimed to alleviate the above listed issues.

(3) An assessment of the unique needs of farmworkers means summarizing MSFW characteristics (including if they are predominantly from certain countries, what language(s) they speak, the approximate number of MSFWs in the State during peak season and during low season, and whether they tend to be migrant, seasonal, or year-round farmworkers). This information must consider data supplied by WIOA Section 167 National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) grantees, other MSFW organizations, employer organizations, and State and/or Federal agency data sources such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Employment and Training Administration.

Assessing the unique needs of farmworkers entails a comprehensive summary of Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker (MSFW) characteristics. This involves analyzing factors such as the predominant countries of origin, languages spoken, the estimated number of MSFWs

during peak and low seasons, and their classification as migrant, seasonal, or year-round farmworkers. This information necessitates collaboration with WIOA Section 167 National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) grantees, MSFW organizations, employer associations, and relevant state and federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Employment and Training Administration.

The farmworker demographic in Puerto Rico has undergone changes since 2019, primarily due to the recruitment of foreign workers in response to the shortage of local agricultural labor. Based on non-seasonally adjusted data, agricultural employment was estimated at 22,000 people in December 2023. When compared to December 2022 (21,000), the number of farmworkers reflected an increase of 1,000 people.

Despite this, farmworkers in Puerto Rico continue to represent the predominant agricultural workforce, totaling 21,000 as of November 2023, according to data from the Worker Group Survey (Table 6, Not Seasonally Adjusted).

In the graph below, the data illustrates the number of MSFWs served by Wagner-Peyser over the last three (3) years, showing a notable rise from 2021 to 2022. Anticipating a growth in the total number of MSFWs served during 2024-2027, this projection aligns with the implementation of new policies and procedures aimed at enhancing the classification of participants as MSFWs.

Total MSFWs Served

<i>PY2020</i>	59
<i>PY2021</i>	198
<i>PY2022</i>	268

The reliance on foreign workers stems from the scarcity of an indigenous agricultural workforce, with individuals arriving from countries such as Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Colombia, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Mexico.

A diminishing number of migrant workers are being referred through the Agricultural Recruitment System (ARS) to agricultural job opportunities in the United States (See Table 1). This decline is also attributed to the availability of longer-lasting and higher-paying employment opportunities through the Promotion of Employment Opportunities Abroad Program (P.L. 87 of June 22, 1962, as amended). Consequently, MSFWs are increasingly gravitating towards alternative types of employment on the U.S. mainland. A prevalent barrier faced by MSFWs in Puerto Rico is the combination of a low educational level and a limited understanding of the English language, rendering them perceived as unprepared for insertion into the non-farm labor market. This perception results in fewer services being offered to them, exacerbating the challenges posed by their educational shortcomings. Overall, most farmworkers in Puerto Rico are economically and educationally disadvantaged, possessing low-level skills that hinder their readiness for non-farm labor market participation.

(3) Outreach Activities. The local offices outreach activities must be designed to meet the needs of MSFWs in the State and to locate and contact MSFWs who are not being reached through normal intake activities. Describe the State agency's proposed strategies for: Efforts are being made to hire four Outreach Workers due to retirement and/or resignation.

These efforts are addressed to the hiring Outreach Workers for the local areas of Southeast (Humacao), AMSI Guayama (Guayama), Mayaguez, and North (Arecibo). Currently we have only two active Outreach workers for the local areas of Coamo and San Germán. This is a hard to fill position that requires staff persons designated as Outreach Workers to be in the field visiting employers and performing outreach to MSFWs to overview their rights not been violated such as wages, housing, working conditions, etc. The PRDOLHR is committed to comply with 20 CFR 653 to conduct Outreach activities as required by law and regulations. The following sections contain the Outreach activities to be carried out during the period of July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2027.

(1) Contacting farmworkers who are not being reached by the normal intake activities conducted by the employment service offices

Puerto Rico has been designated as a significant MSFW supplier. As such, MSFWs significant offices will operate an Outreach program to locate and contact MSFWs not being reached by regular intake procedures. The lack of Outreach Workers put Puerto Rico in a non-compliance situation. We are committed to addressing the situation and to having all remaining Outreach workers hired by the end of June 30, 2024.

Outreach workers are full time staff and contact MSFWs all year-round and during peak agricultural activity periods, which vary dependent on the crop. Contacts are made at locations where MSFWs live and congregate. Written and oral presentations are provided to MSFWs on services such as, but not limited to:

- Information regarding the full array of services offered in the career centers.
- Referral to agricultural, H-2A orders, and non-agricultural employment.
- Referral to training.
- Referral to supportive services.
- Career counseling.
- Job development.
- Information on the Wagner-Peyser complaint system.
- Summaries of farm worker rights (terms and conditions of employment)

The following table shows the MSFWs contacted by Outreach workers from July 1, 2020, to September 30, 2023. To comply with the goal of Outreach Contacts per week, per ETA-5148, Part 3, every quarter, Outreach workers must contact an aggregate of 520 MSFWs. This number is then divided by 13 and the result must be forty (40) contacts or more per week. The table below shows that Puerto Rico complied with this goal during PY2021 through PY2023. PY2020 was the year for the pandemic. Also, the table shows an increase in Outreach contacts throughout the years 2020 to 2023.

Table 50: Total MSFWs Contacted by Outreach Workers

Total MSFWs Contacted by Outreach Workers ¹⁰					
Program Year	1QTR	2QTR	3QTR	4QTR	Total
PY2020	234	171	73	44	522
PY2021	596	638	350	1,067	2,651
PY2022	1,185	829	997	865	3,876
PY2023	1,072	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,072

When visiting MSFWs, Outreach workers must obtain authorization from the agricultural employer to conduct outreach activities within the limits of the employer's property. During the contact, Outreach workers provide valuable information about services available to them (see above) in the career centers and encourage MSFWs to visit the nearest career center for the full range of employment, placement, and training services available to them.

In the event MSFWs cannot or do not wish to visit a physical one-stop system location, Outreach staff will provide the services on-site by assisting MSFWs to complete an application form (ES-511), provide referrals to employment opportunities for which the workers are qualified, assist them in preparing complaints, or make appointments for needed services. As appropriate, Outreach staff will carry out follow-up contacts with MSFW customers.

The State Monitor Advocate also performs a variety of advocacy activities, including, but not limited to:

- Overseeing the operation and performance of the MSFW complaint system.
- Contributing to the State AOP and reviewing the daily reports of outreach workers.
- Participating in public meetings throughout the state.
- Meeting with farm worker groups and employers to promote the use of the career center services.

¹⁰ Data from the ETA-5148 report for Program Years 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023.

The State Monitor Advocate also meets and works with other workforce agencies to coordinate services to MSFWs and raised issues, as appropriate, to ensure that the development of new systems and strategies for service delivery will address the needs of MSFW customers. The State Monitor Advocate conducts onsite reviews at One-Stop Centers, ensuring local workforce systems follow the designated equity indicators and minimum service levels for MSFWs. The State Monitor Advocate also provides training and technical assistance, as needed, to staff of partner agencies regarding outreach and services to MSFWs, and the ES complaint system.

Significant American Job Centers are located close to high MSFWs populations. Since the staff is strategically located close to these MSFWs population we can reach as many MSFWs as possible from the estimated number of 22,000 farmworkers during the period of July 1, 2024, and June 30, 2027. The goal is for Outreach Workers to contact at least twenty-five (25) MSFWs per week during a program year to provide services to MSFWs working on the farm during and after the harvest season. The goal is to keep an aggregate average of MSFWs contacts of at least 40 contacts per week to comply with the established performance goal per ETA-5148. Below is a table showing the total workload for the Outreach workers per local office and the designated status for each Outreach worker in the service area.

Table 51: Staffing and minimum contact levels per program year (PY 2023-2027)

Area/service location	Outreach workers	Contacts per year	Designated outreach worker status
North Central Region	1	1,200	Vacant
Southeast Region	1	1,200	Vacant
AMSI Guayama Region	1	1,200	Vacant
South Central Region	1	1,200	Hired
Southwest Region	1	1,200	Hired
Mayaguez/Las Marías Region	1	1,200	Vacant
Total	6	7,200	

(2) Providing technical assistance to outreach workers. Technical assistance must include trainings, conferences, additional resources, and increased collaboration with other organizations on topics such as one-stop center services (i.e. availability of referrals to training, supportive services, and career services, as well as specific employment opportunities), the employment service complaint system, information on the other organizations serving MSFWs in the area, and a basic summary of farmworker rights, including their rights with respect to the terms and conditions of employment.

For outreach workers to make an efficient job that could be beneficial to farmworkers and agricultural employers, they must be trained in all required areas and competencies to comply with 20 CFR 657.103 and be able to:

- Develop strategies and techniques to locate and contact MSFWs to provide information for services available at the local One-Stop Centers.
- Use the information of the Labor Market Information to inform MSFWs of specific job openings (agricultural and non-agricultural) available to them. Also, to assist agricultural employers in securing workers and acquiring information on labor market trends.
- Provide the necessary competencies on labor related laws affecting MSFWs such as the Fair Labor Standard Act (FLSA), the Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers Protection Act (MSPA), Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, H-2A Regulation, Housing, and other State regulations governing MSFWs.
- Assist MSFWs in filling job applications, preparing worker complaints, making appointments, and arranging for transportation.
- Provide information about services available through electronic means and teach them how to access this information.
- Identify qualified MSFWs seeking employment, using 20 CFR Part 653. Initial and follow-up outreach efforts will be made to provide needed services and assist MSFWs in landing a job or improving employability.
- Contact agricultural and non-agricultural employers, program operators, community or faith-based organizations, and education-and-training providers on

behalf of MSFWs.

- Soliciting jobs, training opportunities and employment related services for MSFWs.
- Provide agricultural and non-agricultural employers with information, services and assistance requests related to labor issues and needs.
- Accept job postings while performing field outreach activities.
- Refer qualified MSFWs from the MSFWs Outreach log and from previous contacts through follow-up activities if there are job openings for referral.
- Select qualified MSFWs from the MSFWs Outreach log to perform job development activities to enhance MSFW applications by including their additional occupational skills, transferable occupations, and matching positions with non-agricultural jobs, when no suitable, agricultural job openings are available for referral.

In addition to providing information about the AJC services, the Outreach workers frequently inquire about the working conditions, wages, and overall wellbeing of the MSFWs and encourage them to visit the nearest career center for the full range of employment, placement, and training services. A network of American Job Center will allow the referral of workers to both agricultural and non-agricultural jobs.

Coordinated efforts will continue between the ES, the Wage and Hour Division, OSHA, and the State Legal Services Farmworker Division, to provide training to outreach workers and the local WP staff. These efforts will result in highly trained Outreach workers in areas such as agricultural workplace safety information to assist and inform MSFWs how to undertake work safety measures, services provided by the Legal Services Program including how to file a complaint with this office, labor laws protecting the MSFWs such as MSPA, etc.

The SMA is responsible for meeting with other workforce agencies to ensure that services provided to MSFWs are rendered in a manner that is quantitatively proportional and qualitatively equivalent to those provided to non-MSFWs. To accomplish this task, the SMA must use monitoring designed and approved by ETA for the timely and accurate identification of issues, strategies and protocols for service delivery that will ensure continuity and increase success rate when addressing the needs of MSFW customers.

During the onsite reviews, the SMA must analyze all available data regarding the provision of services of the local workforce systems to determine their compliance with the designated equity indicators and minimum service levels for MSFWs. The SMA will also provide training and technical assistance to staff and partner agencies as needed.

(3) Increasing outreach worker training and awareness across core programs including the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program and the training on identification of UI eligibility issues.

To comply with federal regulations, all WP must be trained in the Agricultural Recruitment System (ARS). The training provides important information to staff on the use of the ARS system, to fill the need for workers during the harvest season and for other available agricultural jobs. Outreach staff must attend an ARS training session once per year. This will provide the Outreach staff with a refreshment session on all matters related to the ARS.

To better serve the needs of agricultural employers, WP merit staff must focus on employer issues. Employer services are planned and implemented based on each career center service delivery plan. To make sure that agricultural employer needs are met, career centers must provide key activities in the agricultural referral process, such as integrating services for agricultural employers and workers; identifying job- ready workers once they arrive at the work site; and providing employers with labor market information related to their specific industry, such as farmworker rights and support service information, among other services.

The efforts to be provided by Outreach staff will cover those described in 20 CFR 653.107(i-p). These efforts are the minimum required, but staff will be more thorough in their presentation, providing a comprehensive outline of services available in their area. The purpose of the MSFW outreach program is to take available services directly to where MSFWs live and work if they are unable to come to the One-Stop Centers. The MSFW program provides the necessary framework for the One-Stop Centers staff to locate, contact, and enhance employability of MSFWs in Puerto Rico. Outreach interviewers provide services at the point of contact or at the One-Stop Centers office. If needed, services which are not available at the local One-Stop Centers will be provided by the Outreach worker by means of referrals to other WIOA partners, agencies and organizations that

provide the needed assistance.

To accomplish the above, Outreach training sessions will be carried out to reinforce awareness across core programs including UI and training on identification of UI eligibility issues. Regarding UI and WIOA, policies and procedures are in place which provide guidance to WP staff, including Outreach Workers with regards to the provision of services to UI claimants, in special the assistance to file a UI claim. Training will be provided in coordination with WIOA partners to cross train Outreach workers in other WIOA programs such as Title 1A (Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Youth Program), the National Farmworkers Jobs Program (NFJP), etc.

Outreach workers staff contact growers during the harvesting seasons to plan for upcoming labor needs. Coordination is made with the growers and with other career centers to match the labor needs of employers with workers qualified to fill the jobs. In line with PRDOLHR's focus on services to business, State merit staff provide Outreach personnel with comprehensive listings of area growers to aid in scheduling visits throughout the agricultural community. PRDOLHR also collaborates with the Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture to ensure all resources for growers and agricultural workers are coordinated in a seamless fashion. Additionally, Outreach workers have a strong relationship with the UPR's Agricultural Extension Service/Department of Agriculture regional field staff to collaborate and improve services to agricultural employers and MSFWs.

PRDOLHR's focus is on services to business, while the state merit staff provides Outreach staff to aid in scheduling visits throughout the agricultural community. The SMA will reach out to the Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture to design strategies that could ensure all resources available to the agricultural community are coordinated in a seamless fashion. Capitalizing on the long-standing relationship between the Outreach workers with the University of Puerto Rico's Agricultural Extension Service/PRDOA regional field staff, joint meetings will be coordinated to collaborate and improve services to agricultural employers and MSFWs. Efforts will be made to request from the UI Division the possibility that key staff will be granted access to the local UI system to allow WP staff to access basic UI information of MSFWs, which could be used to assist them with issues related to application for benefits, employment records, interstate claims and eligibility issues. Training in the

basic unemployment data system will be arranged for the selected staff.

(4) Providing State merit staff outreach workers professional development activities to ensure they can provide high quality services to both jobseekers and employers.

Both the WIOA State Unified Plan for 2020-2024 and 2024-2027 contain provisions for professional development of all WP staff ensuring the provision of high-quality services to both jobseekers and employers, including MSFWs. To achieve this, the Puerto Rico Government provides to all its public service staff tools to enhance their current skills by means of online platforms in collaboration with the state university, and the Office for the Administration of Human Resources (OATRH, by its acronym in Spanish). The PRDOLHR will also engage in the identification of other sources of professional development for Outreach Workers.

MSFW Outreach Specialists and the American Job Centers staff participate in cross-training from the standpoint of sharing information on Wagner-Peyser programs and Career Centers programs as well as learning the basics of the array of programs offered within and outside the Centers. Program cross-training is a continuous process to be able to offer a more integrated plan of service. Training will include information on Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Outreach Program, MSFW classification, Agricultural Job Orders, Welfare Transition (WT)/Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Job Corps, business services, resource rooms, workshops, Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), Veterans, and Wagner-Peyser programs. For the purposes of referring participants to other support services, training will also include information on vocational rehabilitation, GED programs, childcare, and transportation.

In addition to the above, Outreach workers will be provided with workshops on issues related to MSFWs such as child labor, human trafficking and sex harassment, use of pesticides, OSHA Sanitation Standards, Housing, etc., to provide Outreach staff with the professional development and tools required to serve the MSFW population.

(5) Coordinating outreach efforts with NFJP grantees as well as with public and private community service agencies and MSFW groups.

The newly designated SMA must enter an MOU with the NFJP Grantee, PathStone. As the

ETA designated grantee for Puerto Rico, PathStone operates the National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) and provides career and training services and related assistance for MSFWs. The cooperative agreement will serve to assist in establishing and demonstrating effective outreach coordination, enhance service delivery to MSFWs and increase registration activities between PathStone and significant career centers staff. The partnership provides for the sharing of labor market information, training, supportive services, and job-related resources available to MSFWs. The cooperative agreement will improve mutual capacities and the likelihood of effective customer service, by sharing the responsibilities for this population and displaying an efficient use of available resources.

The primary benefits of the cooperative agreement with PathStone are:

1. The information exchange process is streamlined, something that will improve the occurrence and accuracy of shared information.
2. Each organization will be better prepared to coordinate actions, including those that may require immediate intervention when serving MSFWs.
3. Staff awareness of emerging issues regarding the MSFW community has increased.
4. The establishment of a vehicle of communication with the career centers and PathStone to periodically review and assess quality services to MSFWs.
5. Reports are shared on the staff hours spent performing MSFW outreach activity.

PathStone also has cooperative agreements with several career centers and community partners focusing on integrated service strategies and resource sharing. Collaborative approaches reduce duplication of effort and ensure that resources are used effectively for the benefit of customers.

PathStone Corporation is also the NFJP housing grantee for Puerto Rico and provides housing support services to MSFWs through rental and utility assistance. The State Monitor Advocate and the PRDOLHR Outreach workers will continue to coordinate with PathStone staff in their efforts to assist growers in providing safe and affordable housing for farmworkers, hence expanding the range of services available to this population.

(5) Services provided to farmworkers and agricultural employers through the one-stop delivery system. Describe the State agency's proposed strategies for-

(A) Providing the full range of employment and training services to the agricultural community, both farm workers and agricultural employers, through the one-stop delivery system.

(i) How career and training services required under WIOA Title I will be provided to MSFWs through the One-Stop Centers:

Each outreach staff establishes a list of available resources and develops partnerships with local organizations serving MSFWs. Resources include, but are not limited to: Department of Health, Farmworker Health Program, State Workers Compensation, Migrant Legal Services, PathStone Corporation, PRDE's Adult Education program, and ESL and GED services to MSFWs. Career centers will collaborate with Local Boards to ensure MSFWs have training opportunities for jobs in demand in the area. We believe there are enough resources for Outreach but will continue to seek additional resources to meet the needs of MSFWs as they are identified.

Although Outreach services are provided to MSFWs who cannot or do not wish to visit a physical career center location, other MSFWs visit the career centers in search of employment, placement, or training services. At the career center, these MSFWs receive a Center orientation which is a requirement prior to receiving any services they might apply for. Through this orientation, workers will become aware of the range of services available to them and how to apply for such services.

Once the workers are informed of all the services available to them, depending on their personal employment needs, might opt to use the self-service resource area where they can access the Internet to perform job searches, preparation of resumes, browsing of job offers, among other services. If in need of employment and placement services, the worker is referred to a Wagner-Peyser Employment Specialist. Here, the worker is registered in Wagner-Peyser and assessed to determine his/her job readiness. Depending on the assessment, the MSFW might be referred to an available job offer/job development, or to an Occupational Counselor for additional career services. If deemed not job ready, the MSFW is referred to one of the several partners located in or out of the center to provide the necessary assistance in attaining the skills necessary to get a suitable job.

Once registered, a farmworker might receive the following career services:

- Assistance for program compliance
- Preparation of job applications
- Job information per type of referral to specific employment opportunities (agricultural and non-agricultural), training, counseling, and other services
- Support service referrals for individuals or family members
- Information and referrals to PathStone or other appropriate program services
- Information about farm worker rights (Federal and State employment related protections laws such as MSPA and FLSA)
- How to contact other organizations servicing MSFWs, such as the Migrant Legal Services, Migrant Health, and others
- When applicable, Outreach Staff will make appropriate referrals to PathStone, Inc. as stipulated under the Job Service Cooperative Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

The ARS System is operated and coordinated within the One-Stop Centers by WP and other partners. As a result, the Foreign Labor Certification Unit can share Agricultural Job Orders, both local, intrastate, and interstate, with the AJCs staff and PathStone and receive referrals from the different AJCs. The FLC Unit receives job orders from the different State Order Holding Officers asking for qualified workers for open agricultural jobs. These job orders are mainly associated with an H-2A application. The job orders are accessible via <https://seasonaljobs.dol.gov> distributed to the local Employment Service Offices via SharePoint lists where they be placed for job seekers applying for these agricultural jobs.

Outreach workers and WP staff at the career centers will identify workers and screen them against employer requirements; coordinate referrals with the Puerto Rico FLC Unit and assist with scheduling interviews with employers and make travel arrangements.

One-Stop Centers will continue making efforts to strengthen the working relationships with MSFWs and employers. AJC staff assists Outreach workers in providing MSFW with the full

range of services available through the One-Stop Centers.

Federal requirements call for services to be provided to MSFWs in a “qualitatively equivalent and quantitatively proportionate” to the services provided to other non-MSFWs. This means that MSFWs are to receive all workforce development services, benefits, and protections on an equitable and non-discriminatory basis (i.e., career guidance, testing, job development, training, and job referral). It is necessary, therefore, to continue strengthening the capability of the WP staff to serve the needs for farm working jobs, by helping them find employment through the Labor Exchange System. Also, ES provides a Job Bank where MSFWs can search for jobs they may qualified for.

Career centers staff assist employers by referring qualified workers to the different job orders posted. However, the process still poses challenges for career center staff to provide farmworkers with available jobs since jobs available in the Puerto Rico Job Bank are mostly in professional jobs which require college preparation, advance skills, and job experience. Information on services, including how to register for services, is provided online ensuring that farmworkers have the full range of services available whether services are received in the field or a career center. Bilingual staff are also made available to assist non-Spanish speaking customers.

The career centers receive Job Orders through the Interstate Clearance System. Concerted efforts are made with Order Holding States to refer qualified MSFWs to these job openings. To make sure that employer labor needs are met, WP merit staff works with job matching results to ensure that qualified MSFWs are referred to the corresponding job opening. Outreach efforts are used to recruit workers outside the local job site recruiting area. The outreach staff is committed to providing information on the services provided at the career centers and will help employers posting agricultural job orders and referring workers to these very same opportunities.

(ii) How the State serves agricultural employers and how it intends to improve such services.

PRDOLHR plans to continue implementing strategies and the use of best practices to address the needs of agricultural employers including the following topics:

- Limited knowledge of State/Federal employment laws and regulations. Career centers will continue to host Forums/Workshops to educate employers and agricultural crew leaders regarding State/Federal laws and regulations.
- Lack of efficient use of local human resources. Career centers staff must encourage/facilitate communication between growers, regarding farmworkers' specific needs. One possible resource is Puerto Rico's Agricultural Extension Program.
- Lack of facilities/staff to screen and interview potential farmworkers. Career centers might provide temporary office space that agricultural employers might use as a job-interviewing facility. Workforce Center staff might also provide intake and referral activities at the growers' locations.
- Encourage farm labor contractors to register. Career centers staff might provide forms and instructions for completing crew leader registrations and ensure that farm labor contractors' registration cards are kept current.
- Housing. The ARS requires employers to provide housing at no cost to workers who cannot reasonably return to their place of residence after each working day. This is one of the unique challenges Puerto Rico agricultural employers faces when using ARS; especially when providing housing for coffee pickers. Also, the PRDOLHR is planning to coordinate efforts and grant activities with PathStone, Inc., the Housing Grant coordinator for the NFJP grantee under the WIOA 167 housing grant for Puerto Rico, to address the housing needs of farm workers and their families.

Agricultural employers and MSFWs are critical to the State's workforce, especially in the geographic areas where agriculture is the key economic industry. Serving the needs of the agricultural industry requires coordination among the following stakeholders:

- State Monitor Advocate
- WIOA Section 167, PathStone, Inc.
- Groups that represent MSFWs
- Agricultural employer organizations

- Wage and Hour Division (Caribbean District)
- Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)
- Federal agencies with regulatory responsibilities for enforcing laws related to agricultural labor.
- Other organizations such as OSHA

Each of the above organizations has been instrumental in the ongoing efforts of providing support for the benefit of agricultural employers and their workers. They were provided with the opportunity to comment on and participate in the development of this plan.

(B) Marketing the employment service complaint system to farmworkers and other farmworker advocacy groups.

In fulfilling its responsibilities under Federal regulations, the PRDOLHR has established a Uniform Complaint System under WP pursuant to 20 CFR 658.400. With this complaint system in place, career centers have the capacity to resolve MSWF complaints and any others job seeker impacted by WP activities. The state and local managers have the responsibility to resolve complaints filed pursuant to 20 CFR 658.400.

The State Monitor Advocate is responsible for the oversight, operation, and performance of the complaint system. The Monitor is also responsible for the marketing and promotion of the complaint system to other MSFW advocacy groups and partners such as MSFWs served by PathStone. The State Monitor Advocate also oversees that Outreach workers inform MSFWs about their rights and the way to contact the complaint system, and that provides them help to file a claim, as appropriate.

During the required career center orientation, job seekers are briefed on the Wagner-Peyser complaint system. During registration, a WP Employment Specialist explains the complaint system to the worker and how to properly file a complaint. A complaint form is handed out to the worker at that moment. He is also informed of his rights as an MSFW.

C) Marketing the Agricultural Recruitment System to agricultural employers and how it intends to improve such publicity.

ES is committed to market the use of the ARS among employers in the local service areas by reinforcing Outreach Workers skills and knowledge to promote the ARS within agricultural

employers, including ES staff assigned to placement tasks. Regarding the H-2A program, agricultural employers have started using the program regardless of the cost associated with it since they face shortage of local laborers. This provides additional guarantees to MSFWs such as housing, and transportation, reimbursement, as required by applicable regulations.

(6) Other Requirements. (A) Collaboration. Describe any collaborative agreements the SWA has with other MSFW service providers including NFJP grantees and other service providers. Describe how the SWA intends to build upon/increase collaboration with existing partners and in establishing new partners over the next four years (including any approximate timelines for establishing agreements or building upon existing agreements).

Cooperative agreement with PathStone

As mentioned before, an MOU must be entered between the SMA and the NFJP Grantee. The former MOU must be reviewed and evaluated as a starting point to develop the new MOU which must provide a better comprehensive outreach approach to MSFWs in Puerto Rico. The MOU must be developed and executed not later than June 30, 2024, to enforce the responsibilities of each partner in the agreement.

Legal Services of Puerto Rico

The PRDOLHR has linkages with the Legal Services Program and establishes collaboration to provide orientation and valuable information to MSFW who migrate to the United States to work in farm work through the Federal Agricultural Job Order Clearing System. Before departing to work in the USA, workers are briefed on the rights available to them as MSFWs. Coordination is made with Legal Services if any worker needs legal services due to the violation of his/her rights by the agricultural employer while working in the USA.

U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the United States Department of Labor (DOL) and the Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources (PRDOL&HR) exemplifies a collaborative commitment to effective communication and cooperation in areas of mutual interest. Entered voluntarily, this MOU signifies the shared dedication of both entities to enhancing compliance assistance for employers and employees. Importantly, the agreement does not involve any financial commitments, exchanges of funds, personnel, property, or services.

The collaboration encompasses various initiatives, including coordinated investigations, sharing of training materials, cross-training of staff, and the facilitation of outreach events. Through this MOU, DOL/WHD and PRDOLHR aim to foster a synergistic partnership that promotes efficiency and delivers valuable support to the workforce and business community.

The PRDOLHR is actively engaged in exploring additional Memoranda of Understanding MOUs with potential partners to fortify ongoing initiatives. In line with its commitment to strategic collaborations, PRDOLHR seeks to establish MOUs with entities currently contributing support to existing efforts. This proactive approach underscores the department's dedication to expanding its network of partnerships, fostering cooperation, and maximizing the impact of its programs. Through these prospective MOUs, PRDOLHR aims to create synergies that will further enhance the effectiveness and reach of its initiatives, reinforcing its commitment to the welfare of the workforce and the advancement of labor-related objectives.

Agricultural Technology/University of Puerto Rico at Utuado (UPRU)

The collaborative agreements between the State Workforce Agency (SWA) and the University of Puerto Rico at Utuado (UPRU) showcase a comprehensive partnership aimed at advancing the agricultural sector and supporting the unique needs of Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker (MSFW) participants. Here's a breakdown of the key points:

Educational Programs at UPRU

UPRU offers Associate Degree Programs in Agricultural Production, Food Processing, Horticulture, Pest Control, and Livestock Industries. The university boasts modern laboratories dedicated to various aspects of agriculture, including Food Processing, Livestock Industries, Horticulture, and Pest Control. Facilities for plant propagation, Soil Science, Food Quality Control, and a Pilot Plant contribute to a holistic learning environment. UPRU provides 108 acres of land for practical training in Agriculture, offering hands-on experience for students.

Mission and Vision of UPRU's Department of Agricultural Technology

The mission is to contribute to Puerto Rico's agricultural development by establishing academic programs that promote the adoption of new technology. The department aims to support the growth and advancement of agriculture while ensuring environmental sustainability. The vision is to foster the development of a competitive agriculture sector that operates in harmony with the environment, focusing on economic viability and environmental responsibility.

Success Stories of Visually Impaired Students

The narrative includes inspiring stories of visually impaired students excelling in sustainable agriculture, demonstrating determination and a clear vision of their goals. Specific examples highlight expertise in crop production and dedication to mastering coffee planting techniques and soil conservation.

Puerto Rico's Historical Significance and Commitment to MSFWs

Puerto Rico is designated as a state for Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Workers (MSFW), emphasizing its historical importance in this regard. The Wagner Peyser Annual Performance Report (WP) underscores the high participation of MSFWs in the WP Program. The Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources (PRDOLHR) is committed to providing equitable services to MSFWs, ensuring they receive opportunities comparable to non-MSFW individuals. Recognizing challenges faced by MSFWs in education and employment, PRDOLHR strives to support their needs.

The collaborative efforts between SWA and UPRU reflect a holistic approach to education, skill development, and support for MSFWs in Puerto Rico. The success stories of visually impaired students add a personal touch, showcasing the inclusivity and determination within the educational programs. Puerto Rico's commitment to the equitable treatment of MSFWs aligns with broader goals of providing opportunities for this community. That is why PRDOLRH envisions continuing to join efforts with other entities that provide services in collaboration with existing partners to address their needs.

(B) Review and Public Comment. In developing the AOP, the SWA must solicit information and suggestions from NFJP grantees, other appropriate MSFW groups, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations, and other interested organizations. In addition, at least 45 calendar days before submitting its final AOP, the SWA must provide a proposed plan to NFJP grantees, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations, and other organizations expressing an interest and allow at least 30 days for review and comment. The SWA must:

- 1) Consider any comments received in formulating its final proposed AOP;**
 - 2) Inform all commenting parties in writing whether their comments have been incorporated and, if not, the reasons; therefore, and**
 - 3) Transmit the comments and recommendations received and its responses with the submission of the AOP.**
- (i). Include the list of organizations from which information and suggestions were solicited, any comments received, and responses to those comments. The AOP must include a statement confirming NFJP grantees, other appropriate MSFW groups, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations and other interested employer organizations have been given an opportunity to comment on the AOP.**

The PRDOLHR will provide the opportunity for all interested parties to review and comment on the AOP draft. A copy of the draft will be forwarded to the following organizations for comments. As the program year progresses and the needs of the agribusiness community evolves, the PDOLHR will continue to work with partners of the agricultural community to explore new approaches to meeting the demands of Puerto Rico's expanding agricultural industry through collaborative agreements.

The following organizations will receive the AOP draft:

1. Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE) / Migrant Education Program.
2. Puerto Rico Farmworker Health Program.
3. Puerto Rico Legal Services Farmworker Division.
4. Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture.
5. Department of Export and Commerce (PRDEDC) / WDP.
6. PathStone Corporation.
7. USDOL Wage and Hours Division.

(C) Data Assessment. Review the previous four years Wagner-Peyser data reports on performance. Note whether the State has been meeting its goals to provide MSFWs quantitatively proportionate services as compared to non-MSFWs. If it has not met these goals, explain why the State believes such goals were not met and how the State intends to improve its provision of services to meet such goals.

The PRIS system is being enhanced to add additional functionality and make it more in compliance with the ARS system and to better record services to MSFWs to comply with the Equity Ratio Indicators (ERIs). Changes to the system are expected to be in place by June 30, 2024.

The table below shows actual data taken from WIPS regarding the registration of MSFWs during PY2020, PY2021 and PY2022. The effect of the Covid 19 pandemic was reflected in the data collection of 2019.

Program Year ¹¹	Non-MSFW	MSFWs
PY2020	5,566	59
PY2021	8,111	198
PY2022	11,674	268
PY2023 (1QTR) ¹²	2,122	22
Total	64,316	547

Policies and procedures are in place to address this situation and for the proper classification of MSFWs in the PRIS system. Changes are being made to the system to automate this process by including the required questions and as they are being answered by WP staff, the system will complete both elements 413 and 808. These changes are projected to be completed by June 2024. The goal is to comply with program regulations and to resolve findings in previous monitoring reports and to be able to capture the most number of MSFWs as possible in the system.

Given the above scenario, corrective actions must be taken to:

- Ensure MSFWs are registered in Wagner-Peyser and classified appropriately.
- Ensure services to MSFWs are entered appropriately into the PRIS System.

¹¹ ETA-9129, Annual Performance Report for Wagner-Peyser

¹² ETA-9173, Quarterly Performance Report for PY2023, 1QTR

- Ensure Outreach Workers are not only reaching out to MSFWs but providing the services they are entitled to.

(D) Assessment of progress. The plan must include an explanation of what was achieved based on the previous AOP, what was not achieved and an explanation as to why the State believes the goals were not achieved, and how the State intends to remedy the gaps of achievement in the coming year.

MSFWs contacted by outreach activities.

For the period of July 1, 2020, to June 30, 2022, the current AOP plan calls for at least 11,520 MSFWs. During the same period a total of 8,121 MSFWs were contacted. This is 3,399 contacts less than the planned 11,520 MSFWs to be contacted. In PY22, two out of the five Outreach workers resigned. In PY2023, one Outreach worker was promoted to SMA. This impacted the total MSFWs to be contacted during this AOP period of performance.

We are committed to continue reinforcing the Outreach Program to comply with regulations as required by 20 CFR 653.107, which requires PRDOLHR to operate an Outreach Program to reach farmworkers that for different reasons normally did not reach ES local offices. Once the vacant positions are filled out, ES will be in position to provide the whole range of services to MSFWs dwelling in the significant agricultural areas and to increase the number of MSFWs served and provide outreach services to more than half the population of farm workers that at this time cannot be reached.

Equity Performance Indicators

The lack of performance data from the PRIS System and the failure of local offices to appropriately classify MSFWs in the system are the main barriers to properly identify if Puerto Rico complies with the equity performance indicators. PRDOLHR is committed to working closely with and assessing the conditions that unable ES to meet the performance goals for MSFWs. This assessment will be the basis for a corrective action plan that will allow the ES to meet the performance standards for MSFWs and ensure they are receiving services quantitatively proportionately as compared to non-MSFWs.

Referral of MSFWs to interstate agricultural job orders

The number of MSFWs interested in applying to agricultural jobs in the mainland has decreased in the past years. Several factors have contributed to this as explained in Section E (2), such as the Promotion of Jobs Abroad Program under P.L. 87 which provides better job conditions and the possibility of permanent relocation. The few MSFWs referred to interstate agricultural job orders are those we were recalled by their previous employers.

(E) State Monitor Advocate. The plan must contain a statement confirming the State Monitor Advocate has reviewed and approved the AOP.

A new SMA was designated. A copy of this plan will be provided to the SMA for review and approval.

As the State Monitor Advocate (SMA), I have reviewed and approved the AOP. I commend the collaborative efforts put forth in developing this plan and endorse its implementation as a crucial step in fostering positive outcomes for both MSFWs and the agricultural industry.

Table 52: WAGNER-PEYSER ASSURANCES

The State Plan must include assurances that:	
1.	<p>The Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service is co-located with one-stop centers, or a plan and timeline has been developed to comply with this requirement within a reasonable amount of time. (Sec 121(e)(3));</p> <p>As of the date of this State plan, all Wagner-Peyser Employment Service Local Offices are co-located with One-Stop Centers and is in full compliance with the requirement set forth in Sec. 121(e)(3).</p>

<p>2.</p>	<p>If the State has significant MSFW one-stop centers, the State agency is complying with the requirements under 20 CFR 653.111, State Workforce Agency staffing requirements;</p> <p>The PRDLHR is committed to comply with 20 CFR 653.111. As of the date of this State Plan four Outreach Worker positions are vacant in significant MSFW One-Stop Centers (Southeast Local Area, AMSI Guayama, Mayagüez/Las Marías, and North Central local areas. Efforts to fill the vacant positions are underway. We expect to have these vacancies filled on or before March 31, 2024.</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>If a State Workforce Development Board, department, or agency administers State laws for vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, that board, department, or agency cooperates with the agency that administers Wagner-Peyser Act services, Adult and DWPs and Youth Programs under Title I; and</p> <p>State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency is a workforce system partner and as such it has presence in the American Job Centers. The VR staff is cooperative with all workforce system partners at the American Job Centers providing services to individuals with disabilities referred by other core partners in the Center.</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>SWA officials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Initiate the discontinuation of services; 2) Make the determination that services need to be discontinued; 3) Make the determination to reinstate services after the services have been discontinued; 4) Approve corrective action plans;

	<p>5) Approve the removal of an employer’s clearance orders from interstate or intrastate clearance if the employer was granted conditional access to ARS and did not come into compliance within five calendar days;</p> <p>6) Enter into agreements with State and Federal enforcement agencies for enforcement-agency staff to conduct field checks on the SWAs’ behalf (if the SWA so chooses); and</p> <p>7) Decide whether to consent to the withdrawal of complaints if a party who requested a hearing wish to withdraw its request for hearing in writing before the hearing.</p>
5.	<p>The SWA has established and maintains a self-appraisal system for ES operations to determine success in reaching goals and to correct deficiencies in performance (20 CFR 658.601).</p>

ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAM

The Unified or Combined State Plan must include a description of the following as it pertains to adult education and literacy programs and activities under title II of the WIOA, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA).

(a)Aligning of Content Standards. Describe how the eligible agency has aligned its content standards for adult education with State-adopted challenging academic content standards, as adopted under section 1111(b)(1) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (20 U.S.C. 6311(b)(1)).

The Assistant Secretary for Alternative Education-Adult Education Program (AEP) and State Director for Adult Education, under the Puerto Rico Department of Education, are the implementation units for WIOA Title II activities.

During the 2024-2028 Program years (PY) period, the DEPR will continue focusing on the completion of revision and re-alignment of the State education adopted standards and curriculum. The AEP is part of this effort as it concerns adult education. As of October 2023,

the AEP has completed its conversational English curriculum, which is approximately 75% of the aligned curriculum developed and is expected to be completed and piloted during the 2024 period.

AEP requires local providers to contextualize instruction and make use of research-based best practices in all content areas, including mathematics and reading, and in the implementation of Integrated Education and Training (IET) and Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE).

The alignment of content concerning Adult Education Programs requires continuous faculty development efforts to ensure that teachers are thoroughly familiar with the requirements of academic content standards. The AEP has hired one academic facilitator for each of the core assignments to provide technical assistance in the implementation of the curriculum in all Adult Education program centers, for the training of teachers in curriculum implementation. Adult Education program teachers will receive specialized training on the standards, the indicators, and assessment activities of the curriculum. They will emphasize syllabus content and provide academic guidelines, technology, computer literacy, workforce preparation, and employability skills to facilitate learning among adult participants.

During the 2024-2028 Plan the AEP will update the workforce preparation curriculum and expand the career pathways model custom made to the necessity's education service providers' centers in the Local Workforce Development areas under the WIOA Program for career pathway implementation. These activities on career pathways and soft skills in the new curriculum will provide the transferable skills needed by individuals to make them "employable" to an employer, including Problem-solving, oral communication, adaptability, collaboration, resource management, organizational skills, written communication, and technology use as the leading skills. It also includes activities that promote critical thinking and build self-management skills such as utilizing resources and information, understanding systems, and working with others.

In the implementation of the aligned curriculum standards, the AEP will provide training to teachers based on the program's curriculum, standards, and indicators, and proposed

changes to update teaching for adult or disabled participants. All teachers of the Adult Program will receive specialized professional training related to the standards and indicators of the program, activities related to the development of 21st Century skills that are important for competitiveness in the global labor market, STEM, employability, workforce preparation skills, and career pathways.

To evaluate the curriculum effectiveness the AEP will maintain a continuous teachers log system of feedback annotations on curriculum improvement needs as per students' interactions the lessons and activities. A committee selected from teachers implementing the curriculum will meet regularly to discuss the log notes and plan for future improvements to the curriculum.

(c) Local Activities. Describe how the eligible agency will fund eligible providers to establish or operate integrated English literacy and civic education programs under Section 243 of WIOA, using the considerations specified in Section 231(e) of WIOA and in accordance with 34 CFR 463 subpart C, fund each eligible provider to establish or operate programs that provide any of the following adult education and literacy activities identified in Section 203 of WIOA, including programs that provide such activities concurrently. The Unified or Combined State Plan must include, at a minimum, the scope, content, and organization of these local activities.

Adult Education and Literacy Activities (Section 203 of WIOA)

- Adult education;
- Literacy;
- Workplace adult education and literacy activities;
- Family literacy activities;
- English language acquisition activities;
- Integrated English literacy and civics education;
- Workforce preparation activities; or
- Integrated education and training that—
 1. Provides adult education and literacy activities, concurrently and contextually with both, workforce preparation activities, and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster, and

2. Is for the purpose of educational and career advancement.

Using the considerations specified in section 231(e) of WIOA, the AEP will fund each eligible provider to establish or operate programs that provide any of the following adult education and literacy activities identified in section 203 of WIOA, including programs that provide such activities concurrently: Adult education, Literacy; Workplace adult education and literacy activities, Family literacy activities, English language acquisition activities, Integrated English literacy and civics education, Workforce preparation activities, and integrated education and training that provides adult education and literacy activities, concurrently and contextually with both workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster, and that is for the purpose of educational and career advancement.

Multiyear competition process.

The AEP conducted a multiyear full and open competition for grant activities. The grant application addressed the 13 considerations and requirements established in Title II. Multiyear competition is open to all eligible providers. All eligible providers were required to submit evidence of the demonstrated effectiveness. To demonstrate effectiveness, applicants who have received Title II AEFLA funds in the program years immediately preceding the multiyear competition are evaluated based on their performance against the state's negotiated targets during those years. Applicants that did not receive funds through the AEP will be required to provide data that shows their past ability to achieve success on comparable measures. For both groups, these measures were effective in helping the students develop their academic skills.

The multiyear competition process includes the wide circulation of the RFP among all WIOA local area geographical service providers to ensure the provision of services in areas of difficult access to services and underrepresented services.

The AEP will conduct a new phase of multiyear competition to expand geographical areas and offerings in adult education. The AEP is dire to expand the number of service providers to make educational services more accessible. Applicants that do not receive funds through

the AEP will be required to provide data that show their past ability to achieve success in comparable measures.

Who are eligible individuals and providers?

Service providers will deliver services to eligible individuals who have attained at least 16 years of age, are not enrolled, are required to be enrolled in a secondary school under the Puerto Rico law, lack basic skills, do not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, or are English language learners. Organizations eligible to apply for funding must have demonstrated effectiveness and comply with the 13 considerations established by WIOA in providing adult education and literacy services.

These organizations include local education agencies, community-based organizations or faith-based organizations, volunteer literacy organizations, institutions of higher education, public or private non-profit agencies, libraries, a public housing authority, a non-profit institution that has not been described previously in this paragraph and has the ability to provide adult education and literacy activities to eligible individuals, a consortium or coalition of the agencies, organizations, institutions, libraries, or authorities described previously, and a partnership between an employer and an entity described previously.

The use of the thirteen considerations Of WIOA in funding eligible providers

The PRDE's - AEP, will fund each eligible provider using the considerations specified in section 231(e) of WIOA, to establish or operate programs that provide any of the adult education and literacy activities identified in section 203 of WIOA, including programs that provide such activities concurrently.

Organizations interested in funding to provide services must complete an RFP to solicit funding. When completing the RFP, they must provide evidence that complies with the 13 Considerations of WIOA to be eligible providers and be granted funding.

We summarize the 13 Considerations of WIOA for Funding to be enforced as follows:

1. The degree to which the eligible provider would be responsive to: (1) regional needs as identified in the local plan under WIOA, Section 108; and (2) serving individuals in the community who were identified in such a plan as most in need of adult education and literacy activities, including individuals who: (i) have low levels of literacy skills; or (ii) Are English language learners.
2. The ability of the eligible provider to serve eligible individuals with disabilities, including eligible individuals with learning disabilities.
3. Past effectiveness of the eligible provider in improving the literacy of eligible individuals to meet State-adjusted levels of performance for the primary indicators of performance described in WIOA Section 116, especially with respect to eligible individuals who have low levels of literacy.
4. The extent to which the eligible provider demonstrates alignment between proposed activities and services and the strategy and goals of the local plan under WIOA, Section 108, as well as the activities and services of one-stop partners.
5. Whether the eligible provider's program: (1) is of enough intensity and quality, and based on the most rigorous research available so that participants achieve substantial learning gains; and (2) uses instructional practices that include the essential components of reading instruction.
6. Whether the eligible provider's activities, including reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, and English language acquisition instruction, are based on the best practices derived from the most rigorous research available and appropriate, including scientifically valid research and effective educational practice.
7. Whether the eligible provider's activities effectively use technology, services, and delivery systems, including distance education, is sufficient to increase the amount and quality of learning and how such technology, services, and systems lead to improved performance.

8. Whether the eligible provider's activities provide learning in context, including through integrated education and training, so that an individual acquires the skills needed to transition to and complete post-secondary education and training programs, obtain and advance employment leading to economic self-sufficiency, and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
9. Whether the eligible provider's activities are delivered by well-trained instructors, counselors, and administrators who meet any minimum qualifications established by the State, where applicable, and who have access to high-quality professional development, including through electronic means.
10. Whether the eligible provider's activities coordinate with other available education, training, and social service resources in the community, such as by establishing strong links with elementary and secondary schools, post-secondary educational institutions, institutions of higher education, local workforce investment boards, one-stop centers, job training programs, social service agencies, business, industry, labor organizations, community-based organizations, non-profit organizations, and intermediaries, for the development of career pathways.
11. Whether the eligible provider's activities offer flexible schedules and coordination with Federal, State, and local support services (such as childcare, transportation, mental health services, and career planning) that are necessary to enable individuals, including those with disabilities or other special needs, to attend and complete programs.
12. Whether the eligible provider maintains a high-quality information management system that has the capacity to report measurable participant outcomes (consistent with Section 116) and monitor program performance.
13. Whether the local areas in which the eligible provider is located have a demonstrated need for additional English language acquisition programs and civics education programs (Integrated English Literacy and Civic Education).

How to demonstrate effectiveness:

There are two methods for an eligible provider to meet the following requirements:

1. An eligible provider that has received funds under Title II of the WIOA must provide the National Reporting System (NRS) performance data required in Section 116 of WIOA to demonstrate past effectiveness.
2. An eligible provider who has not previously received WIOA Title II funding must provide performance data to demonstrate past effectiveness in serving eligible individuals deficient in basic skills in all the following areas: Reading, Writing, Mathematics, and Learning English.

To meet the demonstrated effectiveness requirements, applicants must submit their performance records and results. All applicants must complete a Past Effectiveness Data Table to determine their demonstrated effectiveness. Each application is reviewed to determine whether it meets the standard of demonstrated effectiveness. Applications that did not provide sufficient evidence of demonstrated effectiveness for two years were eliminated from the competition.

The following results will be used to determine the effectiveness of the eligible educational service providers:

1. Number of eligible people served who are deficient in the basic skills of Reading, Writing, Math, and English
2. Achievement of high school diploma/equivalent
3. Transition to post-secondary education and training

To meet the demonstrated effectiveness requirements, applicants must submit their performance records and results. All applicants must complete a Past Effectiveness Data Table to determine their demonstrated effectiveness.

As of 2023, the PRDE is funding a multiyear award for 2021-2024. For 2025-2028, PRDE-AEP will run a new multiyear competition.

The continuation award process

The continuation award process is as follows: If an eligible service provider is approved and funded, it will receive an initial one-year grant. After the first-year grant, the PRDE can provide a continuation grant for up to three additional years. Continuation grants are subject to demonstrated effectiveness in service delivery. Furthermore, they are subject to the availability of grant funds. After the four-year period, the PRDE may complete a new competition. The PRDE may also extend the competition during an ongoing period if it is considered appropriate and necessary to serve a particular region or rural area where no service providers have shown in or been approved, and no services have been provided for disadvantaged individuals and population groups. An eligible provider can meet these requirements in two ways:

1. An eligible provider that has been funded under Title II of the WIOA must provide the NRS performance data required under Section 116 of the WIOA to demonstrate past effectiveness.
2. An eligible provider that has not been previously funded under Title II of WIOA must provide performance data to demonstrate its past effectiveness in serving eligible individuals with basic skills deficiency in all the following areas: reading, writing, mathematics, and English language acquisition.

The following outcomes will be used to determine the effectiveness of eligible education service providers:

1. The number of eligible individuals who were deficient in basic skills such as reading, writing, math, and English language skills.
2. Attainment of secondary diploma/equivalent
3. Transition to post-secondary education and training

The following will not be considered eligible applicants: Applicants that are not in compliance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 or those applicants that discriminate based on nationality, origin, race, gender, religion, or handicap, sexual orientation, or gender identity, political or religious ideology, disability or physical or mental disability, being a victim of domestic violence, sexual aggression, or stalking. As required by federal regulations, service providers are prohibited from using federal funds to supplant state or local dollars. All federal funding will be used to enhance learner services, as outlined in this Plan. The Adult Education program will conduct competitions under WIOA upon receiving guidance from the USDOE, Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE). Awards to eligible providers will be made available through a Request for Proposal (RFP) application process. To help ensure direct and equitable access to funds for adult literacy and basic skills activities, RFP's will be announced directly to providers and through the regional media. In addition, all providers are considered for grants based on the same criteria. These criteria are aligned with the requirements in this Plan and the thirteen (13) considerations required by WIOA federal legislation.

Providers' grants distribution criteria

The PRDE's Adult Education Program uses the following parameters to distribute funds to approved applicants:

1. No less than 82.5 percent of the grant funds will be used to award grants and contracts under Section 231 and to conduct Section 225, of which no more than 20 percent of such amount shall be available to conduct Section 225.
2. Shall not use more than 12.5 percent of the grants to conduct State Leadership activities under Section 223.
3. Shall not use more than 5 percent of the grant funds, or \$85,000, whichever is greater, for the administrative expenses of the eligible agency.
4. Every effort is made to select at least one eligible provider for each local area of the workforce system in Puerto Rico.

Providers' grants will be distributed based on the ability to meet the following AEFLA purposes outlined in WIOA:

1. Assist adults in becoming literate and obtaining the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and economic self-sufficiency.
2. Assist adults who are parents or family members to become full partners in the academic development of their children.
3. Promote the transition from adult education to post-secondary education and training through career pathways.
4. Assist adults in completing high school and holding a diploma or equivalent certificate.
5. Assist immigrants and English language learners to improve reading, writing, math, and comprehension of the English language and acquire an understanding of the American government, individual freedom, and responsibilities of citizenship.

How Applications will be reviewed for local plan alignment:

To align with the plans of the Local Workforce Development Board, the applicants for funding will describe the alignment between their proposed services and the local WDB plan to demonstrate the extent to which the eligible provider aligns the proposed activities and services with the objectives of the local plan for the activities and services. As required by WIOA (34 CFR 463.21), the AEP will send proposals for funding to the corresponding local WDB. If the delivery area of services proposed by the applicant includes more than one local area of workforce development, the AEP sends proposals to each area for comments and feedback. The Adult Education Program (AEP) will perform the following process to ensure that eligible providers' applications are aligned with the local plan priorities.

1. The AEP program, as an eligible agency, will submit all grant applications to the appropriate Local Board for its review for consistency with the local plan. The AEP provides all the Local Boards with an appropriate time limit for their comments. In

addition, the AEP will give the local board the opportunity to make recommendations to promote alignment with the local plan.

2. The recommendations will be analyzed and incorporated whenever appropriate if they demonstrate alignment with regional needs as identified in the local workforce development plan and serve individuals in the community who were identified in such a plan as most in need of adult education and literacy activities.
3. As described previously in this section, the PRDE's - AEP will fund each eligible provider using the considerations specified in section 231(e) of WIOA to establish or operate programs that provide any of the adult education and literacy activities identified in section 203 of WIOA, including programs that provide such activities concurrently.
4. The AEP Will maintain an evaluation plan to receive input from service providers regarding the implementation and outcomes of the productivity principles, strategies, and tactics to implement section 231 activities. The evaluation plan will be based on visits to service providers by the program facilitators team, analysis of data gathered from the central office student data and information platform and regular semester workshops with service providers' staff.

Productivity principles in service delivery by approved applicant activities

The PRDE's -AEP will emphasize and encourage several productivity principles in service delivery to participants by the approved applicants. These principles include the following:

1. The delivery of adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually, with both workforce preparation activities and workforce providers for a specific occupation or occupational cluster.
2. Delivery of programs that provide participants with contextualization of English language acquisition with employability, workplace, and financial literacy skills, as described in Sec. 129(b)(2)(D) of the WIOA, under the individual career services category.

3. Fostering the requirements of collaborative agreements and formal partnerships as part of the service provider grant application. If an eligible provider does not have the financial and staff resources to provide comprehensive instructional and support services on their own, they must document how they will partner with other adult education providers and partner agencies to fulfill the career pathway plan components and the Thirteen Considerations of WIOA.
4. The delivery of services to adults who are English language learners fully implementing Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) is described below: (1) integration of civics engagement skills into career pathways and workforce preparation activities, including professionals with degrees and credentials; (2) integration of educational technology and hybrid learning (blended learning) models into civics educational activities, including the use of technology and social media to increase learner opportunities for responsible civic engagement; and (3) training and technical assistance on research and evidence-based instructional strategies.

Activities under Integrated education and training:

During 2024-2028, under the Unified Plan for Title II, the AEP will develop, at the local level, under local activities, with local eligible service providers, several IET credentials projects through higher education university partners in high-demand occupations for the hospitality, health care, and business services industries. To address the findings of the new post-pandemic marketplace situation of hard-to-hire occupations, the AEP will expand the offering of activities under Integrated Education and Training (IET) that provides adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with both workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement. Service providers will be required to develop integrated education and training that provides adult education and literacy activities, concurrently and contextually with both workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster.

The industrial and service sectors and conglomerates to be targeted include manufacturing, health professions, technology, and the hospitality industry. In addition, the AEP will promote partnerships with accredited post-secondary and higher education institutions to design and implement programs aimed at credentials for adult education clientele, providing concurrent basic education and occupational training. The AEP will enter partnerships with accredited post-secondary and higher education institutions to design and implement programs aimed at credentials for adult education clientele.

During the program year 2022 a total of 107 participants participated in a service on Integrated Education and training, under leadership activities, in a partnership between the AEP and a higher education institution. This project will be the reference point for a wider program of local activities over the next four years.

Concurrent Basic education and credential earnings pairing academics' content and technical skill strategies for credentials.

The AEP will continue the I-BEST-like strategy used in several states and accepted by the OCTAE for concurrent basic education and credential earnings, pairing academics' content and technical skill strategies for credentials. This model challenges the traditional notion that students must complete basic education before starting to earn credits in a job-training or academic program. This strategy pairs two instructors in the classroom: one to teach professional and technical or credit—bearing academic content and the other to teach basic skills in areas of reading, math, writing, or English language.

Promotion of credential certificates or diplomas for industries and occupations needs for the infrastructure laws.

The Federal government is promoting building Pathways to Infrastructure Jobs and will invest in public-private partnerships to develop, implement, and scale worker-centered sector strategy training programs in industries and occupations critical to meeting the goals of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), formally known as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), Pub. L. No. 117-58. The United will need a skilled workforce to fill the good-paying jobs created by the BIL's historic investment—along with the Creating Helpful

Incentives to Produce Semiconductors (CHIPS) and Science Act, Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), and American Rescue Plan. The PRDE adult education program will support the initiatives underlined under the ETA TEN 08-22N October 21, 2023.

As part of the Unified State Plan 2024-2028 for Title II of WIOA, the Puerto Rico Department of Education Adult Education Program will promote career pathways for adults' program participants using Integrated Education and Training (IET) credentials in demand in labor market, in coordination with post-secondary education technical colleges, employers and apprenticeship programs. The following list include examples of the in demand possible in demand occupation that could be needed to fulfill the industries clusters needs for the infrastructure projects in Puerto Rico under the several infrastructure laws (BILL, CHIPS, IRA), as described above. The detailed occupations included their O*NET identification number are included below.

The specific requirements of education and job training, credentials needed, if any; tasks to be performed, technology skills, general skills and knowledge, abilities, interests, work values, detailed work activities, work context and apprenticeship opportunities are available on O*NET WEB page, by entering the O*NET code. (Ex. O*NET 51- 9061.00)

The final planning for offerings will be validated at local level with the local workforce boards 15 labor market plans and 5 regional plans. Also, will be validated with the State Wagner Peyser labor market information for in-demand job opportunities offered by employers providing services under the federal programs for infrastructure laws. The AEP local eligible service provider providers will reach and coordinate with the local employers' associations such as General Contractors association and individual contractors engaged in infrastructure projects under the infrastructure laws.

- A. Advanced manufacturing occupations that support renewable energy, transportation, and broadband sectors:
 - 1. Inspectors, Testers, Sorters, Samplers, and Weighers (Quality Assurance) (O*NET 51- 9061.00)
 - 2. Assemblers and Fabricators, All Other (O*NET 51-2099.00)

3. Machinists (O*NET 51-4041.00)
 4. Electrical and Electronic Equipment Assemblers
 5. Electromechanical Equipment Assemblers (O*NET 51-2023.00)
- B. Information technology occupations that support renewable energy, transportation, and broadband sectors:
1. Software Developers (O*NET 15-1252.00)
 2. Software Quality Assurance Analysts and Testers (O*NET 15-1253.00)
 3. Network and Computer Systems Administrators (O*NET 15-1244.00)
 4. Computer Systems Analysts (O*NET 15-1211.00)
- C. Professional, scientific, and technical services occupations that support renewable energy, transportation, and broadband sectors:
1. Telecommunication Equipment Installers and Repairers, Except Line Installers (O*NET 49-2022.00)
 2. Telecommunications Line Installers and Repairers (O*NET 49-9052.00)
 3. Civil Engineers (incl. Transportation Engineers) (O*NET 17-2051.00)
 4. Civil Engineering Technologists and Technicians (O*NET 17-3022.00)
 5. Computer Network Support Specialists (O*NET 15-1231.00)
 6. Computer Network Architects (O*NET 15-1241.00)
 7. Calibration Technologists and Technicians (O*NET 17-3028.00)
 8. Electrical and Electronic Engineering Technicians (O*NET 17-3023.00)
 9. Engineering Technologists and Technicians, except Drafters, All Other (O*NET 17-3029.00)
 10. Mechanical Drafters (O*NET 17-3013.00)
 11. Transportation Planners (O*NET 19-3099.01)
 12. Quality Control Analysts (O*NET 19-4099.01)
 13. Commercial and Industrial Designers (O*NET 27-1021.00)
 14. Construction Managers (O*NET 11-9021.00)

Summary of AEP tactics to boost the development of competencies in local activities under section 231(e) of WIOA and in accordance with 34 CFR 463 subpart C.

The following is a summary of the AEP tactics that will be used to boost the development of competencies in local workforce development activities:

1. A project approach strategy for credentials. This aims to expand the offering of activities focused on earning credentials to increase the number of students who earn their high school diploma and English learning or equivalent simultaneously with the entry-level industry-recognized certification/credentials.
2. Update and expand the implementation of the Career Pathways System.
3. Update the Implementation effort of the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCR Standards).
4. Hire academic facilitators who are specialists in the subject for enriching and tempering AEP educational plans. These staff will provide technical assistance to teachers in the program's curriculum, standards and indicators, and proposed changes to update teaching for adult or disabled participants.
5. Technical assistance to service providers is related to all the requirements of the AEP training activities to achieve better academic performance and greater preparation so that adult participants can compete in post-secondary levels and/or in the labor market in the skills that each employer needs.
6. The delivery of services to adults who are English language learners fully implementing Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE).
7. A multiyear competition process to award funding to eligible applicants. A multiyear competition will be issued for four years and implemented under continuation plans for each of the four years.
8. Meeting the state-adjusted levels of performance described in section 116(b)(3) to comply with the requirements of the NRS.

9. Local providers will be accountable for meeting and complying with quality standards for the administration and instruction of Adult Basic Education activities. The effectiveness of programs, services and activities of funding recipients will be assessed through data reviews, monitoring visits, on-site program reviews and self-assessment of program functions and performance.

Other tactics will be used to promote the integration of services provided to the clientele, including the following:

1. Partnership with the public and not-for-profit private institutions to foster new initiatives in integrated education and training.
2. Collaboration with other core programs and partner's agencies at local level.
3. Technical assistance mentoring program for service providers at local level.
4. Fostering the requirements of collaborative agreements and formal partnerships as part of the service provider grant application. If an eligible provider does not have the financial and staff resources to provide comprehensive instructional and support services on their own, they must document how they will partner with other adult education providers and partner agencies to fulfill the career pathway plan components and the Thirteen Considerations of WIOA.
5. Provide resources and services through One-Stop Centers that include orientation for Adult Education program opportunities, career pathways, transition resources, referral processes, and other joint mechanisms developed through agency partnerships.

The AEP Will maintain an evaluation plan to receive input from service providers regarding the implementation and outcomes of the productivity principles, strategies, and tactics to implement section 231 activities. The evaluation plan will be based on visits to service providers by the program facilitators team, analysis of data gathered from the central office student data and information platform and regular semester workshops with service providers' staff.

(d) Correction Education and other Education of Institutionalized Individuals. Describe how the eligible agency will, using the considerations specified in Section 231(e) of WIOA and in accordance with 34 CFR 463 subpart C, fund eligible providers to establish or operate programs that provide any of the following correctional educational programs identified in Section 225 of WIOA:

- Adult education and literacy activities
- Special education, as determined by the eligible agency;
- Secondary school credit
- Integrated education and training
- Career pathways;
- Concurrent enrollment;
- Peer tutoring; and
- Transition to re-entry initiatives and other post-release services with the goal of reducing recidivism.

Each eligible agency using funds provided under Programs for Corrections Education and Other Institutionalized Individuals to conduct a program for criminal offenders within a correctional institution must prioritize serving individuals who are likely to leave the correctional institution within five years of participation in the program.

How the PRDE Adult Education Program will award section 225 activities according to 34 CFR 463 subpart C.

The awards to service providers serving corrections and other institutionalized individuals will follow the same process as other service providers in the competition held. These service providers will participate in the same multiyear competition and must comply with the 13 considerations of the WIOA legislation and the demonstrated effectiveness criteria. The PRDE's AEP will reserve no more than 20 percent of its Federal grant received under WIOA

to provide programs for corrections education and education for other institutionalized individuals, as described in Section 225.

Areas targeted through this program will include increased basic skills to obtain a high school diploma; readiness to transition successfully into the community and workforce; adults with disabilities literacy and adult secondary education skills; integration of digital literacy skills; English literacy courses; education and development of workforce preparation skills through coordination with vocational education; and use of the career pathway model for fostering a transition from correction facilities to employment and professional development for adult education teachers participating in correction programs through innovative strategies, which include the development of 21st century skills, STEM, and employability skills in a contextualized environment.

Each eligible agency using funds provided under Programs for Corrections Education and Other Institutionalized Individuals, to conduct a program for criminal offenders within a correctional institution, must give priority to serving individuals who are likely to leave the correctional institution within 5 years of participation in the program. Section 225 (a) of WIOA states that, from funds made available under Section 221(a)(1) for a fiscal year, each eligible agency shall conduct corrections in education or education for other institutionalized individuals.

The funds should be used for the cost of education programs for criminal offenders in correctional institutions, other institutionalized individuals, and other individuals, including programs for adult education and literacy services, special education as determined by the eligible agency, secondary school credits, integrated education and training, career pathways, concurrent enrollment, peer tutoring and transition to re-entry initiatives, and other post-release services with the goal of reducing recidivism.

In addition, the integration of digital literacy skills, English literacy courses, education and development of workforce preparation, and professional development of adult education teachers through innovative strategies.

(d) **Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education Program.**

Describe how the eligible agency will, using the considerations specified in section 231(e) of WIOA and in accordance with 34 CFR 463 subpart C, fund eligible providers to establish or operate Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) programs under section 243 of WIOA. Describe how adult English language learners, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries, are served in IELCE programs.

Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will be offered in combination with integrated education and training activities found in 34 CFR section 463.36.

Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will include instruction in literacy and English language acquisition and instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation.

Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under Section 243(a) of the WIOA will be designed to prepare adults who are English language learners for and place such adults in unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency.

Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will be designed to integrate with the local workforce development system and its functions to conduct the activities of the program.

The Adult Education Program will implement an IELCE program based on the model of co-enrollment of participants in an IET program provided within the local or regional workforce development area. Section 243 funds would be used to support IET activities. The AEP will open a new competition for all programs during the 2025 Spring season. In this section, the AEP will focus on IET short-term credentials for in-demand occupations in the labor market, particularly industrial clusters of services for hotels and hospitality, health professions, and services to business.

All eligible providers with an interest in serving individuals in need of IELCE services and activities can participate in multiyear competition and must comply with the demonstrated

effectiveness criteria described in the previous sections of this document. The plans submitted for funding, if approved, and in compliance with demonstrated effectiveness, will be reviewed for local plan alignment by the local areas' workforce development boards. Local boards' recommendations will be considered and approved if they comply with the rules and regulations in force.

The IELCE project will include the following activities as required by WIOA section 243:

1. Provide instruction in literacy and English language learning, civic participation, rights and responsibilities of citizens, and training for the workforce. Activities must be provided in combination with integrated education and training.
2. Prepare adults who are English Language Learners (ELLs) for non-subsidized employment in occupations or career pathways, leading to economic self-sufficiency.
3. Assisting English language learners to achieve proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension.
4. Direct the adult to a high school diploma or its equivalent (Equivalency Exam).
5. Direct English language learners enter post-secondary education or training.
6. Offer education for adults in combination with IET.

The curriculum will include the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic instruction, literacy, and English language acquisition instruction. The program will be designed to prepare adults who are English language learners for and place such adults in unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency, which will be designed to integrate with the local workforce development system.

The instructional strategy will include the following tactical elements:

1. Standardized lesson plans that represent all required IELCE content,

2. Standards-aligned curriculum that integrates civic education into English language acquisition,
3. Classroom observations and observations.
4. It will begin with a study unit evaluating the level and/or knowledge of the participants.
5. The program ensures that all instructions, materials, and activities are appropriate, rigorous, and promote productive challenges.
6. Use contextualization: Activate background knowledge, use peer teaching, and group work.
7. Themes, topics, and/or civic objectives will be used to create a context for instruction. We will start with what is familiar to the participants/students. Previous knowledge is activated before a new topic or topic is introduced.
8. Relevance criteria will be developed around the topic that is applicable to the lives of participants and students.

The AEP will suggest the eligible services providers the possible strategies in course activities in the IELCE program as follows: complementary tutoring, language laboratories, conversation classes, reading clubs, double enrollment, contextualized instruction, and distance education. In addition, will include mock interviews with local recruiters, presentations of local companies, occupational exploration, work success courses, job preparation skills courses (soft skills), job mentoring activities, information sessions, and recruiting events to connect students with local employers.

The AEP will require the local eligible services providers to implement the following recruitment strategies: focus groups, relationships with the community, development of partnerships with WIOA partners and community partners and presentations in class to enrolled students about the IELCE program. It will include, in addition, recruitment among colleagues. Other recruitment strategies will include using ads on social networks, seeking

support from other adult education programs and classes, participation in job fairs, seeking support from WIOA OneStop Centers in all 15 WIOA local areas and meetings with local organizations and businesses such as faith-based organizations, community-oriented organizations, etc.

In addition, the AEP will promote the development of alliances with OneStop centers to provide access to our participants to support services in One Stop Centers with the resources available in such centers for that purpose, including:

1. Administer a pre-test before the start of class.
2. Offer incentives to participate such as support services (childcare, transportation, any WIOA Title I stipend
3. Offer convenient schedules. Flexible class schedules, with virtual options
4. Offer laptops or technology programs.
5. Pay additional expenses related to the course in coordination with the WIOA OneStop centers.
6. Development of an admission process that allows for evaluation and selection of appropriate participants.

All IELCE content must be delivered with materials and instructions that align with content standards adopted by the state and the English language.

The IELCE program under Section 243 will be an original activity. There is no previous experience and no evaluation about program effectiveness.

(e) **State Leadership.**

A. Describe how the State will use the funds to conduct the required State Leadership activities under Section 223 of the WIOA.

DEPR-AEP performs the following four required activities under Section 223:

1. Alignment of adult education and literacy activities with other core programs and one-stop partners to implement strategies identified in the unified State plan, including the development of career pathways to provide access to employment and training services for adult education participants.
2. Operate high-quality professional development programs to improve adult education instruction, including incorporating essential components of reading instruction, instruction related to the specific needs of adult learners, instruction provided by volunteers or other personnel and dissemination of information about models and promising practices.
3. Provision of technical assistance to local providers receiving funds including the development and dissemination of instructional and programmatic practices based on the best available research in reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, English language acquisition, distance education, and staff training. Promoting the role of local providers as one-stop partners and helping with the use of technology, including staff training, and improving efficiency.
4. Monitoring and evaluation of the quality of and improvement in adult education and dissemination of information about models and proven or promising practices within the State.

In addition, under the previous paragraphs requiring a general description of the activities, the AEP will perform during the 2024-2028 Unified Plan for Title II projects in different local areas in the following activity areas:

1. Employer-based training activities in partnership with employers as a tool to help workers learn new skills and evolve within their companies or industries in small businesses in on-demand hospitality, tourism, and health occupations. Increased employer engagement would help the workforce system expand access to new industries and occupations, as well as increase the credibility of training in the business community. The ability to acquire training and skills at work provides an advantage for workers looking to improve their skills more easily and quickly.

2. Develop partnership training programs with industrial sector clusters between two or more employers to train workers for in-demand, high-wage jobs, matching worker demand with local needs in credential programs.
3. Strengthen partnerships with not-for-profit organizations and the job training system in WIOA partners with funding for supportive services to enable more referrals and ensure that anyone in Title II and other WIOA partners have access to supportive services to complete their education. Those services include transportation, childcare, work clothes and supplies, expenses that often hinder participation in programs and overall career progress.
4. Promote a change in American Job Centers (AJCs) to transform them into career centers for all jobseekers in Puerto Rico. Services should be available to people who are out of work, as well as those who want to upgrade their skills to keep up with the changing demands of their job and those who want to change industries or a career change. AJCs need to modernize their operations, provide virtual services, and expand their reach to the workforce.
5. Promote a jail-based American Job Center (AJC) in coordination with the WIOA 15 local areas, aims to increase inmates' employment readiness for the labor market and to better streamline cooperation between workforce and correction agencies. Incarcerated individuals cannot access AJCs. While available to them after their release, the absence of coordinated pre-release job-seeking services is a disadvantage that plays an outsized role in their economic conditions.
6. Provide specialized professional training to teachers in the 21st Century, STEM, employability, and workforce preparation skills are important for competitiveness in the global labor market.
7. Encourage employers to invest in Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAP) and Industry Recognized Apprenticeship Programs (IRAP). To support workers in apprenticeships by providing WIOA funding to demonstration pilot projects. This is a proven model to help job seekers start working immediately and increase their skills

and earnings, and an effective strategy for connecting with businesses in diverse fields and meeting their workforce needs.

a) Update and expand the career pathways initiative: The DEPR-AEP will update and expand the implementation of the Career Pathways system during the 2024-2028 Unified Plan period. It is the goal to have 100% of eligible education providers centers island-wide in Puerto Rico certified with career pathways strategic plan tailored to their local needs. The career pathway initiative is under implementation, including the development of an individual employability plan for each participant with career pathway options. In addition, the AEP has initiated a process for registering participants in the One Stop American Job Center's to maximize the integration of services. The career pathways initiative will be expanded with the following goals:

- a. Making use of the Career Pathways Plan as a strategic planning tool that aligns and bridges training, education, employment, and supportive services at the local and state levels, partnering with employers, enabling individuals to move beyond adult basic education and succeed in post-secondary education, earn industry-recognized credentials, and advance along a career path.
- b. Integrating adult basic education and occupational skills training to enable individuals to increase their educational learning gains and earn industry-recognized credentials while completing basic skills training, as well as connecting the systems and structures that serve individuals with lower skills through mechanisms such as effective contextualized programs that result in increased mastery of basic skills and attainment of credentials that are relevant to employers.
- c. The AEP is aware of the existing gap between labor force skills and the needs of employers in many high-growth industries, including healthcare, technology, tourism, and manufacturing. This gap creates structural unemployment, while well-paying jobs go unfilled, and many low-skilled

adults are trapped in low-wage jobs with little opportunity for career advancement. The career pathways model aims to address the economy's vital need for skilled workers while offering low-wage workers the opportunity to obtain education and training they need to succeed in the labor market.

- d. To achieve these goals, the career pathways approach offers low-skilled adults well-articulated training and employment ladders targeted at locally in-demand jobs combined with supportive services. This approach presupposes that post-secondary education and training should be organized as a series of manageable steps, leading to successively better credentials and employment opportunities in growing occupations. Each step is designed to prepare participants for the next level of employment and education and to provide a credential with labor market value.
- e. The AEP career pathways model will include partnerships with providers, including community-based organizations, community and technical colleges, human services and workforce agencies, and employers. The model will be designed to allow entries, exits, and re-entries, depending on skill levels and prior training, employment prospects, and changing personal situations. The model will have the following main components:
 - i. Basic and occupational skills instruction delivered concurrently to support accelerated entry into college-level occupational training programs and credentials for those participants with skill levels too low to meet entry requirements.
 - ii. Instructors overlap, integrated basic skills and occupational training instruction, allowing participants to build knowledge about the industry while increasing their basic skills.
 - iii. Participants will be exposed to work environments through a diversity of instructional tools, including labs, internships, and shadow jobs (job exploration tours).

- iv. Academic and non-academic supportive services to help participants persist in their programs: guidance and assistance to apply for available financial resources, access to standard college support services such as tutoring, employment linkages to local industries, and access to college career centers.

- v. Finally, the Puerto Rico Department of Education Adult Education State Leadership activities will support the initiatives underlined under the ETA TEN 08-22N October 21, 2023, to encourage the public workforce system, mainly through our partnership with the 16 American Job Centers system in operation in Puerto Rico, to engage in workforce development planning and training activities to attract, retain, and empower a diverse qualified infrastructure workforce. The main strategy will be to focus on linking local workforce partners' capacity to meet infrastructure project needs, seeking practices with a track record for delivering and opening access to high quality training. Through partnerships with employers, technical colleges, and adult education eligible service providers we will aim to enable workers and employers to achieve shared goals and change systems through the creation of effective education and workforce training programs that will ensure workers build the skillsets necessary to fill and grow into locally available infrastructure jobs by focusing Integrated Education and Training activities on credentials for the in-demand occupations as described in our Title II Unified Plan section on local activities. The final planning for offerings will be validated at local level with the local workforce boards labor market plans and the local Wagner Peyser labor market information for in-demand job opportunities offered by employers providing services under the federal programs for infrastructure laws.

B. Describe how the State will use the funds to conduct permissible State Leadership Activities under Section 223 of the WIOA, if applicable.

The DEPR-AEP will perform several permissible activities under Section 223, including technology instruction investments, curriculum development, achieving performance objectives, and transition to post-secondary education. The PRDE's-AEP will work collaboratively with other core programs and partner's agencies to expand access to education, training and employment opportunities for adults, people with disabilities and individuals facing barriers to employment, thus contributing to further our economic development. The AEP program will provide resources and services through One-Stop Centers that include orientation for Adult Education program opportunities, career pathways, transition resources, referral processes, and other joint mechanisms developed through agency partnerships. The PRDE Adult Education Program will develop the following permissible activities under Section 223 of the WIOA:

1. Foster a technology culture.

Foster a technological culture for the development and implementation of technology applications, translation technology, distance education, and professional development to support the use of instructional technology.

- Incorporation of Internet service technology into adult education classrooms.
- Preparation and setting of interactive classrooms in instruction centers.
- Incorporating the online public domain and subscription-based search platforms in interactive classrooms.
- Promoting the role of local providers as one-stop partners and helping with the use of technology, including staff training, and improving efficiency.
- A project under leadership activities to implement a professional development on Low-Tech Options for Virtual Learning
 - How can connectivity issues be overcome in virtual environments?
 - How can several types of technology be used during a virtual class?

- How to choose EdTech tools for the virtual environment?
- What are the best low-tech activity options for a virtual environment?
- Videoconferencing – How to set multiple cell phone users in the same location when no other platform is available.

DEPR-AEP will foster the development and implementation of technology applications, translation technology, distance education, and professional development to support the use of instructional technology. This activity will be performed in compliance with the criteria number seven (7) of the 13 considerations of WIOA, that requires to consider “whether the eligible provider’s activities effectively use technology, services, and delivery systems, including distance education, is sufficient to increase the amount and quality of learning and how such technology, services, and systems lead to improved performance”. Considering this commitment, the DEPR-AEP will develop and implement the following activities:

- a) Incorporation of Internet service technology into any remaining adult education classrooms without that service. DEPR-AEP will expand efforts to incorporate Internet technology into adult education classrooms. The internet has become a powerful tool for communication. It has revolutionized communication, to the extent where we utilize the Internet in everything we do. In education classrooms, the Internet breaks down communication barriers, as its portability enhances collaboration between students and teachers. Internet access is one of the important technologies in education; it allows the adult education clientele to connect to Internet technology without wires. The school Internet facilitates better education through dependable, secure, and supported wireless connectivity, which provides students and staff with the ability to work and connect across all areas of the campus. Internet technology facilitates learning through distance education.
- b) Preparation and setting of interactive classrooms in instruction centers. The AEP will continue to invest funds in developing interactive classrooms with smart boards, Internet access, learning platforms, online resources and learning material libraries to enhance learning on any remaining adult education classrooms without that

service. An interactive classroom fosters spontaneity and flexibility, allowing teachers to draw and comment on a wide variety of web resources. It allows teachers to save time in the classroom, print if necessary, including notes made during the lesson, reduce duplication of effort, and facilitate review. It can be used to conduct videoconferences, attractive presentations, staff training, distance meetings, information sessions and group discussions. Therefore, it is also an excellent information technology and telecommunications (ICT) resource for teachers' professional development. Other benefits that teachers and students can find with the use of the interactive classroom is to have a tool that, in addition to the contents of the book, presents a technological combination in a reflective, contextualized, and strategic way, which gives students the possibility of access to critical and constructive education, in which each one is the manager of their own change and pedagogical progress.

c) Provision of portable notebooks in classrooms. The AEP will continue equipping classrooms with portable computers notebooks in any remaining adult education classrooms without that service. Schools across the country have experimented by providing students with notebooks to facilitate learning. Providing students with notebooks for use in the classroom and at home improves their learning in several subjects, including science, math, and English. Students receive more feedback on their writing, editing, and revising their work more often, drawing on a wider range of resources to write, publish, or share their work with others. The benefits of using computer notebooks in adult education classrooms include the following:

- Fostering online collaboration with other students.
- Providing curriculum support and additional information to students.
- Promoting better organization: Notebooks help students keep track of their assignments and utilize online school calendars.
- Allowing students to receive and view assignments online and submit their work via e-mail rather than being required to print them.

2. Expansion of the distance education program

The AEP will expand the actual distance education program to provide the necessary space to allow teachers to boost the learning and skill gains of adult learners in geographical areas, including limited access or remote areas, in the mountain zones of Puerto Rico where the availability of education-eligible service providers is limited. The distance education strategy will include two modalities: blended (hybrid) distance education and full-distance education in a long-range stage, with emphasis on the last one.

The distance education program initiative will provide the necessary space to allow teachers to boost the learning and skill gains of adult learners. The distance education strategy will include two modalities:

- Blended (hybrid) distance education. This strategy uses a combination of face to face and online learning activities where computer-mediated activities replace “seat-time” in the classroom. It is the “blend” that makes each course unique; thus, blended/hybrid courses can take on different attributes, adjusted to the situation of each classroom and student.
- Full distance education in a long-range stage, in which education is provided without the teacher and students being physically present together at any or most part of the program.

The initiative will allow teachers to develop supplemental activities and materials, fill gaps and address skills as they become more familiar with the curriculum over time. AEP will promote the use of technology platforms for distance education. The AEP will promote a full-distance educational approach using technology platforms.

2. Collaboration with other core programs and partner’s agencies

PRDE's AEP will work collaboratively with other core programs and partner agencies to expand access to education, training, and employment opportunities for adult learners. The AEP will provide resources and services through American Job Centers (One-Stop Centers) including orientation about program opportunities, career pathways, transition resources,

referral processes, and other joint mechanisms developed through agency partnerships. The Adult Education Program has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the 16 American Job Centers (AJC) for collaboration and is, under the financial possibilities of the agency, contributing to infrastructure costs for the operations of the AJC. The AEP maintains a staff member on each of the 16 One-Stop Centers one day a week to evaluate potential adult education participants and make referrals to the adult education service providers approved by the AEP for services. These AEP employees make cross referrals between the One-Stop centers and the AEP service providers.

3. Inter-agency collaboration with the Vocational and Technical Education Division within the PRDE.

The AEP will continue its efforts to coordinate credentials' activities in partnership with the Career and Technical Education (CTE) Assistant Secretariat (Vocational Education Program) at the DEPR and the technology institutes administered by the CTE under the PRDE. This initiative aims to implement integrated education and training programs that provides adult education and literacy activities, concurrently and contextually with both workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster.

4. Activities under Integrated education and training

During 2024-2028, under the Unified Plan for Title II, the AEP will continue to develop several IET credentials projects through higher education university partners in high-demand occupations for the hospitality, health care and business services industries. State research has determined that these are careers in high demand in the labor market. To address the findings of the new post-pandemic marketplace situation of hard-to-hire occupations, the AEP will expand the offering of activities under integrated education and training (IET) that provides adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with both workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement. Service providers will be required to develop integrated education and training that

provides adult education and literacy activities, concurrently and contextually with both workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster.

The industrial and service sectors and conglomerates to be targeted include manufacturing, health professionals, technology, and the hospitality industry. In addition, the AEP will promote partnerships with accredited post-secondary and higher education institutions to design and implement programs aimed at credentials for adult educational participants, providing concurrent basic education and occupational training. The AEP will enter partnerships with accredited post-secondary and higher education institutions to design and implement programs aimed at credentials for adult education participants.

5. Update the Implementation effort of the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCR Standards):

The College and Career ready standards are designed to be relevant to the real world, allow students to master more critical thinking and unique critical thinking skills, and reflect the knowledge, skills, and social foundations that our students need for success in both college and work. These standards require the implementation of the critical skills and knowledge expected by employers and are required for success in workforce training, post-secondary education, and employment. The College and Career Readiness Standards (CCR) for adult education presents a set of College and Career Readiness Standards that reflect the content most relevant to preparing adult students for success in colleges, technical training programs and transition to work. This effort will also promote English language acquisition and civic education. DE-AEP will also focus on updating the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCR Standards) to link basic education for adults, post-secondary education, and the world of work.

6. Operating high-quality professional development programs.

The DEPR-AEP is committed to developing high-quality professional development activities and support services that will help teachers and instructors better understand the career pathway systems and expand their professional knowledge.

- a) Professional development for career pathway updates. Areas and themes related to the development and delivery of career pathway systems that would help low-skilled adults transition into post-secondary education and employment or those with disabilities include the following:
- b) Design of Contextualized Instruction, including the STEM approach.
- c) Integration of employability skills into the classroom.
- d) Integration of career pathways into the curriculum framework of adult education programs.
- e) Integration of career counseling and planning into adult education.
- f) Focusing participants on career pathways.

7. Implementation of online professional development for teachers.

The AEP will develop an online professional development program for adult education teachers. There are several benefits for adult education in the efforts for professional development for teachers: students have better learning outcomes and teachers learn better ways to teach, develop better organization and planning skills and gain knowledge. Online professional development adds flexibility to teachers. In an online class, teachers can work at their own pace and access classes at any time of the day from any working technical location. Online professional development provides an open schedule and great flexibility and can decrease stress for teachers and students. Online courses are typically more affordable than in-person ones. Technology reduces the cost of delivering professional development in several ways. Teachers can save money on gasoline, clothes, and books. The Department of Education can save money on renting spaces, printed materials, and furniture. Therefore, it is an excellent choice for both parties to consider online professional development courses.

8. Provision of technical assistance to eligible providers of adult education and literacy activities.

The plan for providing technical assistance to service providers will include the following:

- a) Technical assistance in curriculum thematic areas.

- b) Academic supervision offers mentoring and coaching in both the content and the andragogy process.
- c) Training and technical assistance for the integration of digital literacy skills into adult education and literacy activities.
- d) Training on the administration of pre- and post-tests standardized by the National Reporting System (NRS) and the descriptors of each level of functioning were used to measure educational gain and training on the monitoring of achievements of the core measures for the NRS.

9. Methodologies for the implementation of activities data analysis, evaluation, and career pathways development

The AEP will implement several methodologies for the implementation of activities data analysis, evaluation, and career pathways development. The data analysis will be focused on compliance with the following NRS requirements:

- a) The Assessment policies
- b) The NRS quarterly reports
- c) The NRS Data quality checklist for collecting and produce accurate and reliable data
- d) The NRS annual narrative report, including activities evaluation of outcomes.

The AEP Will also monitor on a regular basis the career pathways implementation strategy by reviewing the local career pathways plan developed and approved by the AEP for each local education service providers.

(F)Assessing Quality. Describe how the eligible agency will assess the quality of adult education providers and literacy activities under Title II. Describe how the eligible agency will take actions to improve such quality, including providing the activities described in Section 223(a)(1)(B) of WIOA. Describe how the eligible agency will use evaluations, data analysis, program monitoring, or other methods to improve the quality of adult educational activities in the State.

To assess quality, the DEPR-AEP will enforce criteria number 3 of the 13 considerations of the WIOA, regarding the past effectiveness of the eligible education service providers in

improving the literacy of eligible individuals. This follows the requirement of meeting state-adjusted levels of performance for the primary indicators of performance described in WIOA Section 116, especially with respect to eligible individuals who have low levels of literacy. In addition, all applications submitted for funding must comply with Section 231 and the stipulations of this Plan regarding the submission of applications. In addition to those included in the application, applicants must comply with the following requirements and activities implementation criteria:

1. Submit clear and measurable goals and objectives that promote higher student achievement and performance. Their performance levels must satisfy those established at the state level.
2. Demonstrate through measurable outcomes and performance measures, their past effectiveness in helping participants attain higher literacy skills, especially at the lowest levels of literacy.
3. Student performance, retention and promotion must be reported to the State, as might be required, through its new student information system.
4. Must be evidence that they are serving the most in need (low-income and low-literacy students) through needs assessments and community analysis.
5. Programs must be of sufficient intensity and duration; therefore, they must meet the requirements established by the State for programs that assist participants in attaining a high school diploma or in the transition to post-secondary education and training using career pathways. Sufficient intensity and duration must be demonstrated by an operational design that is appropriate for meeting the established performance measures. The integration of prioritized literacy-based workforce preparation skills and digital literacy skills in the instruction delivered under the content domains will be strongly encouraged for all programs.
6. Programs must be based on adult education practices that are supported by the most rigorous or scientifically valid research available and the use of strategies that have proven to be effective and documented through research, such as career pathways, standard-based education and PRDE's adult education academic content standards.

7. Service providers must hold programs in a non-threatening environment where real-life and lifelong learning skills are promoted. These strategies are critical for participants in preparing productive and contributing members of the community for the global economy.
8. Professional development for all adult education program personnel must meet the high-quality standards established by the PRDE in terms of credit hours and intensity of training. The PRDE supports adult educators in learning and applying practices based on the most rigorous or scientifically valid research available.
9. Local service providers must demonstrate how they will implement a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with all appropriate agencies such as universities, training programs, schools, employers, and other government agencies to effectively coordinate services for adults in their programs.
10. Local service providers must commit to providing all the required data to the PRDE and comply with the Student Information System. Student performance, retention and promotion must be reported to the State, as might be required, through the new student information system. This element is essential for tracking students and assessing their performance. Local providers will be trained for data collection and submission procedures and will be required to submit all the required data within the deadlines established by the Adult Education program.
11. Local service providers of English Literacy and Conversational English must substantiate the need for these programs in the community and describe how their programs will effectively address participants' needs and document program outcomes.
12. The Adult Education program encourages service providers to offer programs on a flexible schedule and ample support services to enable adults to attend and complete these programs. Workplace literacy providers must offer flexible schedules and locations to accommodate the needs of working adults. The Adult Education program promotes support services, such as childcare and transportation among local service providers.

Local providers will be accountable for meeting and complying with quality standards for the administration and instruction of basic adult education activities. The effectiveness of the programs, services and activities of funding recipients will be assessed through the DEPR Monitoring Division. The Division employs the following methods to assess programs and evaluate program improvement: data reviews, monitoring visits, on-site program reviews and self-assessment of program functions and performance. Any time a service provider is asked for a corrective action plan to improve in a particular area, AEP personnel will provide technical assistance and support to improve the quality of the adult educational activities of the service provider.

The monitoring of programs implementation

The AEP implements a monitoring process for program implementation activities. The monitoring process consists of three key components: ongoing, data-based desk audits, educational program reviews and on-site program monitoring.

1. The AEP state office will review a sample of programs for compliance with the WIOA requirements. Programs that score high on risk analysis for such things as having a new director, consistent late or incorrect reporting, not meeting objectives, or fiscal irregularities become priorities for monitoring. Programs that do not meet their responsibilities and/or objectives are provided with additional technical assistance to help them achieve full compliance.
2. The AEP Student Information System staff at the central office will regularly review student performance data and other program information. Programs receiving AEFLA or state funds must enter student data at least monthly into the managed student information system, our NRS compliant managed information system. Local programs must collect and document student information regarding their goals, educational functioning levels, progress, and achievements. Programs review data at least quarterly to ensure completeness and accuracy and to determine their standing regarding projected outcome targets. The managed platform will generate annual reports on student performance measures for submission to OCTAE.

3. The AEP will conduct on-site reviews at least every five years guided by a review instrument. Onsite program reviews provide an additional effective tool for continuous improvement.

Assessing the quality of activities for professional development

Section 223(a)(1)(B) of WIOA (B) requires... “the establishment or operation of high quality professional development programs to improve the instruction provided pursuant to local activities required under section 231(b), including instruction incorporating the essential components of reading instruction as such components relate to adults, instruction related to the specific needs of adult learners, instruction provided by volunteers or by personnel of a State or outlying area, and dissemination of information about models and promising practices related to such programs.”

Participants in professional development activities were surveyed after all workshops, conference presentations, and webinars to evaluate and provide feedback on the activity or event. The annual training plan includes state priorities, input from surveys on training needs and advice from professional development presenters. Survey results are reviewed by the professional development team at the AEP central office. In designing an annual professional development plan, the AEP uses an assessment tool to assess the professional development activities implemented to determine the extent to which adult service professionals have core competencies and skills relevant to their competency field. The assessment tool will include a list of items to examine competencies relevant to the core adult participants’ activities.

The assessment will identify areas of strength, areas for improvement, and the next steps for planning. The assessment tool will inform the AEP about the quality of staff capacity and will also serve as a baseline for evaluating the outcome of the professional development plan. The staff will rank how relevant they believe each competency is to their job responsibilities, how knowledgeable or skilled they believe they are in each competency, how much training they have in each competency, and other competencies.

Performance accountability

Performance accountability assesses the effectiveness of grantees in achieving continuous improvement in adult education and literacy activities. The performance outcome measures consist of the following core indicators:

1. Percentage of program participants in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after program exit.
2. Percentage of program participants in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after program exit.
3. The median earnings of program participants in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exiting the program.
4. The percentage of program participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized post-secondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains toward such a credential or employment.
5. Indicators of effectiveness in serving employers were established pursuant to the WIOA.
6. Measurement of the effectiveness of service providers in the previous delivery of services.
7. Review and consideration of the local workforce Boards comments on the service providers' proposal in terms of alignment with the regional plan of each concerned local area.

Program accountability is measured using the following outcome measures:

1. Measurable skill gains (MSG) are reported during regularly established survey schedules as required by the National Reporting System. This is based on the lowest functioning level in which the participant earned at least one eligible literacy

completion point, earned a diploma in secondary education, or exited and enrolled in a post-secondary career and technical education by the end of the reporting year.

2. Credential Attainment Rate measures student attainment of a secondary school diploma, recognized equivalent, or enrolled in post-secondary education or career training within one year of exit.
3. Employment Rate (second quarter after exit) measures the number of participants that exit during the reporting period who are employed during the second quarter after exit divided by the number of those that exited during the reporting period.
4. Median Earnings (second quarter after exit) for all exiting in a core program, the report of the wage that is at the midpoint between the highest and lowest wages earned in the second quarter after exit.
5. Employment Rate (fourth quarter) for the number of participants exiting during the reporting period who are employed during the fourth quarter after exit divided by the number of those exiting during the reporting period.

Each fiscal year, the Adult Education program negotiates the proposed target percentages for each of the core indicators of performance with the USDOE, Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE). Each local program is responsible for meeting or exceeding negotiated performance targets.

Table 53. ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAM CERTIFICATIONS AND ASSURANCES:

States must provide written and signed certifications that:	
1.	The plan is submitted by the State agency that is eligible to submit the plan;

2.	The State agency has authority under State law to perform the functions of the State under the program;
3.	The State legally may conduct each provision of the plan;
4.	All provisions of the plan are consistent with State law;
5.	A State officer, specified by title in the certification, has authority under State law to receive, hold, and disburse Federal funds made available under the plan;
6.	The State officer who is submitting the plan, specified by the title in the certification, has authority to submit the plan;
7.	The agency that is submitting the plan has adopted or otherwise formally approved the plan; and
8.	The plan is the basis for State operation and administration of the program;
The State Plan must include assurances that:	
1.	The eligible agency will expend funds appropriated to conduct title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) only in a manner consistent with fiscal requirements under section 241(a) of WIOA (regarding the supplement-not-supplant requirement);
2.	The eligible agency will ensure that there is at least one eligible provider serving each local area, as defined in section 3(32) of WIOA;

3.	The eligible agency will not use any funds made available under title II of WIOA for the purpose of supporting or providing programs, services, or activities for individuals who are not “eligible individuals” within the meaning of section 203(4) of WIOA, unless it is providing programs, services or activities related to family literacy activities, as defined in section 203(9) of WIOA;
4.	Using funds made available under title II of WIOA to conduct a program for criminal offenders within a correctional institution, the eligible agency will give priority to serving individuals who are likely to leave the correctional institution within five years of participation in the program.
5.	The eligible agency agrees that in expending funds made available under Title II of WIOA, the eligible agency will comply with sections 8301 through 8303 of the Buy American Act (41 U.S.C. 8301-8303).

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA)

Instructions: In the text box below, describe the steps the applicant proposes to take to ensure equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally Assisted Program for students, teachers, and other program beneficiaries with special needs provide information to meet the requirements of Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA), consistent with the following instructions.

OMB Control No. 1894-0005 (Exp. 04/30/2020)

Puerto Rico Adult Education Program (AEP) General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) Section 427 certification for the 2020-2023 WIOA-AEFLA unified plan.

All program activities for the Adult Education Program (AEP) at the Puerto Rico Department of Education will comply with Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA), which outlines the six types of barriers that can impede equitable access or participation in

program activities, including gender, race, national origin, color, disability, and age. AEP program activities target adult students of different genders, races, national origins, colors, disabilities, and ages, to the fullest extent possible. No participant will be denied participation in program activities based on gender, race, national origin, color, age, or disability. The AEP State Director will monitor program activities to ensure that equitable participation in program activities is not limited by gender, race, national origin, color, disability, or age. The AEP will implement the following specific measures:

1. The Department of Education of Puerto Rico has an active Reasonable Accommodation Policy that includes policies and procedures that provide the necessary accommodation for each person with disabilities in our school community. Additionally, the Adult Education Program complied with this requirement in eligibility consideration No. 2. This section outlines the requirements put in place by each educational provider to disclose their accommodation policy contemplating accommodation for the disabled population, including those with learning disabilities, as established in Section 231(e)(2) of the WIOA, which requires that each application of funds disclose how they will provide accommodations for physical, mental, and learning disabilities. These include students, teachers, and all other personnel in the educational provider-school community. This requirement is considered during the evaluation process of the application submission process as established and in compliance with Section 427 of the GEPA Law.
2. Use of Leadership funds to meet GEPA requirements: PRDE - AEP is using leadership funds to create a systematic process that uses technology to level the playing field by providing equity and access to all students while offering strategies using technology that impacts a broad range of students with diverse learning needs. Students will also have continual access to learning resources, expertise, authoritative sources, online tutoring and guided courses, information management, and communication tools. In addition, students will have access to digital learning resources with interactive technologies and relevant learning experiences from a blended delivery model that uses digital content and teacher instruction. All AEP service providers have been

provided with interactive classrooms, the Internet, digital smart boards, and computers. In addition, blended learning methods are used to meet students' diverse learning needs. Students will be empowered to take ownership of their learning and develop self-directed goals to document their strengths, goals, progress toward college, career readiness, and career pathways. This effort on career pathways will be of significant value in providing equity and access to all participants to a transition from unemployment, very low-income brackets to a quality job opportunity, or post-secondary education.

3. Create a systematic process that uses technology to level the playing field by providing equity and access to all students while offering strategies using technology that impacts a broad range of students with diverse learning needs. Students will also have continual access to learning resources, expertise, authoritative sources, online tutoring and guided courses, information management, and communication tools. In addition, students will have access to digital learning resources with interactive technologies and relevant learning experiences from a blended delivery model that uses digital content and teacher instruction. Blended learning methods will be utilized to meet the diverse learning needs of students. Students will be empowered to take ownership of their learning and develop self-directed goals to document their strengths, goals, progress toward college, career readiness, and career pathways.
4. The AEP recognizes that some low-income students and students in rural settings are unable to access ABE instructions because they do not have transportation. The AEP will provide students with ABE instruction via technology to eliminate distance and transportation barriers.
5. The AEP will build the capacity for transformation to a technology-driven culture in rural areas that advances access and enables teacher efficacy, achievement, and engagement for all students.
6. To provide highly qualified teachers with rigorous instruction, AEP will include a transition to allowing students access to the most effective teachers via technology.

We will ensure that students have access to the most effective teachers, while enhancing the capacity of highly qualified teachers.

NOTICE TO ALL APPLICANTS

Review of linked documents. Where “applicant” is mentioned, that refers to the State eligible agency and “application” refers to the state plan. This element does not apply to local providers for state-planning purposes. State-eligible agencies are required to maintain local GEPA responses separately from the state plan. The State-eligible agency must respond to GEPA regarding the use of AEFLA State Administration and State Leadership funds in the State Plan.

The purpose of this enclosure is to inform you about the following provision in the Department of Education's General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) that applies to applicants for new grant awards under Department programs. This provision is Section 427 of GEPA, enacted as part of the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (Public Law (P.L.) 103-382).

To Whom Does This Provision Apply?

Section 427 of the GEPA affects applicants for new grant awards under this program. **ALL APPLICANTS FOR NEW AWARDS MUST INCLUDE INFORMATION IN THEIR APPLICATIONS TO ADDRESS THIS NEW PROVISION IN ORDER TO RECEIVE FUNDING UNDER THIS PROGRAM.**

(If this program is a State-formula grant program, a State needs to provide this description only for projects or activities that it conducts with funds reserved for State-level uses. In addition, local school districts or other eligible applicants that apply to the State for funding must provide this description in their applications to the State for funding. The State would be responsible for ensuring that the school district or other local entity has submitted a sufficient section 427 statement as described below.)

What Does This Provision Require?

Section 427 requires each applicant for funds (other than an individual person) to include a description of the steps the applicant proposes to take to ensure equitable access to, and participation in, its federally assisted program for students, teachers, and other program beneficiaries with special needs. This provision allows the applicants' discretion to develop the required description. The statute highlights six types of barriers that can impede equitable access or participation: gender, race, national origin, color, disability, or age. Based on local circumstances, one should determine whether these or other barriers may prevent students, teachers, etc. from such access or participation in a federally funded project or activity. The description in your application of steps to be taken to overcome these barriers need not be lengthy; you may provide a clear and succinct description of how you plan to address those barriers that are applicable to your circumstances. In addition, the information may be provided in a single narrative or, if appropriate, may be discussed in connection with related topics in the application.

Section 427 is not intended to duplicate the requirements of civil rights statutes but rather to ensure that, in designing their projects, applicants for federal funds address equity concerns that may affect the ability of certain potential beneficiaries to fully participate in the project and achieve ambitious standards. Consistent with program requirements and its approved application, an applicant may use the federal funds awarded to it to eliminate the barriers it identifies.

What are Examples of How an Applicant Might Satisfy the Requirement of This Provision?

The following examples may help illustrate how an applicant complies with Section 427.

(1) An applicant who proposes conducting an adult literacy project serving, among others, adults with limited English proficiency, might describe how it intends to distribute a brochure about the proposed project to potential participants in their native language.

(2) An applicant who proposes to develop instructional materials for classroom use might describe how it will make the materials available on audio tape or braille for students who are blind.

(3) An applicant that proposes to conduct a model science program for secondary students and is concerned that girls may be less likely than boys to enroll in the course, might indicate how it intends to conduct "outreach" efforts to girls, to encourage their enrollment.

(4) An applicant who proposes a project to increase school safety might describe the special efforts it will take to address the concerns of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students, and efforts to reach out to and involve the families of LGBT students.

We recognize that many applicants may already be implementing effective steps to ensure equity of access and participation in their grant programs, and we appreciate your cooperation in responding to the requirements of this provision.

Estimated Burden Statement for GEPA Requirements

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) of 1995, no person is required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1.5 hours per response, including time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering, and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. The obligation to respond to this collection is required to obtain or retain benefits (Public Law 103-382. Send comments regarding the burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to the U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20210-4537, or email ICDocketMgr@ed.gov and reference OMB Control Number 1894-0005.

<http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html>

1. [grants.gov - Certification Regarding Lobbying](http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html)

<http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html>

2. [SF LLL Form – Disclosure of Lobbying Activities \(required, only if applicable\)](http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html)

<http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html>

APPLICANT'S ORGANIZATION	Enter information in this column
Applicant's Organization	Puerto Rico Department of Education
PRINTED NAME AND TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE	Enter information in this column
First Name	Yanira I.
Last Name	Raíces Vega
Title	Secretary
Email	raices_y@de.pr.gov

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Program-Specific Requirements for State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan must include the following descriptions and estimates, as required by sections 101(a) and 606 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA.

(A) State Rehabilitation Council.

1. All VR agencies, except for those that have an independent consumer-controlled commission, must have a State Rehabilitation Council (Council or SRC) that meets the criteria in section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as applicable, has (select A or B):

(A) is an independent State commission.

(B) has established a State Rehabilitation Council.

2. In accordance with Assurance 3(b), please provide information on the current composition of the Council by representative type, including the term number of the representative, as applicable, and any vacancies, as well as the beginning dates of each representative's term.

Table 54. VRP Council Representative

Council Representative	Current Term Number/Vacant	Beginning Date of Term Mo./Yr.
Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)	VACANT	
Parent Training and Information Center	N/A	02/2021
Client Assistance Program	N/A	01/2017
Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor (ExOfficio if Employed by the VR Agency)	VACANT	
Community Rehabilitation Program Service Provider	FIRST TERM	07/2021
Business, Industry, and Labor	FIRST TERM	07/2021

Business, Industry, and Labor	FIRST TERM	10/2021
Business, Industry, and Labor	FIRST TERM	10/2023
Business, Industry, and Labor	VACANT	
Disability Advocacy Groups	SECOND TERM	07/2021
Current or Former Applicants for, or Recipients of, VRservices	FIRST TERM	10/2023
Section 121 Project Directors in the State (as applicable)	N/A	
State Educational Agency Responsible for Students with Disabilities Eligible to Receive Services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	N/A	06/2021
State Workforce Development Board	FIRST TERM	04/2022
VR Agency Director (Ex Officio)	N/A	10/2021
Parent, Family Members or Advocates for People with Disabilities	First Term	10/2021

3. If the SRC is not meeting the composition requirements in section 105(b) of the Rehabilitation Act and/or is not meeting quarterly as required in section 105(f) of the Rehabilitation Act, provide the steps that the VR agency is taking to ensure it meets those requirements.

The Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor is a recent vacancy. The SRC will inform the State VR Agency and also publish the announcement to fill the position.

The SRC sent to the Governor's Office a recommendation of a candidate to fill the Business, Industry and Labor Sector vacancy. Waiting for approval.

The ILC has not been able to identify a representative. The SRC will follow up on this matter.

4. In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(21)(A)(ii)(III) of the Rehabilitation Act, include a summary of the Council's input (including how it was obtained) into the State Plan and any State Plan revisions, including recommendations from the Council's annual reports, the review and analysis of consumer satisfaction and other Council reports.

The Puerto Rico State Rehabilitation Council (CERPR by its Spanish acronym) participated in the actions carried out by the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration (VRA) to comply with the development of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, carried out during 2023. Also, it had the opportunity to provide its feedback regarding the Goals, Priorities and Strategies developed based on the study. Therefore, it provides the following recommendations to the VRA.

Goal 1: Achieve greater effectiveness in the process of providing services to applicants/consumers for a successful integration into the labor force.

Recommendations or Input of the CERPR:

1. Agrees and sees the established goals, priorities, and strategies as favorable, however, it recommends the agency makes sure to have the appropriate professionals to carry out and achieve the proposed strategies.
2. Requests information related to the established protocol for an employer to request the salary incentive.

3. It recommends that the protocol of granting the salary incentive is accessible and viable for the employers that are interested in requesting it.
4. Volunteers to collaborate with the VRA offering guidance to employers related to the benefits of hiring people with disabilities and other possible topics of interest. It also recommends offering guidance to the employers about the tax credits or exemptions that may be available to provide reasonable accommodations to its employees. The ADA National Network can be approached to receive guidance and assistance about these matters.
5. Recommends examining the viability of providing training to the agency's personnel in current affairs and to the employers in matters of interest, through the Technical Assistance Centers or other resources.
6. Recommends approaching the Manufacturers Association and requesting allowing the ARV to have some type of participation in the association's activities, with the objective of encouraging the employment of persons with disabilities.
7. Recommends approaching the Secretary of the Puerto Rico Department of Economic Development and Commerce to achieve an alliance to allow greater approximation with the employers and collaborative employment projects.

Goal 2: Contribute to increasing the skills and opportunities of students with disabilities through the provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services.

Recommendations or Input of the CERPR:

1. Agrees with the strategies designed for the provision of Pre-Employment Transition and Transition Services.
2. Recommends serving the greatest amount of youths and students with disabilities in all of Puerto Rico possible and provide more attention to the least served students with disabilities outside of the metropolitan area, especially in the center of the island.

3. Recommends maintaining the participation of the VRA personnel in the meetings of the Programming and Placement committee (COMPU by its Spanish acronym) of the young persons in transition and, for that, to have more communication between the Department of Education and the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration to find strategies to allow greater participation of the ARV personnel in those meetings during the whole year.

Goal 3: Strengthen administrative, programmatic, and technological procedures to achieve the required institutional efficiency.

Recommendations and input of the CERPR:

1. Recommends approaching the universities that offer careers in marketing, public communication, production, and digital video editing to explore a possible collaboration that allows the students to develop tools to accelerate the broadcasting of information and services; among them videos directed toward the students with disabilities, applicants/consumers, and employers. Among the possible educational institutions and other entities that could be contacted would be, for example: Sagrado Corazón University (Community Outreach area), Cinematography Science, Arts and Television College (CCAT by its Spanish acronym), Atlantic University, Channel 6, Arts and Technology Lyceum, among others.
2. Recommends the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration improving its webpage where all Normative Communications can be available to the people with disabilities, family members and public that want to know the public policy of the Administration. It recommends using the webpage of the Department of Education as reference, which is accessible and has the procedures manual, circular letters, forms, etc. for the benefit of the population which they serve.
3. Requests the ARV to share with CERPR the Normative Communications in the draft stage, so that the Council can carry out its role, established by the Rehabilitation Act, to actively participate in the development of the public policy of the Agency.

4. Provide the VR agency's response to the Council's input and recommendations, including an explanation for the rejection of any input and recommendations.

The VRA reviews the recommendations made by the CERPR to the VRA Portion of the Unified State Plan and presents the following information:

Goal 1:

1. The VRA is constantly evaluating the personnel and recruiting needs, as well as the opportunities to establish collaboration with other entities to carry out some of the plan strategies.
2. Normative Communication No.: 2023-08, of Dec 14 2022, establishes the procedure for the granting of salary incentives. It will be shared with CERPR.
3. The protocol established for granting incentives requires the employers to present the documents established by law to comply with the granting of contracts in the Government of Puerto Rico (ex. Certificate of Good Standing, among others).
4. We accept the recommendation.
5. We accept the recommendation.
6. VRA signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Puerto Rico Association of Industrials with the purpose of establishing an 'Alliance for work development for everyone in PR'. Through it, VRA will provide guidance to employers about vocational rehabilitation services, sensibility, and other subjects, this, with the purpose of facilitating the referrals to promote the placement and teamwork. The first formal meeting related to this MOU to outline the work plan that will begin in all regions will take place on December 2023.
7. We accept the recommendation and inform you that the VRA participates in the meetings of WIOA State Board, that take place at the Department of Economic

Development and Commerce. Also, VRA participates in the 15 Local Boards of Labor Development, island wide.

Goal 2:

1. We adopt the reaction.
2. VRA provides services to youths and students with disabilities throughout the island following the same procedure in all regions.
3. We accept the recommendation and will approach the Department of Education to evaluate possible strategies.

Goal 3:

1. We inform the CERPR that the VRA is working, through the Office of Communications, to establish agreements with institutions like the ones mentioned.
2. VRA is in the process of updating its webpage so it's easier for the user and has the necessary information. We adopt the recommendations, and they will be taken into consideration during this process.
3. We accept the recommendation and, as agreed previously with CERPR, we will begin the presentations of the draft of the normative communications, as of January 2024.

B. Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA).

Section 101(a)(15), (17), and (23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to provide an assessment of:

1. The VR services needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, including:

A. Individuals with the most significant disabilities and their need for Supported Employment;

In this and the following sections, the results of the most recent Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment of Rehabilitation Services, carried out by the company

Énfasis Puerto Rico, are presented. The contract for said study was signed in June 2023 and the final findings report was presented in November 2023. It should be noted that the VRA has worked on several of the findings presented below.

Before presenting the specific needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, required under this section, we will present the Executive Summary explaining the methodology and general recommendations of the researchers.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

- **Goal:** The Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment of the Vocational Rehabilitation Services in Puerto Rico 2023, from now on ‘the Study’, has as its goal: to provide the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration (VRA) and the State Rehabilitation Council of Puerto Rico with a document with valid and reliable quantitative and qualitative data on the needs of people with disabilities and the needs for rehabilitation services in Puerto Rico that allow them to develop their goals, priority areas and strategies; as well as review and strengthen vocational rehabilitation services as part of the Unified State Plan that will be submitted to the federal government in 2024. One of the objectives was to analyze the needs of specific groups with the purpose of identifying unmet or poorly met needs and emerging needs [individuals with most significant disabilities, students (14 to 21 years old, studying at the secondary or post-secondary level), young people (14 to 24 years old, studying or not), and individuals belonging to minorities]. *Énfasis* is an independent consulting firm created in 1999 by Dr. Myrna Rivas, a social psychologist, which develops studies, assessments, and technical assistance for public and private entities in the social, education, health, and economic development areas. *Énfasis* was responsible for the previous 2020-2021 Study.
- **Methodology:** The information was collected through various primary and secondary sources. This multi-methods approach allowed us to contrast and compare the data obtained and conduct the triangulation of the findings, which provided greater reliability and validity to the analysis. As part of the Study, 41 semi-structured individual interviews

were conducted with VRA key individuals and 46 with external key individuals, including Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) partners. The Consumer Survey was administered, which achieved the participation of 382 applicants/consumers from six VRA regions (with a margin of error of +/-5% for a 95% confidence level); another Survey was administered that achieved the participation of 172 professionals and employers; eight focus groups were held with applicants/consumers; innovative and successful practices were identified; the socio-economic context of Puerto Rico was analyzed; and conclusions and strategic recommendations were prepared.

- **Consumer profile:** 53% of the applicants/consumers surveyed were men; this proportion was reversed in the focus groups. The average age was 25.9 years. 67% were between 16 and 24 years old. 41% were studying without working and 32% were working at the time of the consultation. 49% are outside the labor market, either because they study, are unemployed and are not looking for work, have conditions that prevent them from working, and so forth. Among those who work or worked, 51% indicated that they do so with a full-time employer; 35% part-time, and 14% do it in self-employment or their own business. 14% supported employment of consumers. Compared to the 2020-2021 Study, it was found that they conduct a greater diversity of jobs; the increase in jobs related to health, administrative, professional, and manufacturing services is striking. In the focus groups, a third of the individuals were working, another was studying, and another was unemployed and looking for work.
- **Profile of professionals and employers:** 68% were women; and 48% had been in their jobs for between 0 and 8 years, although key individuals had been in their jobs for much longer. 38% of those surveyed were from the VRA; 24% from other public agencies; 19% from employers, employment agencies, and so forth; 10% from community entities; and 10% from post-secondary institutions. Conditions that they serve or employ the most: Cognitive disorders; autism spectrum disorder; specific learning problems; psychosocial; attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; and depression. VRA employees perceive a significant increase in cases of autism compared to the previous Study. The families were

identified as having limited economic resources (below the poverty line) and with little support.

Applicants/consumers consulted and their relationship with the VRA:

- **Initial processes:** Most applicants/consumers indicated that they had learned about the VRA services through the public school where they studied. Several focus group participants who studied in public and private schools indicated that in private schools they were not told about the VRA. The majority indicated that the initial orientation they received at the VRA was “very good” (52%). Their main recommendations were to have information and requirements accessible online; provide information in writing and with easy-to-understand writing and language; guide students and their families at various grade levels; and that the VRA staff be more receptive to repeat the orientation as many times as necessary.
- **Eligibility process:** 44% described the process for determining eligibility as “very good.” This was the only topic where the perception of consumers with supported employment was more negative than the rest (in all the others, their evaluations were more positive). Consumers in the Southern Region expressed more positive satisfaction. In the focus groups, opinions were more divided: about 60% described the process as clear, that it lasted a reasonable time, and that the documents required were also reasonable; and the others indicated the opposite, that it took too long, they required many documents and evaluations and that they had to visit the VRA offices many times. 52% of those surveyed indicated that the process was conducted within the time established by the agency (60 days). A higher proportion of individuals in the Metro East and Central East regions expressed that the process “took longer.” The main recommendations were: to expedite and comply with the stipulated time; inform and communicate to applicants what is happening with their case; follow up on cases, especially if they are under evaluation by other professionals or there was a change of counselor; request fewer evaluations, have professionals who can do them faster and at no cost to the applicant; have greater sensitivity and empathy; and effectively integrate technology and applications (apps) in the procedures and monitoring of the process. In the focus groups, they recommended

that counselors communicate periodically with applicants, especially if the process has exceeded 60 days.

- **Start of services:** 42% indicated that the information they received about procedures and next steps (after being eligible) was “very good.” Half of the people in the focus groups indicated that everything was exceptionally good, and the other half felt confused and had many doubts about what services would be offered to them, when, how, and so forth; who would call them; how often, and so forth. 37% indicated that the waiting time to receive the VRA services was “very good.” This was one of the topics where lower satisfaction was observed (as in the previous Study). The majority recommended that once eligibility is reported, clearer written information should be provided on the procedures and next steps to initiate services and that it should be clearer on the VRA portal site. Several also indicated that they did not fully understand what services they would receive; they found out along the way.
- **Relationship with counselors:** 45% of respondents indicated that communication with their counselor was “very good.” 22% indicated that they saw or spoke to each other at least once a month; and 19% every two to three months. 8% indicated that they had never spoken to or seen their counselor, only their technician. Only 30% of surveyed rated the frequency as “very good.” In the focus groups, the majority rated the frequency as insufficient. This was one of the topics with the lowest satisfaction (as in the previous Study). The Metro East Region had the most negative opinions and the South, West, and North regions had the most positive opinions. These recommended the counselors to be more receptive to answering questions; establish from the beginning what means they will use for communication between the parties; and how often the appointments would be.
- **The counseling service:** 45% of those surveyed described the services they have received directly from their counselor as “very good.” 42% consider that their counselor did help them a lot in selecting an appropriate employment goal, and 33% expressed that they were “very satisfied” with the employment goal they selected with their counselor. In the focus groups, about 60% described the services as incredibly positive for their

personal development, respectful when defining goals, and expressed gratitude, but the others described counselors as deficient and shared their displeasure and dissatisfaction. They allege that the process of defining the goal was overwhelming. 43% indicated that communication with their counseling services technician was “very good.” The main recommendations for counseling services were to increase the frequency of contacts; listen, be more receptive, empathetic, and respectful of consumers' interests; review, increase, and expedite financial aid; give more follow-ups; and be more up to date with new careers, occupations, and youngsters' interests.

- **Relationship with other VRA employees:** 50% of those consulted did not give an opinion about the Assessment and Adjustment Centers (AAC) and 65% did not give an opinion about the Support and Employment Modalities Centers (CAME, by its Spanish Acronym) because they had not received these services. Among those who did respond, 47% indicated that AAC's communication and services were “very good”; and 47% also indicated that CAME's communication and services were “very good”. Several unemployed consumers expressed in the focus groups their frustration for not receiving more support in their job search and recommended that CAME counselors and promoters work more as a team and be more initiative-taking in supporting and monitoring consumers. On the other hand, 44% indicated that the treatment of VRA employees was “very good” (it was 38% in the previous Study), as well as the administrative staff treatment.
- **Support for employment and self-employment/own business:** Only 19% of consumers indicated that they achieved some type of employment experience or job through VRA support. The highest proportion of individuals who did achieve support was observed in the Metro East Region; this is striking because this Region obtained a lower level of satisfaction on other issues. When compared with the previous Study, a reduction is observed in the perception of support received (it went from 28% to 19%). Only 31% expressed being “very satisfied” with the support, it was one of the topics with the lowest satisfaction. Much dissatisfaction was also expressed in focus groups; however, some participants were incredibly grateful for the support received both for jobs and for

businesses of their own. 59% of consumers indicated that they are interested in self-employment or businesses of their own and recommended that VRA focus much more on this alternative because even if someone is not interested at the moment, they could be interested later at another time in their life.

The needs of people with disabilities and underserved groups

Applicants/consumers' needs: The main general needs were reasonable accommodations in employment (61%); financial aid; coordination with employers and employment agencies to achieve a first opportunity or employment experience; vocational or technical training, courses, or workshops; mental health services (including pharmacological); transportation; and development of innovative projects. The main needs in vocational rehabilitation were reasonable accommodations (59%); financial aid; coordination with employers and employment agencies; vocational or technical training, courses, or workshops; transportation (including driving classes and vehicle adaptation); coordination of services; and development of innovative projects. The need for more support was highlighted in the focus groups to obtain and retain employment; financial aid (faster and larger amounts); study and assistive technology equipment and materials arriving on time; and having access to psychological services (the topic of mental health came up in all groups).

Regarding unavailable services: 47% of those consulted indicated that "all the services" they have required from VRA have been available (it was 39% in the previous Study). Still, those who indicated that "very few were available" also increased (it went from 8% to 16%). They perceive that services that have been missing the most are: financial aid, which does not arrive or arrives late (40%); support in finding or retaining employment and employment accommodations; vocational counseling and evaluation; and "all have been absent." Other services also mentioned were psychological services; physical and other therapeutic therapy; occupational therapy, adjustments, and refreshers; transportation and mobility (including driving classes and vehicle adaptation); assistive technology equipment (including wheelchairs and equipment for the visually and hearing impaired); and of independent living and activities of daily living. 37% described

the services as “very agile.” The results were slightly more negative than in the previous Study: the “poorly” and “very poorly” totaled 14% and now 20%. Individuals who responded poorly or very poorly explained that they did so because of: the slowdown in the procedures to obtain a response or resolution for their case (45%); poor communication with the counselor; lack of access to financial aid, equipment, and materials; the lack of support for job search and placement; the lack of evaluations; little access to psychological services and therapies of all kinds; and the lack of support to obtain any professional license or certification when finishing school. In the focus groups, the individuals most satisfied and grateful with VRA had participated in supported employment services, Employment Clubs, and Work-Based Learning Experiences (pre-employment) or had received direct support for their jobs or own businesses.

Professionals and employers’ opinions

The main general needs of the population with disabilities identified by professionals and employers were reasonable accommodations in employment (47%); coordination with employers and employment agencies; vocational or technical training, courses, or workshops; mental health services (including pharmacological); financial aid; transportation; and self-intercession. Numerous complaints were collected about APS Healthcare's mental health services in all regions and their unwillingness to coordinate. The main needs in vocational rehabilitation were vocational or technical training, courses, or workshops (38%); reasonable accommodations in employment; coordination with employers; development of innovative projects; independent living services; coordination of services; and supported employment services for the most significant. Internal key people highlighted the need for the VRA to have more and better-paid employees (counselors, vocational evaluators, transition analysts, occupational therapists, and sign language interpreters). People from other sectors highlighted: the need to insert the VRA into the business ecosystem to improve coordination with employers; strengthen employment services; interagency coordination; and those referred to independent living services.

Employers, factors preventing employment, and market trends in the VRA

- **Employers' perception:** Consumers gave 4.3 (on a Likert scale from 1 to 10) to the willingness of employers to recruit people with disabilities in Puerto Rico, professionals, and employers 4.5, internal key people 6.5, and external key people 7.5. Consumer evaluations were more negative than in the previous Study. Although the labor market appears to be more open to recruiting, they still do not experience it. In the focus groups, half expressed a negative perspective, and the other half observed a greater willingness and talked about their positive experiences with employers. The majority of professionals and employers consulted indicated that employers, although they need to recruit, still do not know how to make reasonable accommodations in the workplace, since they think they are expensive or complicated (65%); they fear lawsuits; Today's jobs require the employee to master multiple skills; and they are unaware of the positive qualities and successful experiences with this population. The premise "previous negative experiences with this population" was only mentioned by 3%. The majority recommended training employers, employment agencies, and Human Resources Managers on VRA services, legislation, reasonable accommodations, and successful cases. Key people recommended: training on accommodations with practical examples and successful cases that show the good qualities of these employees (stability, loyalty, responsibility, and so forth); creating a network of employers who are available to hire; and that the VRA has a more initiative-taking approach to the business sector. To further engage employers with the employment of students and young people with disabilities, it was recommended to continue with the Work-Based Learning Experiences model of the pre-employment transition services (PRE-ETS), which is perceived as one of the primary areas of the VRA progress in recent years.
- **For applicants/consumers, the factors that prevent people with disabilities from obtaining or retaining employment were:** "society's attitude, cultural prejudices" (49%); the bureaucracy and complexity of VRA processes; lack of support and monitoring in the workplace; adequate reasonable accommodations are not made in the workplace; and the disconnection between goals, skills and the labor market; lack of relation between what is studied and the employment. In the focus groups, they highlighted the need to have more support from the VRA in the employment search;

more monitoring once they are at work; and access to mental health services to stay stable. For their part, half of professionals and employers pointed out the “little willingness of employers to recruit people with disabilities, fear of reasonable accommodation, lawsuits, dismissal, and so forth.” Other factors were the lack of a robust public transportation system; reasonable accommodations are not made; today's jobs require multiple skills to be mastered; lack of support and monitoring in the workplace; and lack of access to mental health and emotional support services (including pharmacological); and the family's attitude or circumstances toward employment. Again, many criticisms of APS Healthcare services became known.

- **Market trends in the VRA:** The professionals and employers surveyed gave 4.6 (on a scale of 10) to the topic of how adapted VRA services are to labor market trends, internal key people 6.4; and external people 6. The recommendations were: training employers, employment agencies, and Human Resources Managers on VRA services, legislation, reasonable accommodations, and successful cases (41%); training counselors; and integrating more STEM occupations (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics),
- **Teleworking, and innovations in employment options.** Key people from other sectors were more insistent that the VRA must continue to create more links with the business ecosystem; continually train all their staff on the labor market since topics are continuously changing; promote more remote employment and teleworking; and promote more self-employment and/or own business initiatives.

Employee training, interagency collaboration

Training: The main recommendations of those surveyed were to have a continuous training system within the VRA for all employees; offer mentoring and support for several months to new employees to facilitate their immersion and increase their retention and loyalty; training to manage the growing population with autism spectrum disorder; training on how to integrate technological goals, remote work, and self-employment. Learn more about the latest trends in the current job market (new jobs,

changes in application processes, new resumes, interview formats, and so forth) and new assistive technology equipment. Key people from other sectors further emphasized that the VRA must strengthen its staff's knowledge of reasonable accommodations and how to communicate them clearly and in simple language to employers; employment statistics, occupation projections, and the business ecosystem of Puerto Rico; types of assessments (ecological, adaptive, test work experiences, simulations in real scenarios and other alternative vocational assessments). Other recommended topics were: mental health and drugs; self-employment and owning businesses; new careers and occupations of interest to new generations; the generation of Centennials, their interests and how to work on social skills (soft skills); and the effective treatment, communication, and follow-up of younger consumers (customer service).

Interagency coordination: Although there have been specific advances in the past three years, coordination between entities that serve people with disabilities in Puerto Rico is still perceived as weak and disjointed and with few links with the labor and business markets. The recommendations for coordination between the VRA and the DEPR were: to strengthen interagency communication at the central and regional levels through the designation of liaison people in each region who serve as a bridge to alleviate the communication of situations, attend to special cases, communicate agreements and guidelines, guide, and so forth; and to review public policy and sign new agreements between both agencies that clarify issues such as evaluations and assistive technology equipment. Other recommendations were: that the VRA attend the COMPU and the DEPR inform more about the dates; and that the VRA periodically visits and guides school staff and families in the schools themselves. The recommendations for coordination between the VRA and post-secondary institutions were: to clarify and modernize the VRA's public policy on the offer of training and programs that it can support; and that the VRA periodically guides key personnel of these institutions about their role and services, as well as the importance of the employment goal ("We are not a scholarship"); appoint liaison people; that the VRA be more open to communicate and address students' particular situations; that the VRA visit these institutions and learn more about the changing academic offerings; and establishing more agreements between the VRA and

institutions that train professionals in the agency's difficult-to-recruit areas to offer incentives to students, internships and practical work exposure experiences. Recommendations to improve overall the VRA coordination efforts were: to designate liaisons at the central level and in each region to improve communication with other agencies; sign an interagency agreement for the management of cases of children and young people with disabilities in the custody of the Department of the Family (exempt from parent authorization); guide other agencies and employer/business associations about their role, employment accommodations with practical examples and successful cases; sign agreements with new private health service providers; ask APS Healthcare for more collaboration and better service for its consumers; co-organize collaborative training (cross training) with various entities; sign more agreements with other public and private agencies; and attend to more activities and special events organized by other entities. It was also recommended that the VRA ask for support from the technology staff of the Department of the Treasury to support the technological transformation and modernization.

General recommendations

1. **Applicants/consumers**: The main recommendations are summarized as follows: more support in the search and placement of employment and the necessary accommodations; financial aid and equipment; greater agility in all agency processes, especially in the eligibility process, evaluations, and aid payment; more communication and monitoring of counselors; and access to mental health services. The top priority services: more support for employment, self-employment, and accommodations; more financial aid for studies, food, transportation, equipment, materials, and so forth; improving counseling service, communication with counselors and follow-up; further agility in all services; faster assessments; and access to psychological services.
2. **Professionals and employers**: The main recommendations are summarized as follows: to review, temper, and update the VRA public policy to simplify, streamline, and optimize internal administrative processes; have more and better-paid staff and offer them ongoing training; and increase the VRA communication, agreements, and collaboration

with the business/labor ecosystem and other public or private agencies. To attract individuals over 30 years old, they recommended: outreach campaigns that show people of all ages; and doing more outreach work in communities, municipalities, schools with the Adult Education Program, health service institutions (specialized hospitals, 330 Primary Health Centers), and so forth. The highest priority services were: counseling; search and placement services (regular or sustained -CRP-); vocational evaluation; occupational therapy, adjustments, and skills review; physical therapy and other rehabilitation services; and DEPR/VRA transition. The VRA employees emphasized the need for more and better-paid staff in all positions, especially vocational counselors and evaluators, occupational therapists, sign language interpreters, and transition analysts. Additionally, the need for more staff for AAC services, physical therapy, and other rehabilitation services was highlighted; to improve the facilities where these services are offered at the Medical Center. People from other sectors emphasized more the need to strengthen job search and placement; integrate technology into administrative issues; and offer all services more comprehensively - counseling, CAME, and AAC - (“They have to achieve more organic services, so people don't feel like they are always fighting against the current to get services”). In addition, they recommended continuing to increase what has worked: CRPs, Employment Clubs, and pre-employment services.

3. **Innovative and successful practices:** The people consulted shared fewer examples than in the previous Study. Some of these were: Integrated Community Service Centers (One Stop); Youth Apprenticeship, On the Job Training, and new Work-Based Learning Experiences with specific profiles of young people that last all year; Summer Camps (public housing and non-public housing) to reinforce pre-employment and independent living skills; outreach campaigns with the model of the Fundación Adecco (Spain); projects aimed at promoting business incubation with family support; Independent Living Housing Projects; Sheltered Workshop Programs; and the PEERS® Certificate: Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills that has proven to be effective with young people with autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, anxiety, depression and other socio-emotional problems.

Conclusions and Recommendations of the Research Team

Context analysis: The socio-demographic context of Puerto Rico has changed profoundly in the past ten years. The population has decreased by about 459 thousand people between 2010 and 2021, -12%, due to migration and a sustained decrease in the birth rate according to Census data. In 2021, 17% were under 18 years old, 61% were between 18-64 years old and 22% were over 65 years old. The population with disabilities has also decreased, although less than the rest of the population, going from 726,334 in 2010 to 712,517 in 2021, a slight reduction of 2%. This figure represents 21.8% of the population of Puerto Rico. Compared to data from the United States, the population in Puerto Rico is almost double that of the United States (13.0%). People with disabilities between 18-64 years old went from 378,514 in 2010 to an estimated 319,046 in 2021, which represents a reduction of 16%. However, the most important reduction occurred among those under 18 years old, from 67,585 in 2010 to 52,025 in 2019, a reduction of 23%; and to 42,913 in 2021, a reduction of 18% between 2019 and 2021.

Among people with disabilities, the poverty level is above that of people without disabilities, 47.0% compared to 38.7%, according to the ACS 2021. According to data from the Puerto Rico Planning Board (2023), 47% of personal income comes from government transfers and other sources; in 2005 they were 29%. Government transfers favor the population that is not of working age, but also the working-age population that does not have a job or is actively looking for one. According to ACS 2021 data, 49.5% of households in Puerto Rico (577,665) received financial aid for food. One or more people with disabilities lived in 46.7% (269,619) of these homes. According to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate in Puerto Rico has been decreasing in recent years, it went from 16% in 2011 to 8% in 2019 and 2020 and decreased to 6.0% in 2022. 25% of people with disabilities of working age (18-64 years) in PR are employed (79,881 people), compared to 58.3% of people without disabilities at that same age, according to data from the ACS 2021. In total, 7.7% of employed people in PR have some type of disability. The proportion of people with disabilities outside the workforce is extremely high, 69.9% of the total ACS 2019. In 2021, this proportion increased slightly

to 70.1%. The groups with a higher proportion of active people (18-64 years) in the labor market (employed or unemployed) are people with vision and hearing difficulties, on the other hand, the groups with a higher proportion of people outside the labor market are those with independent living, self-care, and cognitive difficulties. Although the groups with the most people employed, in absolute terms, are those with vision, hearing, and cognitive difficulties, two of these are also the groups with the greatest number of people outside the labor market: individuals with mobility and cognitive difficulties, followed by independent living.

When comparing the validated fiscal year 2019-2020 data with the Department of Education's 2009-2010 enrollment data, we see a significant decrease of -41% in just 10 academic years. In the case of private schools, the reduction is even more marked with a -49% reduction in enrollment. For its part, the proportion of special education students compared to total enrollment is increasing in both public and private schools. The DEPR in 2020-2021 reported that they have an enrollment of 276,413 active students and 86,301 of these are special education, which represents 31% of the enrollment (DEPR, 2020). The student ratio in the fiscal year 2022-2023 is 81,309, accounting for 32% of enrollment. In 2022-2023, the most frequent categories of disabilities for students in the Special Education Program were: specific learning problems; other health impairments; speech and language problems; autism; and intellectual disability.

Conclusions of the Research Team: The review of the contextual data presents us with Puerto Rico facing important challenges such as the low birth rate, the migration of younger families with children, and a significant decrease in enrollment at the school and post-secondary level. But at the same time, there has been an increase in the proportion of students with special needs and a rise in conditions such as autism spectrum disorder. The context also presents us with a historically low unemployment rate and strong demand among multiple economic sectors that proactively seek labor. Although the economic and labor scenario is much more positive than three years ago, the VRA has not been able to capitalize on it favorably, and therefore, generate benefits and consequent opportunities for people with disabilities whom it must guide towards an employment

goal. The agency must be more initiative-taking, effective, and responsive in its relationship with four main players: (1) applicants/consumers and their families; (2) potential employers; (3) agency employees; and (4) other entities that serve this population.

Ten (10) recommendations from the Research Team:

1. Towards greater agility: It is urgent to review, temper, and update the VRA public policy to simplify steps, shorten times, and optimize administrative and programmatic processes, to offer faster and quality services to participants.
2. Towards greater transparency: Completely refocus the application, eligibility determination, and direct service processes to align it with the viewpoint and needs of the applicant/consumer and their families.
3. Towards greater effectiveness: Modernize and diligently process everything related to the request, management, and disbursement of direct financial aid to consumers; and payments or disbursements to post-secondary institutions and purchases from suppliers or other entities.
4. Towards more models such as the CRP: Continue, expand, and allocate more economic resources to Community Rehabilitation Programs and bring more supported employment services to people with more significant disabilities in all regions.
5. Towards a clear answer: Establish a Special Working Group (Task Force) that works for a defined time in the identification, resolution, or closure of cases that are in the process of determining eligibility and that are over 60 days or more; those that are in evaluation or reconsideration processes or that have been denied on several occasions.
6. Towards a specialized service: Create a Specialized Unit to provide vocational rehabilitation service to students, young people, and adults with autism spectrum disorder.

7. Towards a focused and motivated human resource: Have more and better-paid personnel, who receive continuous training. The professionals most in need are vocational counselors, vocational evaluators, occupational therapists, transition analysts, sign language interpreters, physical therapists, and other rehabilitation services.
8. Towards more and better allies: Establish clearer agreements with the DEPR that clarify multiple issues such as evaluations and assistive technology equipment, and other entities to provide mental health services, among others.
9. Towards leadership: The VRA must establish and lead a Work Committee to promote the successful employment of people with disabilities in Puerto Rico.
10. Towards new populations: Bring guidance to schools and educational programs outside the DEPR, homeschooling associations, children's shelters, foster homes, and so forth.

1. INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES

Most significant needs: No differences were observed between the needs identified by consumers of supported employment services and the others; although these emphasized more the need for mental health services (including pharmacological), general health, physical therapies, and other rehabilitation services. The main needs identified by them were: reasonable accommodations in employment; coordination with employers and employment agencies; vocational or technical training, courses, or workshops; coordination of interagency services; transportation; and development of innovative projects. 85% of these indicated that all or most of the services they needed were available (the average for all respondents was 47%). As indicated before, except for the eligibility process, this group expressed a more positive perception of the services received. The main needs for the group of professionals and employers surveyed were: coordination with employers; vocational or technical training, courses, or workshops; reasonable accommodations in employment; development of innovative projects; and independent living services. Most key people highlighted: the need to continue expanding

supported employment services in all regions; promote more agreements with Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP); and guide employers on accommodations with practical examples.

Recommendations to improve VRA services for people with most significant disabilities do not differ from those of the rest of the population. However, professionals and employers insisted on the need to have more CRPs for supported employment services in all regions; have more staff, especially counselors, vocational evaluators, occupational therapists, and sign language interpreters; streamline the eligibility process; and review, temper, and update the VRA public policy to make the agency more agile, effective, and technological.

B. Individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the VR Program;

No particular minority group was identified.

Professionals and employers identified the following groups of individuals with disabilities as less served:

In general: Individuals with most significant disabilities (46%); private school students; Department of Education of Puerto Rico (DEPR) students who are and are not in the Special Education Program; individuals with autism spectrum disorder; young people who dropped out of school; minors in State custody; homeschooling students; individuals who reside in rural areas; individuals with transportation difficulties; and interested in self-employment or own business. Internal key people highlighted more individuals with most significant disabilities, with orthopedic situations, blind, deaf, deafblind, and over 30 years of age; in contrast, external people highlighted students from private schools, young people with autism, intellectual disabilities, minors in State custody and individuals who were victims of accidents or violent incidents. Race, national origin, or membership in the LGBTQ community were not identified as exclusion factors in this Needs Study or the previous one.

With most significant disabilities: People with intellectual disabilities; with autism spectrum disorder; with transportation difficulty; blind or visually impaired; who reside in rural areas; those over 30 years old; and with mobility impairments, orthopedic or wheelchair users. The VRA employees expressed that they previously served more people with orthopedic conditions, in wheelchairs, blind, deaf, deafblind, over 30 years of age, and accident victims (referred by the State Insurance Fund Corporation and the Administration of Compensation for Automobile Accidents (ACAA by its Spanish Acronym). Recommendations to improve VRA services for people with more significant impairments do not differ from those of the rest of the population. However, professionals and employers insisted on the need to have more CRPs for supported employment services in all regions; have more staff, especially counselors, vocational evaluators, occupational therapists, and sign language interpreters; streamline the eligibility process; and review, temper, and update the VRA public policy to make the agency more agile, effective, and technological.

Students and youth: Students with disabilities from private schools (41%); students and young people with autism spectrum disorder; DEPR students who are and are not in the Special Education Program; young people who dropped out of school; students and young people with more significant disabilities; homeschooling students; minors under State custody; young victims of crime or accidents; and with intellectual disabilities. Key people were very vocal in expressing their concern about the increase in students and young people with autism spectrum disorder and the few job alternatives that are being opened for this group in Puerto Rico, unlike other jurisdictions in the United States, Europe, and other countries.

C. Individuals with disabilities served through other components of the workforce development system; and Job Connection Centers:

Good collaboration was found between these Centers and PRVRA. The main recommendations were: to have personnel specialized in sign language; have specialized equipment for people with visual and hearing impairments; to review the agreements between the VRA and each Local Development Area to establish a more systematic and

frequent calendar of counselor visits; train all its staff to provide good service to the population with disabilities; develop collaborative training or cross training with the VRA and other WIOA partners; reach agreements on what information can be exchanged; and have accessible facilities for people with mobility impairments and wheelchairs. Few people knew about the Proyecto Talento Infinito [Infinite Talent Project], but they were interested in learning more about this initiative and recommended that it be made known to the VRA employees so they can refer applicants and consumers to these services.

D. Youth with disabilities, including students with disabilities and their need for pre-employment transition services. Include an assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition career services and pre-employment transition services, and the extent to which such services are coordinated with transition services provided under idea.

Students and young people's needs: No differences were observed between the needs of students (14 to 21 years, studying at secondary or post-secondary level) and young people (14 to 24 years, studying or not), nor were differences observed between these groups and the rest of the population with disabilities. The main needs they identified were: reasonable accommodations in employment; vocational or technical training, courses, or workshops; financial aid; coordination with employers and employment agencies to achieve a first opportunity or labor experience; driving classes and vehicle adaptation; coordination of services; vocational rehabilitation counseling; vocational evaluation; communication skills; and placement and employment services. In the focus groups, the following stood out: financial aid for post-secondary studies; financial aid for other expenses (food, gasoline, lodging, materials, equipment); more support in the search and placement for employment (includes employment accommodations); and monitoring by their advisors. Services that they have required from the VRA and have not been available and/or have had to wait a long time before receiving them were: financial aid; employment and the need for accommodations; vocational counseling and evaluation; all the services; access to mental health services (including pharmacological); occupational therapy, adjustments, and refreshers; transportation and mobility (includes driving classes and vehicle adaptation); and assistive technology equipment. Internal key

people focused more on vocational counseling and assessment services; guidance to their families; and independent living and activities of daily living services. Key people from other sectors further emphasized the need to expand the offering of pre-vocational and technical workshops with innovative topics of interest to younger generations (baristas, graphic arts, pet care, drones, cosmetology, massage, tattoos, social networks, and so forth); interagency coordination; job search and placement services (includes accommodations); and access to quality mental health services. The employees of the Labor Connection Centers identified as a problem the fact that young people arrive at them very disoriented regarding their vocational interests, without occupational skills, and with few communication skills. Furthermore, graduates of the DEPR Special Education Program do not have a Diploma with a degree, which makes it difficult to find a job.

As mentioned in section C, professionals and employers surveyed identified as the less served group of students and youth with disabilities, the followings: students with disabilities from private schools (41%); students and young people with autism spectrum disorder; DEPR students who are and are not in the Special Education Program; young people who dropped out of school; students and young people with more significant disabilities; homeschooling students; minors under State custody; young victims of crime or accidents; and with intellectual disabilities. Key people were very vocal in expressing their concern about the increase in students and young people with autism spectrum disorder and the few job alternatives that are being opened for this group in Puerto Rico, unlike other jurisdictions in the United States, Europe, and other countries.

IDEA Act Transition Services: The average score that consulted professionals and employers gave to the transition services provided by the DEPR was 5.5 (on a scale of 10) and the VRA was 6.5. Key people gave an average score of 6.5 to both agencies on this transition. About a third of those surveyed indicated that they have seen some positive developments in these services in the past three years because of the agreements reached between both agencies for pre-employment services (under the WOIA Act). The

main complaints focused on: the DEPR beginning the transition late; students arriving without basic skills for life or work; the VRA not having the necessary personnel to participate in the Special Education Programming and Placement Committees (COMPU, by its Spanish Acronym), and to begin offering services (transition analysts, counselors, vocational evaluators, occupational therapists, and so forth); and that VRA does not process requests from students in transition quickly. The main recommendations were: offer occupational counseling, counseling for full career exploration and in earlier grades; recruit occupational or rehabilitation counselors; deliver assistive technology equipment to students on time and allow students to keep the equipment; and offer training for the development of social skills and independent living. As in the 2020-2021 Study, the issue of evaluations raised controversy and discomfort. On the one hand, the VRA staff understand that evaluations are often obsolete for the student's age, are not correct, and are of inferior quality, therefore they must be updated. The DEPR staff and people from other sectors understand that these reasons are valid and re-applying significantly affects the transition process, delays the prompt provision of services at the VRA, affects timely entry into post-secondary studies, and discourages applicants and their families. The topic of evaluations also came up in all focus groups; some participants expressed their complaints about the continuous evaluations they had to undergo for the VRA as part of the eligibility process, paying for them out of pocket. The main recommendations were: to have more transition counselors and analysts; participate in COMPUs; clarify public policy between agencies (DEPR and the VRA) on evaluations and equipment; request fewer evaluations and have professionals who can do these evaluations faster and at no cost to the applicant; streamline and simplify administrative procedures; incorporate electronic and virtual processes; and better communicate to families the requirements, next steps to follow, services, and times/calendar.

WIOA Act Transition Services: Although the number of applicants/consumers who used pre-employment services (PRE-ETS) was extremely low, they expressed high satisfaction with them. Several focus group participants spoke very positively about their Work-Based Learning Experiences (WBLE). The services best valued by professionals and employers consulted were WBLE (9.2), followed by Career Exploration Counseling,

Self-Advocacy Instruction, Counseling for Transition to Postsecondary Education or Employment, and the Workplace Readiness Training Service to Develop Social and Independent Living Skills. They highlighted that the VRA has given significant importance to the development of these services in the past three years and expressed a good opinion of the external entities contracted. The main recommendations were: to have more personnel to coordinate these services; expand and diversify WBLE employers; connect these services with counseling; develop orientations, workshops, and experiences focused on specific groups (for example, those with autism disorders); and prepare virtual material so that students and their families can request them and take some of the tests, interactive workshops, or orientations remotely (online).

2. Identify the need to establish, develop, or improve community Rehabilitation Programs within the State.

CRP: Consumers expressed high satisfaction with the services of Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) that offer supported employment services; 80% indicated that the services were “very good” or “good”; and, that all services were available. The professionals and employers surveyed gave them an average score of 8.5 (on a scale of 10); internal key people 8.2 and external key people 8.5. As in the previous Study, they were identified as one of the most positive areas of vocational rehabilitation services in the past three years. However, 95% of those consulted indicated that there are not enough CRPs and supported employment services to meet the demand in Puerto Rico. The main service gaps were identified in the western, eastern, and central areas of the Island. Some training recommendations were: types of evaluations (ecological, adaptive, test work experiences, simulations in real scenarios, and other alternative vocational evaluations); labor market trends and innovative strategies for placement and employment; and the management of groups with specific conditions (autism spectrum disorder). The main recommendations were to expand the contracts and quotas of people served by the CRP; that the VRA promote the creation of more CRPs; that CRPs diversify the types of jobs they offer; that the VRA be more flexible about the length with

certain groups and listen more to the CRPs perspective; and to strengthen communication between the CRPs (Network).

ILC: Although the number of applicants/consumers who used the services of the Independent Living Centers (ILCs) was extremely low, they expressed good satisfaction with them. For their part, the score given by professionals and employers was 6.5; key people also gave 6.5, like the previous Study. The main recommendations were: to establish more specific agreements between these Centers and the VRA for the referral of applicants and consumers; that the VRA train its staff on what ILCs are, when and how to refer them; to have more ILCs covering all regions; bring information from these ILCs to the DEPR so that no young person stays home after finishing school, especially those who are not eligible for VRA services; and that the State Independent Living Council, the Department of Health, and the VRA strengthen their communication about independent living services.

(C) GOALS, PRIORITIES, AND STRATEGIES

Section 101(a)(15) and (23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to describe the goals and priorities of the State in conducting the VR and Supported Employment programs. The goals and priorities are based on (1) the most recent CSNA, including any updates; (2) the State's performance under the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA; and (3) other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including any reports received from the SRC and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under section 107 of the Rehabilitation Act. VR agencies must—

(1) Describe how the SRC and the VR Agency jointly developed and agreed to the goals and priorities and any revisions;

Based on the results of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, monitoring and performance results, State's priorities and other sources of information, the VRA, in coordination and collaboration with the State Rehabilitation Council (CERPR), identify the goals and priorities necessary to carry out

vocational rehabilitation and supported employment programs. The SRC participates in the development activities of the CSNA and provides its input. Draft goals, priorities and strategies are developed by VRA and discussed with the Council in a formal meeting. Second year revisions are carried out in the same way.

(2) Identify measurable goals and priorities in conducting the VR and supported employment programs and the basis for selecting the goals and priorities (e.g., CSN, performance accountability measures, SRC recommendations, monitoring, other information). As required in Section 101(a)(15)(d), (18), and (23), Describe under each goal or priority, the strategies or methods used to achieve the goal or priority, including as applicable, description of strategies or methods that—

As mentioned in the previous section, the VRA developed its goals, priorities and strategies based on the results of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment of VR Needs, performance accountability measures, SRC recommendations, monitoring results and State's priorities, among others.

Goal 1: Achieve greater effectiveness in the process of providing services to applicants/consumers for a successful integration into the labor force.

Priorities:

1. Emphasize the importance of applying public policy, counseling, and employment alternatives, in tune with the times and needs of the consumer.
2. Promote collaboration with other agencies and resources to ensure that applicants/consumers receive information and services necessary to enter the labor force.
3. Strengthen approaches and services to employers to promote the recruitment of people with disabilities.
4. Promote information exchange with applicants/consumers related to their vocational rehabilitation process.

Strategies:

- Increase the provision of general counseling service, career counseling and information exchange with applicants/consumers related to their vocational rehabilitation process.
- Implement and promote the use of the document sharing platform between counselor and consumer (PED)
- Promote the development of a platform for the applicant-consumer that allows the latter to learn about the status of his case (for instance: Awaiting documents from the applicant to determine eligibility; Referred to Vocational Evaluation; etc.).
- Offer formal training (with presentations), by the Central Level programmatic offices, directly to Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, and technical assistance to the personnel of the Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Services Centers in areas related to the new labor market trends (technological goals, remote work, online services); effective management of specific populations such as students and youth on the autism spectrum, with multiple conditions or mental health issues, among others; the ecological assessments, the new assistive technology equipment, self-employment initiatives, the registry and documentation of data for the RSA-911 report and performance indicators, among other topics.
- Promote the development of self-employment and remote job projects with other entities or agencies.
- Promote the development of job projects, work-based learning or job-related experiences for specific groups with significant or most significant disabilities.
- Refer VRA consumers and ineligible people with disabilities to Independent Living Centers.
- Strengthen coordination with the DLHR in order for the VRA personnel and consumers to participate, at least once a year in each region, in orientations and

receive up-to-date information about the job market, high-demand jobs, and available opportunities.

- Develop an online referral exchange process with the Labor Connection Centers (formerly “Americans Job Centers”).
- Continue the implementation of the electronic sharing of referrals with other entities, namely, the Department of Education, and the State Insurance Fund Corporation.
- Develop printed material, also accessible through the VRA website, about community resources available to address consumer’s various needs.
- Coordinate the presentation of formal orientations to the VRA Rehabilitation Counselors on the services offered by programs under WIOA, at least once a year in each region.
- Expand outreach efforts to cover other demographic groups (e.g., municipalities, specialized hospitals, health providers, non-profit organizations that provide services to populations with significant disabilities, among others).
- Provide training and technical assistance to employers on: VRA services, recruitment of qualified people with disabilities, reasonable accommodation, among others. This includes approaches to individual employers and through public and private employer associations and agencies.
- Promote the granting of wage incentives to employers to increase employment opportunities for consumers.
- Continue providing physical and mental restoration services that are identified as necessary to achieve integration into the workforce.

Goal 2: Contribute to increasing the skills and opportunities of students with disabilities through the provision of Pre-Employment and Transition Services.

Priorities:

1. Serve as many youths and students with disabilities as possible.

Strategies:

- Maintain the participation of the VRA personnel at the meetings of the Committee on Programming and Placement (COMPU, by its acronym in Spanish) of youth in transition.
- Offer Pre-Employment Transition Services.
- Continue to identify new Transition referrals and the number of Transition referrals beginning to receive services during the program year.
- Continue orienting school staff, parents, and students about VRA services.
- Provide guidance on VRA services to home school and private schools students.
- Coordinate with the Department of Housing, Department of the Family, and community support groups to offer orientations in strategic places to identify out-of-school youths with disabilities who could benefit from VRA services.

Goal 3: Strengthen administrative, programmatic, and technological procedures to achieve the required institutional efficiency.

Priorities:

1. Facilitate processes using technology, review of public policy and staff strengthening.

Strategies:

- Implement technology projects to facilitate case management and document sharing, among others.
- Integrate visual information resources (videos) to the website for people with disabilities interested in VRA services, and students with disabilities.

- Integrate videos and material geared to employers and make them accessible through the social media networks of the VRA (e. g. videos of success stories of consumers who have been employed and how the VRA can help employers to recruit qualified individuals with disabilities).
- Offer training to personnel to strengthen the knowledge and skills necessary to perform their duties.
- Offer orientations (through formal presentations), once a year, for all the personnel on the VRA Portion of the Unified State Plan, the Strategic Plan/Annual Execution Plan and its Goals and Strategies.
- Continue to conduct periodic performance evaluations of agency employees to ensure institutional effectiveness.
- Update administrative, fiscal, and programmatic procedures in line with established state and federal regulations, as necessary, and to promote institutional efficiency.
- Carry out programmatic monitoring of the service provision process and quality control monitoring to ensure compliance with public policy, quality of reported data and to identify areas for improvement.
- Provide technical assistance based on the findings of the monitoring processes and identification of needs by personnel at the central or regional level or during studies conducted.
- Establish goals (quotas) of consumers placed in regular employment by the personnel of the Support and Employment Modalities Centers (SEMC).
- Establish goals (quotas) for the coordination of job experiences carried out directly by the personnel of the SEMC.

A. Support innovation and expansion activities;

Some of the strategies included under goal 3 correspond to innovation and expansion. In addition to those, the following are included:

- Continue the provision of services to people with disabilities due to traffic accidents, through a collaboration agreement with the Automobile Accident Compensation Administration.
- Improve the availability of information resources or training for newly recruited personnel through the agency's internal page (intranet).
- Continue using video technology for remote interpretation for deaf individuals.
- Continue funding the SCR and CILs to assist and support their operations, as well as develop, in conjunction with the VRA, better employment and independent living opportunities for our applicants/consumers.

B. Overcome barriers to accessing VR and supported employment services;

The VRA has services available and accessible to all individuals with disabilities. For the purpose of promoting the participation in vocational rehabilitation services and supported employment, the personnel of the agency participate in community orientation activities. There is no difference as to the availability of services for groups of specific disabilities, or specific cultural or racial groups. Moreover, the VRA conducts transactions as necessary to continue ensuring that its facilities are accessible to all individuals with disabilities.

C. Improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities, including the coordination of services designed to facilitate the transition of such students from school to postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, postsecondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services); and

See Goal 2 and strategies above.

D. Improve the performance of the VR and Supported Employment programs in assisting individuals with disabilities to achieve quality employment outcomes.

Goal 1 and its strategies, specified above, apply to individuals under the VR and supported employment programs. However, the following specific and additional goals and strategies for supported employment are included:

Goal A: Continue to provide services to consumers identified for supported employment modality.

Strategies:

- Use other sources of funding, in addition to the ones from Title VI, Part B, needed to expand the provision of supported employment services.
- At the Support and Employment Modalities Centers of (SEMC), receive and evaluate at least 150 new candidates for Supported Employment services, referred from the VRC.
- Contract and support community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) throughout the Island so that at least 80 consumers, who received supported employment services, are able to achieve an employment outcome.
- Provide services at the CRP to at least 160 new cases during the period.
- Expand outreach in order to attract other potential service providers. This, by providing orientations in graduate schools (e.g., counseling, occupational therapy) that might develop projects to provide supported employment services as part of internships, and through greater dissemination in the media, among others.
- Strengthen the provision of supported employment services through training and technical assistance to the staff of the CRPs. The Support and Employment Modalities Office (SEMO) and the Support and Employment Modalities Centers (SEMC) will provide such technical assistance in aspects such as:

1. Guidance to new proponents about supported employment services, as requested.
 2. Other aspects related to the provision of supported employment services and extended supports services.
- Continue conducting monitoring interventions to the CRPs in order to validate compliance with the provision of services established in the contracts.

Goal B: Maintain a level of satisfaction of 85% of those consumers who received supported employment services at the closure of the case.

- Continue administering satisfaction surveys of the consumer in terms of the services received in the CRPs and in the SEMC, in order to identify areas to be strengthened or improved.

The VRA continues to implement the following strategies to improve the performance with respect to evaluation standards and performance accountability measures:

- Continue the practice of regularly sharing statistical information with regional staff and providing technical assistance on WIOA Performance Indicators and data entry for the RSA-911 report (See Goal 1, fourth strategy, and Goal 3, eighth and ninth strategies, above).
- Continue promoting, among the Counseling Service Centers' staff, the use of the reports developed that allow them to see a list per work zone (caseload) with or without the information registered in the required fields, including:
 1. MSG Active Cases: Shows the active cases of participants in each caseload and the registered dates for the elements 85, 343-347, and 401.
 2. Cases st.26 and 28 Registration of Credentials: Shows closed cases upon receiving services, if they were registered as "Enrolled" in elements 78, 84 or 400, and whether they have Credential registration. This report allows the Counselor to identify cases that require follow-up for the Credential registration before concluding the period of

one year after exiting. Furthermore, the projection is to develop a similar report for cases in st.20 and 22 (ready for employment and working).

3. Quarters for Post Exit Follow Ups: Displays a list of participants who exited the program after receiving services and the post exit employment data registered for second and fourth quarter follow-up. Staff have been provided with information on the importance of carrying out said follow-ups and data collection for performance indicators. In addition, the Office of Quality Control and Programmatic Management has referred to the Office of Information Systems the requirements for adjustments that the system needs in order to prevent data entry errors by the users and provide alerts for the registration of MSG and Credentials.
- Continue emphasizing the importance of services to employers, including the orientation and training to raise awareness of the benefits of recruiting and retaining individuals with disabilities, and technical assistance after placement (See Goal 1, strategies fourteenth and fifteenth, above).
 - Continue sending or making available to the personnel of the Center for Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Services the information of the Unemployment Insurance to complete the information about the employment indicators of the second and third quarters under WIOA.
 - Continue promoting postsecondary education among its consumers and providing them with follow-up for the presentation of Credentials and proof of Measurable Skills Gained.

(D) Evaluation and reports of progress: VR and supported employment goals.

For the most recently completed program year, provide an evaluation and report of progress for the goals or priorities, including progress on the strategies under each goal or priority, applicable to that program year. Sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to describe—

(1) Progress in achieving the goals and priorities identified for the VR and supported Employment Programs;

The following progress report corresponds to the Goals and Strategies established for PY 2022.

Goal 1: To achieve excellence in the service delivery to applicants/consumers for a successful integration into the workforce.

Strategy: Increase the provision of services such as general counseling, career counseling, and information sharing with applicants/consumers in connection with their vocational rehabilitation process.

Progress Report: During PY 2022, the Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Service Centers Services (VRCSC) provided 8,311 counseling services.

Strategy: The program offices at the Central Level shall provide the personnel of the Centers for Vocational Rehabilitation Services with technical assistance in areas pertaining to case management, public policy, and data registers and documentation for the RSA-911 report, among other areas.

Progress Report: During PY 2022, the Quality Control and Programmatic Management Office (QCPMO) provided:

- 465 technical assistances to personnel at the regional and central level, and
- 20 training sessions for the personnel of the regional VRCSC (Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, Supervisors, Directors, and Rehabilitation Counseling Service Technicians) as follows:

Table 55: Breakdown of Training Activities offered to the Rehabilitation Counseling Staff

Date	Activity/Trainings (topic)	Number of participants
July -1, 2022	Analysis of MSG data registry (2 sessions: VRCSC staff of the West Region (AM) and Metro East Region (PM))	48
Sept. 13 and 15, 2022 Nov. 16, 17 and 22, 2022 December 21, 2022	Performance During the Program Year (PY) 2021: Orientation for Directors and Supervisors of VRCSC (Regions: North, West, Metro East, South, Center East, and North Center)	30
February 1 and 8, 2023	Performance Indicators under WIOA and PY 2021 Performance (Region: North Center)	46
February 10, 2023, and March 10, 2023	Performance Indicators under WIOA and PY 2021 Performance (Region: South)	51
February 10 and 22, 2023	Performance Indicators under WIOA and PY 2021 Performance (Region: North Center)	32
February 24-2023 and March 17, 2023	Performance Indicators under WIOA and PY 2021 Performance (Region: West)	35
February 13 and 16, 2023	Performance Indicators under WIOA and PY 2021 Performance (Region: Metro East)	32

February 27 and 28, 2023	Performance Indicators under WIOA and PY 2021 Performance (Region: Center East)	39
		Total: 313*

*The number includes employees who participated in more than one training.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Service Office (VRC SO) offered training and technical assistance to employees of the Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Service Centers Services (VRC SC) and other support personnel, thus achieving:

- 236 trained professionals at the VRC SC
- 679 technical assistances to VRC SC professionals

The Assessment and Adjustment Office (AAO) carried out the following training and technical assistance activities:

- Training of regional VRC SC personnel (Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, Supervisors, Rehabilitation Counseling Service Technicians, Occupational Therapists, among others) on:
 1. Sensibility towards the deaf population- on September 28 and 30 2022; 80 professionals participated.
 2. Samples of Occupational Therapy Work and Skills to be Evaluated- on August 17, 2022; 35 professionals participated.
- Medical and psychiatric consulting within the analysis for eligibility and ineligibility determination:
 1. January 25, 2023: 23 professionals of the North Center Region participated
 2. February 3, 2023: 24 professionals of the South Region participated

3. February 8, 2023: 13 professionals of the Metro East Region participated
4. February 10, 2023: 17 professionals of the North Region participated
5. February 17, 2023: 22 professionals of the South Region participated

Supervisory personnel of the Assessment and Adjustment Centers (AAC) offered technical assistance to counseling professionals aimed at: reinforcing the referrals to the AACs, and to the Assessment and Adjustment Units (AAU) as well as public policy compliance, on the following dates:

- October 13 and 17, 2022 and December 12, 2022: three (3) professionals participated in the Mayagüez AAC,
- November 10, and December 22, 2022: ten (10) professionals participated in the Aguadilla AAC,
- November 21, 2022: three (3) professionals participated in the San Juan AAC.

The Finance and Budget Division offered technical assistance to counselors and support personnel on an ongoing basis during the period and answered the questions from directors at the Central Level, upon request. Such consultations were carried out through telephone and/or electronic communications.

In the VRCSC, the regional directors and supervisors offer training to Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and Support Personnel through administrative meetings, where they discuss matters related to the services delivery and the analysis of the communications, compliance with the public policy, among other aspects.

Strategy:

- Promote self-employment and remote jobs.

Progress Report:

9 consumers in the self-employment modality achieved an employment outcome during the period.

Strategy:

- Refer VRA consumers and ineligible individuals with disabilities to the Centers for Independent Living.

Progress Report:

The VRCSC achieved:

- 546 referrals of eligible consumers to the Centers for Independent Living (CIL).
- 190 referrals of ineligible individuals with disabilities to the CILs.

Strategy:

- Reinforce the coordination with the Department of Labor and Human Resources (DLHR) for the VRA personnel and consumers to receive conferences and up-to-date information of the labor market, high-demand jobs, and available opportunities, at least once a year in each region.

Progress Report:

The Support and Employment Modalities Centers (SEMC):

- Coordinated 13 activities with the DLHR to learn about the job trends and employer types.
- Offered 984 orientations to consumers.
- Offered 40 orientations to Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and AAC on job market trends and high-demand jobs.

Strategy:

- Share referrals with the Americans Job Centers and other agencies and community organizations.

Progress Report:

The SEMCs:

- Received 29 referrals from the American Job Centers.
- Referred 133 individuals to the mandatory WIOA programs as follows: 25 referrals to Title I-Adult, Dislocated Workers, and Youth Program for Training; 0 for Micro-business Courses and Services; 12 referrals to Title II- Adult Education Program; 96 referrals to Title III-Wagner-Peyser Act.
- Received 10 referrals from agencies and community organizations.
- Made 9 referrals to agencies and community organizations.

Strategy:

- Coordinate the presentation of formal orientations to Rehabilitation Counselors of the VRA on the services offered under WIOA programs, at least once a year in each region.

Progress Report:

The VRCSO and VRCSCs:

- Did not coordinate presentations to the VRC on the services offered under WIOA programs.

Note: The activity was not carried out due to limitations on the coordination and planning by both parties.

Strategy:

- Broaden the outreach efforts to reach other demographics (e. g. municipalities, specialized hospitals, health providers, nonprofit organizations that provide services to populations with significant disabilities, among others).

Progress Report:

The VRA participated in and offered:

- Service Fair in the municipality of Cabo Rojo for the purpose of offering an orientation on VRA services: 251 students benefited therefrom.
- Workshop: Mental health in the workplace, to the personnel of the company Corteva Agriscience in Salinas on October 24, 2022: 29 professionals participated.
- 54 orientations at: educational, government, mental health, hospital, and municipal entities.

Strategy:

- Provide employers with training and technical assistance on: VRA services, recruiting of qualified individuals with disabilities, job accommodation, among others. This includes approaching individual employers and public and private associations and agencies grouping employers.

Progress Report:

The SEMCs:

- Offered two (2) trainings to potential/existing employers as follows:
 1. October 24, 2022 –Vocational Rehabilitation Administration Services at the Transitional Service Center: seven (7) professionals participated.
 2. October 28, 2022 –Diversity at Workplace for Individuals with Disabilities at Abbott Laboratories: 28 professionals participated.

- Offered 980 technical assistances to potential/existing employers, thus achieving: 180 in-person technical assistances; 298 technical assistances through telephone calls; 502 technical assistances through electronic means.
- Offered 1,267 *orientations* to potential/existing employers, thus achieving: 243 in-person; 537 through telephone calls and 487 through electronic means.
- Held 18 teleconferences with potential/existing employers.
- Participated in five (5) virtual talks/forums with potential/existing employers.

Strategy:

- Promote the granting of salary incentives to employers to increase job opportunities for consumers.

Progress Report:

The VRA did not execute contracts for salary incentives during the period.

Note: There was no request from employers to contract through the salary incentive.

Strategy:

- Develop videos and material geared to employers and make them accessible through the social media networks of the VRA (e. g. videos of success stories of consumers who have been employed and how the VRA can help employers to recruit qualified individuals with disabilities).

Progress Report:

The SEMC developed:

- Seven (7) orientation materials aimed at employers, as follows: One (1) quarterly newsletter (July 2022); Four (4) PowerPoint presentations (July and October 2022, and March 2023); Two (2) newsletters (April and January 2023)

- One (1) job club video (July 2022)

Goal 2

Contribute to the increase in skills and opportunities for students with disabilities through the provision of Pre-Employment Transition and Transition Services.

Strategy:

- Maintain the participation of the VRA personnel at the meetings of the COMPU of youth in transition.

Progress Report:

The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors achieved a total of 22 participations at meetings of the Committee on Programming and Placement (COMPU, by its acronym in Spanish).

The Rehabilitation Counseling Analysts achieved a total of 3,941 participations at COMPU meetings.

Strategy:

- Offer Pre-employment Transition Services.

Progress Report:

16,321 students with disabilities received pre-employment transition services.

Note: 10% of students with disabilities participated in one or two activities during the period.

The VRA, represented by the Pre-employment Transition Service Office (PETSO):

- Executed 22 Collaboration Agreements to carry out Work-Based Learning Experiences (WBL) on July 2022, where the following participated:

1. Government agencies: 8
2. Municipalities: 10
3. Private companies: 4
 - Executed 15 contracts to offer pre-employment transition services through service fairs, as follows:
 1. Global Education Exchange Opportunities, Inc.
 2. Future Learning FLC Corporation
 3. INOVA Build Inc.
 4. Emprende.PR LLC.
 5. Centro de Adiestramiento para Personas con Impedimentos, Inc,
 6. JF Educational Services Inc.
 7. WES Innovation & Technology Inc.
 8. Realizate
 9. Colegio Único de Oportunidades
 10. Vocational & Transition Services, PSC
 11. Empleo Alianza, Corporation.
 12. L & G Enterprise Inc.
 13. New Vision, LLC
 14. Damar Aldrey & Associates, LLC
 15. Integra Education Corporation

- Executed ten (10) contracts to develop the 2023 Summer Camp (June) for students with disabilities between the ages of 14 and 16 years to develop pre-employment skills by exposing them to the five (5) WIOA mandatory activities. Received 1,106 students with disabilities at the six (6) regions of the agency. The agency executed contracts with the following entities:

1. Future Learning FLC Corporation
2. New Vision, LLC
3. Emprende.PR LLC.
4. Centro de Adiestramiento para Personas con Impedimentos, Inc,
5. INOVA Build Inc.
6. Vocational & Transition Services, PSC
7. L & G Enterprise Inc.
8. WES Innovation & Technology Inc.
9. JF Educational Services Inc.
10. Realizate

Note: One (1) contract was cancelled during the period.

Prior to the execution of the contracts for the provision of the services through WBLE, Pre-ETS Service Fair, and the Summer Camp, the PETSOC carried out the following activities:

- Prepared the Public Announcements to deliver applications for the WBLEs and the Guidelines for Proposals for the summer fairs and camps, thus achieving the following publications:

1. WBLE- Television: WIPR-*Notiseis* 360pr; Press: News Forum; Digital: YouTube (June 2, 2023) and through social media networks of the agency on May 23, 2023.
 2. Service Fairs – on the website of the agency on August 25, 2022.
 3. 2023 Summer Camp – Television WIPR-*Notiseis* 360pr; Press: News Forum and Weekly Newspaper *Visión al Servicio del Oeste*; Digital: YouTube (December 9 and 12, 2022, and January 2023) and through the social media networks of the agency on November 29, 2022.
- Called and held a meeting with the Proposal Evaluation Committee of the agency on:
 1. September 6, 2022, for Service fair proposals; 10 professionals participated.
 2. April 4, 2023, for Summer Camp proposals; 11 professionals participated.

The Regional Pre-employment Transition Service Areas offered 1,167 orientations on the transition process, to the following:

- Parents: 451
- Teachers: 168
- Students: 548

Strategy:

- Continue identifying new Transition referrals, and those Transition referrals that begin to receive services during the program year.

Progress Report:

The VRA achieved:

- 1,874 transition referrals from schools that completed applications for service.

- 4,042 Individualized Plan for Employment were developed for youths between the ages of 14-24 years.
- 2,067 consumers (youths between the ages of 14-24 years) had an employment outcome.

Strategy:

- Continue offering orientations to the school personnel, parents, and students about the VRA services.

Progress Report:

10,454 orientations were offered about the transition process, to the following:

- Parents: 3,805
- Teachers: 1,646
- Students: 5,003

Strategy:

- Provide orientations about VRA services to homeschoolers and students of private schools.

Progress Report

The VRCSO offered the following orientations to professionals of two (2) home schooling centers:

- Tu Norte Educativo: On February 22, 2023, which impacted two (2) people and identified 32 youths.

- Vil Art: On February 22, 2023, which impacted two (2) people and identified 40 youths.

Strategy:

- Coordinate with the Department of Housing, the Department of the Family, and community support groups to offer orientations in strategic places to identify out of school youths with disabilities who could benefit from VRA services.

Progress Report:

The Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Service Centers Services offered:

- 25 orientations in scenarios outside of schools on February 22 and June 23, 2023
- 137 professionals were impacted
- 169 youths with disabilities were identified

Goal 3

Strengthen the administrative, programmatic, and technological procedures to achieve the required institutional efficiency.

Strategy:

- Implement technology projects to facilitate case management and document sharing, among others.

Progress Report:

The Information Systems Office (ISO) gave continuity to the two (2) projects related to technological innovations and improvements.

- New Case Management System (CMIS System)
- VRA Interactive System (IVRA Project)

Strategy:

- To add visual information resources (videos) to the website for individuals with disabilities interested in VRA services, employers, and students with disabilities.

Progress Report:

The ISO included three (3) publications on the website of the agency.

Strategy:

- To offer training to the personnel to strengthen their knowledge and skills as necessary to discharge their duties (e. g. effective communication, public policy, time management, occupational match, case management in the event of most significant disabilities, among others).

Progress Report:

The Office of Labor Relations and Human Resources (OLRHR):

Coordinated 60 training activities for the VRA personnel, achieving 1,837 participations (includes professionals who participated in various trainings during the period).

Some of the topics of higher interest were:

- Supervision academy;
- Vocational Interest Inventory Administration ARCI “Aguilar- Resto Career Indicator”;
- Government resource administration;
- Assistive technology alternatives for employment and independent living;
- Effective communication in the workplace;
- 2023 Annual Convention of the Audiology Academy of Puerto Rico;

- Conference of professionals who provide assistance: Self-care strategies for professionals who provide assistance;
- Hope, Possibility and Effort: Advancing, Reaching, and Persevering in Times of Intense Challenges;
- Professional Ethics in Times of Zoonosis;
- Compassion Fatigue;
- Equal Pay for Equal Work;
- Generational Integration in the Work Environment
- Mental Health and Anxiety Disorders;
- Leadership, Motivation, and the Establishment of Work Teams;
- Project Management;
- Metrics of Success in the Professional Practice;
- Need for the inclusion of the rehabilitation counselor in the formation of the athlete and his role in sports;
- Strategic planning for supervisors;
- Mental Health First Aid;
- ARCI Test;
- Challenges and strategies in the supervision of professionals and students or recent research;
- Sign Language Sensibility;
- Sensibility Towards Deaf People;

- Supervision: Styles and how they can influence in the motivation of the employees;
- Public Service Values;
- Domestic Violence: Living Without Fear; and
- Others. See section VI. VR (i)(4)(A)

Strategy

- Continue conducting periodic employee performance evaluations to ensure institutional efficacy.

Progress Report:

The Office of Labor Relations and Human Resources (OLRHR) conducted:

- 745 evaluations during the period

Note: The performance evaluations are performed after the each evaluated semester concludes, based on this fact, 490 of the evaluations conducted from July to December 2022 pertain to the 2022 January to June semester; and 255 evaluations received between January and June 2023, pertain to the 2022 July to December semester.

Strategy:

- Update administrative, fiscal, and programmatic procedures in accordance with the established state and federal regulations, as needed.

Progress Report:

The AAO:

- Discussed the 2022-2023 Annual Execution Plan with the personnel of the office and established the Work Plan on July 7, 2022.

- Participated in a meeting with the directors of the VRCSO and SEMO to review the activities of the 2022-2023 Annual Execution Plan, on August 4, 2022.

The Offices of Labor Affairs and Human Resources and of Legal Affairs:

- Trained directors and supervisors of the six regions of the VRA and the Central Level in connection with the laws on public policy. The trainings were held as follows:

1. Center East Region on November 9, 2022
2. North Center Region on November 16, 2022
3. South Region on November 30, 2022
4. North Region on December 7, 2022
5. West Region on December 20, 2022
6. Metro East Region and Central Level on January 18, 2023

The laws and public policies considered were the following:

- Act No. 17 of April 22, 1988, Act to Prohibit Sexual Harassment in Employment.
- Act No. 217 of September 29, 2006, "Protocol for Managing Domestic Violence Situations at the workplace."
- Act No. 22 of March 29, 2013 "Act to set forth the public policy of the Government of Puerto Rico against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity in the public and private sector."
- Act No. 212 of August 3, 1999, "Guaranteed Equal Employment Opportunities by Gender Act."
- Act No. 90 of August 7, 2020, "Act to Prohibit and Prevent Workplace Harassment in Puerto Rico."

- Act. 168 of May 4, 1949, as amended, “Act to require shopping centers, government centers, ports, and airports to establish dedicated areas for small children breastfeeding and diaper changing.”

The VRCSO carried out the following activities:

- Developed Policy Directive No. 2023-01 to amend Policy Directive No. 2016-04 Procedure to recommend training services in the following categories: Training at a graduate college or university to pursue a master’s or doctorate degree; Four-year training at a college or university to pursue a bachelor’s degree or a four-year undergraduate degree; and Training at a Junio or Community College to pursue an associate degree or a certificate, August 9, 2022.
- Developed Policy Directive No. 2023-03 Amendment to Policy Directive No. 2022-22 Procedure for the provision of interpretation services to deaf and partially deaf applicants/consumers of the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration, on August 19, 2022.
- Developed Policy Directive No. 2023-04 to Repeal Policy Directive No. 2023-01, on September 1, 2022.
- Developed Policy Directive No. 2023-06 to Repeal Policy Directive No. 2009-20 Procedure to determine the financial contribution of the applicant to work experiences for evaluation/extended evaluation (ETFE/EE[ST.06]) purposes/consumer of VRA services at a cost and instructions to fill out the form: Financial Analysis for the Contribution to Services at a Cost, on December 12, 2022.
- Developed Policy Directive No. 2023-11 Official name of the regions that constitute the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration, on May 22, 2023.
- Reviewed the following communications:

1. Policy Directive No. 2010-06 Procedure for Evaluation and Adjustment Services for Adapted Driving Lessons and Adaptation of Motor Vehicles with Assistive Equipment in Puerto Rico and the United States for VRA Consumers.
2. Policy Directive No. 2015-02 Procedure to provide maintenance services to VRA applicants/consumers.
3. Policy Directive No. 2015-03 Amendment to the limit on the cost of transportation services to consumers who, even though they can stay, choose to travel daily to attend their rehabilitation training or services.
4. Policy Directive No. 2015-04 Procedure to provide transportation services to VRA applicants/consumers.
5. Policy Directive No. 2018-09 Amendment to the sponsorship of services to defray the difference in enrollment costs and maintenance services to VRA applicants/consumers.
6. Continued reviewing the Manual for Medical Procedures.

The VRCSC discussed:

- Policy Directive No. 2023-06, on December 12, 2022, at:
 1. West Region on December 14, 2022
 2. North and Metro East Regions on December 15, 2022
 3. Center East Region on December 16, 2022
 4. North Center Region on December 22, 2022
 5. South Region on January 9, 2023
- Policy Directives No. 2023-07 and 2023-09, on December 14, 2022, at:

1. East Metro Region on December 15, 2022
2. North and Center East Regions on December 16, 2022
3. North Center Region on December 22, 2022
4. West Region on December 27, 2022
5. South Region on January 9, 2023

The PETS0 updated the following documents:

1. Guidelines for Proposals, attachments, and related documentation for: Service Fairs (July 21, 2022) and 2023 Summer Camp (November 22, 2022).
2. WBLE Public Announcement (April 18, 2023); Pre-employment Service Fair (July 21, 2022) and Summer Camp (August 12, 2022).
3. Collaboration Agreement and related documents for WBLE on April 18, 2023.
4. Policies and Procedures for the Evaluation of Reasonability and Adjudicability of Costs in Pre-employment Transition Services on February 2, 2023.

The QCPMO:

- Developed Policy Directive 2023-02 Training on WIOA performance indicators and estimated annual achievements of program year 2021, on January 25, 2023.
- Shared with the VRCSO recent federal regulations on post-employment services to update the pertinent public policy.
- Shared with SEMO information about Customized Employment and Supported Employment, on April 20, 2023.
- Shared with the Administrator's Office information about Pre-ETS processes in Texas and Minnesota on January 27 and February 9, 2023.

- Participated in four (4) in-person meetings related to the VRA portion of the 2024 Unified State Plan to be developed with the central government, and the Department of Economic Development and Commerce, held by Premier Financial Services on February 22; March 14, May 2, and June 1, 2023, as part of the office's project management duties.
- Maintain communication through email regarding the requests for data and information and made recommendations for the 2024 Unified State Plan.
- In compliance with the federal regulations on conducting a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment for Rehabilitation Services in Puerto Rico (CSNA), jointly with the State Council on Rehabilitation, formalized a project and the following activities were carried out:
 1. Revised and updated of Request for Proposal (RFP) and the Public Announcement (February 2023)
 2. Submitted to the Office of the Administrator the RFP and Public Announcement for recommendations/approval/publication, as pertinent, on January 31, 2023.
 3. The agency carried out the publication of the Public Announcement in a newspaper of the island (on February 10, 15, and 20, 2023) for the purpose of announcing the period to submit proposals to develop a study on needs.
 4. From February 15 – 28, 2023, eleven (11) RFPs were submitted.
 5. Four (4) telephone consultations were answered in connection with the requirements established in the RFP.
 6. On April 5, 2023, four (4) proposals were received to develop the study on needs.
 7. Reviewed the Proposal Evaluation Form.
 8. Submitted a Report on Answers of the VRA to questions issued by proponents, related to Attachment I of the RFP (March 21, 2023).

9. Requested the Operational Policy Administrator to call a meeting of the Proposal Evaluation Committee on April 5, 2023.
10. Called a meeting of the Proposal Evaluation Committee on April 10, 2023.
11. Drafted a Summary of Evaluated Proposals on April 19, 2023.
12. Submitted to the Administrator a Contract Award Recommendation regarding the CSNA (April 26, 2023).
13. Notified proponents of the award to the entity that shall be conducting the study (April 28, 2023).
14. Established the contract conditions for conducting the study; and
15. Called the pertinent entities and held the initial meeting related to the needs assessment (June 9, 2023), where nine (9) professionals participated.

The SEMO developed the following:

- Policy Directive No. 2023-05 Corrections to Policy Directive No. 2022-17 No Cost Codes for supported employment services, on November 1, 2022.
- Policy Directive No. 2023-08 Procedure to grant salary incentive to employers who employ consumers of the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration, on December 14, 2022.
- Policy Directive No. 2023-01 Contracts for Supported Employment Services with Community Rehabilitation Programs for 2022- 2023, on November 22, 2022.

The Fiscal Division developed:

- Policy Directive No. 2023-02 Close of fiscal year 2021-2022, on November 22, 2022.
- Policy Directive No. 2023-10 Close of state fiscal year 2022-2023, on April 17, 2023.

The Administration Office developed:

- Policy Directive No. 2023-03 Delivery of the proclamation of the rehabilitation counselors' week on March 16, 2023.

The Documents Division developed:

- Policy Directive No. 2023-04 Preventive measures for public document protection during the hurricane season, on May 26, 2023.

Strategy:

- Carry out program monitoring of the service delivery process and of quality control to ensure compliance with the public policy, the quality of data reported.

Progress Report:

The QCPMO conducted file monitoring for quality control of the RSA-911 data and provided in-person technical assistance to enable regional counseling supervisory personnel to conduct them, thus achieving:

- 111 reviews of physical files*
- 258 partial reviews of electronic files

*During the period, the number of reviews was limited given that other priorities were established to the office as well as due to personnel limitations.

The VRCSO conducted 24 internal monitoring of 41,070 service records of applicants/consumers to evaluate the service delivery process and take corrective actions to guarantee the services offered, thus achieving:

- 2 internal monitoring of the service delivery process, with 141 monitored records.
- 4 internal monitoring of the process to apply for services (60- day analysis on St. 02) with 274 monitored records.

- 1 internal monitoring of the process to determine eligibility with 112 monitored records.
- 4 internal monitoring to the process of case referred to the State Insurance Fund Corporation, with 193 monitored records.
- 1 internal monitoring of the budget management process with 165 monitored records.
- 1 internal monitoring of Trial Work Experience with 7 monitored records.
- 1 internal monitoring of the training process (St.18) with 110 monitored records.
- 3Internal monitoring of the maintenance service (lodging, transportation) with 374 monitored records.
- 1 internal monitoring of the transition process with 145 monitored records.
- 3Internal monitoring of the closing process for rehabilitated cases (St.26) with 209 monitored records.
- 1 internal monitoring of the stabilization, transition to extended support, and closing process (St.22) with 32 monitored records.
- 1 internal monitoring of the process to document the *Work Opportunity Tax Credit* form of the Bureau of Employment Security with 84 monitored records; and
- 70 corrective actions to guarantee the services offered to VRA consumers.

The VRCSC, through its directors and supervisors, conducted 6,592 internal monitoring of 14,347 files of applicant/consumer services to evaluate the service delivery process, thus achieving:

- 420 internal monitoring of the eligibility determination process, with 861 monitored records.

- 407 internal monitoring of the Individualized Plan for Employment process, with 430 monitored records.
- 157 internal monitoring of the transition process, with 650 monitored records.
- 1,064 internal monitoring of the budget management process, with 1,996 monitored records.
- 46 internal monitoring of the referral process (AAC or SEMC) with 71 monitored records.
- 125 internal monitoring of the process to apply for services (60- day analysis on St. 02) with 359 monitored records.
- 13 internal monitoring of trial work experiences / extended experiences (St.06) with 16 monitored records.
- 40 internal monitoring at the closing on St. 08 with 40 monitored records.
- 1 internal monitoring of the employment counseling service (St.14) with 1 monitored record.
- 467 internal monitoring of the training process (St.18) with 961 monitored records.
- 113 internal monitoring of cases ready for employment, with 122 monitored records.
- 200 internal monitoring of the stabilization, transition to extended support, and closing process (St.22) with 333 monitored records.
- 1,599 internal monitoring of the closing process for rehabilitated cases (St.26) with 1,881 monitored records.
- 8 internal monitoring of cases with over 9 years, with 1,267 monitored records.
- 15 internal monitoring of cases with over 10 years, with 15 monitored records.

- 1,439 internal monitoring of the case discussion process, with 2,090 monitored records.
- 185 internal monitoring of the process to refer cases to the Regional Advisory Committee, with 264 monitored cases.
- 162 internal monitoring of the technical assistance process (VRA-26, Financial Analysis, IPE, WIOA follow up, and others) with 579 monitored records.
- 12 internal monitoring of the process to submit reports on responses, with 19 monitored cases.
- 7 internal monitoring of the referral process for the self-employment modality (small businesses) with 9 monitored records.
- 21 internal monitoring of the transfer process, with 276 monitored records.
- 4 internal monitoring of quality control, with 22 monitored records; and
- 87 internal monitoring to other service delivery processes (assistive and/or technological equipment, RSA-911 validation, quarterly goals, manuals, etc.) with 2,085 monitored records.

Strategy:

- Provide technical assistance based on the findings of the processes for monitoring and identification of needs by the central level or regional personnel.

Progress Report:

VRCSO achieved:

- 2,361 technical assistances through the automated user helpdesk for the provision of services, known as: Client Rehabilitation Information System or CRIS, and

- 4,660 technical assistances to VRC, counseling service supervisory personnel, CVEC directors and Regional Directors, to ensure compliance with the monthly monitoring processes, the strategic plan, performance indicators and metrics; and to increase the compliance level VRC that fail to achieve the established goals.

The QCPMO offered:

629 orientations and technical assistances through emails, calls, and in person to address needs, under the following main categories:

- 54 interventions related to questions about the fields of the RSA-911 Report or the CRIS Case Management System.
- 40 interventions related to the report of errors in programing of the system.
- 111 interventions for the correction of data entry in the system.
- 123 interventions related to Performance Indicators or Reports in general.
- 269 interventions related to the State Plan and the Strategic Plan, among other matters.
- 6 interventions related to Data Quality Control Monitoring of the RSA-911 Federal Report (in person).
- 18 interventions related to the need to strengthen knowledge on the Performance Indicators (in-person sessions at the regions): and
- 8 meetings with the personnel of the programmatic offices at the Central Level.

Strategy:

- Establish quotas for the SEMC of consumers placed in a regular job by the personnel of said centers, as well as employment experience coordination quotas.

Progress Report:

Achievements of the SEMC, in Regular Employment:

- 104 consumers had an employment outcome during the period.
- 14 employment experience developed.

(2) Performance on the performance accountability indicators under section 116 of wioa for the most recently completed program year, reflecting actual and negotiated levels of performance. Explain any discrepancies in the actual and negotiated levels; and

Table 56: Negotiated Levels and Performance for PY 2022

Performance Indicator	Negotiated Level for PY 2022	Achievement
Employment Second Quarter After Exit Quarter	44%	40.9%
Employment Fourth Quarter After Exit Quarter	31.4%	41.6%
Median Earning Second Quarter	\$3,941	\$4,590
Credential Attained	36%	32%
Measurable Skills Gain	34.5%	52.5%

VRA was not able to achieve two of the negotiated levels: Employment 2Q: 3% discrepancy; Credential Attained: 4% discrepancy. The discrepancy in the 2Q employment indicator was mainly due to the difficulty in contacting participants after exit, a delay in obtaining the Unemployment Insurance records on time and the short period of time for the second

quarter after exit data registry because most of the files were closed in the fourth quarter of the Program Year 2021. Discrepancy in the Credential Attainment was also due to the difficulty in contacting participants (cold cases).

To emphasize the importance of compliance with performance indicators and the time periods for data recording in the case management system, during PY 2022, the Quality Control and Programmatic Management Office provided trainings and technical assistance on an ongoing basis to the personnel of the Counseling Service Centers. Furthermore, it revised and updated the visual and explanatory resources which were posted on the internal webpage of the agency for the personnel to access it at any time. After the monitoring visit in June 2023, additional information was shared with the VR Counseling Centers Directors and VRC Supervisors, regarding the advantages of closing as many cases as possible during the first two quarters of the program year, which provides more time to complete second quarter follow-ups.

(3) The use of funds reserved for innovation and expansion activities (sections 101(a)(18) and 101(a)(23) of the rehabilitation act) (e.g., src, silc).

The VRA carried out the following innovation and expansion activities during PY 2022:

Activity: Expansion in the provision of services to blind individuals through referrals for employment to the Blind Individuals Program.

Progress Report: The VRA recruited one professional during the period.

Activity: Expansion in the provision of services to individuals who are blind, have intellectual deficit, and other disabilities through training and employment at the Blind Individuals Corporation.

Progress Report: Personnel of the Blind Individuals Corporation participated in mandatory trainings on VRA public policy and mandatory laws (Acts NO: 22-2013; 11-2009; 17-1988 and 217-2006).

Activity: Broadening of the availability of training resources (for instance: module) through access on the intranet website of the agency to the newly hired personnel.

Progress Report: The VRA developed 11 Policy Directives which were posted on the intranet website, as a reference for the existing and newly hired counseling personnel. VRCSC Supervisors discussed the applicable Policy Directives with the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors.

Activity: Continue using the remote video interpreting technology for deaf individuals.

Progress Report: During the period, the Agency continued using the remote video interpreting technology for deaf individuals.

Activity: Continue funding the SCR and CILs to assist and support its operations as well as developing, in conjunction with the VRA, better opportunities for employment and independent living for our applicants/consumers.

Progress Report: The VRA provided a fund allocation to both councils. Furthermore, it maintains its representation in the agency as well as its collaboration with both councils.

(E) Supported employment services, distribution of Title VI Funds, and arrangements and cooperative agreements for the provision of supported Employment Services.

(1) Acceptance of Title VI Funds:

(A) VR agency requests to receive title VI funds.

(2) If the VR Agency has elected to receive Title VI Funds, Section 606(b)(3) of the Rehabilitation Act requires VR Agencies to include specific goals and priorities with respect to the distribution of Title VI Funds received under Section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of supported employment services. Describe the use of Title VI Funds and how they will be used in meeting the goals and priorities of the supported employment program.

The VRA has developed the following goals and plans for the distribution of Title VI, Part B funds:

Goal A: Continue to provide services to consumers identified for supported employment modality.

Goal B: Maintain a level of satisfaction of 85% of those consumers who received supported employment services at the closure of the case.

Plans, Strategies:

- Use other sources of funding, in addition to the ones from Title VI, Part B, needed to expand the provision of supported employment services.
- At the Support and Employment Modalities Centers (SEMC), receive and evaluate at least 150 new candidates for Supported Employment services, referred from the VRC.
- Contract and support community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) throughout the Island so that at least 80 consumers, who received supported employment services, are able to achieve an employment outcome.
- Provide services at the CRP to at least 160 new cases during the period.
- Expand outreach in order to attract other potential service providers. This, by providing orientations in graduate schools (e.g., counseling, occupational therapy) that might develop projects to provide supported employment services as part of internships and through greater dissemination in the media, among others.
- Strengthen the provision of supported employment services through training and technical assistance to the staff of the CRPs. The Support and Employment Modalities Office (SEMO) and the Support and Employment Modalities Centers (SEMC) will provide such technical assistance in aspects such as:
 1. Guidance to new proponents about supported employment services, as requested.
 2. Other aspects related to the provision of supported employment services and extended supports services.

- Continue administering satisfaction surveys of the consumer in terms of the services received in the CRPs and in the SEMC, in order to identify areas to be strengthened or improved.
- Continue conducting monitoring interventions to the CRPs in order to validate compliance with the provision of services established in the contracts.

Distribution of Title VI, Part B funds:

The estimated total of projected funds for the provision of supported employment services for is \$2,434,096 distributed as follows: \$300,000 from Title VI-B for the contracting of a CRP; and \$2,134,096 from Title I for the contracting of other CRPs and for expenses related to the supported employment services.

- (3) **Supported Employment Services may be provided with Title 1 or Title VI Funds following Placement of Individuals with the most significant disabilities in Employment. In accordance with Section 101(a)(22) and Section 606(b)(3) of the Rehabilitation Act, describe the quality, scope, and extent of supported Employment Services to be provided to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities; and the timing of transition to extended services.**

Quality: The *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act* (WIOA) of July 22 of 2014, emphasizes on the provision of the supported employment services for the consumers with the most significant disabilities. Therefore, the VRA in its mission to integrate the people with disabilities into the labor force and towards a more independent living promotes the provision of the supported employment services leading to an employment outcome.

The Support and Employment Modalities Office (SEMO), at the central level of the VRA, intends to collaborate, provide assistance and facilitate the applicability of the public policy to the Support and Employment Modalities Centers (SEMC), at the regional level, on career development services, services to employers and development of support and employment modes for the consumers. The SEMO staff contributes with other operational/administrative offices of the VRA, in the coordination and collaboration of

efforts regarding the assessment services and the programmatic monitoring and interpretation of data/relevant information to ensure compliance with the VR Portion of the Unified State Plan and the Strategic Plan of the agency.

The VRA, through its SEMC, develops inter/transdisciplinary work teams to ensure that the supported employment services offered by the CRPs are provided uniformly, agile and responsive to the needs of the consumers with the most significant disabilities.

SEMO and SEMC staff also carry out monitoring activities with the purpose of verify compliance, project development, quality of services, identify limitations, use of resources, and consumer's participation, among others.

Scope and extent:

Individuals can receive up to 24 months of supported employment services, or more if necessary to achieve job stabilization. In addition, youth with disabilities may receive up to four years of extended services until the youth reaches 25.

The VR counselor identifies those consumers with the most significant disabilities who could benefit from supported employment, in accordance with the federal provisions set forth in 34 CFR 361.34. Such identification begins with the initial interview, the analysis of medical evidence, the analysis of pre-employment skills and any other aspect relevant to the evaluation process.

The supported employment modality is provided through the SEMC of the VRA; which offer support to the VR counselor in order to validate the vocational strengths and needs of the applicants/consumers, as well as to promote them towards competitive integrated employment under such supported employment modality. Prior to the consumer's referral to the SEMC, he may receive services in the center of Assessment and Adjustment Centers (AAC) of the VRA in order to be evaluated in the following areas:

- Personal skills, daily/family/community living
- Cognitive-Psychosocial skills

- Perceptual-Psychomotor skills
- Training, Job and Work skills

The referral to the AAC will identify that the consumer will be sent to a community rehabilitation program (CRP) to be serviced under the supported employment modality, whereby the evaluation process must have an ecological approach.

The supported employment process has been framed within the following five (5) stages developed for the provision of these services:

Stage I. Determination of Needs

- Revision of documents: assessment of pre-employment skills, needs and support resources.
- Comprehensive situational evaluation
- Determination of needs through profile evaluation
- Support: consumer and family
- Drafting of Habilitation Plan.

Stage II. Vocational Preparation/Supplementary Assessment

- Ecological Evaluation
- Possible Revision of Habilitation Plan
- Continuous support

Stage III. Placement Services

- Marketing Plan
- Promotion

- Occupational Analysis
- Job Proposal
- Reasonable accommodation
- Recruitment process
- Revision of Habilitation Plan (if it applies)
- Meetings with the employer and the family
- Continuous support.

Stage IV. Training and Job Retention

- Intensive and moderate training
- Development of natural support networks
- Revision of Habilitation Plan (if it applies)
- Evaluation/monitoring
- Submittal of reports
- Meetings with the employer and the family
- Continuous support

Stage V. Stabilization and Closure

- Meetings with the employer and the family
- Beginning of the Employment Monitoring Phase (Minimum of 90 days)
- Consumer's performance evaluation carried out by the Employer, Supervisor and Job Coach.

- Identification of extended support to be provided by family, employees (co-workers), and community.
- Satisfaction survey about services provided to Consumer/Family/Employer/Counselor.

The previous information about quality, scope and extent of services apply also to youth. The VRA will continue to provide SE and Extended Services to youth with the most significant disabilities. Through CRIS case management system, the SEMC will identify those consumers between ages 14-24.

The timing of transition to extended services:

In accordance with WIOA, the VRA will make resources available for extended services to youth with more significant disabilities, for a period not to exceed four (4) years. These services will be provided through contracting of CRPs. The SEMC Analysts will receive the request for extended support services from employers and will negotiate with the CRP the service to be provided and the number of interventions needed to stabilize individual in employment. An authorization for services document will be created on the case management system.

In order to improve the quality, the scope and the extent of the supported employment services, the VRA is committed to meet the goals and the strategies established and described in the previous section e.2.

- (4) Sections 101(a)(22) and 606(b)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act require the VR Agency to describe efforts to identify and arrange, including entering into cooperative agreements, with other state agencies and other appropriate entities to provide supported Employment Services. The description must include extended services, as applicable, to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including the provision of extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities in accordance with 34 CFR 363.4(a) and 34 CFR 361.5(c)(19)(v).**

The VRA issues an annual public announcement for the contracting of CRPs that provide supported employment services to consumers with the most significant disabilities. The VRA currently maintains contractual agreements with CRPs across the island.

In accordance with WIOA, the VRA will make resources available for extended services to youth with more significant disabilities, for a period not to exceed four (4) years. These services will be provided through contracting of CRPs. The Support and Employment Modalities Centers' (SEMC) Analysts will receive the request for extended support services from employers and will negotiate with the CRP the service to be provided and the number of interventions needed to stabilize individual in employment. An authorization for services document will be created on the case management system.

(F) ANNUAL ESTIMATES.

Sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act require all VR agencies to annually conduct a full assessment of their resources and ability to serve all eligible individuals before the start of the Federal fiscal year. In accordance with 34 CFR § 361.29(b), annual estimates must include the following projections:

Table 57: Estimates for next Federal Fiscal Year -VR Program

Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under VR Program	Costs of Services using Title I Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
Not applicable	35,000	25,000	18,933,441.73	10,000

Table 58: Supported Employment Program

Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under Supported Employment Program	Costs of Services using Title I and Title VI Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
Not applicable	442	150	2,734,096.00	Not applicable

(G) ORDER OF SELECTION.

The VR agency is not implementing an order of selection and all eligible individuals will be served.

The VR agency is implementing an order of selection with one or more categories closed.

* VR agencies may maintain an order of selection policy and priority of eligible individuals without implementing or continuing to implement an order of selection.

PURSUANT TO SECTION 101(A)(5) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, THIS DESCRIPTION MUST BE AMENDED WHEN THE VR AGENCY DETERMINES, BASED ON THE ANNUAL ESTIMATES DESCRIBED IN DESCRIPTION (F), THAT VR SERVICES CANNOT BE PROVIDED TO ALL ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE STATE WHO APPLY FOR AND ARE DETERMINED ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES.

(1) For VR Agencies that have defined priority categories describe—

(A) The justification for the order;

Not applicable.

(B) The order (priority categories) to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR Services ensuring that individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities; and

Not applicable.

(C) The VR Agency's goals for serving individuals in each priority category, including how the agency will assist eligible individuals assigned to closed priority categories with information and referral, the method in which the VR Agency will manage waiting lists, and the projected timelines for opening priority categories. Note: priority categories are considered open when all individuals in the priority category may be served.

Not applicable.

(1) Has the VR Agency elected to serve eligible individuals outside of the order of selection who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment?

Not applicable.

(H) WAIVER OF STATEWIDENESS.

The State plan shall be in effect in all political subdivisions of the State; however, the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (Commissioner) may waive compliance with this requirement in accordance with section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act and the implementing regulations in 34 CFR 361.26. If the VR agency is requesting a waiver of statewideness or has a previously approved waiver of statewideness, describe the types of services and the local entities providing such services under the waiver of statewideness and how the agency has complied with the requirements in 34 CFR 361.26. If the VR agency is not requesting or does not have an approved waiver of statewideness, please indicate "not applicable."

Not applicable.

(I) Comprehensive system of personnel development.

In accordance with the requirements in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act, the VR agency must develop and maintain annually a description (consistent with the purposes of the Rehabilitation Act) of the VR agency’s comprehensive system of personnel development, which shall include a description of the procedures and activities the VR agency will undertake to ensure it has an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professionals and paraprofessionals that provides the following:

(1) Analysis of current personnel and projected personnel needs including—

- i. The number of personnel currently needed by the VR Agency in the provision of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, including ratios of qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors to clients;**
- ii. The number of personnel currently needed by the VR Agency to provide VR Services, broken down by personnel category; and**
- iii. Projections of the number of personnel, broken down by personnel category, who will be needed by the VR Agency to provide VR Services in 5 years based on projections of the number of individuals to be served, including individuals with significant disabilities, the number of personnel expected to retire or leave the field, and other relevant factors.**

Table 59: Analysis of current Personnel

Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed	No. of Personnel Currently Needed	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years
Counseling staff	116	50	1
Support staff	271	207	37

Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed	No. of Personnel Currently Needed	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years
Administrative	249	124	46
Other staff	1	0	0

(B) Ratio of qualified VR Counselors to clients:

The current ratio is approximately 310 clients per VR counselor (36,000 active cases/116 VRC).

(C) Projected number of individuals to be served in 5 years:

To articulate the Agency's functioning to address the needs of the population it serves, the VRA requires professional personnel related to the rehabilitation field, occupying various positions, as well as other support and administrative professionals. Support professionals also provide direct service to applicants/consumers, while the administrative staff contributes to the continuity of other necessary processes for the operation of the agency and the achievement of programmatic goals. As of September 30, 2023, the VRA has a payroll of 637 employees, of which 116 are VR Counselors managing caseloads, and the projection is to attend an estimate of 44,000 to 46,000 people with disabilities during program years 2024-2028. To see the number of staff by personnel category, see previous section.

Table 60: Projected number of individuals to be served in 5 years

Program Year	Number of Caseloads	Cases Closed	Active Cases	Population Attended	Average Cases Per Caseload
2024	140	10,000	36,000	46,000	322
2025	140	8,000	36,000	44,000	308
2026	140	8,000	36,000	44,000	308
2027	140	8,000	36,000	44,000	308
2028	140	8,000	36,000	44,000	308

(2) Data and information on personnel preparation and development, recruitment and retention, and staff development, including the following:

(A) A list of the institutions of higher education in the state that are preparing VR Professionals, by type of program; the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and the number of students who graduated during the prior year from each of those institutions with certification or licensure, or with the credentials for certification or licensure, broken down by the personnel category for which they have received, or have the credentials to receive, certification or licensure.

Table 61: List of the Institutions of Higher Education in the State that are preparing VR Professionals, by type of Program

Institute of Higher Education	Type of Program	No. of Students Enrolled	No. of Prior Year Graduates
University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus	Rehabilitation Counseling Graduate Program	66	23
Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico, Ponce Campus	Rehabilitation Counseling Graduate Program	27	6
Central University of Bayamón	Rehabilitation Counseling Graduate Program	8	4
Central University of Bayamón	Bachelor of Psychology	54	8
Central University of Bayamón	Bachelor of Social Work	31	12
University of Puerto Rico,	Occupational Therapy	48	16

Institute of Higher Education	Type of Program	No. of Students Enrolled	No. of Prior Year Graduates
Medical Sciences Campus			
University of Puerto Rico, Medical Sciences Campus	Physical Therapy	79	20
University of Puerto Rico, Medical Sciences Campus	Master of Speech Pathology	30	23
University of Puerto Rico, Medical Sciences Campus	Nursing	218	114

(B)The VR Agency’s Plan for recruitment, preparation, and retention of qualified personnel, which addresses the current and projected needs for qualified personnel; and the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the VR Agency and Institutions of Higher Education and Professional Associations to recruit, prepare, and retain personnel who are qualified, including personnel from minority backgrounds and personnel who are individuals with disabilities.

The VRA's institutional mission is to provide vocational rehabilitation services aimed at the successful integration of people with disabilities into the workforce and the enjoyment of a more independent life. For this purpose, the VRA has professionals committed to public service, duly qualified to attend, in an agile and responsive manner,

the vocational rehabilitation and independent living needs of people with disabilities, with priority given to those with the most significant disabilities.

To guarantee that we have the best qualified and fully trained personnel to provide services to people with disabilities, we offer professional development opportunities to our human resources. Also, we take into consideration their needs and recommendations for the best functioning of the agency.

Puerto Rico has various institutions of higher education that are preparing professionals in the rehabilitation field. The VRA has agreements with two (2) universities that prepare professionals in the rehabilitation counseling field. The purpose of such agreements is to provide the students the opportunity to carry out their practicum in facilities of our agency. In addition, the VRA recruits graduates from these institutions and others:

- University of Puerto Rico (UPR)- is the only public institution of higher education in Puerto Rico. It has its main campus in Río Piedras with 10 off-campus sites throughout the Island. The Graduate Program in Rehabilitation Counseling is at their Río Piedras Campus.
- UPR, Medical Sciences Campus, has the following programs: Occupational Therapy; Physical Therapy; Master's Degree in Speech Pathology; and Nursing.
- Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico (Ponce) has Rehabilitation Counseling programs.

The VRA, through the Office of Labor Affairs and Human Resources and its divisions, is responsible for developing, updating, and implementing a plan for recruiting, preparing, and retaining qualified personnel to meet current and projected personnel needs. To comply with such requirement, the VRA will continue to carry out the following procedures and activities:

- Identification and communication of the needs for recruitment, reclassification, training, or any other requirement related to human resources.

- Analysis and development of strategies based on the need for recruitment, reclassification, training, or any other requirement related to human resources.
- Realignment of staff to fill vacancies in consumer service centers (centers offering rehabilitation counseling, assessment and adjustment, support, and employment modalities); This strategy responds to the existing public policy of austerity. Likewise, it fosters employee development while serving the agency's staffing needs.
- Offering advice and support on matters concerning the best use of human resources, specifically assigned to the provision of direct services to meet the needs of consumers.
- Provide advice and support on matters concerning the management of the agency's human resources, maintaining close coordination with the program area.
- Planning and provision of human resources (involves the analysis, design, establishment and elimination of positions; selection and recruitment; and personnel evaluation system).
- Maintenance of a human resources inventory involving job classification, existing vacancies, identification of candidates for retirement, and succession planning. This information is analyzed annually to determine employment patterns, positions that are difficult to recruit, and the number of employees with 25 or more years of service.
- Projections of future needs for human resources (in a term of 1 to 5 years), by number and type of employee, emphasizing the staff that offers direct service to people with disabilities.
- Provide training and promote employee development.
- Establish objectives and types of training activities that will be offered to employees, to meet the programmatic and administrative commitments of the agency.
- Coordinate the training of VRA personnel with universities and other institutions that prepare professionals related to the field of rehabilitation.

- Maintenance of efforts to continue recruiting qualified personnel with disabilities. The VRA has rehabilitation counselors with diverse disabilities. We continue to emphasize compliance with Law 81, as amended, known as the Equal Employment Opportunity Law for Persons with Disabilities. As part of the evaluation of exam applications, an additional 5 points are awarded to anyone who shows evidence of having some type of disabling condition.

The VRA recruits without distinction of age, race, color, gender, social or national origin, social condition, political or religious ideas. Our agency recruits based on the applicant's qualifications. The VRA Puerto Rico is the only Designated State Unit in the nation with more than 99% of its population being a minority (Hispanics and/or Spanish-speakers).

(C) Description of Staff Development Policies, Procedures, and Activities that ensure all personnel employed by the VR Agency receive appropriate and adequate training and continuing education for professionals and paraprofessionals:

As established in the Procedures Manual for the Training of All Staff of the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration, the VRA promotes and emphasizes the continuing education of its employees. Therefore, it carries out the following activities to ensure having qualified staff:

- Identification and communication of training needs.
- Analysis and development of strategies based on training needs.
- Design of training activities to address topics concerning administrative/programmatic issues relevant to the VR program.
- Planning of training activities as a result of the needs identified in the needs assessment study, monitoring reports and performance evaluations.

Trainings to the newly recruited VR counselors cover in detail the following aspects: services provision process and federal regulations; assessment and adjustment services; support and employment mode services; productivity indicators; use of the computerized system to provide services; data on the federal RSA-911 Report; fiscal and

budgetary aspects of the services provision process; independent living services; and the State Plan. Each topic is presented by the staff of corresponding areas, which allows employees to become familiar with the central office.

(i) Particularly with respect to Assessment, Vocational Counseling, Job Placement, and rehabilitation technology, including training implemented in coordination with entities conducting state programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; and

The Program established under Act 264 of 2000, known as the Puerto Rico Assistive Technology Program Act (PRATP), as amended, is responsible for promoting changes in the public and private systems for the inclusion, independence and self-sufficiency of people with disabilities through the use of assistive technology. To do this, it maintains collaborative agreements with government agencies. The VRA maintains an agreement with the PRATP for the exchange of resources, knowledge, and experience in matters of assistive technology.

The VRA offers assistive technology services in its six regions under the following categories: visual, auditory, mobility, communication, independent living, cognitive area, and access to computers. Services are provided by Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, Audiologists, Certified Teachers, Speech-Language Pathologists, Specialists in Services for the Blind and Visual Rehabilitation. These professionals have the required credentials and stay current in the field of AT. To this end, the Agency benefits from the collaboration with the PRATP, since its specialists offer training to VRA personnel on topics such as:

- Low, medium and high technology AT equipment
- AT legislation
- AT integration to assessment and adjustment processes

- AT alternatives for employment and independent living
- AT for specific populations (blind, learning disabilities, mobility impairments)
- New equipment on the market and free equipment alternatives
- Low cost or homemade AT equipment alternatives, among others

These and other training provided to VRA personnel have contributed to keeping their knowledge and skills updated, in turn influencing the provision of services to applicants/consumers, facilitating employment and independent living outcomes.

ii) Procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to VR Agency professionals and paraprofessionals and for providing training regarding the amendments to the rehabilitation act made by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

For the purpose of acquiring and disseminating significant knowledge of research and other sources to professional and paraprofessional staff of the agency, and also regarding the amendments to the Rehabilitation Act made by WIOA, the VRA has established the following procedure:

1. Presentation of the Comprehensive Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs results to staff.
2. Sending, through internal email, links to articles or information resources related to the rehabilitation field.
3. Collaboration with the Graduate School in Rehabilitation Counseling of UPR so that they share with the agency findings of research studies related to the rehabilitation field.
4. Allowing staff participation in continuing education courses, many of which contain information about research and evidence-based practices and strategies.

5. Trainings, technical assistance and normative communications related to the amendments to the Rehabilitation Act made by WIOA.

(3) Description of VR Agency Policies and Procedures for the Establishment and Maintenance of Personnel Standards consistent with Section 101(a)(7)(b) to ensure that VR Agency professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared, including—

A. Standards that are consistent with any National or State-Approved or -recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the profession or discipline in which such personnel are providing VR Services; and

In Puerto Rico, the rehabilitation counseling profession is regulated by Law 58 of May 7 of 1976, as amended, known as the Regulatory Law of the Rehabilitation Counseling Profession in Puerto Rico. This legislation establishes that in order to practice as a rehabilitation counselor, the person must have a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and a current state license issued by the appropriate Board of Examiners. It is also required that the professional maintains active his credentials and licenses in the Professional Registry of the Office of Regulation and Certification of Health Professionals, be a member of the College of Rehabilitation Counseling Professionals of Puerto Rico and comply with hours of continuing education. The VRA recruits personnel who meet these requirements in order to ensure the highest standards of the rehabilitation counseling profession.

Similarly, certification or license is required as a condition for employment, benefits and wages for: teachers, physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech/language pathologists, social workers, and psychologists, among others.

B. The Establishment and Maintenance of Education and Experience Requirements, in accordance with Section 101(a)(7)(b)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act, to ensure that the personnel have a 21st Century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities.

The VRA has developed the following strategies to maintain personnel standards consistent with the highest requirements of the state and applicable to the profession or discipline in particular:

- Annual review of certifications, licenses and continuing education of professions or disciplines
- Continue providing the staff with the necessary education and training for the optimal performance of their duties.
- Maintain an updated record of training, workshops, training, among others, offered to staff.
- Identify staff retraining needs to strengthen the performance of their duties.
- Annual evaluation of staff performance

The following is a list of professional associations related to the field of rehabilitation available to provide training to staff:

- College of Rehabilitation Counseling Professionals of Puerto Rico (CPCR is a Spanish Acronym): Rehabilitation Counselors
- Association for Persons in Supported Employment (APSE): Personnel related to supported employment services, among others.
- National Council on Independent Living (NCIL): Independent Living Services Staff
- College of Occupational Therapy Professionals of Puerto Rico (CPTOPR is a Spanish Acronym to): Occupational Therapists and Occupational Therapy Assistants
- College of Social Work Professionals of Puerto Rico (CPTSPR is a Spanish Acronym): Social Workers
- Association of Employee Assistance Professionals of Puerto Rico: Central Level Staff of the Employee Assistance Program
- Mental Health and Addiction Services Administration (ASSMCA): Staff of the Employee Assistance Program

- Academy of Audiology of Puerto Rico: Audiologists
- Puerto Rico Assistive Technology Program (PRATP): Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Pathologists, Audiologists, among others.
- Puerto Rico Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (PRRID): Interpreters for the Deaf
- Puerto Rican Physiotherapy Association of Puerto Rico: (Physical Therapists and Physical Therapy Assistants)
- National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials: Rehabilitation Counselors and Other Vocational Rehabilitation Professionals
- American Printing House for the Blind (APH): Independent Living

(4) Method(s) the VR Agency uses to ensure that personnel can communicate in appropriate modes of communication with or in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English Speaking ability.

The agency, in its vision of being the leading agency in providing services to people with disabilities; provides staff with the necessary training and workshops to meet the communication needs of deaf, blind, and deaf/blind applicants/consumers. For this reason, agency staff participate in related training activities. In turn, the VRA has four (4) interpreters for the deaf who can be used when necessary to serve applicants or eligible individuals.

Since Puerto Rico is a Spanish-speaking country (English is used as a second language), we can communicate in the native language (Spanish) of our applicants/consumers. However, if an applicant/consumer only speaks English, we can also communicate in that language. In addition, the VRA can provide clients with alternative formats such as Braille and large print, among others.

The VRA installed a video interpretation system through the VRA facilities, which facilitates communication with the deaf population, regardless of whether the interpreter is physically in the place where the applicant/consumer requires the service.

5.As appropriate, describe the procedures and activities to coordinate the designated State Unit's Comprehensive System of personnel development with personnel development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

In Puerto Rico, the Associate Secretary for Special Education and the VRA are in two different state departments (PRDE and PRDOLHR). The first one is responsible for the implementation of Public Law 108-446, as amended, known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA); the second one is responsible for the implementation of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and State Law 97-2000, as amended, known as the Vocational Rehabilitation Law of Puerto Rico. In addition to the aforementioned legislation, the State Law 51-1996, as amended, known as the Integral Educational Services for Persons with Disabilities, provides for the coordination to be achieved between various local agencies to ensure an effective transition of young people with disabilities coming from the Department of Education. Both agencies maintain cooperative ties related to the development of their respective human resources and as such, have been planning, developing, offering and/or participating in training activities since 1987. Some of the topics covered in such training include transition from school to work; vocational evaluation; supported employment; IDEIA; Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Public Law No. 101-336, as amended; Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (Public Law 113-128 of July 22 of 2014); among others. In addition, both agencies are members of an advisory committee, which meets periodically to plan and join efforts in the development and implementation of transition services from school to work.

The efforts and alliances carried out under collaborative agreements with the PRDE, as well as with the PRDOLHR and its components, are conducive to the development of strategies and activities to comply with federal regulations. The VRA is responsible for monitoring the cooperative agreement with the DE. As part of this commitment, the agency participated in meetings with the Special Education Advisory Committee.

J. COOPERATION, COLLABORATION, AND COORDINATION (Section 101(a)(11) of the Rehabilitation Act)

In accordance with the requirements in section 101(a)(11)(D) of the Rehabilitation Act—

- (1) Describe plans, policies, and procedures for coordination between the designated State Agency and Education Officials responsible for the public education of students with disabilities, which are designed to facilitate the transition of the students with disabilities from the receipt of educational services in school to the receipt of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, including Pre-Employment Transition Services.**

VRA has the responsibility to comply with the requirements of Chapter 34 of the Federal Regulations Code (34CFR), Section 361.22, which states that the State Plan must contain plans, policies and procedures for coordination between the Designated State Unit (VRA in Puerto Rico) and the Department of Education (DE) to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to vocational rehabilitation services.

Similarly, the VRA has an interagency agreement as a result of the implementation of Law 51, known as the Law on Integrated Educational Services for Persons with Disabilities, of June 7, 1996. This Law assigns responsibilities to various government agencies for the purpose to provide services in a coordinated manner to people with disabilities.

The responsibilities assigned to the VRA by Law 51 are the following:

1. Evaluate, throughout the vocational rehabilitation counselor, the cases referred, in order to determine their eligibility for services, as established by state and federal guidelines.
2. Implement and provide independent living and vocational rehabilitation services to people with disabilities with the capacity to perform in some type of work, based on state and federal legislation.
3. Design an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), according to the needs of the person with disabilities and in accordance with current regulations. This plan includes:
 - Application of guides and programmatic procedures for the provision of services

- Beginning and ending date of services
 - Employment outcomes (regular employment, supported employment, self-employment or any other innovative option)
 - Projected date for the achievement of the employment outcome
 - Analysis to evidence the functional limitations of the consumer in relation to the employment outcome, outcomes of informed choice and the programmed services
 - Recommended VR services which are necessary to achieve the selected employment outcomes
 - Comparable services and benefits
 - Costs of services
 - Evidence of the financial participation negotiated between the VR counselor with the consumer/family, as applicable
 - Evaluative criteria
 - Specific responsibilities of the VRA
 - Responsibilities of the consumer/representative
 - Coordination with educational agencies
 - Signatures of the parties and dates when plan is developed and approved
 - Evidence in the IPE of the participation of the consumer (his own words) regarding the informed choice process and other actions taken during his VR process
4. Collaborate and participate in the drafting and implementation of the transition plan to adult life, whenever appropriate.

5. Provide Pre-Employment Transition services to students with eligible or potentially eligible disabilities.

The VRA recognizes the importance of the transition process in the youth with disabilities and will maintain its commitment in that it is carried out in accordance with federal and state regulations. The Agency is developing with the PRDE joint activities in order to strengthen the provision of transition services in general, and especially the pre-employment services to those youth with the most significant disabilities.

The VRA has a formal agreement with the SEA and the local DOL regarding Transition Services, which also includes responsibilities of both agencies related to the procedures for exchanging documentation regarding WIOA Section 511, as follows:

-VRA's Transition Analysts will provide orientation to the local Department of Education staff regarding their responsibilities for compliance with Section 511 requirements and completion of an Orientation from VRA to DE Certification Form.

-Local DE has the following responsibilities:

1. During the next 30 days after completion of each Transition activity or service, DE will send to VRA a Certification of Transition Service, as established in Section 397.30 of the CFR and WIOA's Section 511.
2. Provide to the youth with disabilities evidence of transition services completion, among others, within the next 30 days after each activity or service completion, in accordance with CFR 397.20 and WIOA Section 511.

- (2) Describe the status and scope of the formal interagency agreement between the VR Agency and the State Educational Agency. Consistent with the requirements of the formal interagency agreement pursuant to 34 CFR 361.22(b), provide, at a minimum, the following information about the agreement:**

A. Consultation and technical assistance, which may be provided using alternative means for meeting participation (such as video conferences and conference calls), to assist Educational Agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including Pre-Employment Transition Services and other Vocational Rehabilitation Services;

As mentioned in the previous section, in Puerto Rico Law 51 of June 7, 1996, as amended, the VRA through its operational components and the Department of Education through its Associate Secretariat of Special Education develop and implement a Transition program for young people with disabilities from school to the world of work for students with disabilities.

The VRA and the Department of Education maintain constant communication and collaboration with the purpose of developing new strategies for students with disabilities. Some of the responsibilities of both agencies are the following:

A. Vocational Rehabilitation Administration:

1. The Vocational Rehabilitation Administration, in coordination with the Department of Education, will provide Pre-employment Transition Services (PRE-ETS) to students with eligible or potentially eligible disabilities. Pre-employment services for students in the transition process are as follows:

- Job Exploration Counseling
- Work Based Learning Experiences
- Counseling on Enrollment Opportunities
- Workplace Readiness Training
- Instruction in Self Advocacy

2. The Vocational Rehabilitation Administration staff (Transition Counseling Services Analysts who work Transition or Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors) may provide technical assistance to Education Department personnel by sharing, in orientations or meetings, information that contributes to such personnel have a better understanding about:

- Medical and other aspects related to impediments.

- Requirements to request services and eligibility criteria of the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration.
- How school personnel can assist the student in preparing to receive the services of the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration.
- Identification of transition needs, such as assistive technology, orientation training and mobility; in other aspects.
- The scope of pre-employment transition services and the requirements to benefit from them under WIOA.
- The responsibilities of the Educational Agency compliance with Section 511 of WIOA in order to complete the Personnel Orientation Certification form of the Department of Education by the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration.

3. Offer guidance to parents and to students with disabilities, coordinated with the contact person identified in each school, about the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration, application process and scope of services to be provided to people with eligible disabilities, in addition to transition services of pre-employment and the criteria to receive them. These orientations may be offered in general orientation activities coordinated by the school, and in the meetings of the Programming and Location Committee (COMPU), among others.

4. Evaluate through the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, the referred students to determine their eligibility for services, as established by applicable federal and state laws and regulations.

5. Inform in writing, to the official of the agency that refers the case, the criteria used to determine that the student is or are not eligible to receive services from the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration and the basis on which that determination has been made.

6. Collaborate and participate in the drafting and implementation of the transition services established in the Individualized Educational Program (PEI) of the school to

adulthood, every time the person is cited or convened for that purpose. Such participation may be face-to-face, by telephone (teleconference), virtual or any other permissible means.

7. Design an Individualized Plan for Employment (PIPE), according to the needs of the person with disabilities eligible for the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration, on or before the student leaves school.

8. Provide vocational rehabilitation services and other transition services necessary, identified, and recommended in the Individualized Plan for Employment, for vocational rehabilitation of the eligible student in the context of their employment goal.

9. Design and implement mechanisms for the collection of statistical data.

B. Responsibilities of the Department of Education:

1. Identify the population to be referred for evaluation of the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration, according to the eligibility criteria established by the applicable laws and regulations, through the procedure agreed by the agencies.

2. Any referral to the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration must include the following:

- Student's Social Security Number
- Updated Psychological Medical Evidence
- Academic History and Report Cards
- Psychosocial History
- Vocational Evaluation based on Law No. 263-2006
- Copy of the Certification of Functional and Pre-Employment Academic Skills based on Law 53-2016

- Copy of the Individualized Educational Program (PEI)
- Services Plan. Section 504 or others that apply
- Any other document that applies

In the case of pre-employment transition services, the Department of Education will offer and certify the following information:

- Student's Social Security Number
- Date of birth
- Age
- Race
- Ethnicity
- School of origin and town
- Town of residence of the student
- Grade enlisted
- If the student receives special education or Section 504 services
- Any others that may apply

3. Coordinate and offer the provision of services considering the Transition Services developed in the Individualized Educational Programs to ensure an effective transition of young people with disabilities to post-school life.

4. Coordinate with the officials of the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration orientations directed to parents, students and school staff related to the services available to students in the process of transition to adult life.

5. Provide academic and vocational services to the population with disabilities, according to applicable federal and state laws and regulations.
6. Collaborate with the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration in the objective of providing placement and follow-up services to students with disabilities until they graduate from high school, turn twenty-one (21) years of age or complete education services special.
7. Provide through their schools, the human resources for the development of the necessary basic academic and occupational skills, according to the needs identified in the results of the vocational evaluations and according to what is established in the Individualized Educational Program (PEI).
8. Provide those related services, support and technological assistance required to achieve the educational objectives of the student in the school environment or context.
9. Evaluate, together with the staff of the Administration of Vocational Rehabilitation, the achievements in its implementation.
10. Notify the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration, fifteen (15) calendar days in advance, when the participation of its officials in a COMPU meeting is required, for the development of transition services in the PEI.
11. Identify alternative means of participation in COMPU meetings, such as teleconferences, virtual and/or any other means that are permissible.

B. Transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency personnel for students with disabilities that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs (IEPs) under Section 614(d) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act:

Please refer to previous section.

C. The roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services and pre-employment transition services:

Please refer to section j.2.A

D. Procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services and pre-employment transition services. Outreach to these students should occur as early as possible during the transition planning process and must include, at a minimum, a description of the purpose of the vocational rehabilitation program, eligibility requirements, application procedures, and scope of services that may be provided to eligible individuals:

1. Transition process for students with disabilities begins at schools through orientation provided by the Transition Counselor (TC) of the VRA, to teachers, students with disabilities and/or parents. As a result, meetings of the Placement and Programming Committee (PPC) take place, and decisions are made about IPE recommendations. A plan of action is developed, and the TC may accept the referral of the student with disabilities.
2. The PPC compiles medical information related to the student's disability and functional level at the time of the referral.
3. The TC sends those referrals to the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC) at the corresponding VRA regional office and coordinates VRC participation in PPC meetings of eligible students with disabilities.
4. When existing information doesn't describe the current functional level of the student, the VRC will perform a preliminary evaluation and consult with the TC as to which evaluations may be available through the Department of Education to complete the evaluation process.
5. The VRC requests medical consultant's opinion under the following situations:
 - When advice is needed about functional limitations caused by the student's physical or mental disability
 - When clarification about medical aspects of disability is needed to facilitate VRC decision making process and service planning. Eligibility determination is made by the VRC.

6. Eligibility criteria will be applied considering physical and mental functional limitations, functional capacity, vocational interests, skills, abilities, life experiences and others, identified through the evaluation stages for eligibility determination.

E. Coordination necessary to satisfy documentation requirements set forth in 34 C.F.R. part 397 regarding students and youth with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment:

The VRA has a formal agreement with the SEA and the local DOL regarding Transition Services, which includes responsibilities of both agencies related to the procedures for exchanging documentation regarding WIOA Section 511, as follows:

-VRA's Transition Analysts will provide orientation to the local Department of Education staff regarding their responsibilities for compliance with Section 511 and completion of an Orientation Certification Form.

-Local DE has the following responsibilities:

1. During the next following 30 days after completion of each Transition activity or service, DE will send to VRA a Certification of Transition Service, as established in Section 397.30 of the CFR and WIOA's Section 511.
2. Provide to the youth with disabilities evidence of transition services completion, among others, within the next 30 days after each activity or service completion, in accordance with CFR 397.20 and WIOA Section 511.

F. Assurance that, in accordance with 34 C.F.R. § 397.31, neither the SEA nor the local educational agency will enter into a contract or other arrangement with an entity, as defined in 34 C.F.R. § 397.5(d), for the purpose of operating a program under which youth with a disability is engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage:

The VRA will not enter into a contract or other arrangement with an entity, as defined in 34 C.F.R. § 397.5(d), for the purpose of operating a program under which youth with a disability is engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage.

K. Coordination with Employers

In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(11)(E) of the Rehabilitation Act, describe how the VR agency will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of VR services; and transition services for youth and students with disabilities, including pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities.

The designated State unit will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of:

1. VR Service:

The VRA continues to work with employers to identify opportunities for integrated competitive employment and career exploration. For this purpose, it has Support and Employment Modalities Centers (SEMC), whose staff is responsible for working with employers. They contact new potential employers, as well as those who employ people with disabilities for the purpose of promoting employment opportunities and making their facilities available for career evaluation and exploration activities.

SEMC also organize training activities for employers, through which their knowledge is increased regarding the population with disabilities and the benefits of using them, among other topics. Also, participate in job fairs, where information is provided on the services of the VRA and qualified candidates are marketed.

2. Transition services for youth and students with disabilities, including pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities:

In compliance with WIOA, the VRA has been carrying out activities aimed at offering pre-employment transition and transition services aimed at helping students with disabilities to a successful transition to post-secondary life, as well as individuals with disabilities that we serve. See the Progress Report section for details of activities carried out (achievements).

L. INTERAGENCY COOPERATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES

In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(11)(C) and (K), describe interagency cooperation with and utilization of the services and facilities of agencies and programs that are not carrying out activities through the statewide workforce development system to develop opportunities for community-based employment in integrated settings, to the greatest extent practicable for the following:

1. State programs (designate lead agency(ies) and implementing entity(ies)) carried out under section 4 of the assistive technology act of 1998;

The VRA has representation in the Assistive Technology Advisory Council of Puerto Rico (PRATP, by its acronym in Spanish) in order to exchange professional knowledge and to continue referring consumers who could benefit from services such as building and adaptation of equipment, among others.

The PRATP is composed by members representing government agencies and people with disabilities representing the public interest. VRA's participation in that Council is mandatory. The main function of the Council is to respond and represent people with disabilities for the establishment, implementation, and evaluation of the Program, in order to facilitate information, availability and access to assistive technology (AT). The Director of the VRA's Evaluation and Adjustment Office is the agency's representative at the Council. VRA's participation consists in attending meetings to:

- Provide information to facilitate changes or current processes improvement for AT service delivery to people with disabilities.
- Facilitate coordination of VRA consumers in the AT Annual Needs Assessment
- Offer recommendations for plan development in order to address AT needs, plans implementation and results evaluation.
- Share with members of the Council information about training opportunities on AT topics (forums, symposiums, conferences, etc.).

Share information about local and federal legislation regarding AT services.

2. Programs carried out by the under secretary for rural development of the department of agriculture;

At the moment, the VRA is not using services, facilities or a program carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the US Department of Agriculture.

3. Non-educational agencies serving out-of-school youth;

WIOA promotes that vocational rehabilitation agencies reach groups and entities that provide services to young people, including young people with disabilities, and makes direct reference to programs such as Job Corps. For this purpose, the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration (VRA) developed public policy to establish the referral process for the Job Corps Program (JC).

This is a free education and vocational training program administered by the federal Department of Labor, which provides services to at-risk youth between the ages of 16 and 24, with the purpose of preparing them for employment. This is a process that facilitates the exchange of referrals, orientations between programs, and the provision of services for those young people who are eligible to VRA.

- VRA will refer to Job Corps out-of-school youth who might benefit from their services (including training), and Job Corps will also refer individuals to VRA.
- VRA will send to JC reports about eligibility determination on those referrals.
- JC may provide information/training to VRA staff regarding services available at JC and any other topic identified or beneficial to both parties.
- VRA and JC will provide services island wide, according to their resources.

4. State use contracting programs;

VRA does not utilize services and facilities of agencies and programs with respect to state use contracting programs.

5. State agency responsible for administering the state medicaid plan under title xix of the social security act (42 u.s.c. 1396 et seq.);

The Medicaid staff can provide VRA staff with information about the program and also orientations to help them identify individuals with disabilities not receiving services from Medicaid that may be potential beneficiaries. Receiving needed services from Medicaid is a way to provide adequate conditions to benefit from the vocational rehabilitation process to achieve competitive integrated employment. Although Medicaid participants can receive VR services with or without a formal agreement between agencies, and are currently receiving services from the VRA, the agency will coordinate a meeting with Medicaid representatives to discuss topics related to the scope and preparation of a formal collaborative agreement.

6. State agency responsible for providing services for individuals with developmental disabilities;

The VRA participates actively in the meetings of the State Council on Developmental Disabilities (SCDD), as well in activities that promote employment opportunities for this population. It also shared its employers' list with the SCDD and VRA staff is available to support their efforts in order to develop competitive integrated employment opportunities.

7. State Agency Responsible for providing Mental Health Services; and

This Advisory Council of Substance Abuse and Mental Health of Puerto Rico is composed of government agencies, mental health patients and family members. It is supported by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (ASSMCA, by its Spanish acronym). This is the organization selected by the Health Insurance Administration of Puerto Rico to carry out operational functions of the Health Plan and offer treatment for mental health conditions, alcohol and drug abuse in the San Juan and Western regions. The VRA is a mandatory member of this council and participates in the planning for the provision of these services.

VRA participates as a member of the Advisory Council of Substance Abuse and Mental Health of Puerto Rico. The Council's mission is to promote compliance with federal public law and the public policy of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, in order to offer adequate mental health and substance abuse services and promote a better quality of life for people and their families. The Council's objectives are to:

1. Participate in the writing and implementation of the Block Grant, in accordance with Section 1915 (a) of the federal law.
2. Participate in the development of the State Plan for the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Administration.
3. Review and evaluate adequacy and distribution of mental health and substance abuse services in PR to identify service needs.
4. Advocate for people with mental health and substance abuse disabilities in PR, in order to guarantee establishment of a high-quality integrated service system.

Functions of each member, including VRA, are:

1. Attend meetings
2. Active participation in deliberation and vote processes
3. Staying informed and updated about matters of interest for mental health and substance abuse services improvements
4. Participate in activities and perform assigned tasks
5. Participate in the Council's working groups.

Every situation regarding an applicant/consumer is managed with the corresponding member. Annually, the VRA submits to the Council a report of mental health impairments attended in the Agency. On the other hand, cases with mental health conditions may request VRA services as self-applicants or through "Atención Primaria de Salud" (APS, by

its acronym in Spanish), which are companies contracted by the Health Insurance Administration to offer mental health and substance abuse services to beneficiaries of the Government Health Care Insurance.

The VR Counselor maintains contact with the APS social workers or case manager in order to offer integrated services, including public health actions such as: diagnostic, prevention, and occupational services by the VRA.

8. Other Federal, State, and Local Agencies and Programs outside the Workforce Development System.

The VRA has collaborative agreements with the following agencies, corporations and programs not carrying out activities under the Statewide Workforce Development System:

University of Puerto Rico

The VRA coordinates the placement in its own agency of internship as well as practicum students of the master's degree program in Rehabilitation Counseling. These students are a potential human resource to be recruited once their professional credentials are completed. Also, the Graduate School of Rehabilitation Counseling carried out the *Comprehensive Assessment of Vocational Rehabilitation Needs* during 2016-2017.

The VRA has VR counselors placed in the facilities of the Río Piedras and Mayagüez campuses of the UPR for the provision of services to eligible students. The VRA also maintains a collaborative agreement with the Humacao Campus and the Medical Sciences Campus of the UPR so that Occupational Therapy students will carry out practices in the VRA.

State Insurance Fund Corporation

The VRA maintains a *Contractual Agreement of Comprehensive Action for the Rehabilitation of Injured Workers* under the SIFC. Act 182-1951, as amended, authorizes the SIFC to invest in the vocational rehabilitation of its beneficiaries who have disabilities

for work. The VRA receives an annual allocation of funds of \$600,000, which is used to match federal funds.

Institute of Developmental Disabilities

The VRA maintains collaboration with and representation in the IDD in order to meet the service needs of the population with developmental disabilities. It has participated in activities aimed at the population with autism, which were coordinated by the IDD.

Caribbean Planning and Work Incentive Assistance Program

The VRA contains a public policy that those consumers who receive SSDI will be referred to this program. The purpose of the referral is that these beneficiaries who are interested in getting a job will be oriented as the impact that the salary will have on the disability benefits they receive, the counseling service needed for benefits planning.

Department of Veterans Affairs

The VRA participates in activities and meetings coordinated by this agency, in order to offer referred eligible veterans with disabilities access to the various services available to achieve competitive employment.

State Independent Living Council (SILC)

The VRA, SILC and independent living centers promote collaborative actions with other public or private organizations that offer services to the population with significant disabilities. They also join efforts to increase the opportunities for community support services for such population. The Normative Communication No. 2011-19 establishes the referral procedure to the independent living centers of those disabled persons who are not eligible for services under Title I, but who could benefit from services provided in such centers. The VRA allocates funds to the SILC for its operations under the Innovation and Expansion Section.

Department of Health - Division of Services for People with Intellectual Disability (DSPID)

The DSPID is based on a *Community-Based Service Plan*, whose main focus is the deinstitutionalization of people with intellectual disabilities. The VRA offers orientation to the staff of the DSPID and provides services to referred individuals who are eligible.

State Council on Developmental Disabilities

VRA supports and participates in activities related to services for people with developmental disabilities. Also attends assigned work committees.

Private IHE and Non-Profits

Carlos Albizu University. The VRA maintains a collaborative agreement with this university for the practicum of psychology students in our facilities.

The VRA maintains a collaborative agreement with Catholic University of Puerto Rico for the placement in our facilities of practicum and internship students of the Rehabilitation Counseling Department.

9. Other Private Nonprofit Organizations.

Approval of Proposals:

In 2023, the VRA reviewed the guidelines for formalizing contractual agreements with private non-profit organizations. These guides are intended to guide the proponent regarding the principles and procedures for generating a service proposal. They offer an outline of how the proposals will be presented and the order that will govern them. Likewise, they include the documents that must be attached as part of the proposals submitted.

Currently, the VRA has the following guides:

- Guide for the preparation of proposals to offer services to VRA consumers under the Supported Employment Modality

- Guide for the preparation of proposals to offer Pre-Employment Transition Services
- Request for Proposal for the Comprehensive Statewide VR Services Needs Assessment

This contracting process begins with a Public Notice in written press, which establishes the deadlines for the collection of the Proposal Guide in reference and the deadline for the delivery of the proposal. Once both processes have passed, a Proposal Review Committee analyzes them according to the guidelines, and based on the results, they make recommendations to the Administrator, then beginning the hiring process.

In compliance with the established federal regulations, the VRA assigns responsibility to the programmatic areas of the agency to carry out monitoring activities to those organizations contracted for the purpose of verifying compliance, project development, services offered, difficulties encountered, use of resources, beneficiary participation, among other matters.

The VRA is willing to establish collaborative agreements with other nonprofit organizations that provide services to people with disabilities, with the purpose of receiving referrals and offering training.

ASSURANCES

The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate and identified in the State certifications included with this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, through signature of the authorized individual, assures the Commissioner, that it will comply with all the requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, as set forth in sections 101(a) and 606 of the Rehabilitation Act. The individual authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement makes the following assurances:

Table 62: VP Assurances

<p>The State Plan must include</p>
<p>1. Public Comment on Policies and Procedures: The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
<p>2. Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement: The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a Unified State plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140.</p>
<p>3. Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan: The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to:</p>
<p>3.a. the establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
<p>3.b. either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>

The State Plan must include
3.c. consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.d. the financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3).
3.e. as applicable, the local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.f. as applicable, the shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.g. statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.h. the requirements for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.i. all required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.j. the requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act.

<p>The State Plan must include</p>
<p>3.k. the compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
<p>3.l. the reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities as set forth in section 101(a)(18)(A).</p>
<p>3.m. the submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
<p>4. Administration of the Provision of VR Services: The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will:</p>
<p>4.a. comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(E) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
<p>4.b. impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
<p>4.c. provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services or, if implementing an order of selection, in accordance with criteria</p>

The State Plan must include
established by the State for the order of selection as set out in section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.d. determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.e. comply with the requirements for the development of an individualized plan for employment in accordance with section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.f. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act
4.g. provide vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the State, in accordance with section 101(a)(13) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.h. comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by sections 101(a)(14) and 511 of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.i. meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act if the State elects to construct, under special circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs.
4.j. With respect to students with disabilities, the State,

The State Plan must include
4.j.i. has developed and will implement,
4.j.i.A. strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and
4.j.i.B. strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and
4.j.ii. has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15), 101(a)(25) and 113).
4.j.iii. shall reserve not less than 15 percent of the allocated funds for the provision of pre-employment transition services; such funds shall not be used to pay for the administrative costs of providing pre-employment transition services.
5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement to the State plan:
5.a. The designated State unit assures that it will include in the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan all information required by section 606 of the Rehabilitation Act.
5.b. The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act separately for individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act.

The State Plan must include

6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program (Title VI):

6.a. The designated State agency assures that it will expend no more than 2.5 percent of the State's allotment under title VI for administrative costs of carrying out this program; and, the designated State agency or agencies will provide, directly or indirectly through public or private entities, non-Federal contributions in an amount that is not less than 10 percent of the costs of carrying out supported employment services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved for such purpose under section 603(d) of the Rehabilitation Act, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(H) and (I) of the Rehabilitation Act.

6.b. The designated State agency assures that it will use funds made available under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act only to provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, who are eligible to receive such services; and, that such funds are used only to supplement and not supplant the funds provided under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, when providing supported employment services specified in the individualized plan for employment, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(A) and (D), of the Rehabilitation Act.

7. Provision of Supported Employment Services:

7.a. The designated State agency assures that it will provide supported employment services as defined in section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act.

7.b. The designated State agency assures that the comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes

The State Plan must include

consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act an individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(7)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act.

Do you attest that these assurances will be met?
Yes

Vocational Rehabilitation (Combined or General) Certifications

States must provide written and signed certifications that:

1. The (enter the name of designated State Agency or designated state unit, as appropriate,) is authorized to submit the VR Services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act), as amended by Title IV of WIOA[1], and its State Plan Supplement under Title VI of the rehabilitation act;

[1] Public Law 113-128.

Enter the name of designated State Agency or designated State Unit, as appropriate

Vocational Rehabilitation Administration

2. IN THE EVENT THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY IS NOT PRIMARILY CONCERNED WITH VOCATIONAL AND OTHER REHABILITATION OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES, THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY MUST INCLUDE A DESIGNATED STATE UNIT FOR THE VR PROGRAM (SECTION 101(A)(2)(B)(II) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT). AS A CONDITION FOR THE RECEIPT OF FEDERAL FUNDS

UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES, THE (DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WHEN THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY HAS A DESIGNATED STATE UNIT)[2] AGREES TO OPERATE AND IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE STATE VR SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN[3], THE REHABILITATION ACT, 34 CFR 361.13(B) AND (C), AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[4], POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED BY THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION. FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE TO STATES UNDER SECTION 111(A) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT ARE USED SOLELY FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN;

[2] All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

[3] No funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

[4] Applicable regulations, in part, include the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 76, 77, 79, 81, and 82; 2 CFR part 200 as adopted by 2 CFR part 3474; and the State VR Services program regulations at 34 C.F.R. part 361.

ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY

Department of Labor and Human Resources

3. As a condition for the receipt of federal funds under title vi of the rehabilitation act for supported employment services, the designated state agency, or the designated state unit when the designated state agency has a designated state unit, agrees to operate and is responsible for the administration of the state supported employment services program in accordance with the supplement to the vr services portion of the unified or combined state plan[5], the rehabilitation act, and all applicable regulations[6], policies, and procedures established by the

secretary of education. Funds made available under title vi are used solely for the provision of supported employment services and the administration of the supplement to the vr services portion of the unified or combined state plan;

[5] No funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved supported employment supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

[6] Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in footnote 4, as well as Supported Employment program regulations at 34 C.F.R. part 363.

4. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT OR, IF NOT APPLICABLE, THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY HAS THE AUTHORITY UNDER STATE LAW TO PERFORM THE FUNCTIONS OF THE STATE REGARDING THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT AND IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE VR PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH 34 CFR 361.13(B) AND (C);

5. THE STATE LEGALLY MAY CARRY OUT EACH PROVISION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT.

6. ALL PROVISIONS OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT ARE CONSISTENT WITH STATE LAW.

7. THE (ENTER THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW) HAS THE AUTHORITY UNDER STATE LAW TO RECEIVE, HOLD, AND DISBURSE FEDERAL FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT;

ENTER THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW

María M. Gómez-García

8. THE (ENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW) HAS THE AUTHORITY TO SUBMIT THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND THE SUPPLEMENT FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;

ENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW

Administrator

9. The agency that submits the vr services portion of the unified or combined state plan and its supplement has adopted or otherwise formally approved the plan and its supplement.

Footnotes

[¹] Public Law 113-128.

[²] All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

[³] No funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

[⁴] Applicable regulations, in part, include the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 76, 77, 79, 81, and 82; 2 CFR part 200 as adopted by 2 CFR part 3474; and the State VR Services program regulations at 34 C.F.R. part 361.

[⁵] No funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved supported employment supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

[⁶] Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in footnote 4, as well as Supported Employment program regulations at 34 C.F.R. part 363.

Certification Signature

Signatory information	Enter Signatory information in this column
Name of Signatory	María M. Gómez-García
Title of Signatory	Administrator
Date Signed	02/28/2024

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Each State VR program must submit expected levels of performance in its Unified or Combined State Plan and in the two-year modification of that plan. Expected levels of performance for the first two years of a state plan must be submitted in the initial submission of the Unified or Combined State Plan and in the initial submission of the two-year modification of that Plan, for years three and four, as described in 34 CFR § 361.170(a). Expected levels of performance must be stated to the nearest tenth of a percent (XX.X %) or to the nearest whole dollar for median earnings. State VR programs are reminded that the expected levels of performance must be published for public comment prior to plan submission in accordance with state law, regulation, and policy.

After the Unified or Combined State Plan submission, each State VR program must reach agreement with RSA on the negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the Unified or Combined State Plan (or for the third and fourth years of the Unified or Combined State Plan during the required two-year modification process) in accordance with WIOA section 116(b)(3)(A)(iv).

RSA will use its statistical adjustment model to derive pre-program year estimated levels of performance for each indicator. Each State VR program and RSA will consider the negotiation factors outlined in WIOA section 116(b)(3)(A)(v) during the negotiation

process. Once negotiated levels of performance are agreed upon, each State VR program must incorporate the negotiated levels of performance into the Unified or Combined State Plan and the two-year modification of that plan prior to the plan’s approval (section 116(b)(3)(A)(iv) of WIOA).

Effectiveness in Serving Employers

In the final rule implementing WIOA, the Departments indicated that they would initially implement this indicator in the form of a pilot to test the feasibility and rigor of three proposed approaches. During Program Year (PY) 2022, the Departments initiated the rulemaking process to establish a standard definition of Effectiveness in Serving Employers. States will continue to report two of three proposed approaches until the Departments issue the final rule and implement the indicator.

Table 63: **Effectiveness in Serving Employers**

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	45.0%		45.0%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	33.0%		33.0%	

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	4,020		4,020	
Credential Attainment Rate	38.0%		38.0%	
Measurable Skill Gains	35.0%		35.0%	
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

GEPA 427 Form Instructions for Application Package - Vocational Rehabilitation

EQUITY FOR STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, AND OTHER PROGRAM BENEFICIARIES

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) ([20 U.S.C. 1228a](#)) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA Section 427 Form Instructions for State Applicants

State applicants must respond to the following four questions:

1. Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.
2. Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?
3. Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?
4. What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?
 - Applicants identify any barriers that may impede equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity, including, but not limited to, barriers based on economic disadvantage, gender, race, ethnicity, color, national origin, disability, age, language, migrant status, rural status, homeless status or housing insecurity, pregnancy, parenting, or caregiving status, and sexual orientation.
 - Applicants use the associated text box to respond to each question. However, applicants might have already included some or all this required information in the narrative sections of their applications or their State Plans. In responding to this

requirement, for each question, applicants may provide a cross-reference to the section(s) in their State Plans that includes the information responsive to that question on this form or may restate that information on this form.

- Applicants are not required to have mission statements or policies that align with equity to apply.
- Applicants that have already undertaken steps to address barriers must still provide an explanation and/or description of the steps already taken in each text box, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement.
- Applicants that believe no barriers exist must still provide an explanation and/or description to each question to validate that perception, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement.

Please refer to [GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package](#)

1. DESCRIBE HOW YOUR ENTITY'S EXISTING MISSION, POLICIES, OR COMMITMENTS ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO, AND EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION IN, THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY.

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) ([20 U.S.C. 1228a](#)) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

[GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package](#)

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The first of four questions is:

Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.

The VRA has services available and accessible to all individuals with disabilities. For the purpose of promoting the participation in vocational rehabilitation services and supported employment, the personnel of the agency participate in community orientation activities. There is no difference as to the availability of services for groups of specific disabilities, or specific cultural or racial groups. Moreover, the VRA carries out transactions as necessary to continue ensuring that its facilities are accessible to all individuals with disabilities.

2. BASED ON YOUR PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY, WHAT BARRIERS MAY IMPEDE EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, OR OTHER BENEFICIARIES?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The second of four questions is:

Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?

There are no barriers identified that may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries.

3. BASED ON THE BARRIERS IDENTIFIED, WHAT STEPS WILL YOU TAKE TO ADDRESS SUCH BARRIERS TO EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) ([20 U.S.C. 1228a](#)) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

[GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package](#)

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The third of four questions is:

Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?

Not applicable. There are no barriers identified.

4. WHAT IS YOUR TIMELINE, INCLUDING TARGETED MILESTONES, FOR ADDRESSING THESE IDENTIFIED BARRIERS?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) ([20 U.S.C. 1228a](#)) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

[GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package](#)

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The final of four questions is:

What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

Not applicable. There are no barriers identified.

GEPA 427 Form Instructions for Application Package -Supported Employment

EQUITY FOR STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, AND OTHER PROGRAM BENEFICIARIES

OMB Control Number 1894-0005 Expiration 02/28/2026

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) ([20 U.S.C. 1228a](#)) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA Section 427 Form Instructions for State Applicants

State applicants must respond to the following four questions:

1. Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.
2. Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?
3. Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?
4. What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

- Applicants identify any barriers that may impede equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity, including, but not limited to, barriers based on economic disadvantage, gender, race, ethnicity, color, national origin, disability, age, language, migrant status, rural status, homeless status or housing insecurity, pregnancy, parenting, or caregiving status, and sexual orientation.
- Applicants use the associated text box to respond to each question. However, applicants might have already included some or all this required information in the narrative sections of their applications or their State Plans. In responding to this requirement, for each question, applicants may provide a cross-reference to the section(s) in their State Plans that includes the information responsive to that question on this form or may restate that information on this form.
- Applicants are not required to have mission statements or policies that align with equity to apply.
- Applicants that have already undertaken steps to address barriers must still provide an explanation and/or description of the steps already taken in each text box, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement.
- Applicants that believe no barriers exist must still provide an explanation and/or description to each question to validate that perception, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement.

Please refer to [GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package](#)

1. DESCRIBE HOW YOUR ENTITY'S EXISTING MISSION, POLICIES, OR COMMITMENTS ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO, AND EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION IN, THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY.

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) ([20 U.S.C. 1228a](#)) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of

Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The first of four questions is:

Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.

The VRA has services available and accessible to all individuals with disabilities, including supported employment participants. For the purpose of promoting the participation in vocational rehabilitation services and supported employment, the personnel of the agency participate in community orientation activities. There is no difference as to the availability of services for groups of specific disabilities, or specific cultural or racial groups. Moreover, the VRA carries out transactions as necessary to continue ensuring that its facilities are accessible to all individuals with disabilities.

2. BASED ON YOUR PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY, WHAT BARRIERS MAY IMPEDE EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, OR OTHER BENEFICIARIES?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The second of four questions is:

Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?

Not applicable. No barriers identified.

3. BASED ON THE BARRIERS IDENTIFIED, WHAT STEPS WILL YOU TAKE TO ADDRESS SUCH BARRIERS TO EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) ([20 U.S.C. 1228a](#)) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

[GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package](#)

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The third of four questions is:

Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?

Not applicable. No barriers identified.

4. WHAT IS YOUR TIMELINE, INCLUDING TARGETED MILESTONES, FOR ADDRESSING THESE IDENTIFIED BARRIERS?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) ([20 U.S.C. 1228a](#)) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of

Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

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State applicants must respond to four questions.

The final of four questions is:

What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

Not applicable. No barriers identified.

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