

Region IX Education WIOA Youth Contract
Scope of Work

Summary

The reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act to the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act, was a reform much needed for our nation. Program design is based on being proactive and connecting our youth and young adults to a journey toward academic and career success. Region IX will leverage resources and eliminate duplicate services to ensure that federal funds are being spent effectively and efficiently.

The Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act provides the framework for a unique academic preparation and employment system. Region IX is particularly excited to support this framework and will present the following goals in this Scope of Work:

- To strengthen youth services by focusing on both at-risk students and those who have dropped out
- Provide effective and comprehensive program service delivery
- Prioritize career awareness and career pathways with a focus on work-based learning opportunities designed to build stronger connections between job training programs and local employer needs
- Support the development of alternative, evidence-based programs that encourage youth to:
 - Re-enter and complete secondary education
 - Enroll in postsecondary education and advanced training
 - Progress through a career pathway
 - Prepare youth to enter employment and become self-sufficient.
- Promoting an integrated system where all agencies are working together
- Provide effective connections to businesses and targeting in-demand occupations.

Organizational Experience Comprehensive/Year Round Youth Program

The Region IX Education Cooperative (REC IX) has been providing Workforce Investment Act (WIA) youth services in Lincoln and Otero Counties since the implementation of the Workforce Investment Act in 2000 and has been providing services throughout the Eastern area since July 2011.

1. Overview

REC IX will provide services to Eastern Area Workforce Development Board's (EAWDB) 12 county area. These partners include the public school districts, state supported schools, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Schools, post-secondary institutions, and local business and industries with a focus on out-of-school youth. The infrastructure of REC IX technology gives the staff the ability to communicate throughout the area, while identifying and interacting with youth in all communities of the region. Services will be provided, through case management and through a variety of means including: face-to-face interaction, virtual meetings, and/or utilizing a variety of electronic options as appropriate.

Region IX will employ a Quality Assurance Coordinator, recognizing the importance of continuous monitoring of the program and case management. The coordinator will assure that constant and consistent support is available to field staff for proper documentation and internal file maintenance processes. The coordinator works directly with the Eastern Area Workforce Development Board (EAWDB) and administrative staff to ensure the continuous improvement of quality of the Youth Program and its records.

Due to the current budget and the need to be innovative in providing the best services for the least cost, Region IX proposals to cost share a Quality Assurance Coordinator with the Adult/Dislocated Worker program.

All eligibility documents will be electronically reviewed prior to building the youth application. This is extremely important when enrolling youth 18-24 years of age that could potentially co-enroll with the WIOA Adult Program. It is essential to ensure goals and objectives are meaningful to the client for delivery of program services. The Quality Assurance Coordinator will review the Individual Service Strategy prior to the plan being entered in VOSS and will also provide the necessary support to ensure individual goals and objectives are targeted and attainable. The plan goals and objectives will be aligned

with the plans of partner agencies also serving the youth to help facilitate success of the youth as well as the outcomes for the partners.

The Quality Assurance Coordinator randomly selects a minimum sample of 20% quarterly and reviews them for accuracy and quality. Before an individual is exited in the VOSS system a pre-closure final review is conducted by the Quality Assurance Coordinator to assure compliance is maintained.

As in the past, Region IX will continue to support the workforce system to provide seamless services without duplication. Region IX also promotes staff professional development to ensure the population it serves is receiving the best services.

Program Design/Service Delivery Plan

Strategies to provide services via technology and other means in rural communities.

Efficiently using technology can reduce or eliminate the need for youth to travel and physically access a job center. Services offered virtually via computer, smartphone, tablet, or chromebook empower people with transportation challenges, or anyone preferring to access information virtually. These tools allow them to access workforce programs and services on their terms and at a time and location more convenient to them. Virtual service delivery helps customers with childcare or transportation barriers making it possible for them to progress toward a better future. A parent can have services available to them at opportune times that are not always consistent with regular office hours, or a family lacking transportation can access resources virtually to obtain valuable information without traveling a considerable distance.

Much of the population in the Eastern area live hours away from their nearest job center. Building partnerships with local libraries in the rural communities, plays a vital role to providing internet accessibility to rural customers who may be lacking internet access in their homes.

Region IX strength is providing services through online learning programs. Some of the programs Career Development Specialist's utilize are: Money Smart, Alison, Kahn Academy, and NM Career Solutions. Region IX will be looking to use a free online math readiness program designed to help individuals prepare for their high school equivalency exam, AccuPlacer, Compass, SAT, and ACT. Partnering with Adult Basic Education to help provide other accesses to quality online programs, will assist rural customers in developing their academic skills. Providing online courses and e-learning strategies benefits our rural

communities by educating and allowing participants and their families to stay in an environment that is supportive and conducive to a successful transition into the workplace.

Social media, chat, and instant messaging also provides case management and workforce services to rural customers. The ability to use video meetings and the use of the screen share feature allows the ability to still connect one on one and assist customers via technology.

With the partnership and technological support, we have with Region IX, our vision is to establish partnerships with local schools or libraries to support the rural community with poor internet access by assisting to establish Federal E-Rate applications which would help provide broadband services into those communities.

Strategies tailored according to different age groups.

Providing services to the 16-17 year old population will remain with the youth provider and other entities directly working with the youth.

Strategies will be established to build an early foundation of workforce knowledge and terminology, soft skills, and the beginning steps of building a career portfolio. Career Development Specialist (CDS) will seek developmentally appropriate work readiness and financial literacy materials and resources for our participants. The goal is to foster career exploration, rather than the need to pick a particular occupation. Introduction into the workforce may include community volunteer projects, job shadowing, summer employment, and/or part-time work experience. Throughout this process, partnering with the Adult Education Program is essential. All participants who have dropped out of school must enroll in the Adult Education or a program leading to a diploma or its equivalent.

Providing services to the 18-24-year-old population can begin with either the partners, adult or youth staff. Adult/youth staff will interview the individual participant with the intent of tailoring the services of all programs to best guide the customer in the appropriate pathway to success. Strategies in workforce preparation will highlight transition from soft skills to hard skills development, from work experiences to on-the-job training (OJT) opportunities, and from secondary school transition to post-secondary education. If the participant has not completed their high school education, they will enroll in the Adult Education Program to obtain their high school equivalency. Participants will continue to build on work readiness knowledge, experiences, and skills. Occupational skills training opportunities will be identified to provide more opportunities for paid internships and apprenticeship training for youth 18 and older and co-enrolling with the adult program. Successful completion of the program entails the participant to achieve gainful employment with livable wages. We encourage those who have completed the program to become mentors, tutors and advocates for the younger population.

Engagement of sector partnerships is an essential piece of the puzzle when delivering program services to youth. Region IX will continue to partner with local economic development agencies, community colleges and chambers of commerce to identify the industry sectors that will address the uniqueness of each local economy in the Eastern Area. Selection of sector industries will include those industries with the highest number of job postings or projected vacancies. Healthcare, education, construction, retail and hospitality, are some of the industries with higher numbers of employer job vacancies. Region IX will work closely with the identified employers within the industry sectors to drive program services, provide career awareness with youth and to identify educational and employment training needs to build and provide the skilled workforce the sector industries are seeking.

In Lincoln County, for example, the wind energy sector has been identified as a projected industry that will require focused attention in workforce development and service delivery. A collaborative partnership is underway and being established with Eastern New Mexico University-Ruidoso, Region IX Education Cooperative, Mescalero Education Office, and the Eastern Area Workforce Development Board to identify and develop training programs to recruit and train Wind Energy Turbine Service Technicians by December 31, 2018 for potential employment in the regional wind energy industry.

Continually supporting the needs of the local economies and sector industries will be the focus of program services delivery at Region IX.

The evaluation of local labor market data and communication with businesses, will assist to identify opportunities in demand occupations. Healthcare, Leisure & Hospitality, Government, and Construction & Trade have been identified in the local plan as the current in-demand industries. Region IX will implement strategies to target in-demand occupations and facilitate opportunity to build trained, skilled and work-ready employees that will offer longevity of employment in the businesses and provide career opportunities for youth.

Region IX will work to identify internship and apprenticeship opportunities in the Eastern Area for in-demand occupations by working with businesses and local economic developers. Partnering with the Adult Program to utilize on-the-job training (OJT) opportunities for in-demand occupations offers another opportunity to place customers in occupations that build the necessary skills to obtain and retain gainful employment.

Region IX will continue opportunities for co-enrollment between the youth, adult, and vocational rehabilitation programs to provide continuous service delivery and leverage resources for youth in training programs and to meet the business demand.

Region IX will support education and training programs that connect the knowledge gained at worksites with a planned program of study, referred to as work-based learning or specific occupational skills training. Region IX will support the area educational institutions, economic development agencies, and business partners in developing career ladders and pathways in the in-demand occupations. The goal is to establish pilot programs to support the development of curriculum and training plans that will help link academic and workplace learning to create “stepping-stones” for future careers for the youth we serve. We will seek to collaborate across programs and partners to link and implement strong education and training programs that lead to success for the partners, employers and the youth.

Work-based learning will be utilized in entrepreneurial education and training programs. This will result in the development of practical skills such as financial literacy, teamwork, personal responsibility, decision-making, and public speaking. One of the projects in development is to work collaboratively with the Adult Education program to build a youth run thrift shop. Within the project we will be creatively linking academic skills (math, language, science and writing) with career skills. Youth will apply their knowledge in work readiness and soft skills development. Engaging youth will increase academic performance and attendance. An important component when working with disconnected youth is, the opportunity for them to connect socially to peers and building confidence and leadership skills.

Region IX will be key in facilitating appropriate academic, community, employer, and technology support for all involved in the work-based learning experience. Region IX recognizes the need to provide innovative strategies to develop quality work-based learning experiences which can result in many positive outcomes that will strengthen the opportunity for youth into jobs with livable wages.

Supportive Services

All participating youth may be assisted in, but not limited to, transportation, child care, assistance in educational testing, stipends and incentives, books, work attire, tools, accommodations for persons with disabilities etc., where appropriate. Many employers require an employee to have a valid driver’s license. In the assessment process, case managers can determine if supportive services are needed to take a driver’s education course and/or test.

The Career Development Specialist (CDS) will be resourceful and strategic when using supportive service funds to address barriers. The CDS will determine a participant's need for supportive services as a part of their initial and on-going assessment. The CDS will also evaluate whether other community resources or partner programs are available to cover necessary expenses and will show evidence of referrals to other resources and report the outcome of the referral. Our goal is to model for our participants how to leverage available resources within the community to allow them to become self-sufficient. This ties in with the importance of understanding personal budget and financial literacy. The life skills addressed through this process will be a component in the Individual Service Strategy and a step to addressing barriers.

A shift in serving out-school youth under WIOA, the Eastern area has experienced an increase in developmental delays and mental health needs among the youth population enrolled in the program. Region IX has been an asset in advising WIOA staff on how to access resources. This is essential because, youth come to us with little or no family support, abuse, housing instability, which affects their social-emotional development and hinders their progress in the program. Youth needing medical services, including mental health assistance, alcohol and substance abuse, should be identified so that appropriate supportive services and referrals can be made to attain medical care and counseling services.

Eligibility, assessment, case management, and counseling services

Youth will have access to high-quality services in an integrated system. We will cross-train all American Job Center staff and partners to promote knowledge and understanding of youth eligibility requirements and expectations. Our goal is to emphasize educational attainment and sustainable employment, thus eliminating the duplication of services. The implementation of common tools and practices across programs is crucial to minimizing duplication. Knowledge of community resources and partner programs will provide the youth with an array of wraparound services. The foundation of youth services is, building a strong system of communication within the integrated system to effectively track and collaborate and provide a level of high-quality, seamless services.

Disconnected youth entering the program must overcome a number of barriers to achieve self-sufficiency. Establishing involvement in meaningful training opportunities in in-demand occupations, result in meaningful employment that will offer opportunity for advancement, satisfaction and self-sufficiency.

Region IX uses two types of in-depth assessments, informal and formal. Continuous professional development with the CDS's will be part of an on-going process to enhance the effectiveness of these assessments.

Informal assessment will include initial intake interview, questioning, observation, and self-assessment checklists. This informal assessment will help identify dreams, goals, strengths, interests, fears, feelings, perceptions, family and peer interaction, prior work experience, barriers, and supportive services needed.

Observing youth behavior, CDS's can assess work readiness and employability as well as barriers to employment and social-emotional development delays. For example, a CDS can determine work readiness by evaluating how the youth arrives to scheduled appointments, their attire, eye contact, and posture. The staff will be observing for signs of learning disabilities, behavioral issues, drug or substance abuse. This in-depth assessment will determine the need for referrals to professional community resources for a formal evaluation and additional help.

Formal assessments will include but are not limited to; basic skills testing, O*Net, Workkeys, Prove-it and Conover. These assessments and the data obtained play a significant role in building an Individual Service Strategy and the pathway that will drive the customers success.

For example, with active CDS collaboration, the youth will use O*Net to obtain career and labor market information. These include information such as sustainable occupations, green industries and national wages. Since the goal for both the youth and the program is employment that leads to self-sufficiency, it is important that the occupational goal relates to a need in the local labor market. It is critical that youth make a well-informed choice. After this formal assessment, youth have the ability to experience several career opportunities through job shadowing and work experience.

Actively engaged and retaining in the program

The youth participating and enrolled in the youth program have disconnected at several levels. The opportunity to reconnect to a purpose, future life, and the community, plays a key role in engaging and retaining the youth in the program.

A goal for the program is to seek opportunities to enroll in small groups versus admitting individuals on a walk-in basis. This is so we can encourage engagement by facilitating peer relationships and feeling of community.

Region IX will seek volunteers to participate in an adult mentorship program. The presence of caring, committed adults who can provide moral and emotional support and guidance will be an important avenue for youth engagement. It promotes a family-like atmosphere and a sense of belonging that many of the disconnected youth lack.

Region IX will also seek to develop a business mentorship program. The *New Mexico Career Clusters Guide* identifies sixteen career clusters. Efforts will be made to identify businesses in each of the career clusters to begin implementation of a business mentorship program. The vision is to expose youth to a variety of careers, opportunities and options. Business mentors discuss with youth their educational journey and experiences. Developing opportunities for onsite business tours to expose participants to the day to day operations and provide meaningful connection to possible careers.

Youth build trusting relationships with staff members. Region IX will maintain a manageable caseload and will provide regular communication, support, and feedback from management to career development specialists. In addition, we will work on providing professional development opportunities.

Region IX will support cross-training between WIOA programs and teaming of staff between neighboring areas. For example, if a youth CDS and an adult CDS team up for small group activities such as, work readiness workshops and life skills workshops. Then in the case of staff turnover or absence, the back up staff member can step in. In this situation, the case load of the former case manager can be assigned to a second case manager temporarily until the staff either returns or is replaced.

Other innovative approaches to engagement and retention are emphasizing activities in the leadership youth program element; such as, forming social groups, working with community organizations, advocates and/or recruiters for the youth program, youth developing a brochure or newsletter highlighting upcoming dates, social group information, workforce tips, job openings, and community events.

Strategies for youth engagement and retention will be creative and will include: giving young people the chance to build skills, exercise leadership, forming adult and business relationships, and helping their communities.

Communication with program participants after exit.

Communication with participants after exit will ensure successful outcomes for the program and increase the opportunity for long term participant success. Case managers emphasize follow-up services during the orientation and the intake process and obtain valid addresses and contact numbers. Mailing a thank you card after orientation is a great method of building rapport, and a success method to validating mailing addresses. This approach is continued

throughout the program and after exit with, congratulations, birthday and holiday cards. This will be a success avenue for communication and reconnection with the individual client. Region IX will be implementing a youth developed newsletter to be distributed to follow-up participants as well.

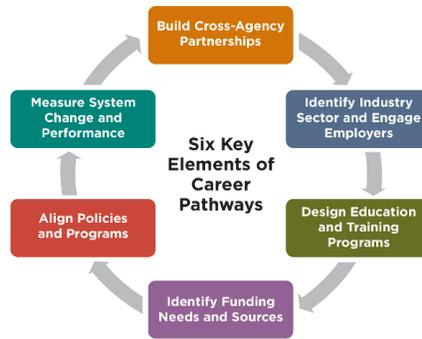
Surveys via technology are being developed. Region IX is updating the quarterly follow-up surveys. Our goal is to design surveys that are more appealing, that have youth friendly questions, and are returned. This will allow us to obtain information on their progress and identify where assistance may be needed.

Social media has proven to be a successful method to communicate with youth after they exit the program. We will take advantage of this approach to enhance communication by sending information on upcoming events like, job fairs, skills upgrading classes or workshops. Another initiative, alongside the adult program, is to create an alumni program and hosting class reunions. This will provide an opportunity for those who have graduated or completed a workforce program to network and become advocates for current participants.

Communication with those who have exited our program has been challenging, but Region IX is taking the lead to be creative and innovative for long-lasting communication with our participants.

development and implementation of career pathways and partnering with educational institutions.

Region IX has a close relationship with the eight postsecondary education institutions located in the Eastern area, which allows for direct communication of regional labor market knowledge to assist in analyzing potential training programs and to review existing programs. Initial ideas for development and implementation of career pathways is to have a Dream Team established in each local area to engage businesses and to assist in closing the skills gap. The Dream Team would include workforce staff, educators, employers, and members of the Eastern Area Workforce Development Board. The process would begin by defining partner roles and establishing a shared vision. Next, we would work with the Department of Labor's Career Pathway toolkit, to enhance or develop career pathways in the Eastern Area.



A challenge facing our workforce system and education and training partners is the lack of available funding to support the development of curriculum and implementation of rigorous programs of study toward a career pathway. Region IX will work with the Eastern Area Workforce Board and educational institutions to actively seek external funding opportunities, similar to the Carl D. Perkins Grant.

We must match businesses with workers. We can facilitate this by developing the workforce with the necessary skills to contribute to economic growth. Region IX will align with the Eastern Area Local Workforce Development Board to concentrate efforts in supporting businesses in Healthcare, Government, Leisure & Hospitality, and Constructions and Trades and other high growth areas identified by the state and local board.

Region IX will continue to work closely with Emerging Technology Ventures (ETV), a provider and developer of systems and technologies for operations in national security and commerce. This business is new to the Eastern Area, but is highly motivated to support economic growth locally and nationally and support education and skills in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). Existing partnerships in the health field include Presbyterian, Community Home Care, and Spring River Dental will continue to be a priority. We continue to develop and strengthen partnerships in agriculture with the U.S. Forest Service, Southwest Cheese plant, and the Cargill meat processing plant. Labor market data also reveals high job vacancies in teacher and administrative positions. Region IX is positioned well to partner with school districts, regional education cooperatives, and post-secondary schools, to develop workforce strategies and help close workforce skills gap. Bringing business partnerships to the forefront of service delivery and developing these relationships will be an important investment as we move forward towards economic growth.

Region IX will continue working to create an efficient workforce system by continuing to strengthen the relationships of WIOA core partners. Projects such as Job Fairs, Maze of Life, Employer outreach, workshops, and youth summits, are underway as WIOA Core Partners are working as workforce team members. Workforce team projects have proven to be a great avenue to build workforce morale and relationships, while developing a deeper understanding of each other's programs.

Local partnership meetings are also proving to be effective in developing strong relationships and closing the communication gap. The Juvenile Probation Office, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), New Mexico Works, Children Youth and Families Department (CYFD) are some in attendance, along with core partners.

Career Development Specialists (CDS) in each area are tailoring partnership development to the availability of partners in their area. The CDS are making appointments and attending program meetings. Their goal is to engage and move forward on actions plans to a common referral system thus partnering and leveraging resources. These organizations include: Indian and Native American Programs, Job Corps, Boys and Girls Club, Eco Servants, New Mexico Department of Health, Youth Challenge and WIC (Women, Infants, and Children). We will continue our outreach strategies to increase partnerships throughout the region.

Region IX has had long-time relationship with the New Mexico Graduation Reality and Dual-role Skills program (GRADS) held at the Ruidoso High School. With the effort and coordination of the Eastern Area Workforce Development Board (EAWDB), the board will be extending this relationship in 3 more locations and developing a MOU with the Public Education Department (PED). Region IX is looking forward to onward collaboration with the GRADS program and enhancing workforce services to teen parents.

Region IX will commit to enhancing all relationships, to deliver an efficient workforce system that will leverage resources, identify gaps, eliminate duplications of services, and providing the best system of program deliveries.

Performance Measurement

Region IX will use the performance data to identify where service delivery improvement is needed to implement immediate action plans. Region IX is looking forward to designing an internal reporting of the four performance measures: credential attainment, employment/training/education, skills gained, and median earnings for every participant in follow-up. We will be working with the board to identify methods to track the progress of active and follow-up participants at the beginning of each quarter which will allow for real time

data and immediate transparency of outcomes and comparison to federal reporting. Continuous contact with participants will also allow the case manager to immediately identify need in services, rather than addressing them at the end of quarter. Then, working with staff on a quarterly basis to analyze the collected data through a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats), to continually improve program delivery and identify challenges. Region IX recognizes the importance of staff accountability to follow-up services and is addressing challenges during the process, which will result in program and participant success.

Results of performance measures will be used constructively in employee evaluations. This will help identify strengths, improvements, resources and professional development needs along with areas in need of immediate support. The same data will be used to recognize success, motivate employees and encourage staff to pursue continuous learning and improvement that will translate into positive program outcomes and accountability.

Youth receive comprehensive services to achieve academic and employment success. Each of the fourteen WIOA required program elements are offered to the youth participants, including follow-up services. All program elements are designed to offer an array of educational, employment, and career training support. When program services are used effectively, participants are equipped with the tools and knowledge they need to achieve positive outcomes including credential attainment and employment with livable wages.

Services offered to all participants include but not limited to:

Education

- Tutoring and test preparation
- Adult Education Classes- In partnership with the Adult Educational Program
- Assessments and testing
- Post-secondary Transition

Training

- Work Experiences
- Job Shadows
- Postsecondary career training and education
- Financial literacy training
- Mentoring
- Leadership Development
- Entrepreneurial skills training

Career

- Career assessments and counseling
- Career exploration
- Labor market and employment information
- Online Youth Resource Tool: Career Solutions
www.nmcareersolutions.com