

# 2024

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

**DRAFT**





**I. WIOA STATE PLAN AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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- (b) **Plan Introduction or Executive Summary**

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|               |                                                                                                  |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| AAC           | Assessment and Adjustment Centers                                                                |
| AAO           | Assessment and Adjustment Office                                                                 |
| AAU           | Assessment and Adjustment Units                                                                  |
| 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                                                                  |
| AEFLA         | Adult Education and Family Literacy Act                                                          |
| AEFLA P       | Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program                                                  |
| AEMEAD        | AEMEAD is a Spanish Acronym to Puerto Rico State Agency for Emergency and Disaster Management    |
| AEP           | Alternative Education-Adult Education Program                                                    |
| AI            | Artificial Intelligence                                                                          |
| AJC           | American Job Centers                                                                             |
| APH           | American Printing House for the Blind                                                            |
| APS           | APS is a Spanish Acronym to Primary Health Care. Means is Spanish: "Atención Primaria de Salud." |
| APSE          | Association for Persons in Supported Employment                                                  |
| 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 to 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                                                                      |
| BIS           | Budget Information Summaries                                                                     |
| CAME          | Support and Employment Modalities Centers                                                        |
| CCAT          | College of Cinematography, Arts and Television                                                   |
| CCR           | College and Career Readiness                                                                     |
| CCR Standards | College and Career Readiness Standards                                                           |
| CEPR          | CEPR it's a Spanish Acronym to State Rehabilitation Council of Puerto Rico                       |
| CFR           | Code of Federal Regulations                                                                      |

|                 |                                                                                                |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CIL             | Centers for Independent Living                                                                 |
| CJ YDP          | Club JOVEM (Youth Development Program)                                                         |
| COMPU           | COMPU it's a Spanish Acronym to Special Education Scheduling and Placement Committee           |
| CPR             | Community Rehabilitation Programs                                                              |
| CPTOPR          | CPTOPR is a Spanish Acronym to College of Occupational Therapy Professionals of Puerto Rico    |
| CPTSPR          | CPTSPR is a Spanish Acronym College of Social Work Professionals of Puerto Rico                |
| CRCR            | CRPR is a Spanish Acronym to College of Rehabilitation Counseling Professionals of Puerto Rico |
| CSEM            | Center of Support and Employment Modes                                                         |
| CTE             | Career and Technical Education                                                                 |
| CUS             | Unique Service Center                                                                          |
| DDEC            | 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                                                                            |
| DSPID           | Department of Health - Division of Services for People with Intellectual Disability            |
| DVA             | Department of Veterans Administration                                                          |
| DW              | Dislocated Workers                                                                             |
| EAI             | Economic Activity Index                                                                        |
| EEL/CE          | Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education                                               |
| EEOC            | Equal Employment Opportunity Commission                                                        |
| 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                                                        |
| ERP             | Eligibility Review Program                                                                     |
| ES              | Employment Services                                                                            |
| ETPL            | Eligible Training Provider List                                                                |
| FEMA            | Federal Emergency Management Agency                                                            |
| GDP             | Gross Domestic Product                                                                         |
| GED             | General Educational Development Test                                                           |
| GEPA            | General Educations Provisions Act                                                              |
| GUS             | Geographic Unemployment System                                                                 |
| HUD             | US Department of Housing and Urban Development                                                 |
| ICT             | Information Technology and Telecommunications                                                  |

|                        |                                                                                                |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| IDD                    | Institute of Developmental Disabilities                                                        |
| IDEA                   | Individuals with Disabilities Education Act                                                    |
| IELCE                  | Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education                                               |
| IEP                    | Individual Employment Plan                                                                     |
| IET                    | Integrated Education and Training                                                              |
| ILC                    | Independent Living Centers                                                                     |
| ION                    | Innovation and Opportunity Network                                                             |
| IPE                    | Individualized Plan for Employment                                                             |
| IRAP                   | Industry Recognized Apprenticeship Programs                                                    |
| ISS                    | Individual Service Strategy                                                                    |
| ISY                    | In school Youth                                                                                |
| ITA                    | Individual Training Accounts                                                                   |
| ITE                    | Integrated education and training                                                              |
| IWT                    | Incumbent Worker Training                                                                      |
| JC                     | Job Corps Program                                                                              |
| JVSG                   | State Jobs for Veterans Grants                                                                 |
| L135-2014/L60-ICIFL-YE | Law 135-2014 (Now Law 60 Incentives Code Incentives and Financing Law for Young Entrepreneurs) |
| LWDA                   | Local Workforce Development Areas                                                              |
| LWDA                   | Local Workforce Development Area                                                               |
| LWDB                   | Local Workforce Development Boards                                                             |
| MIP                    | MIP is an Acronym of the Financial Management System                                           |
| MOU                    | Memorandum of Understanding                                                                    |
| MSFW                   | Migrant and Seasonal Farm Workers                                                              |
| MSG                    | Measurable Skill Gains                                                                         |
| NCIL                   | National Council on Independent Living                                                         |
| NCRE                   | National Council on Rehabilitation Education                                                   |
| NDWG                   | National Dislocated Worker Grants                                                              |
| NECA                   | National Employment Counselor Association                                                      |
| NGWD                   | National Dislocated Workers Grant                                                              |
| NRS                    | National Reporting System                                                                      |
| OA                     | Office of Apprenticeship                                                                       |
| OCTAE                  | Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education                                                |
| OLRHR                  | Office of Labor Relations and Human Resources                                                  |
| OMB                    | Office of Management and Budget                                                                |
| OPEVE                  | OPAVE is a Spanish Acronym to Planning, Validation and Statistics Office in DDEC               |
| OSEM                   | Office of Support and Employment Modes                                                         |

|         |                                                                                      |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| OSY     | Out-of-School Youth                                                                  |
| PDJ     | Youth Development Program                                                            |
| PEI     | PEI is a Spanish Acronym to Individualized Educational Program                       |
| PETSO   | Pre-employment Transition Service Office                                             |
| PIPE    | PIPE it's a Spanish Acronym to Individualized Plan for Employment                    |
| PIR     | Development of Individual Reemployment Plan                                          |
| PPC     | Placement and Programming Committee                                                  |
| PRAI    | Puerto Rico Association of Industrials                                               |
| PRATP   | PRATP it's a Spanish Acronym to Assistive Technology Advisory Council of Puerto Rico |
| PRDE    | Puerto Rico Department of Education                                                  |
| PRDOL   | Puerto Rico Department of Labor                                                      |
| PRE-ETS | Pre-Employment Transition Services                                                   |
| PRG     | The Policy & Research Group                                                          |
| PRIC    | Puerto Rico Incentives Code                                                          |
| PRIS    | Participant Record Information System                                                |
| PRRID   | Puerto Rico Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf                                    |
| PRT&EC  | Puerto Rico Trade and Export Company                                                 |
| PRVRA   | Puerto Rico Vocational Rehabilitation Administration                                 |
| PY      | Program Years                                                                        |
| QCPMO   | Quality Control and Programmatic Management Office                                   |
| QRA     | Quarterly Report Analysis                                                            |
| RA      | Registered Apprenticeship                                                            |
| RCSO    | Rehabilitation Counseling Service Office                                             |
| 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                                              |
| RTAA    | Reemployment Trade Adjustment Assistance                                             |
| SCDD    | State Council on Developmental Disabilities                                          |
| SEMC    | Support and Employment Modalities Centers                                            |
| SEMO    | Support and Employment Modalities Offices                                            |
| SIFC    | State Insurance Fund Corporation                                                     |
| SILC    | State Independent Living Council                                                     |
| SME     | Subject Matter Experts                                                               |
| SME's   | Small and Medium-Sized Business                                                      |

|       |                                                               |
|-------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| SMEs  | Small and Medium Enterprises                                  |
| SOEPP | State Office of Energy Public Policy                          |
| SRC   | State Rehabilitation Council                                  |
| SSA   | Social Security Act                                           |
| STEM  | Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics              |
| SWDB  | State Workforce Development Board                             |
| 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                                     |
| UCX   | Unemployment Compensation for Ex-servicemembers               |
| UI    | Unemployment Insurance                                        |
| UPR   | University of Puerto Rico                                     |
| USCIS | United States Citizenship and Immigration Services            |
| USDA  | United States Department of Agriculture                       |
| VIF   | Variance Inflation Factor                                     |
| VRC   | Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors                          |
| VRCS  | Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Service Centers Services |
| VRP   | Vocational Rehabilitation Program                             |
| WBD   | Workforce Development Board                                   |
| WBLE  | Work-Based Learning Experiences                               |
| WBO   | Worker Benefit Orientation                                    |
| WDP   | Workforce Development Program                                 |
| WIA   | Workforce Investment Act of 1998                              |
| WIOA  | Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act                      |
| WP    | Wagner-Peyser Program                                         |

## 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, 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, adheres to the 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 qualified individuals.

**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 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, particularly in digital telecommunications. 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.

## 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.*

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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 Federal 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 identifies major changes in Puerto Rico’s economic landscape and the level of administration of workforce programs across agencies implemented after 2020.

## 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) Over the past few years, Puerto Rico has endured a significant population decline marked by the departure of over 300,000 residents.
- 2) The effects of hurricanes Irma and Maria resulted in the acceleration of the emigration of another 600,000 people from Puerto Rico.
- 3) The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to a decline in the country's economic activity.
- 4) 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%.
- 5) 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.
- 6) Distribution of Medicaid Benefits in Puerto Rico.
- 7) Overestimation of economic growth projections has resulted in deficits and increases in financial debt.

- 8) Changes in government policies, modifications in economic planning strategies, and inconsistent progression in diverse economic activities could potentially benefit society.
- 9) Lack of communication at all levels of the productivity sectors, both government and private companies.
- 10) 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.
- 11) 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.
- 12) Ease and guidance for establishing new businesses.
- 13) 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%).
- 14) 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:

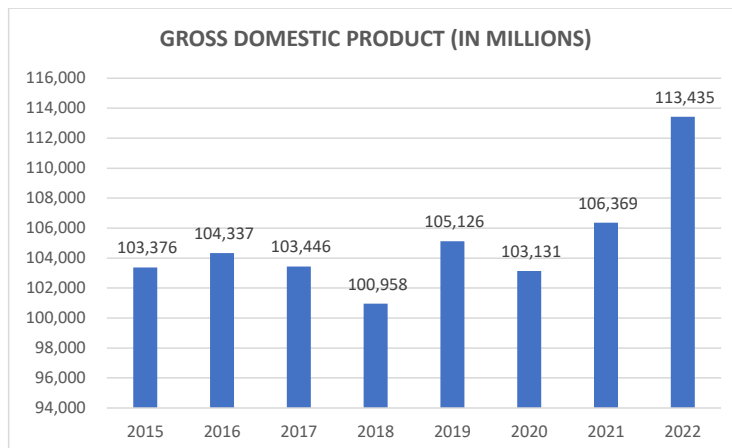
1. Bioscience;
2. Aviation;
3. Information Technology;
4. Agrobusiness;
5. Travel and Tourism.

This is 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:



Source: [www.estadisticaspr.gov](http://www.estadisticaspr.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.

| 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: *Junta de Planificación - Ingreso y Producto 2022*

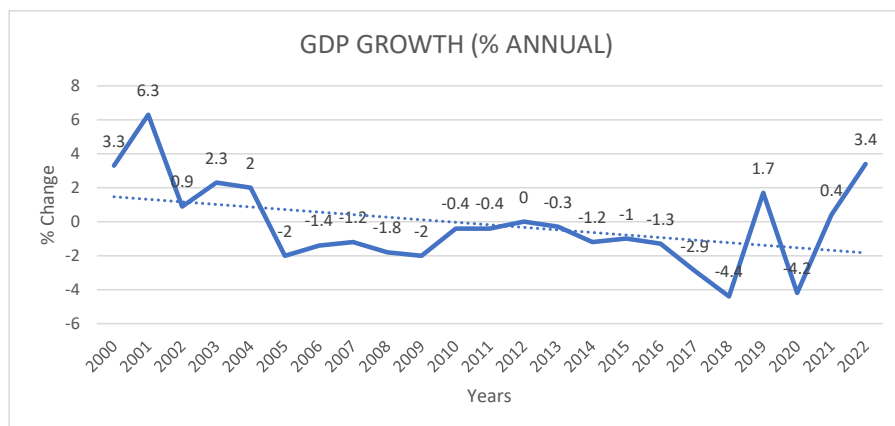
The next table shows the same macroeconomic variables in per capita terms. This information shows that GDP increases over time except for 2020 because of the pandemic on production and population.



| 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: Planning Board – Income & Product 2022

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

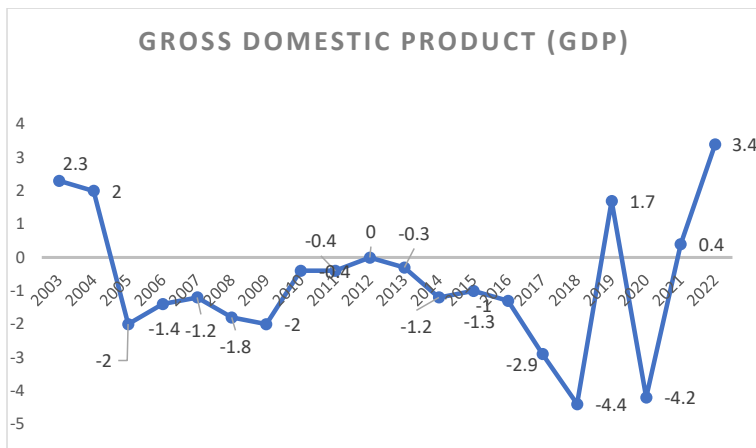


Source: [www.estadisticapr.gov](http://www.estadisticapr.gov)

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:



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

The Gross National Product for fiscal year 2022 totaled \$77,953.5 million in current terms, representing an increase of 6.9%. At constant prices, it reached \$5,937.8 million, an increase of 3.7%.

The following table shows the behavior of exports for the period from 2000 to 2022. The percentage that exports represent in the GDP represents more than 60% of the GDP except for the years 2012, 2021 and 2022. This is one of the economic variables promoted by the government, which is included in the strategies of the Purpose project, which seeks economic development and sustainability.

### C. Exports

| PUERTO RICO EXPORTS |                   |          |
|---------------------|-------------------|----------|
| 2000-2022           |                   |          |
| Year                | Billions in US \$ | % of GDP |
| 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](https://macro.trends.net/countries/PRI/puerto-rico/exports)

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

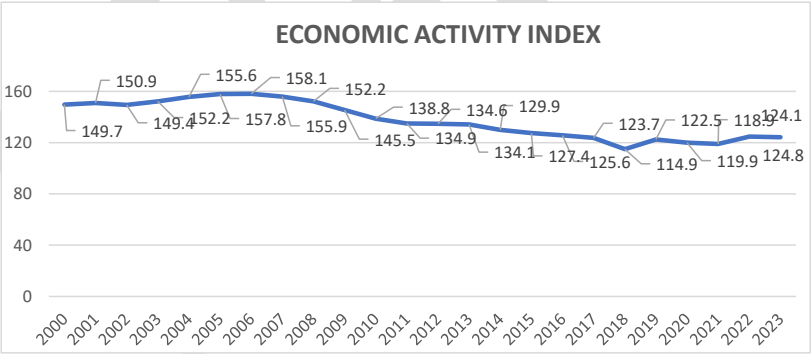
| TOP PUERTO RICO EXPORTS BY TRADE DOLLAR VALUE 2020 and 2022 |             |         |            |          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|---------|------------|----------|
|                                                             | In Billions |         |            |          |
| 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 as 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).



Source: [www.estadisticaspr.gov](http://www.estadisticaspr.gov)

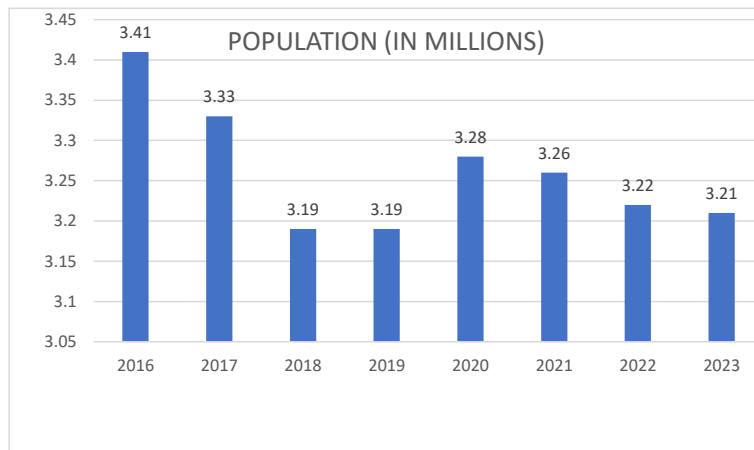
If we visualize the movement of the index in the previous graph, it shows a reduction in economic activity from 2005, which continues at a decreasing rate until 2018. In 2019, this indicator improved, but in 2020, it fell again (COVID-19). It showed positive performance from 2021 to 2023, although it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



Source: [www.estadisticaspr.gov](http://www.estadisticaspr.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).



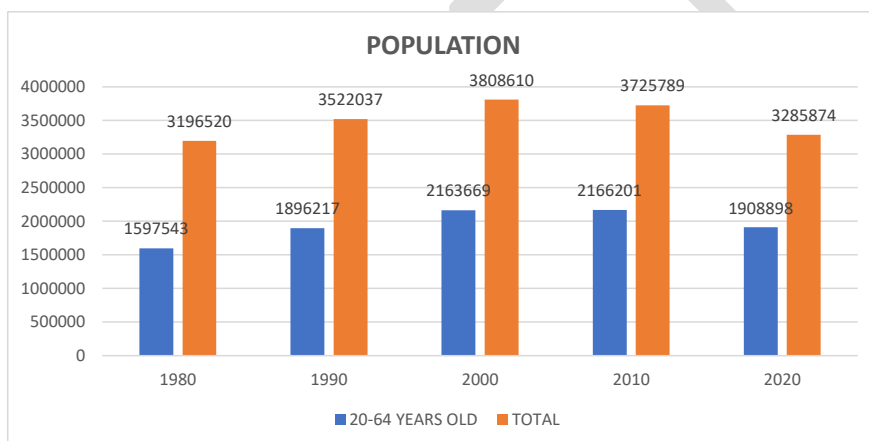
Migration effects are an important factor for economic development, since most of them are part of the country's workforce. Below is a distribution of the country's migration effect, for the years 2010 to 2023. Starting in 2010, the net migration rate has been increasing until 2020. From 2021 to 2023, 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.

| PUERTO RICO NET MIGRATION RATE DATA |                      |               |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| 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](https://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:



Source: [www.estadisticaspr.gov](http://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:

| 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: 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)

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%.

| 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    |

[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)

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.

| 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://estadisticas.pr/files/inventario/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).

| 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,<br>and Magistrate | 540  | \$48.54 | \$100,960.00 |
| 29-1218 | Obstetricians and<br>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](https://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).

| TOP 10 LOWEST OCCUPATION WITH SALARY |                             |              |                     |                     |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 2022 (MAY)                           |                             |              |                     |                     |
| Occupation<br>Code                   | Occupation Title            | Employment # | Mean Hourly<br>Wage | Annual Mean<br>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<br>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](https://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:

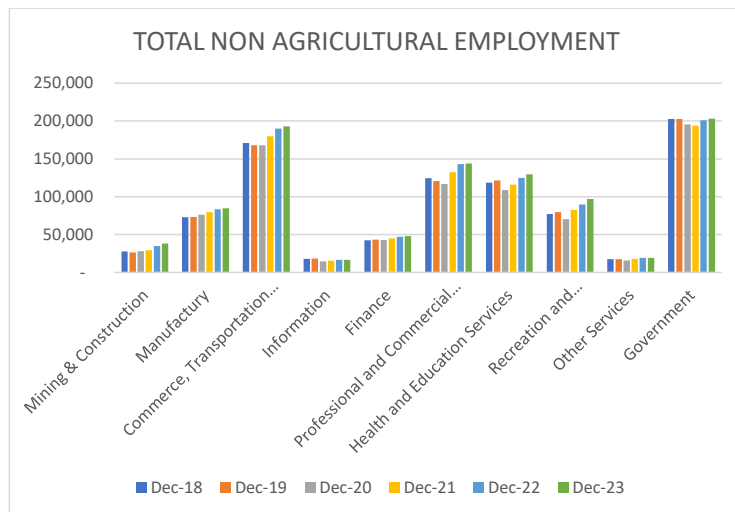
| Occupation                | PR Employment | Projected Job Growth Rate (2020-2030) | Projected Job (2020-2030) | Mean Annual Salary | Education Level   |
|---------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| 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: 21<sup>st</sup> 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).



Source: [www.estadisticaspr.gov](http://www.estadisticaspr.gov)

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

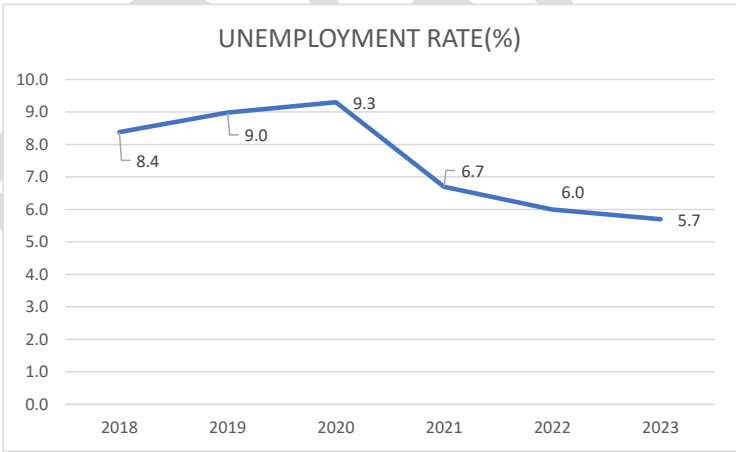
| NON-AGRICULTURAL WAGE EMPLOYMENT: STATE GOVERNMENT |                                  |          |
|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------|
| SEASONALLY ADJUSTED AND PERCENTAGE CHANGE          |                                  |          |
| 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: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)

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:



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.

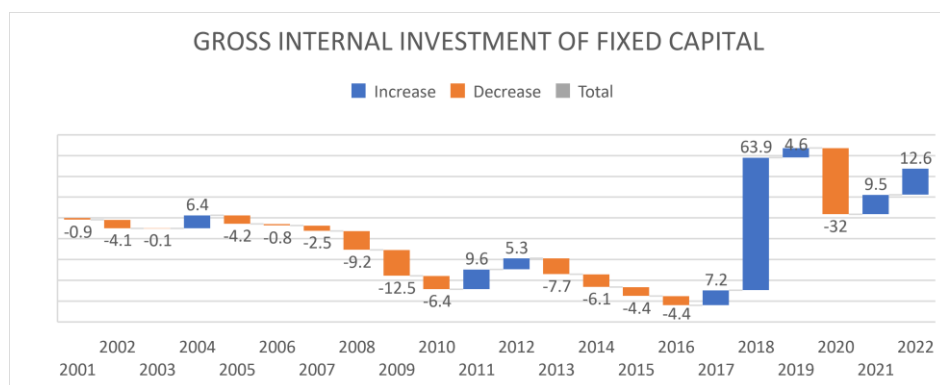
Conversely, the labor participation rate presented for the years 2019 to 2023 shows a -.02% decline in percentage terms from 2019 to 2020. After that, it started to rise, but for the year 2023, it fell in comparison to the year before (2022). However, although 2023 reflected a slight percentage decrease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

| 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:



Source: DDEC. Resumen de Cuentas Sociales AF 2022

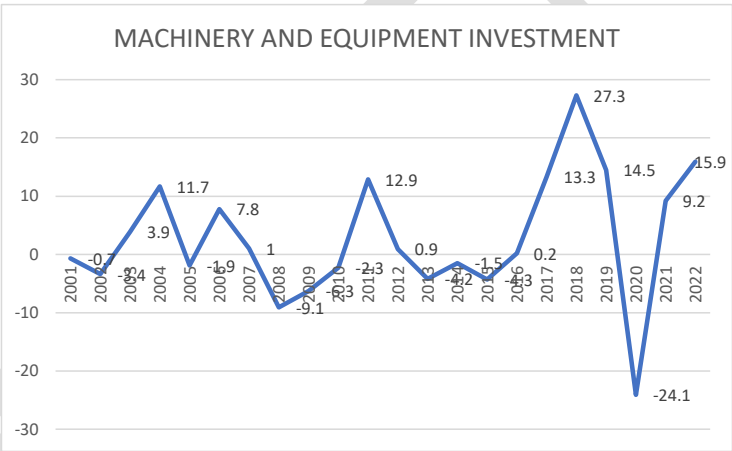
| NET INCOME TO GENERAL FUND |                  |          |
|----------------------------|------------------|----------|
| FISCAL YEAR 2019-2023      |                  |          |
| Year                       | Net Income       | Change % |
| 2019                       | \$ 10,234,191.00 | 25.3     |
| 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:

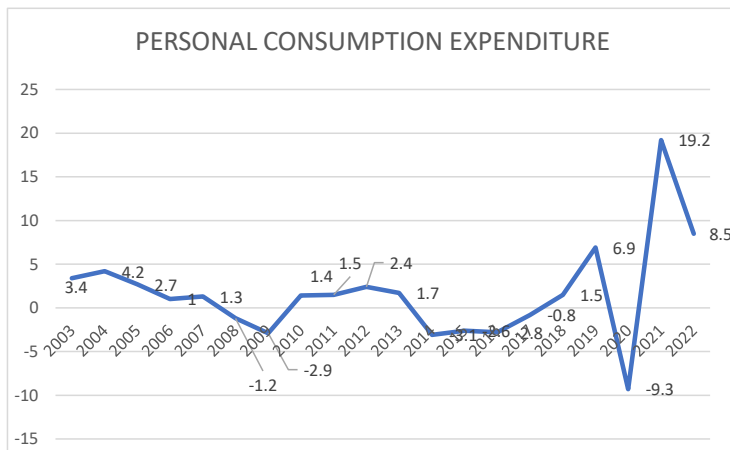


Source: DDEC. Resumen de Cuentas Sociales AF 2022

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:



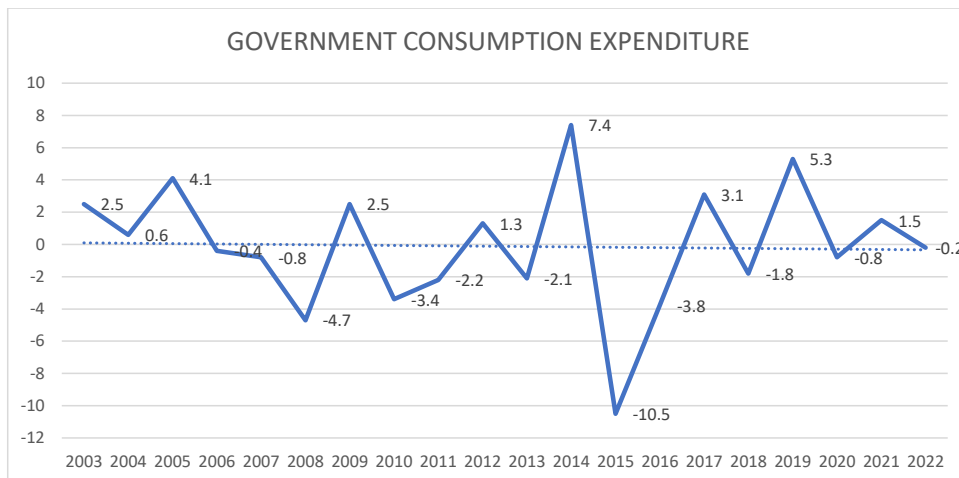
Source: DDEC. Resumen de Cuentas Sociales AF 2022

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:





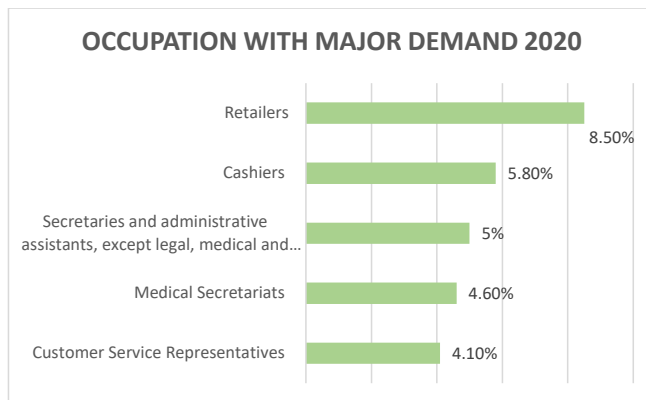
Source: DDEC. Resumen de Cuentas Sociales AF 2022

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:



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](http://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** – 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** – It is responsible for the privacy and data protection of companies and organizations to avoid or anticipate cyberattacks.
- 6) **"Community Manager"** – It is a specialist in communication and "marketing" in digital environments.
- 7) **Sustainability Consultant** – Analyzes the environmental impact of a company and proposes strategies to improve it.
- 8) **Logistics Expert** - 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** – They are responsible for leading innovation and technological transformation processes in organizations in any sector.
- 10) **Renewable Energy Expert** – Specialist in designing, managing, and directing electricity generation projects based on renewable energy.
- 11) **Wellness and Health Coordinator** – Consists of organizing and developing prevention measures to protect the mental and physical health of workers.
- 12) **Expert in Edtech** – 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—

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

## **(1) LABOR MARKET**

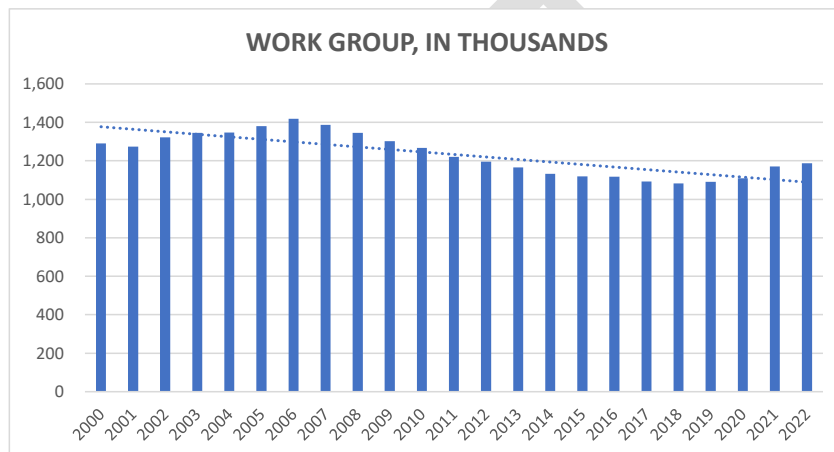
The structure of Puerto Rico's labor market is one of the main components in terms of development and economic sustainability. This economic component plays a significant role in society, and its performance is reflected in sensitive macroeconomic variables such as GDP and EAI. The components of the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

## **(2) 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:



Source: [estadistica.pr.gov](http://estadistica.pr.gov)

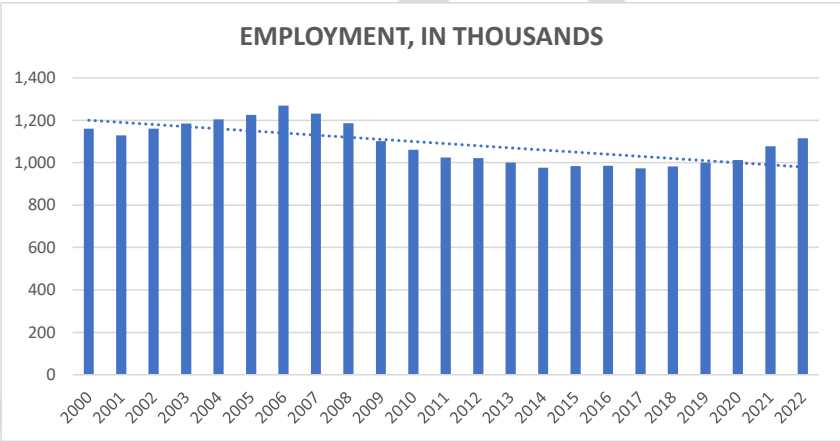
According to the graph, participation in the labor market in Puerto Rico exceeds one million people. If we compare the number of participants in the labor force in 2010 based on the year 2000, we can see that the labor force in 2000 of 1,291,000 decreased by 2010, where it registered 1,268,000 participants, 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.

**(3)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:



Source: [estadistica.pr.gov](http://estadistica.pr.gov)

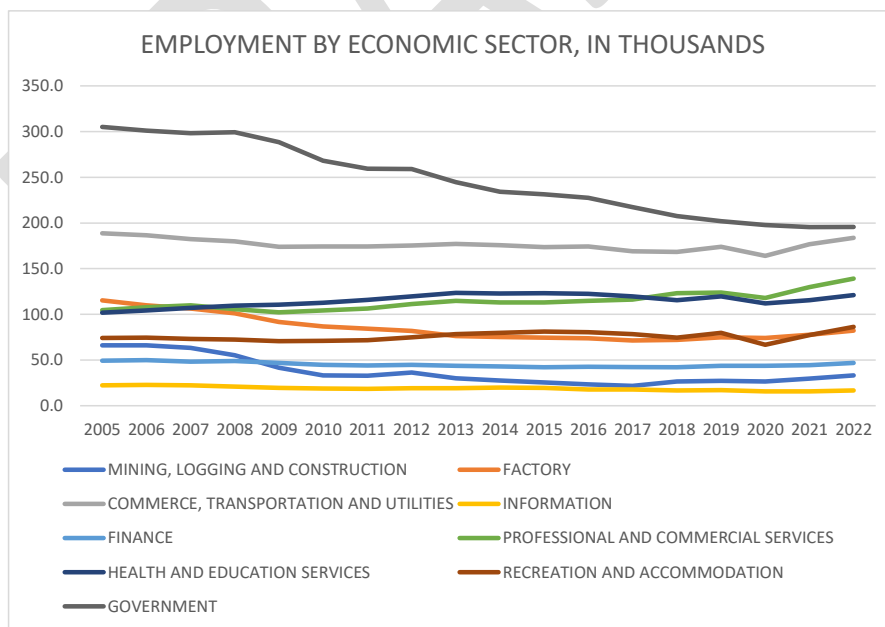
According to the graph, the participation of employed people in the labor market exceeded one million, except for the years from 2014 to 2018. This decrease is partly due to the declining economic situation, the effects of Hurricanes Irma and Maria and the COVID-19 pandemic.

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:



Source: estadistica.pr.gov

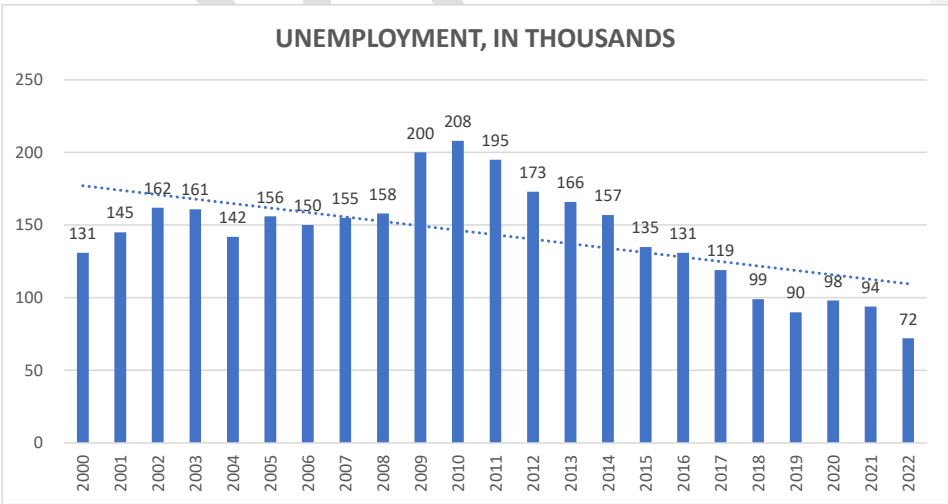
The economic sectors with the highest number of employees from 2005 to 2022 are as follows.

- 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.

**(4) 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:



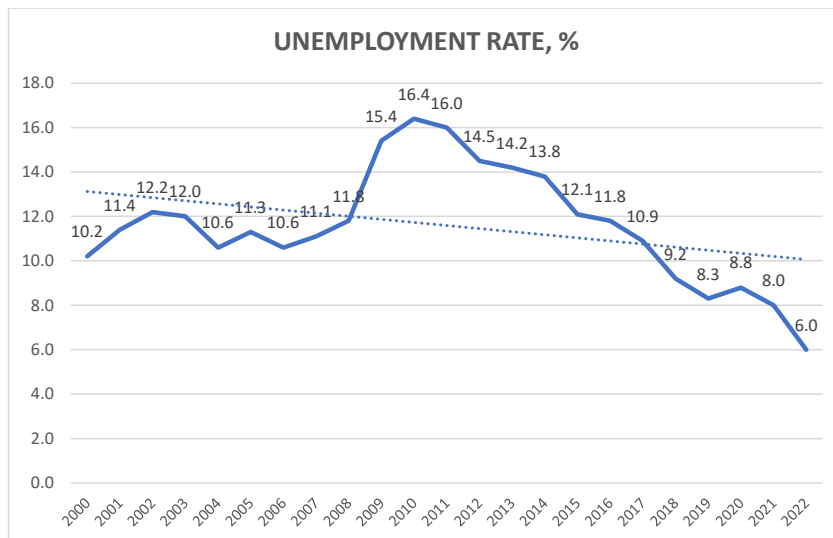
Source: estadistica.pr.gov

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.

#### **(5) 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:



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.

(ii) 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):

| <b>OCCUPATION</b>                                                 | <b>NUMBER OF NEW<br/>JOBS PROJECTED<br/>(2031)</b> | <b>AVERAGE<br/>ANNUAL SALARY<br/>2021</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| 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<br>material movers, hand         | 168,400                                            | \$31,230                                  |
| Stockers and order fillers                                        | 157,900                                            | \$30,110                                  |
| Market research analyst and<br>marketing specialists              | 150,300                                            | \$63,920                                  |
| First-line supervisors of food<br>preparation and serving workers | 145,700                                            | \$36,570                                  |
| Medical and health services<br>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.

### **(iii) 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.

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

| 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: American Community Survey of the US  
Census Bureau (ACS) DTE 5 – Year Estimates Subject Tables

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:"

| 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.

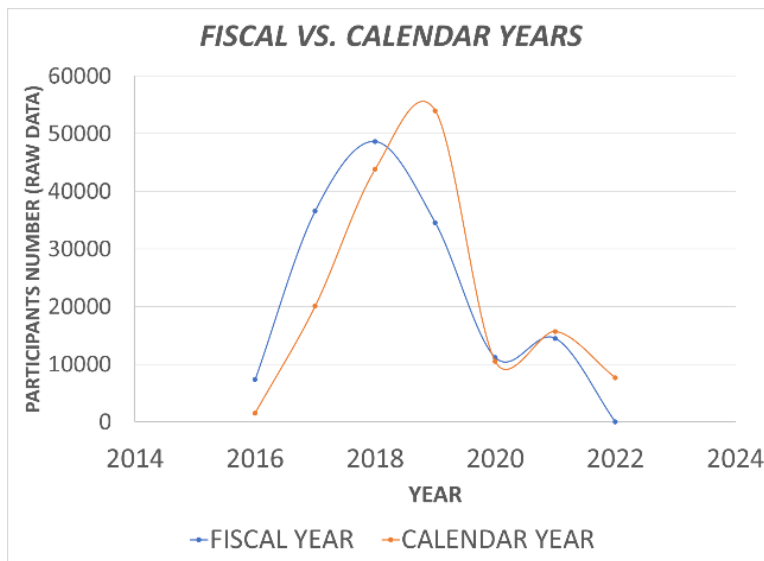


**Figure 1: Row WIOA program applicants - Fiscal Vs. Calendar years**

#### 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 1: 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<br>Element No. | PIRL logic | WIASRD<br>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 Entretenimiento Recreacion                                         | Arte_Entretenimiento_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_Asist_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_Clasi |                     |            |                       |              | 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 (NT)                                                               | 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                                                                   |                               | age >=14 and age <=18                                                                   |       |    | x OK           |
| 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           |
| Age18 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             |
| Age45 to 59                                                             | age4559          | NEW               | age >=45 and age <=59                                                                   |                               |                                                                                         | x     | x  | OK             |
| Age 60+ (NT 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) (NT)                                                 | 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 (NT)            | 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                                               | empntst          | 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                                    | engleamer        | 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                              | uiehxaustee      | 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                                             | recindividuals   | p1200             | p1200 not missing                                                                       | item_1200                     | item_1200 not missing and nonzero                                                       | x     | x  | OK             |
| Received training services                                              | rectraining      | 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 minus p900                                                                         | item_900                      | 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                                   | yinaa            | 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                    | yedachievsvc     | 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                | avgabepreivi     | p1905 p1912 p1919 | average of (p1905, p1912, p1919)                                                        | n/a                           | n/a                                                                                     |       |    | x OK           |
| Average Adult Basic Education Functioning Post-test Level               | aveabepostivi    | p1908 p1915 p1922 | average of (p1908, p1915, p1922)                                                        | n/a                           | n/a                                                                                     |       |    | x OK           |
| Average English as a Second Language Pre-test Level                     | avgeslpreivi     | p1905 p1912 p1919 | average of (p1905, p1912, p1919)                                                        | n/a                           | n/a                                                                                     |       |    | x NO           |
| Average English as a Second Language Post-test Level                    | avgeslpostivi    | 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 2: 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.



| 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           |

**Figure 2: PR Local Areas Location**

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.

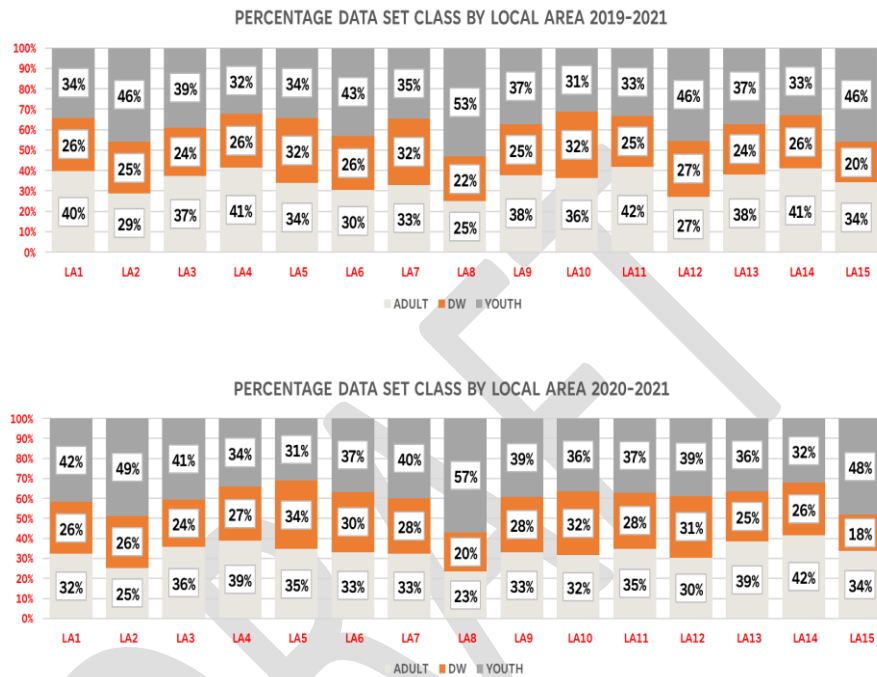


**Figure 3: WIOA program distribution by Local Areas**

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

**2019-2021**

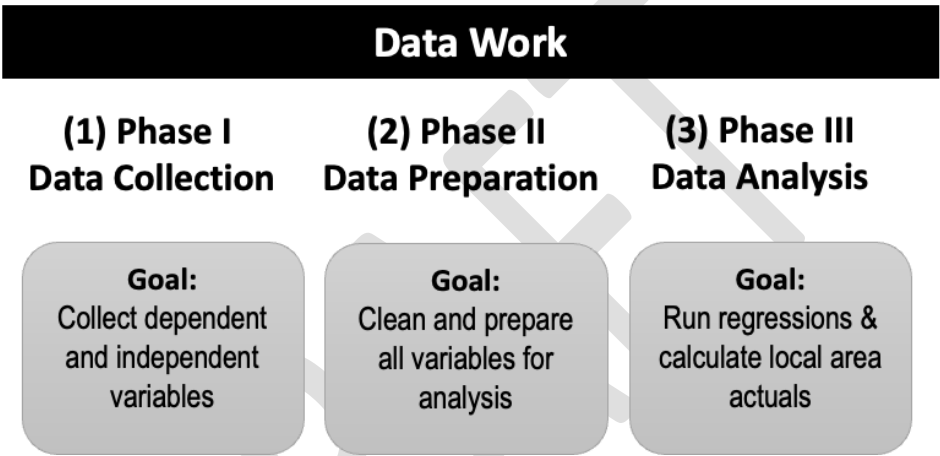
**2020-2021**

| Program      | Ammount       | Program      | Ammount       |
|--------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|
| Adults       | 7,882         | Adults       | 4,985         |
| DW           | 5,948         | DW           | 3,969         |
| Youth        | 9,229         | Youth        | 6,021         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>23,059</b> | <b>Total</b> | <b>14,975</b> |

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

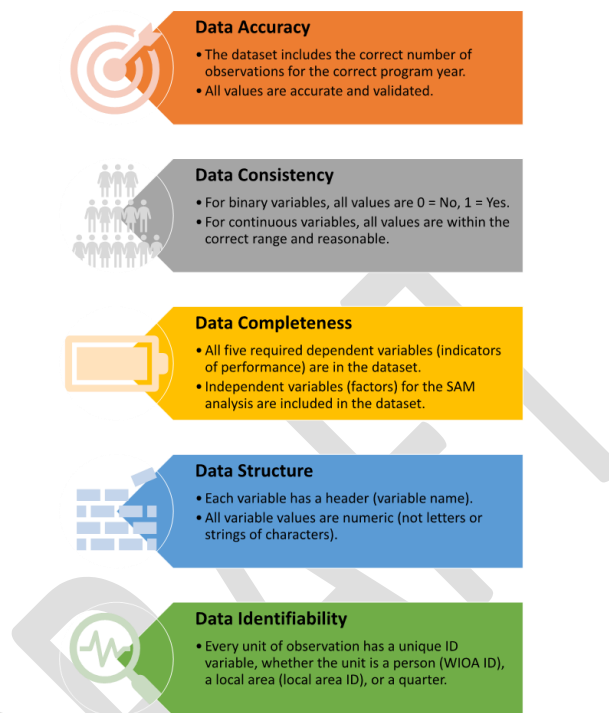
**Statistical Model Development**

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:

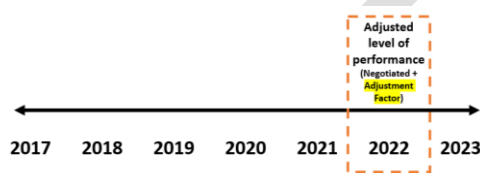
$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * X_1 + \beta_2 * X_2 + \beta_3 * X_3 + ..... + \beta_n * X_n + \epsilon$$

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

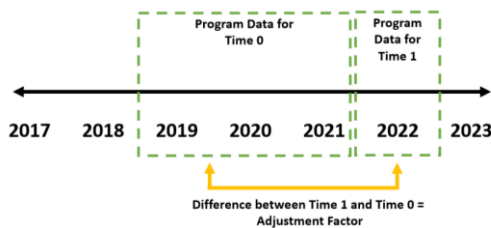
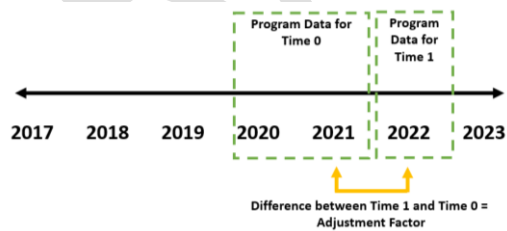
- 1) Most of the Dominium I, dependent and independent variables are dichotomous binary variables.
- 2) A generalized liner statistical model (GLM) was used to evaluate the correlation matrix using a logit link function. That matrix was exported as an input for a linear

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.***

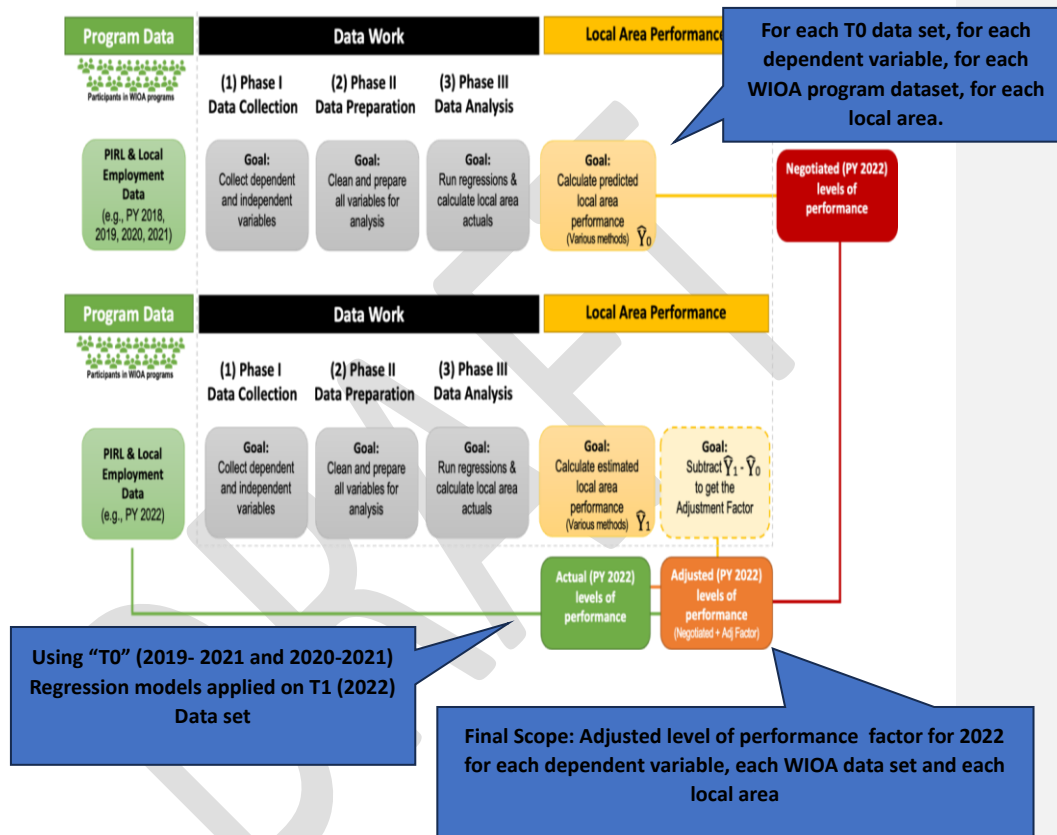


- 5) Due to the influence of external factors on the PR data (External factors affecting the dataset: Hurricanes and tropical storms, earthquakes, the Covid-19 pandemic, and post pandemic events) there is not a clear trend form the historical datasets. To estimate a better assessment of ***the statistically 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.





- 6) 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 required<sup>1</sup> and optional one-stop delivery system partners.<sup>2</sup>

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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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:

| 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):

| OCCUPATION                          | NUMBER OF NEW JOBS<br>PROJECTED (2031) | AVERAGE ANNUAL SALARY<br>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 housekeeping 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 are those that are related to health, food, business, and technology. As part of the technology, we must mention what is related to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math), which include, but is not limited to the various fields of biology, chemistry, engineering, mathematics, physics, robotics, genetics, and scientists.

*(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:

|                 |                                                                                                      |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 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-11-20    | Close-out reports under Financial Reports                                                  |
| 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.

## OPPORTUNITY

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, taking into account 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:

| 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:

| 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:

| 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.

| 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.

*(C) 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:
- Diagnostics: Determines the level of a company's export capacity.
  - Export plan development: essential tool for exporting products and services. In addition, it should be part of the company's business plan.
  - 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.
  - 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:
- Investigation of operational strengths and weaknesses.
  - Preparation of an export plan.
  - Implementation assistance
  - 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.
- Expenses related to travel, business meetings, and/or participation in international events.
  - Marketing campaign
  - Business Intelligence Services
  - Website translation
  - 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:

| 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](https://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 9. Program services offered by Puerto Rico's Government

|                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Agency:</b>              | Business Development Office (BDO)<br>Workforce Development Program (WDP)<br>Assistant Secretary of Permit Management (ASPM)                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Program:</b>             | SMEs, Innovative SMEs                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Population served:</b>   | 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. |
| <b>Program Description:</b> | 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.                                                                                                         |
| <b>Authority:</b>           | Economic Incentives Fund of the Incentives Code Act 60-2019. (EIF-ICA 60-2019)                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

|                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Agency:</b>              | DDEC                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Program:</b>             | Air Cargo Logistics Community (ACLC)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Population served:</b>   | The new Air Cargo Community of Puerto Rico will include airlines, airports, medical and pharmaceutical device manufacturers, ground operators, and carriers.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Program Description:</b> | <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"> <li>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,</li> <li>2. Raise international awareness of Puerto Rico's air transportation capabilities, and</li> <li>3. Leverage Puerto Rico's expertise in the life sciences field.</li> </ol> |

|                             |                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Agency:</b>              | DDEC                                                                                                   |
| <b>Program:</b>             | <p>Club JOVEM (CJ YDP)</p> <p>(Young entrepreneurs)</p> <p>(Youth Development Program)</p>             |
| <b>Population served:</b>   | Youth from public and private academic institutions.                                                   |
| <b>Program Description:</b> | Promote an entrepreneurial lifestyle and a sense of leadership in youth through educational workshops. |
| <b>Authority:</b>           | DDEC                                                                                                   |

|                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Agency:</b>              | DDEC, along with the Trade and Export Company and the Economic Development Bank for Puerto Rico,                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Program:</b>             | Incentives and Financing for Young Entrepreneurs (Microentrepreneurs)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Population served:</b>   | Youth from 16 to 35 years old                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Program Description:</b> | 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. |
| <b>Authority:</b>           | Law 135-2014 (now in Law 60 Incentives Code (L135-2014/L60-ICIFL-YE)<br>Incentives and Financing Law for Young Entrepreneurs.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

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

|                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Agency:</b>              | DDEC                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Program:</b>             | Law to Incentivize the Relocation of Individual Investors to Puerto Rico                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Population served:</b>   | Investors                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Program Description:</b> | 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. |
| <b>Authority:</b>           | Act 22 of the year 2012.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

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|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Agency:</b>              | DDEC                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Program:</b>             | Puerto Rico Incentives Code (PRIC)                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Population served:</b>   | Residents of the Island                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Program Description:</b> | 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. |
| <b>Authority:</b>           | Act 60 - 2019                                                                                                                                                                                                                |



|                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Agency:</b>              | DDEC                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Program:</b>             | Unique Service Center (CUS)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Population served:</b>   | Entrepreneurs and individuals interested in establishing a business.                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Program Description:</b> | 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 DDEC to entrepreneurs and those interested in establishing a business. |
| <b>Authority:</b>           | DDEC                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

|                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Agency:</b>              | DDEC                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Program:</b>             | Youth Development Program (PDJ)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Population served:</b>   | Youth between the ages of 13 to 29 years                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Program Description:</b> | 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. |
| <b>Authority:</b>           | DDEC                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

|                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Agency:</b>              | DDEC                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Program:</b>             | 21st Century TechForce Puerto Rico                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Population served:</b>   | Digital workers, university students.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Program Description:</b> | 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. |
| <b>Authority:</b>           | DDEC                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

|                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Agency:</b>              | DDEC                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Program:</b>             | PRopósito                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Population served:</b>   | Private enterprises, non-profit organizations, business associations, and government entities.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Program Description:</b> | <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> |
| <b>Authority:</b>           | DDEC                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

|                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Agency:</b>              | Puerto Rico Trade and Export Company (PRT&EC)                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Program:</b>             | Creative Industries                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Population served:</b>   | Self-employed entities and individuals                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Program Description:</b> | 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. |
| <b>Authority:</b>           | Act 173-2014                                                                                                                                                                                       |

|                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Agency:</b>              | Roosevelt Roads Redevelopment Authority (RRRA)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Program:</b>             | Roosevelt Roads Redevelopment (RRR)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Population served:</b>   | People of Puerto Rico                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Program Description:</b> | 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. |
| <b>Authority:</b>           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

|                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Agency:</b>              | State Office of Energy Public Policy (SOEPP)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Program:</b>             | Energy Public Policy Law of Puerto Rico (EPPLPR)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Population served:</b>   | People of Puerto Rico                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Program Description:</b> | 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. |
| <b>Authority:</b>           | 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:

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

**Other programs:**

|                             |                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Agency:</b>              | Department of Homeland Security (DHS) U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)                                                                                                       |
| <b>Program:</b>             | EB-5 Visa                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Population served:</b>   | Investors (and their spouses and unmarried children under 21 years old)                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Program Description:</b> | 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. |
| <b>Authority:</b>           | US Congress                                                                                                                                                                                   |

|                             |                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Agency:</b>              | U.S. Department of the Treasury and Internal Revenue Service (IRS)                                                                                           |
| <b>Program:</b>             | Government of Puerto Rico                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Population served:</b>   | Opportunity Zones (OZ)                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Program Description:</b> | These OZ were created to promote local, national, and international investment, create jobs, and generate economic development in disadvantaged communities. |
| <b>Authority:</b>           | Federal Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.<br>On July 1, 2019, Law 21 ("Law for the Development of Puerto Rico Economic Development Opportunity Zones") was enacted.     |

|                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Agency:</b>              | U.S Small Business Administration                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Program:</b>             | Federal Small Business Agency (SBA)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Population served:</b>   | Interested entrepreneurs must have two or more employees and generate at least \$250,000 in annual revenues.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Program Description:</b> | The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) helps small businesses access financing by establishing loan standards and reducing lenders' risk. These SBA-backed loans facilitate access to the necessary funding for small businesses. The SBA has designed a training program for small entrepreneurs who want to grow their businesses but may be unsure of how to achieve it. |
| <b>Authority:</b>           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

## 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.

(b) **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.

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:

1) 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.

- 2) 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.
- 3) Update infrastructure and information systems mechanisms - to achieve transparency, compliance, and commercial and productive agility by providing stakeholders with an integrated information system mechanism.
- 4) 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 employment<sup>3</sup> and other populations.<sup>4</sup>
- 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.

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> Veterans, unemployed workers, and youth and any other populations identified by the State.

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.

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 - Position Puerto Rico as a fertile space to develop entities capable of improving productivity from their respective scenarios.

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

(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.

|                                                | Title I – Adult Program |                  |                    |                  |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|
|                                                | Program Year: 2024      |                  | Program Year: 2025 |                  |
|                                                | Expected Level          | Negotiated Level | Expected Level     | Negotiated Level |
| Employment<br>(Second Quarter after Exit)      | 53.50%                  |                  | 54.00%             |                  |
| Employment<br>(Fourth Quarter after Exit)      | 49.00%                  |                  | 51.00%             |                  |
| Median Earnings<br>(Second Quarter after Exit) | \$2,500.00              |                  | \$2,600.00         |                  |
| Credential Attainment Rate                     | 42.00%                  |                  | 42.50%             |                  |
| Measurable Skill Gains                         | 80.00%                  |                  | 80.50%             |                  |

|                                                   | Title I – Dislocated Worker Program |                  |                    |                  |
|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|
|                                                   | Program Year: 2024                  |                  | Program Year: 2025 |                  |
|                                                   | Expected Level                      | Negotiated Level | Expected Level     | Negotiated Level |
| Employment<br>(Second Quarter<br>after Exit)      | 52.50%                              |                  | 53.00%             |                  |
| Employment<br>(Fourth Quarter<br>after Exit)      | 52.00%                              |                  | 54.00%             |                  |
| Median Earnings<br>(Second Quarter<br>after Exit) | \$2,600.00                          |                  | \$2,700.00         |                  |
| Credential<br>Attainment Rate                     | 51.00%                              |                  | 51.50%             |                  |
| Measurable Skill<br>Gains                         | 58.00%                              |                  | 58.50%             |                  |

|                                                        | Title I – Youth Program |                  |                    |                  |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|
|                                                        | Program Year: 2024      |                  | Program Year: 2025 |                  |
|                                                        | Expected Level          | Negotiated Level | Expected Level     | Negotiated Level |
| Employment<br>(Second Quarter after Exit) <sup>5</sup> | 50.00%                  |                  | 50.50%             |                  |
| Employment<br>(Fourth Quarter after Exit) <sup>6</sup> | 50.00%                  |                  | 50.50%             |                  |
| Median Earnings<br>(Second Quarter after Exit)         | \$1,800.00              |                  | \$1,900.00         |                  |
| Credential Attainment Rate                             | 20.00%                  |                  | 20.50%             |                  |
| Measurable Skill Gains                                 | 32.10%                  |                  | 34.10%             |                  |

<sup>5</sup> For Title I Youth programs, employment, education, or training.

<sup>6</sup> For Title I Youth programs, employment, education, or training.

|                                                | Title II – Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program |                  |                    |                  |
|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|
|                                                | Program Year: 2024                                         |                  | Program Year: 2025 |                  |
|                                                | Expected Level                                             | Negotiated Level | Expected Level     | Negotiated Level |
| Employment<br>(Second Quarter after Exit)      | 12.00%                                                     |                  | 12.50%             |                  |
| Employment<br>(Fourth Quarter after Exit)      | 14.00%                                                     |                  | 14.5%              |                  |
| Median Earnings<br>(Second Quarter after Exit) | \$ 3,400.00                                                |                  | \$ 3,450.00        |                  |
| Credential Attainment Rate                     | 10.00%                                                     |                  | 10.5%              |                  |
| Measurable Skill Gains                         | 57.80%                                                     |                  | 57.90%             |                  |



|                                                   | Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service Program |                  |                    |                  |
|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|
|                                                   | Program Year: 2024                           |                  | Program Year: 2025 |                  |
|                                                   | Expected Level                               | Negotiated Level | Expected Level     | Negotiated Level |
| Employment<br>(Second Quarter<br>after Exit)      | 50.00%                                       |                  | 50.00%             |                  |
| Employment<br>(Fourth Quarter<br>after Exit)      | 50.00%                                       |                  | 50.00%             |                  |
| Median Earnings<br>(Second Quarter<br>after Exit) | \$2,300.00                                   |                  | \$2,300.00         |                  |
| Credential<br>Attainment Rate                     | Not Applicable                               | Not Applicable   | Not Applicable     | Not Applicable   |
| Measurable Skill<br>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<br>(Second Quarter after Exit) <sup>22</sup>     | 30.0%                             |                  | 30.0%              |                  |
| Employment<br>(Fourth Quarter after Exit) <sup>22</sup>     | 30.0%                             |                  | 30.0%              |                  |
| Median Earnings<br>(Second Quarter after Exit) <sup>7</sup> | \$4,000                           |                  | \$4,000            |                  |
| Credential<br>Attainment Rate                               | 32.0%                             |                  | 32.0%              |                  |
| Measurable Skill<br>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. Describe how the State will assess the overall effectiveness of the workforce development system in the State in relation to the strategic vision and goals stated above in sections (b)(1), (2), and (3) and how it will use the results of this assessment, which may include evaluation findings and other feedback to make continuous or quality improvements.

PRDEDC is responsible for evaluating the effectiveness of the state's workforce development system. The State's performance report is in accordance with Sec. 116(d)(2) of WIOA. Performance reporting will comply with the requirements set forth in 20 CFR Sec. 677.160 of the proposed rule, including, which might be applicable to each core program:

- State performance report on program levels achieved with respect to the number of participants served,
- Total number of participants who exited each of the core programs, including disaggregated counts of those who participated in and exited a core program by individuals with barriers to: employment,
- Demographics,
- Total number of participants and program departees who received career and training services for the most recent program year and the three preceding program years,
- Levels achieved for the primary indicators of career and training services for the most recent program year and the three preceding program years,
- Percentage of participants in a program who obtained unsubsidized employment related to the training received through Title I-B programs,
- Amount of funds spent on each type of career and training service for the most recent program year and the three preceding program years,
- Average cost per participant for those who received career and training services, respectively, during the most recent program year and the three preceding program years,
- Percentage of a State's annual allotment spent on administrative costs, and
- Any other information that facilitates comparisons of programs with programs in other States.

The State Board and core programs will enforce the incorporation of assessment protocols, leading to improvements through the selection and certification processes of local boards, operators, and providers. Measurement mechanisms will be devised to account for the outcomes resulting from the implementation of sector strategies and career pathways based

on the following four main goals: (1) Human Capital and Workforce, (2) Inter-agency Collaboration, (3) Agile and Competitive Market, and (4) Strategic and multi-sector alliances. Therefore, the results will be used to identify areas to improve not only at career centers but also at the agency level to enhance the services and experience of the participants.

(c) **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 \_\_ - Alignment of goals with strategies plan of PR workforce system**

**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.

1.1 Increase the number of individuals who participate in human capital training programs.

|                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.2 Modernize the system of service to the individual and/or families through the inclusion of emerging technologies.                                                                             |
| 1.3 Increase the effectiveness of inclusive educational programs to better serve individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds.                                                                      |
| 1.4 Enhance the effectiveness of assistance, support, and follow-up services by providing relevant training and development opportunities to participants.                                        |
| <b>GOAL 2: Inter-agency Collaboration</b> - modernize information management systems to integrate emerging technologies in harmony in the context of the continuously changing globalized market. |
| 2.1 Achieve better alignment and compliance with the offerings, operation and management offered at the regional job centers.                                                                     |
| 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.                                                   |
| <b>GOAL 3: Agile and Competitive Market</b> - Position Puerto Rico as a fertile space to develop entities capable of improving productivity from their respective scenarios.                      |
| 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.                                                                                |
| <b>GOAL 4: Strategic and multi-sector alliances</b> –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.

ARV 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 be turned into interactive classrooms across state.

The Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources has entered a MOU with DDEC/PDL in which 1.7M have been identified to improve PRIS. Components such as Wagner-Peyser, RESEA/WPRS, and other modules within PRIS need 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 DDEC 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.

ARV 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, ARV 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.

ARV 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/PDL 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).

Established pursuant to Act 171-2014 and Executive Order OE-2014-064, the State Board's mandate is to enhance the overall coordination and strategic planning of employment and training initiatives across the State. The PRDEDC is tasked to assist the board through its Workforce Development Program, which is responsible for overseeing Title I of WIOA and TAA. The Board's role includes orchestrating planning and coordination activities linked to federal assistance received via WIOA and additional workforce development-related programs.

The State Board engages in the formulation of the plan in conjunction with an inter-agency committee, which incorporates WIOA core programs into its comprehensive, year-long operational schedule. The Board's duties and authority are outlined in WIOA, local laws, and internal regulations. These regulations call for the formation of various subcommittees and working groups to tackle specific technical matters. These include the Strategic Planning and Budget Committee, Private Sector Liaising Committee, Evaluation, Monitoring and Auditing Committee, Entrepreneurship Committee, Continued Improvement Committee, and the Executive Committee.

## Functions

In addition to these roles, the State Board plays a pivotal part in supporting the Governor by fulfilling extra responsibilities as outlined in WIOA. These responsibilities encompass:

- Crafting and executing a State Unified Plan along with performance metrics.
- Fostering and broadening collaborative strategies within key sectors and occupations.
- Formulating and harmonizing policy directives.
- Enhancing and modernizing the one-stop delivery system.
- Developing guidelines and policies regarding the involvement and contributions of one-stop partners.

(2) 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.

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 \_\_\_\_ - Core Program Activities to Implement the State’s Strategy**

| Core Program            | Program Activities to Implement the State’s Strategy                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| WIOA Title I<br>(DDEC)  | <p>(1) All MOUs will be reviewed. (4.2)</p> <p>(2) An analysis will be conducted to define the new regions of the Workforce Development System in Puerto Rico. (4.1; 3.3)</p> <p>(3) Expand the Registered Apprenticeship program in Puerto Rico. (4.5)</p> <p>(4) Puerto Rico Workforce System Brand Analysis. (4.1; 1.4; 2.3)</p> <p>(5) Develop and implement state policies to improve operational processes under WIOA. (4.2, 4.3, 2.3)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| WIOA Title II<br>(PRDE) | <p>1. Partnership with the Career and Technical Education area. (1.4, 3.5, 4.3)</p> <p>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)</p> <p>3. Implementation of online professional development for teachers. (1.2, 1.4; 3.1, 3.3, 3.5)</p> <p>4. Collaboration with other core programs and partner’s agencies. (2.1, 2.3, 3.5)</p> <p>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)</p> <p>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)</p> <p>7. Incorporation of Internet service technology into adult education classrooms. (3.3, 3.5; 4.1, 1.2)</p> |



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|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                           | <p>8. Preparation and setting of interactive classrooms in instruction centers. (2.1, 2.2, 2.3; 3.1)</p> <p>9. Provision of portable notebooks in classrooms. (3.5)</p> <p>10. Incorporating the online public domain and subscription-based search platforms in interactive classrooms. (3.1, 3.5; 1.2, 1.3)</p> <p>11. Development of a distance education program. (3.1, 3.5; 4.1)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Wagner-Peyser Act (PRDOL) | <p>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)</p> <p>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)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Rehabilitation Act (ARV)  | <p>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)</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>4. Provide technical assistance and information to employers to promote the employment and retention of people with disabilities.</p> <p>5. Identify referrals to the services of the Core Programs. (2.1, 2.3, 4.3)</p> <p>6. Participate in the meetings to which the Core-programs are summoned to outline information exchange strategies.</p> <p>7. Continue providing technical assistance and training to staff to strengthen their knowledge and skills in providing services to the participants.</p> |

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|--|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <p>8. Coordinate the participation of ARV 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)</p> <p>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> <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> |
|--|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

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. According to the *"Guía del Programa para Adultos, Trabajadores Desplazados y Jóvenes"*, the staff will be trained to provide information to customers about the programs, services, and activities available through the partner programs. The activities listed in Section A were planned for the entire workforce development component of Puerto Rico. 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.

### **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), and the Sureste LWDB is going through the qualification process.

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.

**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**

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.

*(C) 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 DDEC 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 DDEC 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 DDEC 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 DDEC-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 new PRIS database platform contains integration elements using the same database: case management, intake, and reporting.

- The PRIS's first phase of implementation targeted compliance with required reporting. We are expecting that through the RFP DDEC-PDL-2020-06, the State will be able to develop technology integration of the Title I, Title II, Title IV, TAA, Rapid Response and Apprenticeship. The selection of the technology service provider for this second stage of the PRIS will be crucial to achieve integration of technological services, avoid duplication of services, and expand the connectivity of core partners through online systems at the AJC.

#### **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 ARV 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 MOU was signed on September 28, 2018, effective June 30, 2021. 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 CGUAJC.
- 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 CGU-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 CGU-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 TEGL 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.

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### **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 CGU 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 of developing the Business Service Unit at State Level and lead to the development of the Statewide Business Services Framework Plan to guide the LWDBs and the AJC to collaborate with businesses. The DEDC contracted the consulting firm Premier Financial Services PSC to conduct this process.

The Plan 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.

In addition, the firm will assist the DEDC and State Board in developing and implementing strategies for layoff aversion. 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 will also contract a consultant to evaluate the AJC brand among employers. The consultant conducts qualitative and quantitative assessments of the AJC local brand among employers. Interviews will be conducted with employers to discover employers' awareness, perception, and usage of AJCs. The assessments are followed by recommendations to improve services and increase awareness of available services, increase brand awareness, maintain brand awareness, rollout of the new plan, and development of an outreach plan.

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 the use of patrons 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),

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- 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.

As previously discussed, the State Board will coordinate with the PRDE's State Board for Career and Technical Education, the PRDOLHR, the education services industry, and the effective delivery of occupational education for high-demand, mid- and high-skilled, and/or technologically advanced occupations.

The State Board will assume its convening functions under WIOA to leverage the resources and concert the support of the Education Council, the PRDE, IHEs, and CTE institutions to adopt a common framework to support the implementation of career pathways and to further the alignment of the educational and workforce systems. Educational institutions will also be engaged as providers of educational and training services and will be critical to the successful implementation of the Registered Apprenticeship program. The system will develop and deploy a training program to educate AJC staff about how to work with structured work-based learning programs. In addition, the design of this framework will contribute to collaboration on pre-apprenticeship programs developed in response to industry demands.



Regarding services for students with disabilities, Act 51-1996, as amended, mandates coordination between the PRDE's Special Education Program and the PRVRA, among other agencies, with the purpose of ensuring a seamless transition of young people with disabilities to post-secondary education. The PRVRA intervenes in the process of transition before eligible students with disabilities graduate from or exit the school system and facilitates the insertion of training programs and post-secondary educational institutions. The PRVRA sponsors such training in various accredited educational institutions to acquire the knowledge and occupational skills necessary for the workplace.

In terms of serving individuals with barriers to employment, along with basic adult education, the PRDE's CTE program is key to meeting the workforce development needs of the correctional population. Please refer to Sections III(A), (2), and (B) for additional information regarding coordination with the Carl D. Perkins program.

(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.

As required under the WIOA, the State maintains a publicly accessible list of eligible training providers and their eligible training programs, including relevant performance and cost information. The State Board adopted procedures for the initial determination of eligibility and the subsequent certification of training providers.

When issuing a determination, local boards are required to:

- Analyze the impact of economic, geographic, and demographic factors and the characteristics of the populations served by applicants, including their difficulties accessing or providing services, if any.
- Determine the occupations for which they are requesting training services, which are those in demand in the geographic region covered by the local board.

- Keep the process of initial eligibility determination open throughout the year.
- Establish eligibility criteria, requirements for additional information, and minimum performance levels for providers of training beyond what is required by the State Board, which might be applicable to a specific local area.
- Safeguard the confidentiality of personally identifiable information of any education records, including the circumstances related to prior consent, and comply with the provisions of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
- Periodically invite public and private educational institutions and community-based organizations are periodically invited to submit applications for initial or subsequent eligibility determination as providers of training for occupations in demand.
- Regarding apprenticeship programs, promote the automatic inclusion of providers in the State List after a request is made by a registered provider under the provisions of the Registered Apprenticeship Act and enabling State provisions.

Exceptions made by Registered Apprenticeship and One-Stop Centers' operators are required to collect performance information and determine whether the providers meet the performance criteria. Providers who meet these criteria are considered eligible 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.

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### **Main Components of Economic Development**

WIOA's core programs are designed to strengthen and improve the nation's public workforce system and help get Americans, including youth and those with significant barriers to employment, into high-quality jobs and careers. Here's how these core programs relate to economic development:

- **Adult Program:** This program provides workforce development services to adults 18 years and older. It's designed to increase employment, retention, and earnings of participants, and to increase occupational skill attainment, thereby improving the quality of the workforce, reducing welfare dependency, and enhancing the productivity and competitiveness of the nation.
- **Dislocated Worker Program:** This program focuses on individuals who have been terminated or laid off, or who have received a notice of termination or layoff from employment. The program aims to quickly reemploy dislocated workers, improve their employability and earnings, which is essential for maintaining a skilled and adaptable workforce in a dynamic economy.
- **Youth Program:** Targeted at individuals aged 14-24, this program focuses on out-of-school youth and those at risk of dropping out, providing them with services to achieve academic and employment success. It's important for preparing the future workforce and reducing youth unemployment, which contributes to a stronger, more resilient economy.
- **Wagner-Peyser Employment Service Program:** This program provides employment services such as job search assistance, job referral, and placement assistance for job seekers, as well as recruitment services for employers. By matching supply and demand in the labor market, it helps to ensure that jobs are filled more efficiently, contributing to overall economic stability and growth.
- **Adult Education and Literacy Program:** This program aims to assist adults to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency. It's important for workforce development as it addresses basic skills deficiencies, thereby improving the employability of the workforce.
- **Vocational Rehabilitation Program:** This program focuses on assisting individuals with disabilities to obtain and maintain employment. It contributes to economic development by enabling a significant portion of the population to participate in the workforce, thus expanding the talent pool available to employers.

- **Job Corps:** This is a residential education and vocational training program for young people, aged 16 to 24. It prepares them for the labor market with a focus on career development, contributing to the creation of a skilled and adaptable workforce.

The relationship between these WIOA programs and economic development is clear: by improving workforce skills, increasing employment opportunities, and addressing specific needs of various population segments, WIOA plays a crucial role in enhancing the overall productivity and competitiveness of the workforce. This, in turn, supports business growth, stimulates job creation, and fosters a more robust economy.

#### **PRopósito:**

Puerto Rico's economic landscape is poised for transformation through the strategic integration of PRopósito'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 PRopósito's plans and the WIOA State Plan is crucial in transforming Puerto Rico's economy into a competitive, knowledge-based one. PRopósito'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 PPropósito's goals by providing training in emerging fields and ensuring that the workforce is adaptable to future industry developments. Furthermore, PPropósito'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.

PPropósito's social well-being goal is 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.

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.

### **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.

#### **Structural Reforms:**

The enactment of Acts such as Act 1-2017, Act 4-2017, Act 8-2017, Act 13-2017, Act 17-2017, Act 18-2018, and Act No. 47-2021 demonstrates Puerto Rico's commitment to economic development and labor market competitiveness through a multi-faceted approach:

- Act 1-2017 (Participative Public-Private Partnerships Act): This act underscores the commitment to leverage public-private partnerships to improve and expand critical infrastructure, which is a cornerstone of economic development. By facilitating these partnerships, the act aims to harness private sector efficiencies and innovation, leading to better public services and infrastructure development.
- Act 4-2017 (Labor Transformation and Flexibility Act): This reform of labor laws is a clear signal towards making the labor market more competitive and flexible. It seeks to adapt the labor market to current economic realities, aiming to improve employment rates, retain talent, and stop the outflow of workers to external markets. This act reflects an understanding that a dynamic and flexible labor market is crucial for economic competitiveness.
- Act 8-2017 (Administration and Transformation of Human Resources in Government Act): By allowing the transfer of workers across government departments and aiming for cost savings, this act shows a commitment to more efficient and effective government operations. Streamlining government functions can have a cascading effect on the overall business environment, making it more conducive to economic growth.
- Act 13-2017 (Enterprise Puerto Rico Act): The creation of a non-profit corporation to promote economic development and attract foreign investment signifies a proactive approach to economic development. This act is instrumental in fostering an environment that encourages investment, particularly in technology sectors, which are key drivers of modern economies.
- Act 17-2017: This act facilitates the creation of a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO), highlighting the commitment to bolstering the tourism sector, a significant contributor to Puerto Rico's economy. A DMO can effectively brand and market Puerto Rico as a prime destination, which is essential for tourism growth.

- **Act 18-2018:** By reforming and simplifying the permitting process, this act aims to remove bureaucratic barriers and improve the ease of doing business. This is crucial for attracting and retaining businesses, thereby fostering an entrepreneurial environment, and stimulating economic activity.
- **Act No. 47-2021 (Minimum Wage Act):** Raising the minimum wage demonstrates a commitment to improving the standard of living for workers, which is vital for a sustainable and equitable economy. A higher minimum wage can increase consumer spending, stimulate economic activity, and attract a more skilled workforce.

Each of these acts represents a strategic approach to addressing specific challenges and opportunities in Puerto Rico's economic landscape. Collectively, they signify a comprehensive effort to enhance the island's appeal as a business location, improve government efficiency, and create a more dynamic, competitive, and equitable labor market. These reforms aim to improve infrastructure, labor market competitiveness, labor participation rates, government workforce mobility, economic development, and destination marketing.

#### **Key Initiatives:**

The PR Department of Economic Development (DDEC) 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 DDEC has signed a collaboration agreement with CICIM to boost its infrastructure and programmatic projects.
- **Carga Aérea:** The DDEC 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.

(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—

- (1) 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 DE (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](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), which was entered 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.

In the initial phase of the PRIS system, Title I-B programs and W-P programs were fully integrated. The Workforce Development Program is in the final stages of development to streamline the application process for integrating or interfacing the participant management systems of WIOA 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 for PY 2019 and PY 2020 were submitted and certified by WIPS.

The main challenge for submitting ETA 9169 and 9173 reports was migration from the former database to the new platform with the required elements of the PIRL. This migration produced thousands of data errors, which required an analysis effort to identify the data and complete the required fields.

Additional data elements that were added under WIOA, which were not collected in the developed software under WIA parameters, were the main source of PRIS errors. However, with the collaboration of the partners and the staff of the Local Board, it was possible to develop a work plan to enter the data, correct the errors reported by the WIPS, and finally submit the ETA 9169 reports for PY 2019 and PY 2020.

PR did not submit the performance reports required by WIOA regulations since the implementation of the Act. Negotiation with Region I and ETA allowed PR to present with priority the reports of PY 2019 and PY 2020. We will present soon the execution reports for AP 2017 and AP 2018 so that our jurisdiction would comply with the WIOA reporting.

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 – The case management module is a supplemental tool to facilitate the collection of data from case managers in the AJC, currently in the process of implementation in PRIS. Its design was made through the input of a sample of case managers, WP and WDP staff. The module is in the stage of performing QA and user tests to upload it to the platform.
- 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 – This module is in the process of QA and user testing to proceed to be uploaded to the PRIS. In addition, 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 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.

**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 Autocoder 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.

B. Data-collection and reporting processes used for all programs and activities, including those present in one-stop centers

Data-collection and reporting processes used for all programs and activities, including those present in one-stop centers.<sup>10</sup>

[10] For the PY 2016 state plan, descriptions of data collection and reporting processes need only include currently known indicators.

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.

**Panel Consensus (Compliance)** The narrative must describe the data collection and reporting process for Title II. There is little information about the NRS. In addition, if title II is included in the PRIS, there is no information on when this will be implemented and how title II will collect and report with the PRIS system.

### **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.

**Panel Consensus (Technical Assistance):** The narrative should include a timeline of when titles II and IV may be included in the PRIS system.

Database integration among core partners began in PY 2021. The most time-consuming task within the work plan established with the vendor is the analysis of the information infrastructure (IT) because each core program has a different technological architecture. The goal is not to share the entire database, as there is a lot of confidential and sensitive information of the participants, but to share the relevant information of delivery services that help co-enrollment, improve the delivery of services, and avoid overlapping. The partners agreed that this integration could be completed by the third quarter of PY 2022.

(2) 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 \_\_ - State Policies and Procedures

|   |                     |                                                                                                                                 |
|---|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | DDEC- WIOA-01- 2021 | Policy to comply with the Sunshine Provision for Local Board activities under the Workforce Opportunity and Innovation Act WIOA |
| 2 | 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.                                                    |
| 3  | DDEC-WIOA-08-20        | Case Management and Record-Keeping Policy                                                                                 |
| 4  | DDEC-WIOA-04-20        | Guidelines to the process of certification, recertification, and decertification of Local Boards                          |
| 5  | DDEC WIOA-RR-02-20     | Public Policy to allocation of funds for COVID Prevention                                                                 |
| 6  | RESOLUCION NUM 01-2021 | State Board Resolution No. 01-2020 to Temporary Jobs                                                                      |
| 7  | DDEC-WIOA-11-20        | Financial Reports - Close-Out Reports                                                                                     |
| 8  | DDEC-WIOA-10-20        | Payroll Cost Allocation Policy - Guidelines and procedures for payroll base on budget                                     |
| 9  | DDEC-WIOA-09-20        | Cost allocation and fund reimbursement                                                                                    |
| 10 | DDEC-WIOA-07-20        | Procedure for the follow-up service required by WIOA for participants of the Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Programs |
| 11 | DDEC-WIOA-06-20        | TAA Definition of eligible displacement area                                                                              |
| 12 | DDEC-WIOA-05-20        | TAA Training - Requirements when approving Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Training funds request.                      |

|    |                                  |                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 13 | State Board Rule                 | Internal Rule of the State Board                                                                                                                                          |
| 14 | WIOA-03-20                       | WIOA-03-20 - Policy for the Competitive Selection of Eligible Youth Service Providers                                                                                     |
| 15 | 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 |
| 16 | DDEC-WIOA-RR-01-20               | Policy for COVID-19 Layoff Aversion Fund                                                                                                                                  |
| 17 | Waiver Policy                    | Operational Procedure for Implementing the Waiver for Business Capitalization                                                                                             |
| 18 | State Board Sanctions            | Policy to establish the procedure for the determination of WIOA rules violations and the imposition of state board sanctions                                              |
| 19 | Carta Circular DDEC-WIOA-04-2021 | Faculty of local areas to pay a summer bonus as part of fringe benefits to their employees                                                                                |
| 20 | WIOA 01-2017                     | Policy to the development of Memorandum of Understanding MOU with AJC partners                                                                                            |
| 21 | WIOA 2-2017                      | Guideline to the Competitive Selection of One Stop Center Operators - American Job Center                                                                                 |
| 22 | WIOA 03-2017                     | Circular Letter on Public Policy and Requirements for Publicity, Transparency, Openness and Disclosure of Local Board Affairs                                             |



|    |                                    |                                                                                                                                                                               |
|----|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 23 | WIOA-03-2021                       | Prohibition of the total closure of the One Stop Centers (OSC) during the administrative closures decreed by the municipalities                                               |
| 24 | DDEC-WIOA-02-2022                  | Policy related to allowable expenses to travels paid with WIOA Funds                                                                                                          |
| 25 | TBD                                | Establish the roles and responsibilities of the actors involved in the fiscal and programmatic areas in the One-Stop Center.                                                  |
| 26 | Draft pending State Board Approval | Policy to provide guidelines regarding the Work-based Training, including On the Job Training, Customized Training, Incumbent Workers Training, and Registered Apprenticeship |
| 27 | TBD                                | Priority of Services to youth, adult, and dislocated workers programs                                                                                                         |

#### ***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 CGU-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 UGC-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 Single Management Center.
  - 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 CGU-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, Principle 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,  
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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 recipients 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

#### **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. WDP approach is intended to raise enrollment and then measuring their effect on enrollment statistics and further downstream outcomes. Targeted research questions and hypotheses about potential interventions to support the Local Areas fall broadly into two categories:

- 1) Why is take-up low?
  - Hypothesis: Services/trainings are not aligned with local needs to help clients transition from welfare to work
- 2) What is the best way of improving client outcomes?
  - Hypothesis 1: Improve the quality and effectiveness of caseworker services and support
  - Hypothesis 2: Provide soft skills training with the intent to improve job readiness and job-seeking outcomes

WDP have identified two interventions that can leverage this under-enrollment phenomenon and are likely to have an impact both on services take-up and on client outcomes: Intervention 1: Improve job-coaching, job promotion and case management services; Intervention 2: Improve training alignment. The primary outcomes expected to change by interventions are: (i) participation in WIOA programs, (ii) employment status and earnings two and four quarters after receiving Job Center services, (iii) credential attainment, (iv) measurable skill gains, and (v) effectiveness in serving employers measured through retention, repeat business, and employer penetration rate. We can use our own administrative data and Puerto Rico Department of Labor data linked through data sharing agreements.

(3) State Program and State Board Overview.

(A) *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.

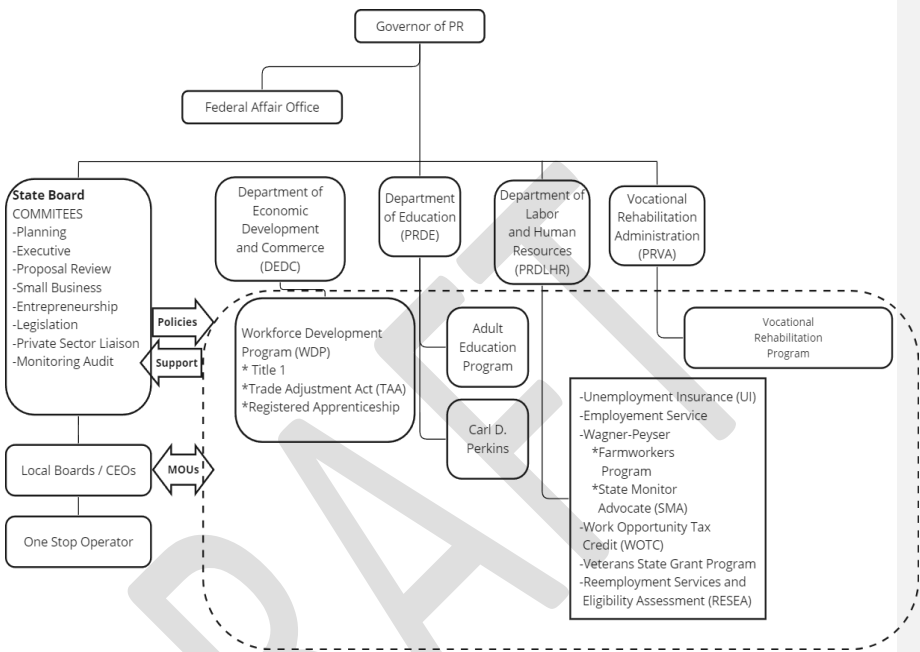
**Panel Consensus (Compliance w/TA):** *The narrative includes an organizational chart, but it's unclear if the chart represents all core programs. Also, there is no description of how each state agency is organized and the delivery system at the State and local levels. The organizational chart is also difficult to read. Puerto Rico must also include an organization chart and provide a description for all core programs. Also, Puerto Rico must include information on how the VR agency (PRVRA) is organized.*

*Core programs are under three departments of the Government of PR, Department of Economic Development and Commerce, Department of Education, and Department of Labor and Human Resources. The organization charts below show the overall design of the workforce development system and the specific design of the four departments, with their respective programs.*

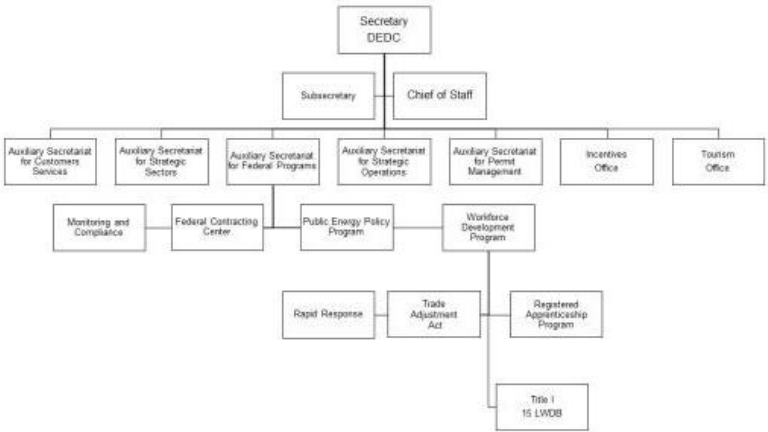
*The first organizational chart shows the integration of the four core programs under the direction of the governor of PR, as a grantee of Title I, Title II, Title IV, and RAV; the participation of the state board in the development of public policy; the operator of the one-stop centers and their relationship with the programs. It also shows the participation of the WDP, as a programmatic entity of the state board and the process of interaction between the programs through the Memorandums of Understanding. The following diagrams show the organizational structure of each state department, with its units related to the workforce development system.*

*Subsection II. a. 2., Workforce Development, Education and Training Activities Analysis, above, include a more details breakdown of core programs and their respective units, entitled State Administered Workforce Programs by WIOA Type. The following chart is*

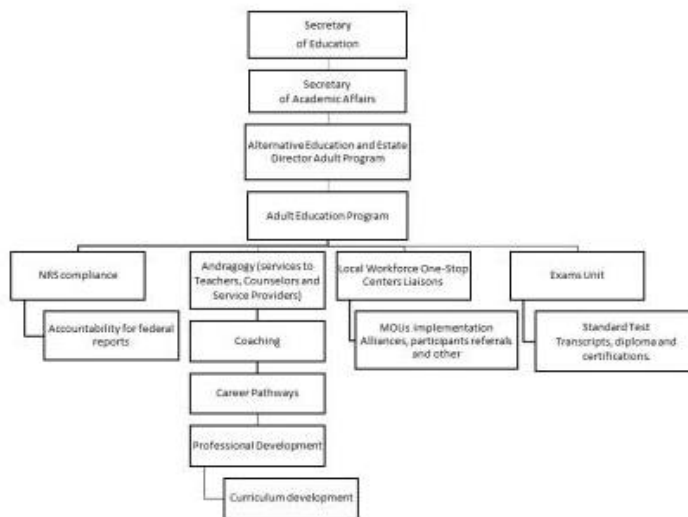
presented in a straightforward design and with complete and official program names to facilitate readers.



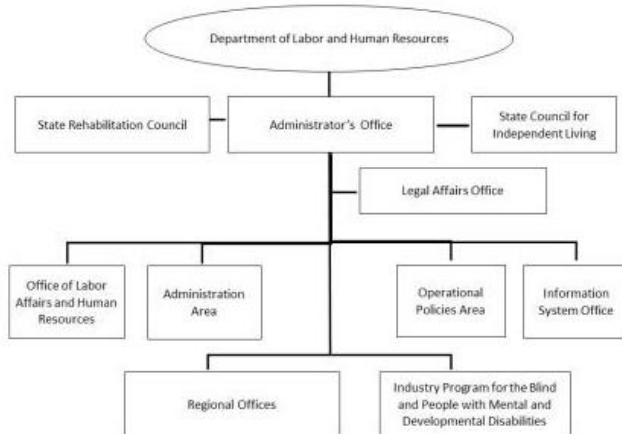
DEDC Organization Chart



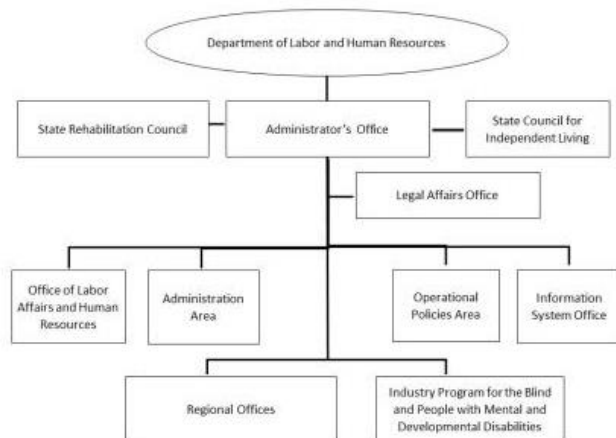
*PRDE Organization Chart*



*PRDOL Organization Chart*



*VRA Organization Chart*



*VRA is made up of an Operational Policies Area and an Administrative Area*

1. *Operational Policies Area: This area is responsible for developing policies for officials who offer direct service and will serve as the liaison for these units at the Central Level. These units 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).*
2. *Administration Area: it oversees formulating, reviewing, advising, and facilitating compliance with administrative regulations that comply with applicable laws and regulations, allowing the development of decentralized administrative procedures and promoting agile and expeditious services. In addition, it formulates, coordinates, and supervises the implementation of the public policy required and authorized by the Administrator. It establishes the operational and administrative processes in the Budget, Finance, Purchasing, Documents and General Services Divisions.*

(B) *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 \_\_ - PR State Workforce Board Members**

The Governor of Puerto Rico signed a new executive order (OE-2022-034) establishing the State Workforce Development Board in accordance with the requirements of WIOA sec. 101 and 20 CFR § 679.110. As a result, a new SWDB was instituted effective September 2022. The Executive Order establishes a greater emphasis on Apprenticeship Program representation by requiring three representatives from this sector.

The composition of the SWDB is as follows:

**State Workforce Development Board (WIOA )**

| Sector                                                 | Name                             | Position / Organization                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Governor Office                                        | Lcdo. Yamil J. Ayala Cruz        | Governor of PR representative                 |
| Chamber of the State<br>Legislature<br>Representatives | Hon. Domingo H. Torres<br>García | Representative, Chamber of<br>Representatives |
|                                                        | Vacant                           | Representative, Senate of PR                  |
| Government<br>Representatives                          | Hon. Manuel Cidre Miranda        | Secretary, DEDC                               |
|                                                        | Hon. Yanira Raíces Vega          | Secretary, DE                                 |

|                                             |                                                     |                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                             | <b>Hon. Gabriel Maldonado<br/>González</b>          | <b>Secretary, DLHR</b>                                                |
|                                             | <b>Dra. María M. Gómez García</b>                   | <b>Administrator, VRA</b>                                             |
|                                             | <b>Hon. Lornna J. Soto<br/>Villanueva</b>           | <b>Mayor, Canóvanas Municipality</b>                                  |
|                                             | <b>Hon. Jaime Alverio Ramos</b>                     | <b>Mayor, San Lorenzo Municipality</b>                                |
| <b>Representatives of<br/>Businesses or</b> | <b>Mrs. Viviane Fortuño Cosimi<br/>PRESIDENT SB</b> | <b>President, CTI Consulting Group</b>                                |
|                                             | <b>Mrs. Ivis E. González Rosa<br/>SECRETARY SB</b>  | <b>President<br/>Del Carmen Pharmacy</b>                              |
|                                             | <b>Mr. José E. Vázquez Barquet,<br/>Ph.D.</b>       | <b>President, Subway Restaurants</b>                                  |
|                                             | <b>Lcda. Julybeth Alicea<br/>Rodríguez, esq.</b>    | <b>Human Resources Manager,<br/>International Aireko Construction</b> |
|                                             | <b>Mrs. Sonia E. Navarro<br/>González</b>           | <b>President, Fina Consulting Group</b>                               |
|                                             | <b>Mrs. Bettina Mercado</b>                         | <b>President<br/>Bettina Cosmetics</b>                                |

|  |                                               |                                                                 |
|--|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <b>Lcdo. Juan A. Alvarado<br/>Zayas, CPA</b>  | <b>Administrator, Alvarado Tax &amp;<br/>Business Advisors</b>  |
|  | <b>CPA Carl R. Leyva Ramos</b>                | <b>Senior Associate, Carl Leyva &amp;<br/>Associates, Corp.</b> |
|  | <b>Lcdo. Luis A. Gierbolini<br/>Rodríguez</b> | <b>President<br/>Gierbolini Consulting Group</b>                |

Note: Board vacancies are pending Governor's appointments.

#### ii. Board Activities

Provide a description of the activities that will assist State Board members and staff in conducting State Board functions effectively.

The development of the plan is a task that the State Board accomplishes with the collaboration of, and interagency committee integrated by core and required partners and a year-round working agenda. The role and responsibilities of the State Board are defined by WIOA, local statute and its internal regulations. The latter establishes subcommittees and working groups in connection with technical and specific issues. Among these: Strategic Planning and Budget Committee; Private Sector Liaising Committee; Evaluation, Monitoring and Auditing Committee; Entrepreneurship Committee; Continued Improvement Committee; and the Executive Committee.

The State Board is also responsible for assisting the Governor with additional functions designated by WIOA. These include:

- Developing and implementing the State Unified Plan and performance measures;



- Developing/expanding strategies for partnership in in-demand sector/occupations;
- Developing and aligning policies;
- Developing and continuously improving the one stop delivery system; and
- Developing policies and guidance on one stop partner role and resource contribution.

**Panel Consensus (Technical Assistance):** The narrative includes a list of responsibilities. This section would strengthen if Puerto Rico included the activities that facilitate these functions instead of listing the parts. Also, it would have been helpful if Puerto Rico documented the Board's decision-making processes to ensure the development of strategies to support career pathways for individuals with disabilities and how they will ensure technology is accessible to individuals with disabilities residing in remote areas.

The Puerto Rico State Workforce Development Board (PRSWDB) meets at least four times a year, either in person or by videoconference. These meetings provide opportunities for the PRSWDB to address issues impacting the state network, guide and create strategic policy, obtain performance information, and oversee funding initiatives. Decisions are made by a vote of a majority of the total serving member of the PRSWDB. Decision-making votes shall be conducted according to Robert's Rules of Order. All decisions and initiatives are developed to foster inclusivity and collaboration of all stakeholders to strengthen our workforce system. Educational and informational portions of meetings are conducted according to the preference of the Chair. The state board's executive committee assists and expedite the work of the state board, and meet separately, in person or by videoconference, as scheduled and at the request of the Council Chairman. The executive committee evaluates reports from WDP and makes recommendations to the state board regarding the allocation of workforce development funds within the state board's purview.

Duties include, but are not limited to:

- overseeing the implementation of the strategic plan,
- tracking workgroup plans and progress

- leading the alignment of the workgroups
- Advocates for efficiency and cooperation among stakeholders
- Oversees strategies to foster education about career opportunities and businesses about services and resources available to help them meet their workforce needs.
- Makes recommendations to the Governor on geographic designations and alterations for workforce development areas.

One of the priorities of the PRSWDB is to foster information technology functions focusing on achieving technological integration with the partners of the Labor Development System and availability online as appropriate and addressing the need for more responsive career information — tied to the eligible training provider list, and on data systems. This will drive better coordination of services across the system and support process and outcome metrics as part of the performance functions. Another priority for the PRSWDB is performance. The performance functions will focus on continuous improvement and how they contribute to achieving the PR State Unified Plan goals. The performance system will look at process and outcome measures focusing on interim gains and outcomes related to the state board's WIOA performance common measures and other necessary areas.

The executive committee meets monthly; among the works they do, they collaborate with staff to guide and oversee the preparation and submission of the WIOA State Plan, preparation and submission of an annual report, and other oversight functions. The Executive Committee is empowered to meet on an interim basis between regular full Board meetings and make emergency or time-sensitive decisions on behalf of the full PRSWDB membership when necessary as it relates to the explicit duties or responsibilities of the PRSWDB as the state's designated state workforce development board under WIOA. Immediate notification to the entire Board will occur if the Executive Committee ever taken any action without the entire board's prior consent. Actions taken by the Executive Committee on behalf of the PRSWDB that require official approval by the entire board are brought forward for approval at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the board. The Executive Committee shall monitor the work of other Board committees and the Board staff,

develop, and approve agenda items for the entire board's meetings, work on legislative issues, and develop policy proposals for the entire board to consider for approval. The PRSWDB Executive Committee, Planning Committee, other standing committees, and any task forces or other working groups established by the PRSWDB Chairperson also meet throughout the calendar year to produce policy recommendations or reports to be considered by the full PRSWDB for approval.

The Planning Committee is a standing committee of the PRSWDB that reviews, recommends, and approves the necessary reports, information, and all requirements under the functions listed above. State agency staff members provide subject matter expertise, data, information, and recommendations to the committee. Committee members are members of the PRSWDB who represent business and industry, state agencies, education, and community-based organizations.

The planning committee works closely with state agency staff during the development of the WIOA State Plan and reports regularly to the executive committee and entire board.

The Innovation and Trends Committee will oversee developing strategies to support career pathways for hard-to-reach individuals with disabilities.

**Board Staff** — The PRSWDB staff shall be attached to the DEDC for administrative and staff purposes. The PRSWDB may ask for assistance from other units of state government as it requires to fulfill its duties and responsibilities.

### **Support career pathways for individuals with disabilities**

The PRDE-AEP has under implementation a career pathways intensive program that guides its activities under nine components written strategic plan:

1. Building Strategic Partnerships,
2. Creating a Career Pathways Culture,
3. Analyzing LMI

4. Integrating Career Pathways in Onboarding
5. Creating a Student Education and Career Plan
6. Intensive Advising
7. Providing Instruction in a Career Pathways Model
8. Support Services
9. Sustainability for Continuous Improvement

During 2021-2022 over 50 service providers, 50 counselors, and 50 conversational English teachers have been trained in career pathway plan development for each education center in a 6-week workshop program with a national expert as host and the Puerto Rico Department of Education Adult Education Program (PRDE-AEP)

The strategy involves the implementation of the memorandum of understanding with the 15 local workforce development boards and their One-Stop Centers.

#### **Initiatives VRA**

1. Obtain advice from the Advocacy Office for People with Disabilities to help the One-Stop Centers (American Job Centers) continue compliance with accessibility policies to benefit persons with disabilities. Also, that Office offers technical assistance with accessibility guides according to the current legislation.
2. Evaluate the public policies of the American Job Centers to offer recommendations.
3. VRA advice for the American Job Center of Guaynabo, Puerto Rico, to acquire tests and instruments to assess the interests, aptitudes, academic skills, and learning styles of the population with disabilities.
4. VRA collaboration with the American Job Centers to use the Accessibility Study Form of our agency, provide guidance about their content and the implementation using the VRA Occupational Therapists' expertise.

5. VRA will provide the staff of all American Job Centers a Workshop on Sensitivity towards the Population with Disabilities, emphasizing 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.

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

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 PRIS collects and reports on performance measures for Title I and Title III programs. Currently, ETA 9169 for PY 2019 and PY 2020 were submitted and certified by WIPS.

The main challenge for submitting ETA 9169 and 9173 reports was migration from the former database to the new platform with the required elements of the PIRL. This migration produced thousands of data errors, which required an analysis effort to identify the data and complete the required fields. Additional data elements that were added under WIOA, which were not collected in the developed software under WIA parameters, were the main source of PRIS errors. However, with the collaboration of the partners and the staff of the Local Board, it was possible to develop a work plan to enter the data, correct the errors reported by the WIPS, and finally submit the ETA 9169 reports for PY 2019 and PY 2020.

PR did not submit the performance reports required by WIOA regulations since the implementation of the Act. Negotiation with Region I and ETA allowed PR to present with priority the reports of PY 2019 and PY 2020. We will present the execution reports for AP 2017 and AP 2018 so that our jurisdiction would comply with the WIOA reporting.

PRDEDC going to request a waiver for statewide required activities described in WIOA Sections 129(b)(1)(A) and 134(a)(2)(vi); to conducting evaluations under section 116(e) of activities authorized under this chapter and chapter 3 in coordination with evaluations conducted by the Secretary under section 169(a).

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.

**Panel Consensus (Compliance):** The narrative must describe how one-stop partner programs in the AJC will be assessed. Also, the narrative indicates that Puerto Rico has not submitted PY 2017 and PY 2018 reports. Therefore, an assessment was not conducted.

Section III. b. 4. A, Assessment of Core Programs, above describe the process to access the one stop partners.

(B) *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.

**Panel Consensus (Compliance):** Puerto Rico did not respond to this section of the narrative due to not submitting PY 2017 and PY 2018 reports. Therefore, Puerto Rico did not include previous assessment results for all core programs. Instead, Puerto Rico should refer to assessment results for PY 2020 and PY 2021.

## **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 DDEC 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) 2020-2021, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, complied with the provisions of 20 CFR 683.410 (b)(2)(1) and conducted monitoring remotely and on-site. In the PY 2020-21, 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 2019 and 2020**

##### **Title I Program Participation Levels PY 2019**

The PRIS data reflect 1,815 participants in PY 2019, with 53% adults, 36% dislocated workers and 11% youth. Related to the type of services, 73% of youth, adults and displaced workers received career services and 27 % received training services.

##### **Program Year 2019 Participants by Title I Program**

| Type of Service   | Adults     | Dislocated Workers | Youth      | TOTAL        |
|-------------------|------------|--------------------|------------|--------------|
| Career Services   | 701        | 526                | 98         | <b>1,325</b> |
| Training Services | 257        | 126                | 107        | <b>490</b>   |
| <b>TOTAL</b>      | <b>958</b> | <b>652</b>         | <b>205</b> | <b>1,815</b> |

##### **Program Year 2019 Exits by Title I Program**

| Type of Service   | Adults       | Dislocated Workers | Youth      | TOTAL        |
|-------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------|--------------|
| Career Services   | 785          | 589                | 94         | <b>1,468</b> |
| Training Services | 256          | 122                | 102        | <b>480</b>   |
| <b>TOTAL</b>      | <b>1,041</b> | <b>711</b>         | <b>196</b> | <b>1,948</b> |

### Effectiveness in Serving Employers performance indicator

In terms of reporting performance measure on services to employers under WIOA, the USDOL/ETA are still developing the performance goals to be applied under WIOA. Therefore, no reporting performance measures are provided.

### Title I Programs Performance Accountability System

The Youth, Adults and Displaced Workers Programs served 1,815 participants in Program Year (PY) 2019. From these, 1,948 exited the programs representing 107.3% of the participants. The adult program served 958 participants and 1,041 exited, or 108.7 percent, while the dislocated workers program served 652 and 711 exited the program, equivalent to 109.0% of total participants. The youth program served 205 participants with 196 exits, equivalent to 95.6% of which received service.

| <b>PY 2019</b>                                  |                        |               |          |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------|----------|
| <b>Performance Indicators</b>                   | <b>Negotiated Rate</b> | <b>Actual</b> | <b>%</b> |
| <b>Adult Program</b>                            |                        |               |          |
| Employment Rate<br>Second Quarter After<br>Exit | 72.0%                  | 49.1%         | 68%      |
| Employment Rate<br>Fourth Quarter After<br>Exit | 50.0%                  | 52.50%        | 105%     |

| <b>PY 2019</b>                                                        |                        |               |          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------|----------|
| <b>Performance Indicators</b>                                         | <b>Negotiated Rate</b> | <b>Actual</b> | <b>%</b> |
| Median Earnings Second Quarter After Exit                             | \$2,890.0              | \$1,759.0     | 61%      |
| Credential Attainment Rate                                            | 69.0%                  | 77.8%         | 113%     |
| Measurable Skill Gains                                                |                        | 69.7%         | -        |
| Effectiveness in Serving Employers - Retention with the Same Employer |                        |               |          |
| <b>Dislocated Worker</b>                                              |                        |               |          |
| Employment Rate Second Quarter After Exit                             | 73.0%                  | 53.40%        | 73%      |
| Employment Rate Fourth Quarter After Exit                             | 52.0%                  | 56.20%        | 108%     |
| Median Earnings Second Quarter After Exit                             | \$3,454.0              | \$1,885 .0    | 55%      |



|                                                                       |                        |               |          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------|----------|
| <b>PY 2019</b>                                                        |                        |               |          |
| <b>Performance Indicators</b>                                         | <b>Negotiated Rate</b> | <b>Actual</b> | <b>%</b> |
| Credential Attainment Rate                                            | 73.0%                  | 40.0%         | 55%      |
| Measurable Skill Gains                                                |                        | 50.0%         | -        |
| Effectiveness in Serving Employers - Retention with the Same Employer |                        |               |          |
| <b>Youth</b>                                                          |                        |               |          |
| Employment Rate Second Quarter After Exit                             | 51.0%                  | 53.8%         | 105%     |
| Employment Rate Fourth Quarter After Exit                             | 54.0%                  | 25.7%         | 48%      |
| Median Earnings Second Quarter After Exit                             |                        | \$900.0       | -        |
| Credential Attainment Rate                                            | 48.4%                  | 3.6%          | 7%       |

|                                                                       |                        |               |          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------|----------|
| <b>PY 2019</b>                                                        |                        |               |          |
| <b>Performance Indicators</b>                                         | <b>Negotiated Rate</b> | <b>Actual</b> | <b>%</b> |
| Measurable Skill Gains                                                |                        | 59.5%         | -        |
| Effectiveness in Serving Employers - Retention with the Same Employer |                        |               |          |

During PY 2019, Puerto Rico complied with 4 of the 18 Performance Measures negotiated with 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 49.1% performance rate, while in the dislocated worker program for the same measure was 53.4%. Neither of those program surplus de 90% of the negotiated rate, so didn't pass the measure. Meanwhile, youth program rate rises 53.8%, with 15% over the negotiated rate, passing the negotiation.

In the measure of Employment Rate Fourth Quarter After Exit, adult and dislocated workers programs comply with negotiated measure with 52.5% and 56.2% respectively, meanwhile youth program didn't reach the negotiated performance with 25.7%, in relation with the negotiated measure of 54.00 percent.

Related with the Median Earnings Second Quarter After Exit, none of the three programs reached the 90% required to comply with the negotiated measure, so in this performance indicator it was not reached in the PY 2019. The Benning of COVID-19, and the implementation of the executive orders issued by State and local governments to manage the

Covid-19 pandemic would impact the delivery of service in the one stop center decreasing the number of participants and excisers.

The Credential Attainment Rate was achieved only in the adult program, with 113.0% of the respective negotiated level. In the youth programs, the credential rate reaches only 3.6%, related with a performance measure of 48.4 percent, equivalent to 7% of the negotiated rate.

The Measurable Skill Gains was not negotiated to PY 2019, but the three programs shows considerable scores, with 69.7% in adults, 50.0% in dislocated workers and 59.5% in the youth program.

#### **Program Year 2020 Participants by Title I Program**

The PRIS data reflects 9,027 participants in PY20, with 50% adults, 35% dislocated workers, and 15% youth. Related to the type of services, 68% of youth, adults, and displaced workers received career services, and 32% received training services.

| Type of Service                            | Adults | Dislocated Workers | Youth | TOTAL |
|--------------------------------------------|--------|--------------------|-------|-------|
| Career Services                            | 3,048  | 2,204              | 904   | 6,156 |
| Training Services                          | 1,484  | 976                | 411   | 2,871 |
| TOTAL                                      | 4,532  | 3,180              | 1,315 | 9,027 |
| Program Year 2020 Exits by Title I Program |        |                    |       |       |
| Type of Service                            | Adults | Dislocated Workers | Youth | TOTAL |

| Type of Service   | Adults | Dislocated Workers | Youth | TOTAL |
|-------------------|--------|--------------------|-------|-------|
| Career Services   | 1,528  | 953                | 390   | 2,871 |
| Training Services | 708    | 416                | 155   | 1,279 |
| TOTAL             | 2,236  | 1,369              | 545   | 4,150 |

The Youth, Adults, and Displaced Workers Programs served 9,027 participants in PY20. Of these, 4,150 exited the programs representing 46% of the participants. The adult program served 4,532 participants, and 2,236 exited, or 49%, while the dislocated workers program served 3,180 and 1,369 exited the program. The youth program served 1,315 participants with 545 exits, equivalent to 41% of which received service.

| Performance Indicators                          | PY 2020         |        | %    |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------|--------|------|
|                                                 | Negotiated Rate | Actual |      |
| Adult Program                                   |                 |        |      |
| Employment Rate<br>Second Quarter After<br>Exit | 60%             | 49.60% | 83%  |
| Employment Rate<br>Fourth Quarter After<br>Exit | 45%             | 48.70% | 108% |

| Performance Indicators                                                | PY 2020 |         | %    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------|------|
| Median Earnings Second Quarter After Exit                             | \$2,880 | \$2,163 | 75%  |
| Credential Attainment Rate                                            | 46%     | 41.80%  | 91%  |
| Measurable Skill Gains                                                | 24%     | 80.00%  | 333% |
| Effectiveness in Serving Employers - Retention with the Same Employer |         |         |      |
| Dislocated Worker                                                     |         |         |      |
| Employment Rate Second Quarter After Exit                             | 62.00%  | 51.20%  | 83%  |
| Employment Rate Fourth Quarter After Exit                             | 48.00%  | 52.50%  | 109% |
| Median Earnings Second Quarter After Exit                             | \$3,444 | \$2,516 | 73%  |
| Credential Attainment Rate                                            | 50%     | 51.10%  | 102% |
| Measurable Skill Gains                                                | 16.50%  | 60.00%  | 364% |

| Performance Indicators                                                      | PY 2020 |         | %    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------|------|
| Effectiveness in Serving Employers - Retention with the Same Employer       |         |         |      |
| Youth                                                                       |         |         |      |
| Employment Rate<br>Second Quarter After<br>Exit                             | 42.00%  | 53.60%  | 128% |
| Employment Rate<br>Fourth Quarter After<br>Exit                             | 42.00%  | 34.60%  | 82%  |
| Median Earnings Second<br>Quarter After Exit                                | \$2,880 | \$1,524 | 53%  |
| Credential Attainment<br>Rate                                               | 46.00%  | 9.80%   | 21%  |
| Measurable Skill Gains                                                      | 29.10%  | 16.70%  | 57%  |
| Effectiveness in Serving<br>Employers - Retention<br>with the Same Employer |         |         |      |

During PY20, Puerto Rico complied with seven (7) of the eighteen (18) Performance Measures negotiated with the USDOL. The following section summarizes the results obtained from each negotiated performance measure.

The Adult Program reached a 49.6% performance rate for the Employment Rate Second Quarter After Exit. The Dislocated Worker Program achieved a 51.2% performance rate. Lastly, the Youth Program rose to a 53.6% performance rate.

In the measure of Employment Rate Fourth Quarter After Exit, Adult and Dislocated Workers Programs complied with the negotiated measure with 48.7% and 52.5% respectively. The Youth program reached a 34.6% performance.

Related to the Median Earnings Second Quarter After Exit, none of the three (3) programs reached the 90% required to comply with the negotiated measure. The early implementation of the executive orders issued by the state government to manage the COVID-19 pandemic provoked a complete lockdown, leading to a full closure of businesses and other entities crucial to advancing the process of employment colocation retention, and increased income.

The Credential Attainment Rate was achieved in the Adult and Dislocated Workers programs, with over 90% of the respective negotiated level. In the Youth programs, the credential rate reached 9.8% performance measure. The online education used to provide services during the pandemic may explain this low execution in contrast to within-person learning. We are currently revising the strategies to be used in the system to provide services in the eventuality of similar emergencies.

The Measurable Skill Gains were achieved with considerable scores in the Adults and Dislocated Workers programs. In the Youth program, a rate of 16.7% was reached. 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. After an objective evaluation, we have initially identified some possible reasons, such as the lockdown due to COVID-19, the use of a new database (PRIS), as well as the novelty of online services, and the impact of the different incentives. 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 state board and the local boards must enter the process of analyzing the low execution achieved in the PY 2019 and 2020. The state will request technical assistance from DOLETA Region I, then the state will offer technical assistance to the 15 local boards, to increase the delivery of service, in the use of the he database, targeting that the performance measures can be reached in the next program years.

### **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.

The Workforce Development Program, through a partnership with Abdul Latif Jemeel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) North America, has been working since 2021 to strengthen our program's use of evidence-based strategies to support the 15 Local Workforce Development Areas. This work aims to enable the LWDA to continuously improve the various workforce development services AJCs provide, as stipulated by WIOA. The opportunity to collaborate with researchers in the J-PAL North America network would be crucial support as we seek to access and generate rigorous evidence that would help DDEC best use the available resources to serve the people of Puerto Rico.

The first phase of research is expected to be completed by December 2022. This will be followed by the second phase of technical assistance to the case management staff of each LWDAs. By measuring progress and implementation results, we will be able to collect data that can move our work along an evidence continuum. In addition, by December 2022 we expect to have a complete case management module that will allow us to better measure the compliance of WIOA requirements and with the needs of participants as part of the process.



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

| <b>Performance Indicators</b>             | <b>PY 2019 Negotiated Level</b>                 | <b>PY 2019 Achievement</b> | <b>PY 2020 Negotiated Level</b>                 | <b>PY 2020 Achievement</b> |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 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.

(C) *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**

Title I of the workforce development system in PR has not conducted any evaluation of WIOA implementation. Since PY 2017, the State has applied for Waiver 129(b)(1)(A) and 134(a)(2)(vi), to exempt the state from conducting the evaluation required by the regulation. In PY 2018-2020, ETA approved the waiver for statewide required activities described in WIOA Section 129(b)(1)(A) and 134(a)(2)(vi); to conducting evaluations under section 116(e) of activities authorized under this chapter; however, after finishing the waiver, the state did not make any evaluations required in section 129 and 134.

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 obsolesces 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

**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 —*

(i) 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. 331/3 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. 331/3 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. 331/3 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.

(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. 331/3 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. 331/3 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. 331/3 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.

(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

(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(j)(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.

(iii) 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 Single Management Center 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 (DDEC) must provide the Governor of Puerto Rico with program execution indicators. These reports are based on those submitted through the Program Planning Information 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 DDEC website.

Regarding the reports required by the WIOA Law, Puerto Rico complied with submitting and certifying them, including ETA 9173 of Q4 for the PY2021 and

PY2022 programming years. ETA 9169 and 9171 are in the process of reporting PY2022.

(iv) 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:

a) 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.

b) 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.

c) 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.

d) 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.

e) 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.

(B) 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.

(C) *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.

(D) *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 are 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.

(B) 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.

(C) 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
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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 Single Management Centers:**

A crucial aspect of the local board's responsibilities involves the annual evaluation of the physical and programmatic accessibility of Single Management Centers, 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 Single Management Center.

#### **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)

| 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, and approved the elements as serving the needs of the populations served by such programs;                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Yes      |
| 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 administering 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>(b) 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;                                              | Yes |
| 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 |

## 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.

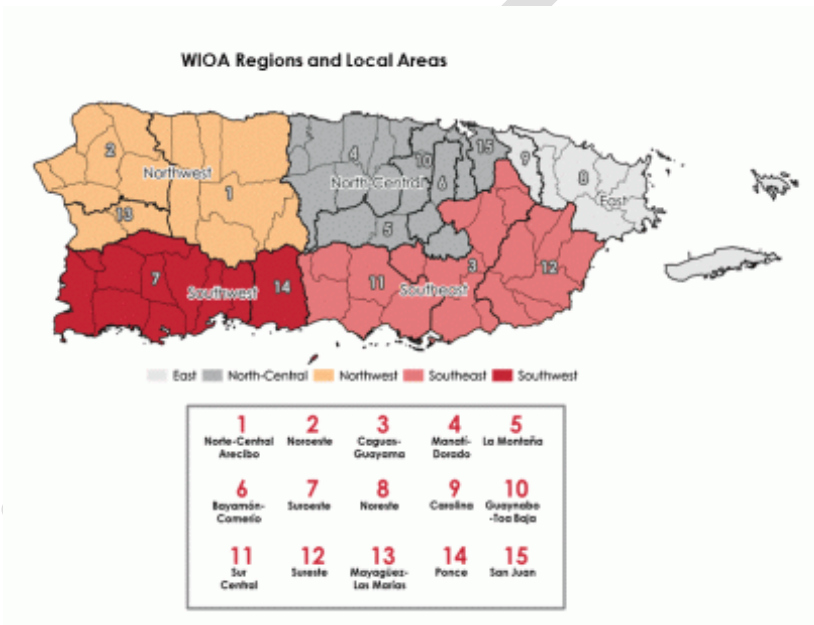
**Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Activities under Title I-B.** The Unified or Combined State Plan must include the following with respect to activities conducted under subtitle B—

### (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.



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.



(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 an elected official.

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.

**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      |

| Region        | Municipality | Workforce Area    |
|---------------|--------------|-------------------|
| East          | Naguabo      | Northeast         |
| East          | Río Grande   | Northeast         |
| East          | Vieques      | Northeast         |
|               |              |                   |
| North-Central | Bayamón      | Bayamón-Comerio   |
| North-Central | Comerio      | Bayamón-Comerio   |
| 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> |

| Region        | Municipality | Workforce Area      |
|---------------|--------------|---------------------|
| North-Central | Barceloneta  | Manatí-Dorado       |
| 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           |



| Region    | Municipality  | Workforce Area        |
|-----------|---------------|-----------------------|
| Northwest | Rincón        | Northwest             |
| 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 | Utado         | 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      |

| Region    | Municipality | Workforce Area |
|-----------|--------------|----------------|
| Southeast | Juncos       | Southeast      |
| 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      |

| Region    | Municipality  | Workforce Area |
|-----------|---------------|----------------|
| Southwest | Maricao       | Southwest      |
| 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:

#### 2022

| WIOA<br>PERFORMANCE<br>INDICATOR            |           |           |                  |           |           |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|------------------|-----------|-----------|
| WIOA ADULTS                                 | NORTHEAST | NORTHWEST | NORTH<br>CENTRAL | SOUTHEAST | SOUTHWEST |
| Employment Rate<br>in the Second<br>Quarter | 53.50%    | 53.50%    | 53.50%           | 53.50%    | 53.50%    |

|                                             |               |                   |                   |                   |               |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Employment Rate<br>in the Fourth<br>Quarter | 49.00%        | 49.00%            | 49.00%            | 49.00%            | 49.00%        |
| Median Earnings                             | \$2,500.00    | <b>\$2,364.00</b> | <b>\$2,250.00</b> | <b>\$2,425.00</b> | \$2,500.00    |
| Credential<br>Achievement Rate              | 42.00%        | 42.00%            | 42.00%            | 42.00%            | 42.00%        |
| Measurable Gains<br>in Skills               | <b>72.00%</b> | <b>72.00%</b>     | <b>72.00%</b>     | <b>72.00%</b>     | <b>72.00%</b> |
| <b>WIOA POSTED<br/>WORKERS</b>              |               |                   |                   |                   |               |
| Employment Rate<br>in the Second<br>Quarter | 52.50%        | 52.50%            | 52.50%            | 52.50%            | 52.50%        |
| Employment Rate<br>in the Fourth<br>Quarter | 52.00%        | 52.00%            | 52.00%            | 52.00%            | 52.00%        |
| Median Earnings                             | \$2,600.00    | <b>\$2,500.00</b> | <b>\$2,510.00</b> | <b>\$2,568.00</b> | \$2,600.00    |
| Credential<br>Achievement Rate              | 51.00%        | 51.00%            | 51.00%            | 51.00%            | 51.00%        |
| Measurable Gains<br>in Skills               | <b>52.20%</b> | <b>52.20%</b>     | <b>52.20%</b>     | <b>52.20%</b>     | <b>52.20%</b> |

| <b>WIOA YOUTH</b>                           |                   |            |                   |               |            |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------|------------|-------------------|---------------|------------|
| Employment Rate<br>in the Second<br>Quarter | 50.00%            | 50.00%     | 50.00%            | <b>47.0%</b>  | 50.00%     |
| Employment Rate<br>in the Fourth<br>Quarter | 50.00%            | 50.00%     | 50.00%            | <b>47.0%</b>  | 50.00%     |
| Median Earnings                             | <b>\$1,620.00</b> | \$1,800.00 | <b>\$1,682.00</b> | \$1,800.00    | \$1,800.00 |
| Credential<br>Achievement Rate              | 20.00%            | 20.00%     | 20.00%            | 20.00%        | 20.00%     |
| Measurable Gains<br>in Skills               | <b>28.9%</b>      | 32.10%     | <b>28.89%</b>     | <b>28.89%</b> | 32.10%     |

## 2023

| <b>WIOA<br/>PERFORMANCE<br/>INDICATOR</b>   |                  |                  |                          |                  |                  |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>WIOA ADULTS</b>                          | <b>NORTHEAST</b> | <b>NORTHWEST</b> | <b>NORTH<br/>CENTRAL</b> | <b>SOUTHEAST</b> | <b>SOUTHWEST</b> |
| Employment Rate<br>in the Second<br>Quarter | 54.00%           | 54.00%           | 54.00%                   | 54.00%           | 54.00%           |

|                                             |               |               |            |                   |               |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Employment Rate<br>in the Fourth<br>Quarter | 51.00%        | 51.00%        | 51.00%     | 51.00%            | 51.00%        |
| Median Earnings                             | \$2,600.00    | \$2,600.00    | \$2,340.00 | <b>\$2,525.00</b> | \$2,600.00    |
| Credential<br>Achievement Rate              | 42.50%        | 42.50%        | 42.50%     | 42.50%            | 42.50%        |
| Measurable Gains in<br>Skills               | <b>72.45%</b> | <b>72.45%</b> | 72.45%     | <b>72.45%</b>     | <b>72.45%</b> |
| <b>WIOA POSTED<br/>WORKERS</b>              |               |               |            |                   |               |
| Employment Rate<br>in the Second<br>Quarter | 53.00%        | 53.00%        | 53.00%     | 53.00%            | 53.00%        |
| Employment Rate<br>in the Fourth<br>Quarter | 54.00%        | 54.00%        | 54.00%     | 54.00%            | 54.00%        |
| Median Earnings                             | \$2,700.00    | \$2,700.00    | \$2,610.00 | <b>\$2,668.00</b> | \$2,700.00    |
| Credential<br>Achievement Rate              | 51.50%        | 51.50%        | 51.50%     | 51.50%            | 51.50%        |
| Measurable Gains in<br>Skills               | <b>52.65%</b> | <b>52.65%</b> | 53.00%     | <b>52.65%</b>     | <b>52.65%</b> |

| <b>WIOA YOUTH</b>                           |                   |                   |               |              |              |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| Employment Rate<br>in the Second<br>Quarter | 50.50%            | 50.50%            | 50.50%        | <b>47.5%</b> | 50.50%       |
| Employment Rate<br>in the Fourth<br>Quarter | 50.50%            | 50.50%            | 50.50%        | <b>47.5%</b> | 50.50%       |
| Median Earnings                             | <b>\$1,710.00</b> | <b>\$1,710.00</b> | \$1,782.00    | \$1,900.00   | \$1,900.00   |
| Credential<br>Achievement Rate              | 20.50%            | 20.50%            | 20.50%        | 20.50%       | 20.50%       |
| Measurable Gains in<br>Skills               | <b>30.7%</b>      | <b>30.7%</b>      | <b>30.69%</b> | <b>30.7%</b> | <b>34.1%</b> |

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.



(C) 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

(D) 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

(A) 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.

(B) 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.

1. **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.
1. **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.
2. 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.

3. 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.
1. **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.

(C) 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, DDEC has developed the following public policies or procedures for the allocation of funds under WIOA and other federal programs:

|                       |                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 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

(D)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 USDOL/ETA.

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 DDEC 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.

(E) 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 LWDV 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).

**(b) Adult and Dislocated Worker Program Requirements.**

(1) 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 LWDBs 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.

(2) 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.

(3) 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 CGU 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 CGU 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 CGU, 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](https://careerpathways.workforcegps.org/resources/2016/10/20/10/11/EnhancedCareer_Pathways_Toolkit)

g. TEGL 7-20 presents examples of how CGU 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](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.

(4) 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.

(5) 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.

(6) 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.

(7) 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-

(1) 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.

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<sup>8</sup> Sec. 102(b)(2)(D)(i)(V)



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 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.

(2) 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).

(3) 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.

(4) 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—

(1) Any comments from the public comment period that represent disagreement with the Plan. (WIOA section 108(d)(3).) –

Not applicable.

(2) 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.

(3) 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.

(4) A description of the roles and resource contributions of one-stop partners.

Not applicable.

(5) Competitive process used to award subgrants and contracts for title I activities.

Not applicable.

(6) 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.

(7) 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.

(8) 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:

(1) 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 DDEC 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).

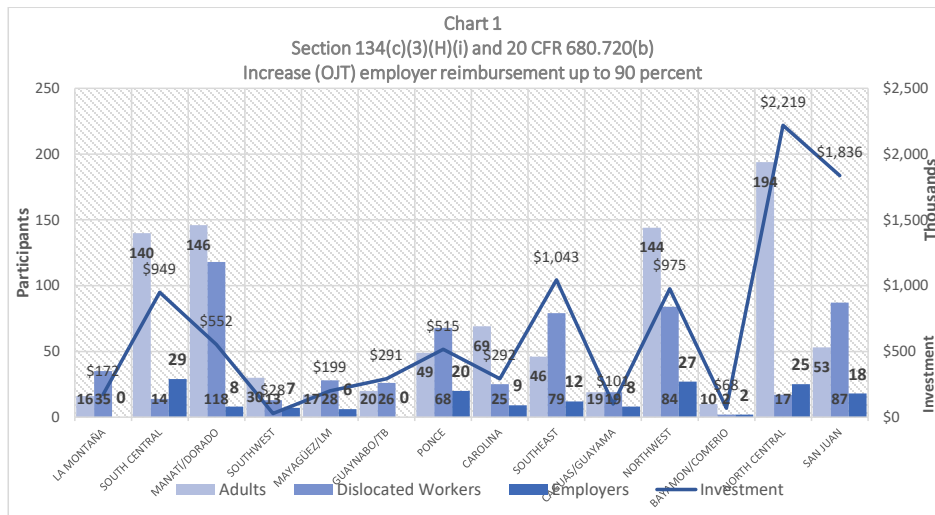
Puerto Rico is proposing a sliding scale of reimbursement to the employer based on its size and capability. Under this waiver, the following scale will be implemented:

- 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.



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 1- Training Services PY 2020-2022 & Projected 2025**

| PY   | Receive Training | OJT | %   | Employment<br>Exit<br>2Q | %   | Retention<br>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 ALDLs 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 2 - Projected Participants OJT PY 2023**

|             |               |                   |           |                   |
|-------------|---------------|-------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| PY 2023-24  |               |                   |           |                   |
| <b>LWDA</b> | <b>Adults</b> | <b>Allocation</b> | <b>DW</b> | <b>Allocation</b> |
| 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           |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>270</b> | <b>\$1,399,665</b> | <b>728</b> | <b>\$8,317,452</b> |

(2) 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.

(3) 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 3 - Waiver Outcomes 2023-2025**

| PY           | Adults     | DW           | Total        |
|--------------|------------|--------------|--------------|
| 2023         | 270        | 728          | 998          |
| 2024         | 281        | 759          | 1,040        |
| 2025         | 309        | 836.58       | 1,146        |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>860</b> | <b>2,324</b> | <b>3,184</b> |

- 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.

(4) 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.

(5) 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.

(6) 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 DDEC 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.

(7) 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 DDEC 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 ALDLs, 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.

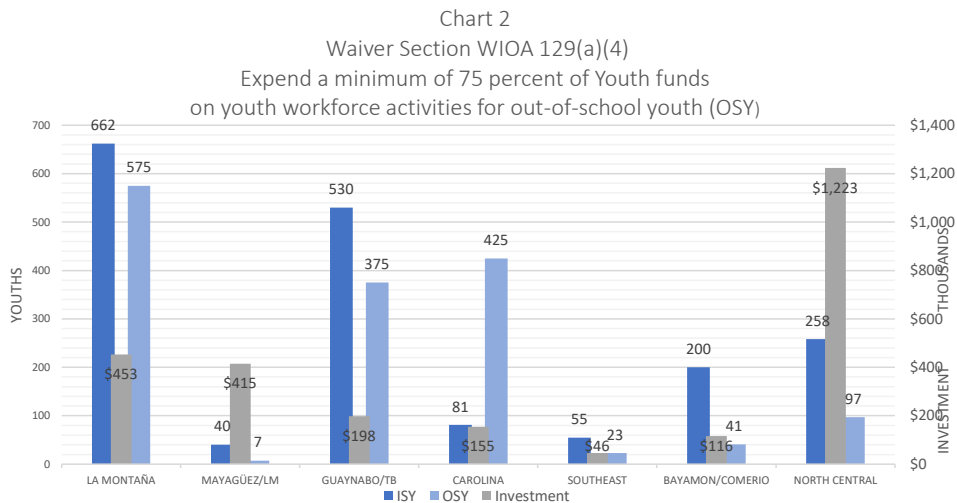
On the other hand, demand for services for ISY increases considerably in the face of emergencies, as schools must close during and after hurricanes, others have been destroyed by earthquakes and a substantial number become obsolete due to damage in its structure. In the case of pandemics, all schools have been forced to a full lockdown. 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.



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.

#### 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%               |

| PY           | OSY   | %   | ISY   | %   | TOTAL | % OSY<br>Expenditure |
|--------------|-------|-----|-------|-----|-------|----------------------|
| 2021         | 1,120 | 40% | 1,682 | 60% | 2,802 | 59%                  |
| <b>2022</b>  | 2242  | 45% | 2707  | 55% | 4,949 |                      |
| <b>2023*</b> | 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  |
| <b>ISY</b>   | 1,588  | 1,835 | 1,436 | 1,148 | 2,124 | 1,742     | 1,807 | 2,052 |
| <b>OSY</b>   | 2,160  | 1,625 | 1,503 | 926   | 1,145 | 1,492     | 1,377 | 1,361 |
| <b>Total</b> | 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 DDEC 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 DDEC 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 ALDLs, 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:

#### Home Care Aides

| <i>LWDA</i>             | <i>OSY</i> | <i>DW</i>    | <i>Total<br/>Participants</i> | <i>Allocation<br/>OSY</i> | <i>Allocation<br/>DW</i> | <i>Total<br/>Allocation</i> |
|-------------------------|------------|--------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Guaynabo- Toa<br>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<br>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-<br>Guayama      | 40         | 160          | 200                           | \$581,040                 | \$2,324,160              | \$2,905,200                 |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>320</b> | <b>1,310</b> | <b>1,630</b>                  | <b>\$4,648,320</b>        | <b>\$19,029,060</b>      | <b>\$23,677,380</b>         |

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:

| 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 |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>2,000</b> |                                           |

**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 DDEC 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 DDEC 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 ALDLs, 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**

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      |

| The State Plan must include                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Included |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| 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      |
| 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      |

| The State Plan must include                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Included |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| 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 appropriate action to secure compliance with the Uniform Guidance under section WIOA 184(a)(3);        | Yes      |

#### **WAGNER-PEYSER ACT PROGRAM (Employment Service)**

##### **(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 meeting 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's worth noting that the 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 that staff are 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 practices 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 firsthand 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.

PRDOL has invested time and effort in implementing technological changes by integrating new platforms to enhance its services. In this regard, the PRDOL 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 invested in integrating 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.

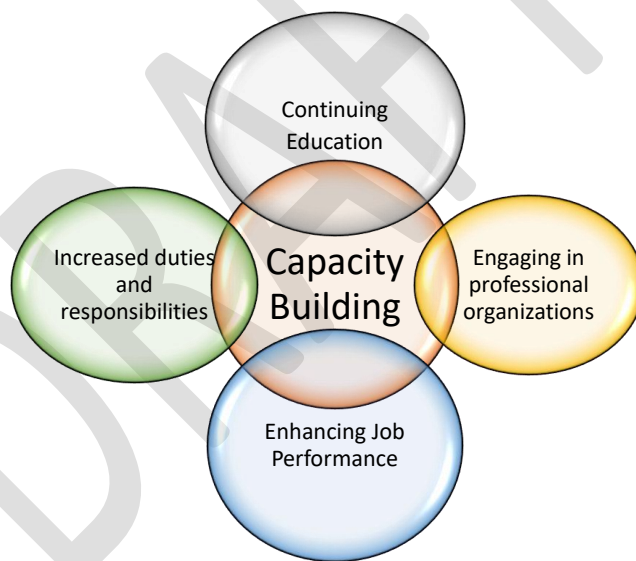
Our goal is to have a comprehensive curriculum aligned with these competencies to equip staff with the necessary tools to provide high-quality services to both job seekers and employers. This includes intensive interview techniques, professional assessment administration, labor market information access and interpretation, personalized service strategies, identification of people 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 recently hired 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, 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 the latest 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 professionally 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. Merit-based WP state staff will provide these services. 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 one-stop centers, 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:

Recommend the Division of Unemployment Insurance to continue collaborating 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.

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.

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*Career Services under WIOA Include the Provision of "Information and Assistance" in Connection with the Filing of a UI Claim.*

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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 professionally 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 aiding UI's claimants, "significant assistance" means having staff in the American Job Centers professionally 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 aid 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 conducted 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 aid in a timely manner.

It is important to emphasize that UI eligibility determinations must be made by UI merit staff who is 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 Programa (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 conduct activities to file a UI claim to receive UI compensation benefits.

(c) **Describe the State's strategy for providing re-employment assistance to UI claimants and other unemployed individuals.**

**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:

- (5) A UC eligibility review.
- (6) Provision of customized labor market and career information.
- (7) Co-enrollment in the Wagner-Peyser Act-funded Employment Service program.
- (8) Support with an Individual Reemployment Plan.
- (9) 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 Wagner Peyser 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 by 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 \_\_. *Initial RESEA Overview*<sup>27</sup>

| Topic                                        | Content                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Unemployment Benefits Eligibility Assessment | 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 |

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|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                        | <p>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 Self-Assessment Form, the Job Search Skills Assessment Form, and the Job Search Activity Log Form. The claimant reviews completed forms with an RESEA representative and/or career counselor alongside a review of the claimant's employment history and educational level to determine their job prospects.</p> <p>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.</p> |
| Development of Individual Reemployment | <p>A 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, which have been determined to be most appropriate to</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

|                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Plan (<i>Plan Individual de Reempleo</i> – PIR)</p> | <p>achieve their reemployment. The cooperative creation of a PIR focuses on the claimant’s unique goals, relevant experience, and barriers to employment.<sup>28</sup> 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.</p> |
| <p>Referrals to Reemployment Services</p>              | <p>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.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

## **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 entire 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 Wagner-Peyser Act funds to support UI claimants and the communication between the Employment Service and UI, as appropriate, including the following:**

***(5) Coordination 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 Proyecto Infinito.

The Infinite Talent 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 Infinite Talents 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 diverse 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 Infinite Talent. The program covered legal aspects of employability in infinite talent, recruiting infinite talent, and integrating infinite talent.

d. Infinite Talent Integrated Services Center

The Infinito Talent Service Center is responsible for coordinating and facilitating numerous 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 leading technology based on AI to improve the lives and careers of its citizens known as PR Workforce Exchange. Through this partnership, 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 onto the platform and create their resume online through [www.perfil.trabajo.pr.gov](http://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

***(6) 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.

***(7) 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.

***(8) 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, educational programs, and resources. It is of utmost importance for WP to coordinate the integration of these services, which is the primary goal of 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, General Educational Development Test (GED), occupational training, OJT, and support services that make training possible to enhance an individual's ability to return to work. The network functions 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 and assisting 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 services not provided by WP. This will serve as an access point to inform UI customers about other WIOA Title I-B 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.

- (e) **Agricultural Outreach Plan (AOP)**. Each State agency must develop an AOP every four years as part of the Unified or Combined State Plan required under sections 102 or 103 of the WIOA. The AOP must include an assessment of need.

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 WP 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 the highest number of MSFW participants in the WP program, as reported in the Wagner-Peyser (WP) Annual Performance Report, ETA-9173 4QTR report.

- (6) **Assessment of Need.** Provide an assessment of the unique needs of farmworkers in the area based on past and projected agricultural and farmworker activities in the State. Such needs may include, but are not limited to, Employment, Training, and Housing.

The Agricultural Outreach Plan (AOP) mandates a comprehensive assessment of the distinct requirements of farmworkers in the region, grounded in historical and anticipated agricultural and farmworker activities within the State. These needs encompass, but are not confined to, aspects such as employment, training, and housing.

The AOP is geared towards scrutinizing the specific needs of farmworkers for the 2023-2027 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) State Unified Plan. It 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) not reached through standard intake procedures conducted by local Employment Service offices.

In compliance with the Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by WIOA, the Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources (PRDOLHR) holds the responsibility of formulating precise strategies to ensure that Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers receive services through American Job Centers that are both quantitatively proportional and qualitatively equivalent to those provided to non-MSFWs. Furthermore, the WP 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 safeguard them.

Puerto Rico retains its designation as a significant MSFW State, driven by extraordinary 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 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. 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                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Lack of flexibility in their work schedules prevents them from accessing basic services, as agricultural work hours do not coincide with typical business hours.</b></p>                                                         | <p>As a strategy, the PRDOLRH has implemented the provision of services in the field by outreach personnel to migrant workers and or their families to coordinate referrals to support services, assistance in making appointments and arranging transportation for individual MSFW or a member of their family to and from American Job Centers or other appropriate agencies.</p>                     |
| <p><b>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 equipped housing facilities near your workplace.</b></p> | <p>To address this barrier, PRDOLRH has already agreed with employers to provide transportation to agricultural workers during the work period; some have implemented shelters or housing within the workplace premises for easier access. PRDOLRH evaluates whether worker housing meets federal OSHA regulations as a suitable place to live.</p>                                                     |
| <p><b>Lack of coordination of assistance to access educational development opportunities, as many appear to lack basic skills.</b></p>                                                                                                 | <p>The PRDOLRH is close to establishing collaboration agreements with educational entities to provide training or education courses that improve or acquire the skills necessary to conduct their tasks. Additionally, the Interamerican University, San German Campus, currently administers the High School Equivalency Program and the College Assistance Program for Migrants (HEP/CAMP), which</p> |



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|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <p>offers educational programs to students from migrant families or seasonal agricultural workers. HEP helps students who have dropped out of high school earn their GED, and CAMP helps students in their first year or college with academic, personal, and financial support.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <p><b>The lack of young farmers since 65% of the island's agricultural workforce is over 55 years old. The decline in new farmers will have significant negative effects on the island's agriculture in the coming decades.</b></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><b>Lack of knowledge and adequate training to protect oneself from occupational risks.</b></p>                                                                                                                                   | <p>The PRDOLRH has collaboration agreements to provide advice, guidance, and legal services so that workers know their rights and protect themselves at work.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <p><b>Discriminatory practices in the hiring process reduce your chances of obtaining employment.</b></p>                                                                                                                           | <p>The PRDOLRH, through its programs, continues to promote the implementation of inclusion to avoid employment discrimination. Additionally, outreach staff along with the SMA provide support by coordinating referrals to legal services and channeling complaints of violations of their rights for investigation.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

|                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Low educational level, some illiterate.</b>                                                                             | The PRDOLRH, through its programs, continues to bring training to work areas to address this barrier and provide guidance on the range of services available in their native language, English and/or Spanish.                                                     |
| <b>Lack of basic communication skills in English, which prevents them from seeking employment offered by US employers.</b> | The PRDOLRH has bilingual staff available in DSE offices to offer guidance on the services available in English to help them identify employment with US employers. In addition, the DSE plans to include courses in English in its list of educational workshops. |

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 you.

**(7) Provide an assessment of the agricultural activity in the State:** 1) identify 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) Identify 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 diverse 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 when compared to 2022 (30,122), a reduction<sup>9</sup>.

As of December 2023, the total number of workers (not seasonal adjusted) was 18,000, according to PRDOLHR's statistics for this worker group, experiencing a reduction in total workers with respect to October 2023 (16,000) of 2,000 workers. We conclude that this workforce reduction is closely related to climate change. Extended periods of heat and drought have a negative impact on agricultural production. 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 to attract a workforce and to retain the current one.

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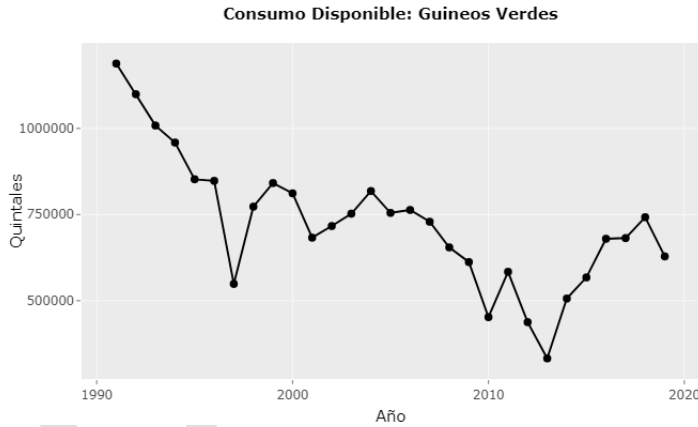
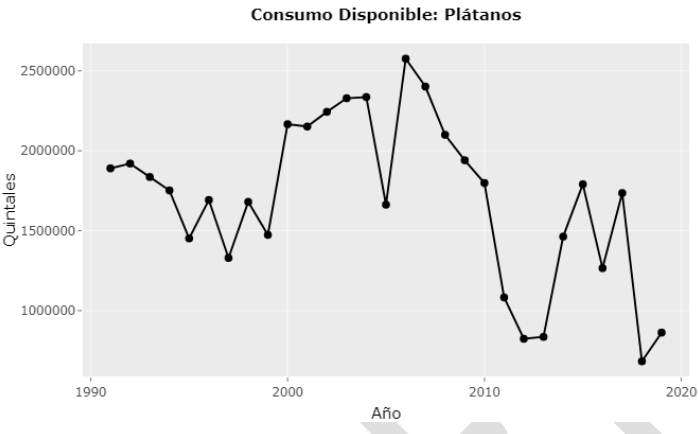
<sup>9</sup> In preparing the Agricultural Outreach Plan for 2023-2027, we faced the lack of statistics and data from governmental agencies responsible for keeping track of agricultural activities in Puerto Rico. Even the most Federal Agricultural Census for 2020, is still not been published by the US Department of Agriculture. This poses a big challenge to provide up to date data for the AOP.

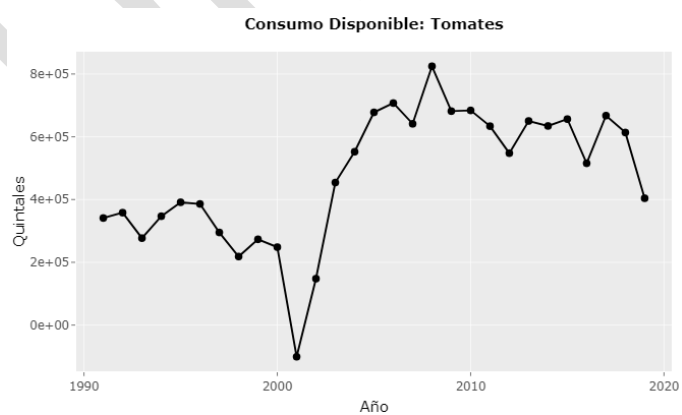
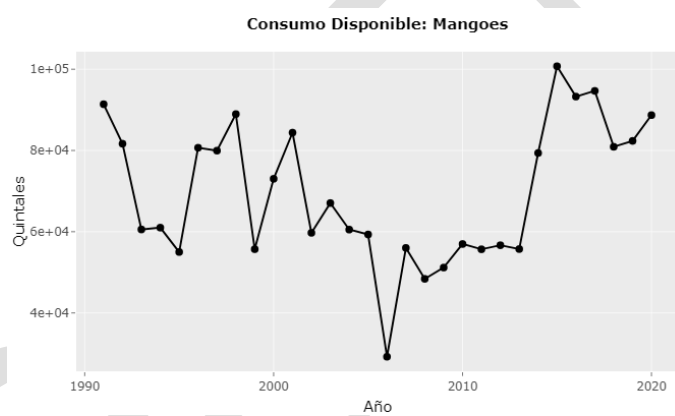
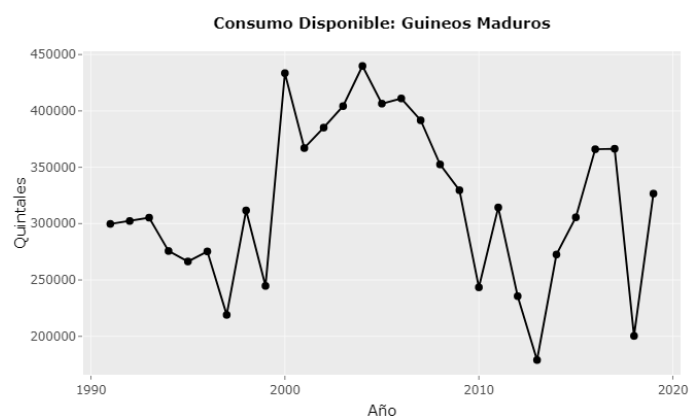
According to the Puerto Rico Statistics Institute for 2019, we can pinpoint the top five labor intensive crops as follows based on the quantity harvested:

| Crop          | Quantity Harvested |
|---------------|--------------------|
| Plantain      | 805,805 quintals   |
| Green Bananas | 606,569 quintals   |
| Banana        | 326,614 quintals   |
| Mango         | 282,726 quintals   |
| Tomatoes      | 218,629 quintals   |

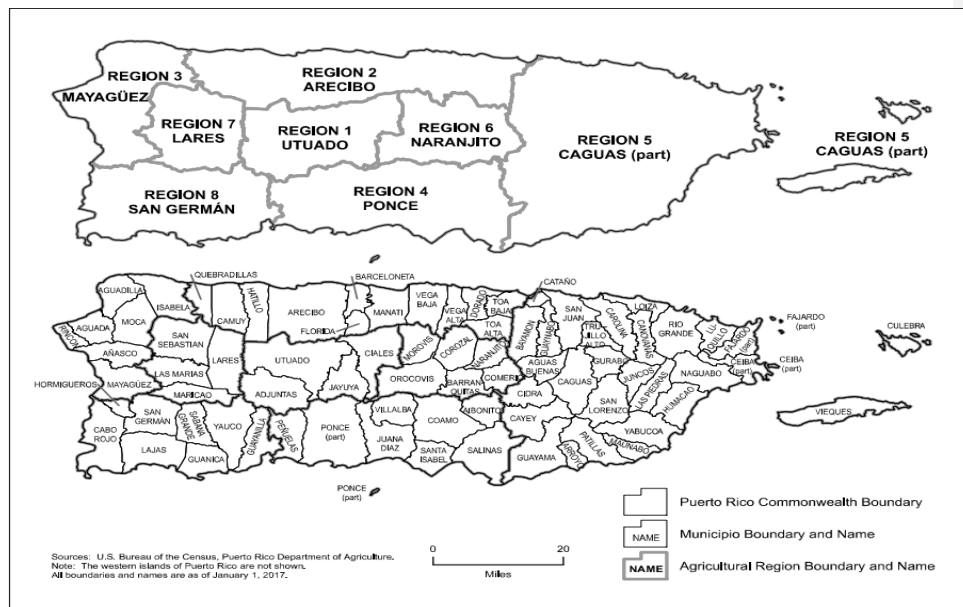
The Plantain industry remains among the top five most labor-intensive crops. Growing coffee represents one of the major contributions to the Puerto Rico's economy, one of its main businesses and way of life for much of the population of the central area of the island. According to the USDA Census of 2017, there are about 1,251 coffee farms, of whom the vast majority are small and medium producers. Coffee farms are mainly located in the central and western region of Puerto Rico although other small farms could be found in the Caguas region per the 2017 Agricultural Census. The major coffee harvesting was in the regions of Utuado, Lares and San Germán comprising of 15 municipalities in the central and western region. The months of heavy activity for this crop is during the months of September, October, and November.

Consumption of Puerto Rico’s main crops in the last 30 years





## 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. Mayagüez, 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.

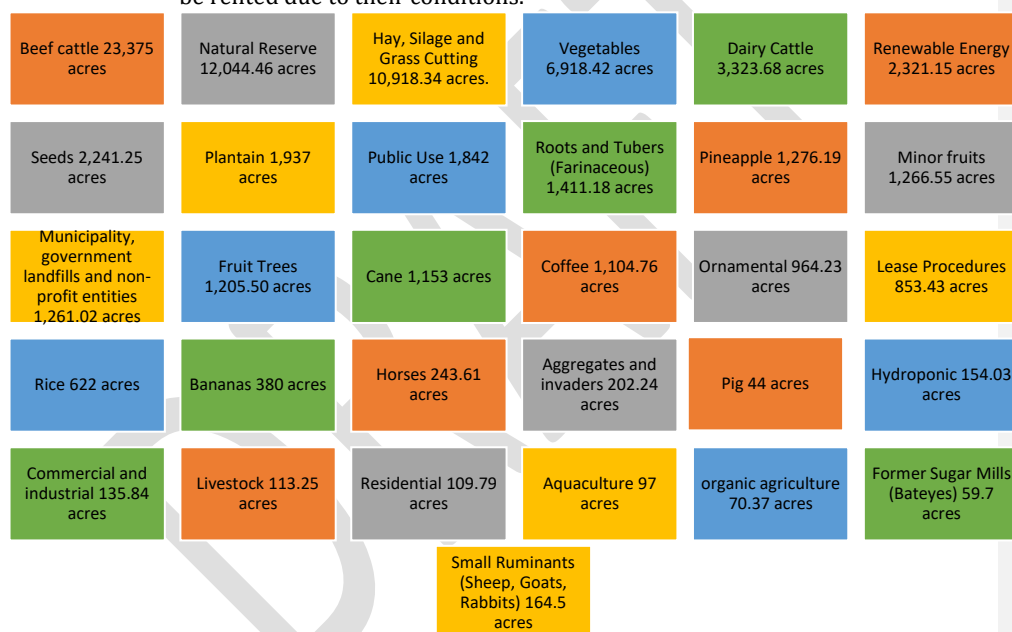


Table 46. Plantains Harvested for Sale: 2018

[Harvested and planted cuerdas were assumed to be the same. For meaning of abbreviations and symbols, see introductory text.]

| Geographic area             | Plantains |         |            |                |             |                                |
|-----------------------------|-----------|---------|------------|----------------|-------------|--------------------------------|
|                             | Farms     | Cuerdas | Trees      |                |             | Quantity harvested (thousands) |
|                             |           |         | 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   | 1,963,720  | 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.]

| Harvested and planted cuerdas were assumed to be the same. For meaning or abbreviations and symbols, see introductory text. |         |         |           |                |             |                                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------|-----------|----------------|-------------|-----------------------------------|
| Geographic area                                                                                                             | Bananas |         |           |                |             |                                   |
|                                                                                                                             | Farms   | Cuerdas | Trees     |                |             | Quantity harvested<br>(thousands) |
|                                                                                                                             |         |         | 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 - Mayaguez                                                                                                         | 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 German                                                                                                       | 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 |         |           |                |             |                              |
|-----------------------------|------------|---------|-----------|----------------|-------------|------------------------------|
|                             | Farms      | Cuerdas | Plants    |                |             | Quantity harvested<br>(tons) |
|                             |            |         | 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 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 soaring 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 productions 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.

- **Inflated 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 inflated 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.
- 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.
- 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 demanding situation of a severe lack of workers turned into a real crisis forcing many agricultural employers, 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 125 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 | Totals |
|--------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|--------|
| <b>Employer</b>                | 2    | 17   | 29   | 27   | 8    | 83     |
| <b>Job Orders<br/>Received</b> | 2    | 22   | 35   | 56   | 25   | 140    |

|                                            |    |     |     |     |     |       |
|--------------------------------------------|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| <b>Job orders<br/>approved by<br/>CNPC</b> | 2  | 20  | 30  | 51  | 20  | 125   |
| <b>H2-A Visa<br/>Requested</b>             | 14 | 177 | 266 | 491 | 218 | 1,166 |
| <b>Foreign Workers<br/>in PR</b>           | 14 | 91  | 204 | 355 | 56  | 720   |

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 (PRDOE), 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.

- (8) Provide an assessment of the unique needs of farmworkers by summarizing migrant and Seasonal Farm Worker (MSFW) characteristics (including if they are from certain countries, what language(s) they speak, the approximate number of MSFWs in the State during peak season and low season, and whether they tend to be migrant, seasonal, or year-round farmworkers). This information must consider data supplied by the 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. 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.

As indicated by the Worker Group Survey, specifically Table 6, which details people employed by the Main Occupational Group (Not Seasonally Adjusted), the agricultural workforce in Puerto Rico is currently at 50,000, exhibiting an increase in workers. This survey encompasses the entire agricultural workforce, irrespective of seasonal status, even though agricultural employers in peak seasons are obligated to utilize the H-2A program.

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. Despite this, farmworkers in Puerto Rico continue to represent the predominant agricultural workforce, totaling 50,000 as of November 2023, according to data from the Worker Group Survey (Table 6, Not Seasonally Adjusted). 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. This decline is 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.

- (9) Outreach Activities. Local office outreach activities must be designed to meet the needs of MSFWs in the State and to locate and contact MSFWs that are not being reached through normal intake activities. Describe the State agency's proposed strategies for:

Efforts are addressed to hire four Outreach Workers due to retirement and/or resignation. The hiring efforts are to hire Outreach workers for the local areas of Sureste (Humacao), AMSI Guayama (Guayama), Mayagüez, and Norte Central (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 conducted during the period of July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2027.

**Describe the State agency's proposed strategies for:**

- (1) Contacting farmworkers who are not being reached by normal intake activities conducted by 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 March 31, 2024.



Outreach workers are full time and make contacts with 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)

When making contacts, Outreach workers obtain permission from the agricultural employers 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 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 help the worker to complete an application for ES (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 conduct 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.

The State Monitor Advocate also meets and collaborates 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.

The six Outreach Workers (four of the six outreach positions are in the process of being filled) are stationed within Puerto Rico One-Stop Career Centers. These centers are located close to high populations of MSFWs.

Since the staff is strategically located close to the MSFWs population the goal is to reach as many MSFWs as possible from the estimated number of 22,000 farmworkers during the period of July 1, 2023, and June 30, 2024. All Outreach workers are full-time staff. Therefore, an objective for the AOP is for the outreach staff to conduct frequent visits to farms with a workforce of MSFW at least four days per week. Outreach workers must perform at a minimum of 25 MSFWs contacts per week (1,200 per program year) and 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.

**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                             |

| Area/service location      | Outreach workers | Contacts per year | Designated outreach worker status |
|----------------------------|------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Mayagüez/Las Marías Region | 1                | 1,200             | Vacant                            |
| <b>Total</b>               | <b>6</b>         | <b>7,200</b>      |                                   |

(2) Providing technical assistance to outreach staff. 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 and Employment-Related Law Complaint System (“Complaint System” described at 20 CFR 658 Subpart E), 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.

The hired Outreach Workers were trained and participated in workshops provided by PathStone, Legal Services Farmworker Division, PROSHA and the Wage & Hour Division to professionally train the Outreach workers of WP and PathStone in all required areas and competencies established on 20 CFR 653.103. Some of the areas and topics covered were:

- Develop strategies and techniques to locate and contact MSFWs to provide information for services available at the local AJCs.
- Use the Labor Market Information to inform MSFWs of specific job openings (agricultural and non-agricultural) available to them.
- 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 Standards Act (FLSA), the Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers Protection Act (MSPA), Equal Employment Opportunity laws, H-2A Regulations, Housing, and other State regulations governing MSFWs.

- Assist MSFWs in filling job applications, preparing worker complaints, making appointments, and making transportation arrangements.
- Provide information about services available through electronic means and teach them how to access this information.
- Identify qualified MSFWs seeking employment and plan follow-up visits to provide needed services to improving their 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 orders while performing field outreach activities.
- Refer qualified MSFWs to job openings of their interest.

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.

The SMA will be 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 work in the development of monitoring tools that will simplify the timely and accurate identification of issues and a series of 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 of the AJCs, 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 staff training and awareness across core programs, including the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program and training on identifying UI eligibility issues.

To comply with federal regulations, all WP must be trained in the Agricultural Recruitment System (ARS). The training provides vital 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. All Outreach activities will be funded with Wagner-Peyser funds for those activities managed by the Employment Service. All outreach activities managed by PathStone will be funded through WIOA- 167 funds.

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. The SMA will make recommendations to the AJCs to ensure that key staff will be granted access to the local UI system to allow them to view basic 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) Provide outreach staff professional development activities to ensure that they can provide high-quality services to both jobseekers and employers.

20 CFR 653.107(i-p) requires PRDOLHR to operate an Outreach Program to reach farmworkers that for several reasons normally did not reach ES local offices. The PRDOLHR provides outreach through six career centers in agriculturally significant areas and continues to reinforce the Outreach program to comply with regulations as required by 20 CFR 653.107. These centers will be part of the State's WIOA One-Stop Centers system, serving as either a comprehensive One-Stop Center or an affiliated One-Stop site. The employment-related needs of MSFWs are of primary importance to the PRDOLHR. These needs will be a priority for the following six significant career centers:

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 |
| Mayagüez / Las Marías Region | Mayagüez, Las Marías                                                                                    |

Source: PRDOLHR.

The MSFW Outreach Specialists and the American Job Centers staff are included in cross-training from the standpoint of sharing information on the ES and Career Centers programs as well as learning the basics of the array of programs offered through the Centers 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 farm workers and agricultural employers through a one-stop delivery system. Describe the State agency's proposed strategies for:

(A) Providing a full range of employment and training services to the agricultural community, both farm workers and agricultural employers, through a one-stop delivery system. This includes:

(i) How career and training services required under WIOA Title I will be provided to MSFWs through the one-stop centers; and

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, MSFWs receive an orientation which is a requirement prior to receiving any services for which they might apply. Through this orientation, workers will become aware of the range of services

available to them at the center 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 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 for which they may qualify.

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 Complaint System to farm workers and other farm worker 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 for the U.S. Workers (ARS) to agricultural employers and how they intend 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 fear using the system due to the excessive costs it represents for them to provide the additional guarantees to MSFWs such as housing, and transportation, reimbursement, as required by applicable regulations. State laws have been forwarded to stimulate and regulate the employment of foreign workers with no avail since this is a Federal occupied field.

Agricultural industry in Puerto Rico is far different from the agricultural industry in the United States and local agricultural employers cannot afford the costs of implementing the required guarantees they need to provide to MSFWs, local or foreign guest workers.

To enhance the advertising of the agricultural recruitment system, the Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources (PRDOLRH) is utilizing various media channels such as radio, television, and billboards to promote the employment platform. This platform provides employers access to a personal resource bank of available workers and links for registration on the platform for recruitments.

(6) Other Requirements.

(A) *Collaboration.* Describe any collaborative agreements the State Workforce Agency (SWA) has with other MSFW service providers, including NFJP grantees and other service providers. Describe how the SWA intends to build up or increase collaboration with existing partners and establish 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 into 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. 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 PRDOL&HR aim to foster a synergistic partnership that promotes efficiency and delivers valuable support to the workforce and business community.

The Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources (PRDOL&HR) 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, PRDOL&HR 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, PRDOL&HR 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.

(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, for at least forty-five 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 interest and allowing 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; and 3) transmit the comments and recommendations received and its responses with the submission of the AOP.

- i. The AOP must include a statement confirming that 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. Include the list of organizations from which information and suggestions were solicited, any comments received, and responses to those comments.

The PRDOLHR will provide the opportunity for all interested parties to review and comment on the draft AOP. The organizations listed below will receive the draft AOP and are invited to comments. As the program year progresses and the needs of the agribusiness community evolves, the PDOLHR will continue to collaborate with partners of the agricultural community to explore novel approaches to meeting the demands of Puerto Rico's expanding agricultural industry through collaborative agreements.

The following organizations will receive the draft AOP:

- a. Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE) / Migrant Education Program.
- b. Puerto Rico Farmworker Health Program.
- c. Puerto Rico Legal Services Farmworker Division.
- d. Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture.
- e. Department of Export and Commerce (PRDEDC) / WDP.
- f. PathStone Corporation.
- g. USDOL Wage and Hours Division.



(C) *Data Assessment.* Review the previous four-year Wagner-Peyser Act data reports on performance. Note whether the State has been meeting its goals to provide MSFWs with quantitatively proportionate services as compared to non-MSFWs. If it has not met these goals, explain why the State believes that 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. As we can see, the number of MSFWs registered as of June 30, 2023, is extremely low when compared to non-MSFWs.

| Program<br>Year | Non-MSFW | MSFWs |
|-----------------|----------|-------|
| PY2020          | 5,566    | 59    |
| PY2021          | 8,111    | 198   |
| PY2022          | 11,674   | 268   |
| Total           | 25,351   | 525   |

Policies and procedures were put in place to address this situation and for the proper classification of MSFWs in the PRIS system. Changes are to be 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 must 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.
- Ensure Outreach Workers are not only reaching out to MSFWs but providing the services to which they are entitled.

(D) *Assessment of progress.* The plan must include an explanation of what was achieved based on the previous AOP, what was not achieved, an explanation as to why the State believes the goals were not achieved, and how the State intends to remedy the gaps in 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 7,047 MSFWs were contacted. This is 4,473 contacts less than the planned of 11,520 MSFWs to be contacted. This was since in PY2022, two out of the five Outreach workers resigned. 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 distinct reasons normally did not reach ES local offices. Once the vacant positions are filled out, ES will be in position to provide the entire 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 allows 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 that the State Monitor Advocate 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.

#### 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><b>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).</b></p>                                                                                                                                                   |
| 2.                                           | <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><b>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.</b></p> |

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3. | <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><b>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.</b></p>                                                                                           |
| 4. | <p>SWA officials:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Initiate the discontinuation of services;</li> <li>2) Make the determination that services need to be discontinued;</li> <li>3) Make the determination to reinstate services after the services have been discontinued;</li> <li>4) Approve corrective action plans;</li> <li>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;</li> <li>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</li> </ol> |

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    | 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.             |
| 5. | 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). |

#### 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.

(b) **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 (IEL/CE) 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 (IEL/CE).
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.

(c) **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 OneStop 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.

**ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAM CERTIFICATIONS AND ASSURANCES**

**Commented [CV4]:** Necesitamos contestación a cada una.

| <b>States must provide written and signed certifications that:</b> |                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 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;                                                                                        |
| <b>The State Plan must include assurances that:</b>                |                                                                                                                                                                     |

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 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](mailto:ICDocketMgr@ed.gov) and reference OMB Control Number 1894-0005.

#### SF424B - Assurances – Non-Construction Programs

<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>

2. SF LLL Form – Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (required, only if applicable)

<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 |

| APPLICANT'S ORGANIZATION                            | Enter information in this column |
|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 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-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.** 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.

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.

| <b>Council Representative</b>                                                                     | <b>Current Term<br/>Number/Vacant</b> | <b>Beginning<br/>Date of Term<br/>Mo./Yr.</b> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)                                                       |                                       |                                               |
| Parent Training and Information Center                                                            |                                       |                                               |
| Client Assistance Program                                                                         |                                       |                                               |
| Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)<br>Counselor (ExOfficio if Employed by the VR<br>Agency) |                                       |                                               |
| Community Rehabilitation Program Service<br>Provider                                              |                                       |                                               |
| Business, Industry, and Labor                                                                     |                                       |                                               |
| Business, Industry, and Labor                                                                     |                                       |                                               |
| Business, Industry, and Labor                                                                     |                                       |                                               |
| Business, Industry, and Labor                                                                     |                                       |                                               |

|                                                                                                                                                                         |  |  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|
| Disability Advocacy Groups                                                                                                                                              |  |  |
| Current or Former Applicants for, or Recipients of, VRservices                                                                                                          |  |  |
| Section 121 Project Directors in the State (as applicable)                                                                                                              |  |  |
| State Educational Agency Responsible for Students with Disabilities Eligible to Receive Services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) |  |  |
| State Workforce Development Board                                                                                                                                       |  |  |
| VR Agency Director (Ex Officio)                                                                                                                                         |  |  |

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.

In this and the following sections, the results of the most recent Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment of Rehabilitation Services, conducted 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 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 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.

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 conducted by the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration (VRA) to comply with the development of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment of Vocational Rehabilitation Needs, conducted 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 conduct and achieve the proposed strategies.
2. It 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. It 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. It 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. It 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. It 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. Adopts with pleasure the strategies designed for the provision of Pre-Employment Transition and Transition Services.
2. It 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. It 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. It 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: Universidad Sagrado Corazón (Community Outreach), Colegio de Cinematografía, Arts and Television (CCAT), Atlantic University, Channel 6, Liceo de Arte y Tecnología, among others.

2. It 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. It requests the ARV to share with CERPR the Normative Communications in the draft stage, so that the Council can conduct its role, established by the Rehabilitation Act, to actively participate in the development of the public policy of the Agency.

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 conduct 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 (PRAI) 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, with the purpose of facilitating the referrals to promote 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 in December 2023.

7. We accept the recommendation and inform you that the VRA participates in the meetings of WIOA State Board, which 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.

The VRA does not reject the CER's recommendations since several of them are part of the agency's work plan and initiatives and are in the process of being analyzed and implemented.



**(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;

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 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 (WBA). The services best valued by professionals and employers consulted were WBA (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 WBA 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.

The VRA issues an annual public announcement for the contracting of CRPs that provide services to consumers with the most significant disabilities. The VRA currently maintains contractual agreements with CRPs across the island. The VRA conducts orientations, offers technical assistance, and conducts monitoring activities in all its stages for the provision of services, and during the contract period between the VRA and each CRP. All PRCs that have identified areas with some type of need for improvement during any stage of the monitoring process shall be provided with technical assistance.

The Agency will expand outreach efforts for the purpose of attracting other potential service providers. This shall be conducted through orientations provided to 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.

**CRPs:** 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).

**ILCs:** 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; and

Please, refer to section C.(2) below.

(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., CSNA, 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—

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.
- Continue promoting, among the Counseling Service Centers' staff, the use of the reports developed and that allows them to see a list per work zone (caseload) with or without the information registered in the required fields, including:
  - MSG Active Cases: Shows the active cases of participants in each caseload and the registered dates for the elements 85, 343-347, and 401.
  - 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).

- Quarters for Post Exit Follow Up: 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 conducting 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 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.
- 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.

#### A. Support innovation and expansion activities;

The VRA will continue to identify innovation and expansion needs. Some strategies are:

- 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 promoting 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

The PRVRA has identified several strategies necessary to achieve the goals and priorities established in section (I).

The VRA has identified several strategies necessary to achieve the goals and priorities established in section (I), above.

**Goal 1:** Achieve greater effectiveness in the process of providing services to applicants/consumers for a successful integration into the labor force.

**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 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.

**Goal 2: Contribute to increasing the skills and opportunities of students with disabilities through the provision of Pre-Employment and Transition Services.**

**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.**

**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.
- Conduct 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 (CAME, by its acronym in Spanish).
- Establish goals (quotas) for the coordination of job experiences conducted directly by the personnel of the CAME.

D. Improve the performance of the VR and Supported Employment programs in assisting individuals with disabilities to achieve quality employment outcomes.

The VRA, in coordination and collaboration with the State Rehabilitation Council (CERPR), has identified the following goals and priorities necessary to conduct vocational rehabilitation and supported employment programs.

**Goal 1:** Achieve greater effectiveness in the process of providing services to applicants/consumers for a successful integration into the labor.

**Priorities:**

- Emphasize the importance of applying public policy, counseling, and employment alternatives, in tune with the times and needs of the consumer.
- Promote collaboration with other agencies and resources to ensure that applicants/consumers receive information and services necessary to enter the labor force.
- Strengthen approaches and services to employers to promote the recruitment of people with disabilities.
- Promote information exchange with applicants/consumers related to their vocational rehabilitation process.

**Goal 2:** Contribute to increasing the skills and opportunities of students with disabilities through the provision of Pre-Employment and Transition Services.

**Priorities:** Serve as many youths and students with disabilities as possible.

**Goal 3:** Strengthen administrative, programmatic, and technological procedures to achieve the required institutional efficiency.

**Priorities:** Facilitate processes using technology, review of public policy and staff strengthening.

These goals and priorities were developed taking into consideration the results of the Comprehensive Statewide Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs and the amendments set forth in the WIOA.

**(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;

**a. Strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals:**

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:

1. 465 technical assistances to personnel at the regional and central level, and
2. 20 training sessions for the personnel of the regional VRCSC (Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, Supervisors, Directors, and Rehabilitation Counseling Service Technicians) as follows:

| <b>Date</b>                                                            | <b>Activity/Trainings (topic)</b>                                                                                                                                          | <b>Number of participants</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 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<br>Nov. 16, 17 and 22, 2022<br>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<br>March 10, 2023                               | Performance Indicators under WIOA and PY 2021 Performance (Region: South)                                                                                                  | 51                            |
| February 10 and 22,<br>2023                                            | Performance Indicators under WIOA and PY 2021 Performance (Region: North Center)                                                                                           | 32                            |
| February 24-2023 and<br>March 17, 2023                                 | Performance Indicators under WIOA and PY 2021 Performance (Region: West)                                                                                                   | 35                            |
| February 13 and 16,<br>2023                                            | Performance Indicators under WIOA and PY 2021 Performance (Region: Metro East)                                                                                             | 32                            |
| February 27 and 28,<br>2023                                            | Performance Indicators under WIOA and PY 2021 Performance (Region: Center East)                                                                                            | 39                            |
| Total trained professionals*                                           |                                                                                                                                                                            | 313                           |

\*Includes employees who participated in more than one training course during the period.

The Rehabilitation Counseling Service Office (RCSO) offered training and technical assistance to employees of the Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Service Centers Services (VRCSC) and other support personnel, thus achieving:

- 236 trained professionals at the VRCSC
- 679 technical assistances to VRCSC professionals

The Assessment and Adjustment Office (AAO) conducted the following training and technical assistance activities:

Training of regional VRCSC personnel (Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, Supervisors, Rehabilitation Counseling Service Technicians, Occupational Therapists, among others) on:

- Sensibility towards the deaf population- on September 28 and 30 2022; 80 professionals participated.
- 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:

- January 25, 2023: 23 professionals of the North Center Region participated.
- February 3, 2023: 24 professionals of the South Region participated.
- February 8, 2023: 13 professionals of the Metro East Region participated.
- February 10, 2023: 17 professionals of the North Region participated.
- 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 conducted 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.
- Conducted 133 referrals to the mandatory WIOA programs as follows:
  - 25 referrals to Title I-Adult, Dislocated Workers, and Youth Program as follows:
    - 25 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 conducted 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 with 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:
  - October 24, 2022 –Vocational Rehabilitation Administration Services at the Transitional Service Center; seven (7) professionals participated.
  - 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 technical assistances
  - 537 technical assistances through telephone calls
  - 487 technical assistances 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 conduct Work-based Learning Experiences (WBL) in July 2022, where the following participated:
  - 8 Government agencies
  - 10 municipalities
  - 4 private companies
- Executed 15 contracts to offer pre-employment transition services through service fairs, as follows:
  - Global Education Exchange Opportunities, Inc.
  - Future Learning FLC Corporation
  - INOVA Build Inc.
  - Emprende.PR LLC.

- Centro de Adiestramiento para Personas con Impedimentos, Inc,
- JF Educational Services Inc.
- WES Innovation & Technology Inc.
- *Realizate*
- *Colegio Único de Oportunidades*
- Vocational & Transition Services, PSC
- Empleo Alianza, Corporation.
- L & G Enterprise Inc.
- New Vision, LLC
- Diamar Aldrey & Associates, LLC
- 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 in the six (6) regions of the agency. The agency executed contracts with the following entities:
- Future Learning FLC Corporation
- New Vision, LLC
- Emprande.PR LLC.
- Centro de Adiestramiento para Personas con Impedimentos, Inc,
- INOVA Build Inc.

- Vocational & Transition Services, PSC
- L & G Enterprise Inc.
- WES Innovation & Technology Inc.
- JF Educational Services Inc.
- *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 PETSO conducted 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:
    - 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.
    - Service Fairs – on the website of the agency on August 25, 2022.
    - 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:

- September 6, 2022, for Service fair proposals; 10 professionals participated.
- 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 at 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.

Note: The statistics provided include professionals who participated in various training courses 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 aid: Self-care strategies for professionals who aid;
- 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.

**Progress Report:**

*a. 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.



*b. 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:
  - Center East Region on November 9, 2022
  - North Center Regio on November 16, 2022
  - South Regio on November 30, 2022
  - North Region on December 7, 2022
  - West Region on December 20, 2022
  - Metro East Region and Central Level on January 18, 2023

*c. 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, 2023 "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 for the Sexes Act."
- Act No. 90 of August 7, 2020, "Act to Prohibit and Prevent Workplace Bullying 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.”

*d. The VRCSO conducted 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:

- 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.
  - Policy Directive No. 2015-02 Procedure to provide maintenance services to VRA applicants/consumers.
  - 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.
  - Policy Directive No. 2015-04 Procedure to provide transportation services to VRA applicants.
  - 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.
  - Continued reviewing the Manual for Medical Procedures.
- e. The VRCSC discussed:
- Policy Directive No. 2023-06, on December 12, 2022, at:
    - West Region on December 14, 2022.
    - North and Metro East Regions on December 15, 2022
    - Center East Region on December 16, 2022
    - North Center Region on December 22, 2022
    - South Region on January 9, 2023
  - Policy Directives No. 2023-07 and 2023-09, on December 14, 2022, at:

- East Metro Region on December 15, 2022
- North and Center East Regions on December 16, 2022
- North Center Region on December 22, 2022
- West Region on December 27, 2022
- South Region on January 9, 2023

f. The PETSO updated the following documents:

- Guidelines for Proposals, attachments, and related documentation for: Service Fairs (July 21, 2022) and 2023 Summer Camp (November 22, 2022).
- WBLE Public Announcement (April 18, 2023); Pre-employment Service Fair (July 21, 2022) and Summer Camp (August 12, 2022).
- Collaboration Agreement and related documents for WBLE on April 18, 2023.
- Policies and Procedures for Assessing the Reasonableness and Suitability for Judgment of Costs in Pre-employment Transition Services as of February 2, 2023.

The QCPMO:

- Developed Policy Directive 2023-02 Training on WIOA performance indicators and estimated annual achievements of the program for 2021, 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 Study on the Needs for Rehabilitation Services in Puerto Rico, jointly with the State Council on Rehabilitation, formalized a project and the following activities were conducted:
  - Revised and updated of Request for Proposal (RFP) and the Public Announcement (February 2023).
  - Submitted to the Office of the Administrator the RFP and Public Announcement for recommendations / approval / publication, as pertinent, on January 31, 2023;
  - The agency conducted 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;
  - From February 15 – 28, 2023, eleven (11) RFPs were submitted;

- Four (4) telephone consultations were answered in connection with the requirements established in the RFP;
- On April 5, 2023, four (4) proposals were received to develop the study on needs;
- Reviewed the Proposal Evaluation Form;
- Submitted a Report on Answers of the VRA to questions issued by proponents, related to Attachment I of the RFP (March 21, 2023);
- Requested the Operational Policy Administrator to call a meeting of the Proposal Evaluation Committee on April 5, 2023;
- Called a meeting of the Proposal Evaluation Committee on April 10, 2023;
- Drafted a Summary of Evaluated Proposals on April 19, 2023;
- Submitted to the Administrator a Contract Award Recommendation regarding the Comprehensive Needs Assessment of Rehabilitation Services in Puerto Rico (April 26, 2023);
- Notified proponents of the award to the entity that shall be conducting the study (April 28, 2023);
- Established the contract conditions for conducting the study; and
- Called the pertinent entities and held the initial meeting related to the needs assessment (June 9, 2023), where nine (9) professionals participated.

g. 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.

h. The Finance 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.

i. The Administration Office developed: Policy Directive No. 2023-03 Delivery of the proclamation of the rehabilitation counselors' week on March 16, 2023.

j. The Documents Division developed: Policy Directive No. 2023-04 Preventive measures for public document protection during the hurricane season, on May 26, 2023.

**Strategy:** Conduct 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 27 internal monitoring of 41,546 service files 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;
- 1 internal monitoring for the analysis of expired individualized plans for employment (St. 12) with 39,224 monitored records;
- Internal monitoring for the analysis of plans vs. expired plan, with 476 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;



- Internal monitoring of the maintenance service (lodging, transportation) with 374 monitored records;
- 1 internal monitoring of the transition process with 145 monitored records;
- Internal 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 files;
- 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:**

a. 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.

b. 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 programming 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.

***Performance of the Vocational Rehabilitation program with respect to the performance indicators established under section 116 of WIOA:***

During PY 2021 and 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 about the Performance Indicators and the correct and timely registration of the data required for each. 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.

***How were the funds reserved for innovation and expansion activities used:***

The VRA conducted the following innovation and expansion activities:

1. 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.

2. 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).

3. 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. See Goal 3, Strategies 2 and 5.

4. 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.

5. 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 fund allocation to both councils. Furthermore, it maintains its representation in the agency as well as its collaboration with both councils.

- (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

During PY 2021 and 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 about the Performance Indicators and the correct and timely registration of the data required for each. 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.

- (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).

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- (1) Expansion in the provision of services to blind individuals through referrals for employment to the Blind Individuals Program.

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**Progress Report:** The VRA provided 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.

(B) ☐ VR agency does NOT elect to receive title VI funds and understands that supported employment services must still be provided under title I.

(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 PRVRA 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:**

- 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 Centers of Support and Employment modes (CSEMs), 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, can achieve an employment outcome.
- Provide services at the CRP to at least 160 new cases during the period.



- Expand outreach 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 Office of Support and Employment Modes (OSEM) and the centers of support and employment modes (CSEMs) 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 CSEMs, to identify areas to be strengthened or improved.
- Continue conducting monitoring interventions to the CRPs 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 the provision of the supported employment services for the consumers with the most significant disabilities. Therefore, the PRVRA 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 Office of Support and Employment Modes (OSEM), at the central level of the PRVRA, intends to collaborate, aid, and facilitate the applicability of the public policy to the center of support and employment modes (CSEM), at the regional level, on career development services, services to employers and development of support and employment modes for the consumers. The OSEM staff contributes with other operational/administrative offices of the PRVRA, 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 PRVRA, through its CSEMs, 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.

OSEM and CSME staff also conducts monitoring activities with the purpose of verifying compliance, project development, quality of services, identify limitations, use of resources, and consumer's participation, among others.

### **Scope**

Individuals can receive up to 24 months of support for 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 CSEMs of the PRVRA; which offer support to the VR counselor 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 CSEM, he may receive services in the center of assessment and adjustment (CAA) of the PRVRA 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 CAA 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 conducted 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 to youth. The PRVRA will continue to provide SE and Extended Services to youth with the most significant disabilities referred from Transition. Through CRIS case management system, the CSEM will identify those consumers between ages 14-24.

PRVRA will make available resources for extended services for a period not exceeding 4 years. These services will be provided through contracting of CRPs. CSEM 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.

(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).

PRVRA will explore in the community, agencies, organizations, legislature and social interest groups, the availability of funds to the PRVRA for the provision of supported employment and extended services for the youth with the most significant disabilities. As part of those efforts, in 2016 the Agency signed a collaborative agreement with the State Council on Developmental Disabilities for the optimization of interagency resources, develop a community support network in favor of individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth, employment activities to promote inclusion of these population into integrated work settings, activities or projects to provide extended services, among others.

As for the outreach procedure to identify and serve persons with disabilities that are a minority, they do not apply to Puerto Rico. The Island is considered a Hispanic or Latino country, with a population of 3,194,807 of which 99% (3,163,735) are of Hispanic or Latino origin (Source: US Census Bureau, Census Estimate for 2022). Therefore, the VRA considers that there is no need to implement any type of procedure to identify people with disabilities who are a minority.

The VRA has Community Outreach Units, within the Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Service Centers Services operating in six (6) regions. These units have personnel that stays connected with various sources of referrals, such as: schools, hospitals, institutions specialized in the provision of services to the population with disabilities, and

public/private agencies. This personnel participates in activities (orientations about vocational rehabilitation services, job fairs, among others) to broaden the dissemination of services and increase the inclusion of individuals with most significant disabilities and those identified as possibly underserved.

The Agency continues to be active and participates in the bills developed by the legislative assembly related to people with disabilities.

**(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:

(1) Estimates for next Federal fiscal year—

(A) VR Program; and

Based on VRA data for previous years and projections for PY 2024, the Agency estimates that 46,000 or more people with disabilities might be attended and considered to receive services during PY 2024. The purpose is to assist them in achieving an employment outcome and a more independent life. The VRA is not in the Order of Selection.

The following table shows a description of the service areas and the projected cost breakdown:

**SERVICE AREAS AND THE BREAKDOWN OF PROJECTED COSTS**

| 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) |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                   |                                          |                                                                           |                                       |                                                                    |

|                                               |  |        |                |     |
|-----------------------------------------------|--|--------|----------------|-----|
| Assessment<br>(purchased<br>services)         |  | 2,036  | \$0            | N/A |
| Physical and<br>Mental<br>Restoration         |  | 15,199 | \$241,350.74   | N/A |
| Training                                      |  | 18,294 | \$9,819,481.02 | N/A |
| Maintenance                                   |  | 5,733  | \$3,973,004.30 | N/A |
| Transportation                                |  | 4,501  | \$3,400,287.83 | N/A |
| Personal<br>assistance<br>(personal<br>aides) |  | 642    | \$451,265.86   | N/A |
| Assistive<br>Technology                       |  | 682    | \$785,799.27   | N/A |
| Post-<br>employment                           |  | 49     | \$5,045.62     | N/A |
| Small<br>businesses,<br>other                 |  | 264    | \$257,207.09   | N/A |



|                                               |        |                |                 |     |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------|----------------|-----------------|-----|
| Community Rehabilitation Programs contracting |        | 867            | \$2,434,096.00  | N/A |
| Supported Employment Services                 |        | included above |                 | N/A |
| <b>Total</b>                                  | 46,000 | 48,267**       | \$21,367,537.73 | N/A |

\* Estimates based on FFY 2022 projections.

\*\* Duplicate consumers who receive a diversity of services depending on the nature of this (E.g., A consumer in training may also include support services, transportation, personal assistance, etc., and be receiving assistive technology services, among others).

(B) 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) |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|

The VRA has estimated the provision of supported employment services to 160 eligible individuals during PY 2024.

**Each priority category, if under an order of selection:**

Not applicable.

**The number of individuals who are eligible for VR services, but are not receiving such services due to an order of selection; and**

Not applicable.

**The cost of services for the number of individuals estimated to be eligible for services. If under an order of selection, identify the cost of services for each priority category:**

Please, refer to section (f)(1)(A). above. Order of selection not applicable.

**(g) Order of Selection.**

[X] 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;

[N/A]

(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

[N/A]

(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.

[N/A]

(2) Has the VR agency elected to serve eligible individuals outside of the order of selection who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment?

[N/A] Yes

[N/A] No

**(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—

(A) The number and type of personnel that are employed by the VR agency in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services, including ratios of qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors to clients;

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.

As of September 30, 2023, the VRA has a payroll of 639 employees and the projection is to attend about 46,000 people with disabilities during program year 2024. The reason for a reduction of these projections compared to previous PY is due to the closure of cold cases to be conducted during PY 2023. 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.

#### **BREAKDOWN COUNSELORS AND NEW CASELOADS**

| <b>Fiscal Year</b> | <b>Total caseloads in the period*</b> | <b>New caseloads</b> | <b>New VR counselors</b> |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| 2023               | 151                                   | 0                    | 10                       |
| 2022               | 151                                   | 0                    | 4                        |
| 2021               | 153                                   | 0                    | 15                       |
| 2020               | 153                                   | 0                    | 15                       |
| 2019               | 154                                   | 3                    | 0                        |

\*Active caseloads. In some of them the VR Counseling Supervisors are doing the case management (vacant caseloads).

#### **BREAKDOWN AVERAGE CASELOADS FOR VR COUNSELOR 2019-2023**

| <b>Fiscal Year</b> | <b>Number of caseloads</b> | <b>Active cases</b> | <b>Cases closed</b> | <b>Population served</b> | <b>Average cases per caseload</b> |
|--------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 2023               | 151                        | 48,275              | 7,761               | 56,036                   | 320                               |

| <b>Fiscal Year</b> | <b>Number of caseloads</b> | <b>Active cases</b> | <b>Cases closed</b> | <b>Population served</b> | <b>Average cases per caseload</b> |
|--------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 2022               | 151                        | 50,210              | 8,024               | 58,234                   | 333                               |
| 2021               | 153                        | 52,404              | 6,393               | 58,797                   | 343                               |
| 2020               | 153                        | 53,280              | 3,966               | 57,246                   | 348                               |
| 2019               | 154                        | 54,002              | 6,402               | 60,404                   | 350                               |

The VRA continues to strengthen work teams to provide agile services that respond to the needs of people with disabilities. Currently, the VRA has 113 VR counselors managing cases. To provide other necessary services in the rehabilitation process (assessment, employment-related services, among others), the agency has 220 support staff.

The following table breaks down VRA employees by staff category:

#### **DESCRIPTION OF PRVRA STAFF**

| <b>Staff category</b> | <b>Total positions</b> |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Counseling staff      | 113                    |
| Support staff         | 220                    |
| Administrative staff  | 147                    |

| <b>Staff category</b> | <b>Total positions</b> |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Other staff           | 1                      |
| <b>TOTAL</b>          | <b>481</b>             |

(B) The number of personnel currently needed by the VR agency to provide VR services, broken down by personnel category; and

| <b>Personnel Category</b> | <b>No. of Personnel Currently Needed</b> |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Counseling staff          | 50                                       |
| Support staff             | 207                                      |
| Administrative staff      | 124                                      |
| Other staff               | 0                                        |
| <b>TOTAL</b>              | <b>381</b>                               |

(C) 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.

| <b>Personnel Category</b> | <b>No. of Personnel Employed</b> | <b>Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years</b> |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Counseling staff          | 113                              | 1                                                   |
| Support staff             | 220                              | 37                                                  |
| Administrative staff      | 147                              | 46                                                  |
| Other staff               | 1                                | 0                                                   |
| <b>TOTAL</b>              | <b>481</b>                       | <b>84</b>                                           |

(D) Ratio of qualified VR counselors to clients:

Ratio = Number of Clients ÷ Number of VR Counselors = 46,000 ÷ 113 ≈ 407

In summary, the ratio of VR counselors to clients as of 2023 is approximately 1:407

(E) Projected number of individuals to be served in 5 years: The current projection for the program year 2024 is about 46,000 people.

(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.

As established in the Procedures Manual for the Training of All Staff of the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration, the PRVRA promotes and emphasizes the continuing education of its employees. Therefore, it conducts 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 because of the needs identified in the needs assessment study, monitoring reports and performance evaluations.

The following is a breakdown of some of the training activities offered to the rehabilitation counseling staff and other related professionals during PYs 2022 and 2023:

| Training                                                    | Participants |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Supervision Academy                                         | 15           |
| Vocational Interest Inventory Administration                | 10           |
| Government resources administration                         | 111          |
| Analyzing gender intersectionality and functional diversity | 129          |

| Training                                                                   | Participants |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Legal aspects of supervision                                               | 5            |
| Healthy self-esteem: Key for personal success                              | 61           |
| Certification on leadership in human capital management                    | 7            |
| Professional certification on mediation and labor affairs                  | 2            |
| How to deal with difficult people and situations                           | 145          |
| Competency in multicultural counseling and social justice                  | 177          |
| Assertive communication                                                    | 39           |
| Effective communication at workplace                                       | 22           |
| Annual congress of the people with disabilities ombudsman                  | 1            |
| 11th Conference and Annual Assembly 2022- Occupational Therapy             | 1            |
| 5th Congress of Occupational Therapy in Mental Health                      | 3            |
| Audiology Academy Annual Convention 2023                                   | 1            |
| Developing a leader employee, encouraging organizational goals achievement | 7            |
| Development of high impact objectives in labor effectiveness               | 15           |

| Training                                                                                            | Participants |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Discrimination at workplace                                                                         | 13           |
| Universal Design                                                                                    | 158          |
| Education and empowerment about transition to adult life services and independent living            | 2            |
| Helping professionals gathering: Selfcare strategies for helping professionals                      | 2            |
| Hope, possibility, and effort: How to advance, reach and persevere during intense challenging times | 96           |
| Professional ethics during times of zoonosis                                                        | 2            |
| Differentiated evaluation and transition                                                            | 165          |
| Compassion fatigue                                                                                  | 65           |
| Equal pay for equal salary                                                                          | 21           |
| Generations integration at workplace                                                                | 19           |
| Use of labor market information during the occupational decision-making process                     | 25           |
| Mental health and anxiety disorders                                                                 | 22           |

| Training                                                                                         | Participants |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Leadership. Motivation and work teams' development                                               | 27           |
| Loss management                                                                                  | 158          |
| Project management                                                                               | 1            |
| Success measure in professional practice                                                         | 42           |
| The need for the inclusion of VR professionals and their role as part of the athlete's formation | 2            |
| Professional panel: Social presence of the VR counseling                                         | 180          |
| Strategic Planning for Supervisors                                                               | 19           |
| Suicide prevention                                                                               | 391          |
| First aids in mental health                                                                      | 55           |
| ARCI Test "Aguilar-Resto Career Indicator" for career selection                                  | 2            |
| Challenges and strategies for the supervision of students and professionals or recent research   | 2            |
| Sensibility in sign language                                                                     | 10           |
| Sensibility towards deaf people                                                                  | 21           |

| Training                                                                              | Participants |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Sensibility and cultural competency when providing services to the LGBTTTQ+ community | 101          |
| Supervision styles and how they can influence employees' motivation                   | 23           |
| Effective telecommuting with Microsoft tools                                          | 10           |
| Skills transference and goal selection for participants with disabilities             | 7            |
| Postsecondary transition                                                              | 121          |
| Values for public employees                                                           | 139          |
| Domestic violence: Live without fear                                                  | 218          |
| TOTAL:                                                                                | 2,870        |

Source: PRVRA, PYs 2022 and 2023. Includes employees who participated in more than one training activity.

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.

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 using 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.

i. LIST OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE STATE  
THAT ARE PREPARING VR PROFESSIONALS, BY TYPE OF PROGRAM;

Puerto Rico has various institutions of higher education that are preparing professionals in the rehabilitation field. The PRVRA has agreements with two (2) universities that prepare professionals in the rehabilitation counseling field. The purpose of such agreements is to provide the students with the opportunity to conduct their practicum in the facilities of our agency. In addition, the PRVRA recruits graduates from these institutions and others:

1. 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
2. UPR, Medical Sciences Campus, has the following programs: Occupational Therapy; Physical Therapy; Master's degree in Speech Pathology; and Nursing
3. Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico (Ponce) has the Rehabilitation Counseling programs.

ii. THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED AT EACH OF THOSE  
INSTITUTIONS, BROKEN DOWN BY TYPE OF PROGRAM; AND

1. University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus: Rehabilitation Counseling Graduate Program: 66 students enrolled.
2. University of Puerto Rico, Medical Sciences Campus: 375 students enrolled in the following programs: Occupational Therapy (48); Physical Therapy (79); Master of Speech Pathology (30); and Nursing (218).

3. Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico, Ponce Campus: 27 students enrolled.
  4. Central University of Bayamón: 93 students enrolled in the following programs: Rehabilitation Counseling Graduate Program; Bachelor of Psychology; Bachelor of Social Work; Certification in Vocational Evaluation and Certification in Visual Impairments.
- iii. 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.
1. University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus: Rehabilitation Counseling Graduate Program 23 graduate students. Staff Category: Counseling
  2. University of Puerto Rico, Medical Sciences Campus: 173 graduate students in the following programs: Occupational Therapy (16 graduates); Physical Therapy (20 graduates); Master of Speech Pathology (23 graduates); and Nursing (114 graduates). Staff Category: Support
  3. Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico, Ponce Campus: 6 graduate students in the Rehabilitation Counseling Graduate Program. Staff Category: Counseling
  4. Central University of Bayamón: 24 graduates from the following programs: Rehabilitation Counseling Graduate Program (4 graduates) / Staff category: Counseling. Bachelor of Psychology



(8 graduates); Bachelor of Social Work (12 graduates); Certification in Vocational Evaluation (0 graduates) and Certification in Visual Impairments (0 graduates). Staff Category: Support.

(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 Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (VRA) is dedicated to a strategic approach for the recruitment, preparation, and retention of qualified personnel. This approach is designed to address both current and projected needs for skilled staff and involves active coordination with institutions of higher education and professional associations. Our plan includes:

- Targeted Recruitment: Focused efforts to recruit individuals from diverse backgrounds, including minorities and persons with disabilities, to enrich our workforce. This includes outreach to universities and professional networks.
- Partnerships with Educational Institutions: Collaboration with universities, such as the University of Puerto Rico and the Pontifical Catholic University of Ponce, for "practicum" opportunities and recruitment of graduates. These partnerships aim to bridge the gap between academic preparation and practical application in the field.
- Continuous Professional Development: Ongoing training and development programs are provided to our staff, ensuring they are equipped with the latest skills and knowledge. This includes workshops and seminars

conducted by the PR College of Rehabilitation Counseling Professionals and other relevant bodies.

- Inclusive Hiring Practices: Adherence to the Equal Employment Opportunity Law for Persons with Disabilities, including additional considerations for applicants with disabilities, and a commitment to non-discriminatory hiring practices across all demographics.
- Human Resource Management: Regular analysis and realignment of staff based on the needs of our service centers, coupled with a robust human resource planning strategy that includes succession planning and forecasting future resource requirements.

(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:

- 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

We are committed to providing comprehensive training in assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology. This includes collaboration with entities involved in State programs under the Assistive Technology Act of 1998, ensuring our staff are proficient in the latest rehabilitation technologies and methodologies.

- 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.

Procedures are in place for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources. This ensures that both our professionals and paraprofessionals are up to date with the latest developments in the field. Training on the amendments to the Rehabilitation Act made by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act is a key component of our staff development program, ensuring that our practices are aligned with current legislation and best practices.

These policies and procedures demonstrate our commitment to maintaining a workforce that is not only qualified but also continually evolving to meet the dynamic needs of the vocational rehabilitation field.

(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 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 PRVRA recruits' personnel who meet these requirements 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 PRDOL). 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 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 topics covered in such training include transition from school to work; vocational evaluation; supported employment; T; 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 conducted under collaborative agreements with the PRDE, as well as with the PRDOL 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 link with the DE. As part of this commitment, the agency participated in meetings with the Special Education Advisory Committee.

#### **COOPERATION, COLLABORATION, AND COORDINATION (Section 101(a)(11) of the Rehabilitation Act)**

**(j) Coordination with Education Officials.** 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 because 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 of providing 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, 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 (PIPE it's a Spanish Acronym to Individualized Plan for Employment), 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 PRVRA
  - 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 PRVRA recognizes the importance of the transition process in the youth with disabilities and will maintain its commitment in that it is conducted in accordance with federal and state regulations. The Agency is developing with the PRDE joint activities to strengthen the provision of transition services in general, and especially the pre-employment services to those youth with the most significant disabilities.

The PRVRA 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:

PRVRA'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:

- a. 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.
- b. Provide 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:
  - a. Career Exploration Counseling
  - b. Learning experiences based on employment
  - c. Counseling on opportunities to enter transition programs or post-secondary education.
  - d. Training to develop social and independent living skills necessary to be ready for employment and.
  - e. Instruction on self-intercessory
2. 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:
  - a. Medical and other aspects related to impediments.

- b. Requirements to request services and eligibility criteria of the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration.
  - c. How school personnel can assist the student in preparing to receive the services of the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration.
  - d. Identification of transition needs, such as assistive technology, orientation training and mobility; in other aspects.
  - e. The scope of pre-employment transition services and the requirements to benefit from them under WIOA.
  - f. The analysts of the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration will guide on the responsibilities of the Educational Agency compliance with Section 511 of WIOA 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. 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:

- a. Student's Social Security Number
- b. Updated Psychological Medical Evidence
- c. Academic History and Report Cards
- d. Psychosocial History
- e. Vocational Evaluation based on Law No. 263-2006
- f. Copy of the Certification of Functional and Pre-Employment Academic Skills based on Law 53-2016.
- g. Copy of the Individualized Educational Program (PEI)
- h. Services Plan. Section 504 or others that apply
- i. Any other document that applies

In the case of pre-employment transition services, the Department of Education will offer and certify the following information:

- a. Student's Social Security Number
- b. Date of birth
- c. Age
- d. Race
- e. Ethnicity

- f. School of origin and town
  - g. Town of residence of the student
  - h. Grade enlisted
  - i. If the student receives special education or Section 504 services
  - j. 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;

This component of the interagency agreement between the Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (VRA) and the State Educational Agency (SEA) focuses on the collaborative efforts in transition planning, facilitating the development and implementation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for students with disabilities. Key aspects include:

- Collaborative Development of IEPs: VRA staff work in conjunction with educational agency personnel to support the creation and execution of



IEPs. This collaboration ensures that the IEPs are comprehensive and tailored to the specific vocational rehabilitation needs of each student.

- **Participation in IEP Meetings:** VRA personnel, including Transition Counseling Services Analysts and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, may participate in IEP meetings and other relevant planning sessions. Their involvement is aimed at integrating vocational rehabilitation considerations into the educational planning process.
- **Input on Vocational Rehabilitation Needs:** VRA's participation in IEP development includes providing input on aspects such as assistive technology, orientation and mobility training, and other vocational rehabilitation needs that support the student's transition to post-school activities.
- **Facilitation of Transition to Post-School Activities:** The agreement emphasizes the role of both VRA and educational agency personnel in facilitating a smooth transition for students from school to post-school activities, including vocational rehabilitation services.

This collaborative approach in transition planning ensures that the educational and vocational rehabilitation needs of students with disabilities are addressed holistically, paving the way for their successful transition into adulthood and the workforce.

(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;

The interagency agreement between the VRA and the State Educational Agency (SEA) clearly outlines the roles and financial responsibilities of each agency. This includes:

- **Designation of Lead Agencies and Personnel:** The agreement specifies which agency and qualified personnel are responsible for providing transition services and pre-employment transition services. This designation ensures clarity in the execution and management of the services provided.
- **Responsibilities of VRA Under Law 51:** The VRA is tasked with various responsibilities, including evaluating referred cases for service eligibility, implementing independent living and vocational rehabilitation services, and designing Individualized Plans for Employment (PIPE) for eligible individuals.
- **Financial Participation:** The agreement includes provisions for the financial participation negotiated between the VR counselor and the consumer/family, as applicable, ensuring that the costs of services are transparent and managed effectively.
- **Coordination with Educational Agencies:** Responsibilities for coordinating with educational agencies are outlined to ensure that the transition from school to vocational rehabilitation services is seamless and effective.
- **Commitment to Compliance and Collaboration:** The VRA's commitment to comply with federal and state regulations, including Law 51, and its role in collaborating in the drafting and implementation of transition plans, are integral parts of its responsibilities.

This component of the agreement ensures that both the VRA and the SEA understand and effectively execute their respective roles, with a clear delineation of financial responsibilities, to facilitate the successful transition of students with disabilities into vocational rehabilitation and employment.

(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;

The interagency agreement between the Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (VRA) and the State Educational Agency (SEA) includes specific procedures for the outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who require transition services. These procedures encompass:

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:

- a. When advice is needed about functional limitations caused by the student's physical or mental disability
- b. 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 CFR part 397 regarding students and youth with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment; and

The interagency agreement between the Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (VRA) and the State Educational Agency (SEA) includes specific provisions to ensure compliance with documentation requirements related to students and youth with disabilities seeking subminimum wage employment. This involves:

- Documentation Compliance: Ensuring that all necessary documentation, as required under 34 CFR part 397, is accurately maintained and readily available. This is crucial for students and youth with disabilities who are considering or engaged in subminimum wage employment.
- Collaborative Efforts in Documentation Management: Both VRA and SEA work collaboratively to manage and oversee the documentation process. This ensures that all regulatory requirements are met, and

necessary records are maintained to support the employment choices of students and youth with disabilities.

- Orientation and Certification Form Completion: The Transition Analysts from the VRA provide orientation to the local Department of Education staff about their responsibilities under Section 511 requirements, including the completion of the Orientation from VRA to DE Certification Form.
- Certification of Transition Services: The Department of Education is responsible for sending a Certification of Transition Service to the VRA within 30 days of completing each transition activity or service, as established under Section 397.30 of the CFR and WIOA's Section 511.

This section of the agreement ensures that both VRA and SEA adhere to the legal requirements concerning documentation for students and youth with disabilities seeking or engaged in subminimum wage employment.

(F) Assurance that, in accordance with 34 CFR 397.31, neither the SEA nor the local educational agency will enter a contract or other arrangement with an entity, as defined in 34 CFR 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.

In the formal interagency agreement between the Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (VRA) and the State Educational Agency (SEA), there is a specific assurance that aligns with the requirements of 34 CFR 397.31. This assurance states that:

- No Contracts for Subminimum Wage Employment: Both the SEA and the local educational agency will not enter any contract or arrangement with any entity for the purpose of operating a program where youth with disabilities are engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage.

- **Compliance with Legal Standards:** This assurance is in strict compliance with the legal standards set forth in 34 CFR 397.31, which are designed to protect youth with disabilities from being placed in subminimum wage employment situations.
- **Protecting Rights of Youth with Disabilities:** The agreement emphasizes the commitment of both the VRA and the SEA to safeguard the rights of youth with disabilities, ensuring that their employment opportunities are in line with prevailing wage standards and do not undermine their potential for earning fair wages.

**(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 collaborate with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities 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.

#### **1. VR SERVICES:**

The VRA continues to collaborate with employers to identify opportunities for integrated competitive employment and career exploration. For this purpose, it has Support and Employment Modalities Centers (CSEM), whose staff is responsible for collaborating 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.

CSEMs 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, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, FOR STUDENTS AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES:**

In compliance with WIOA, the VRA has been conducting 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 (p)(1)(A) for details of activities conducted (achievements).

**(I) 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 conducting 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)) conducted under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998;

The Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (VRA) will collaborate with the lead agency(ies) and implement entity(ies) of state programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998. This cooperation aims to enhance opportunities for community-based employment in integrated settings for individuals with disabilities. The VRA will leverage assistive technology services and resources to support these individuals in achieving competitive integrated employment.

The VRA has the purpose of providing assistive technology services to eligible applicants/consumers who require said services. To such effects, the VRA has the following:

- Procedures, Normatives (Policies), and Manuals for the provision of assistive technology services

- Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors who refer applicants / consumers to the AAC (CAA, by its acronym in Spanish) for: assistive technology needs assessment, equipment recommendation and prescription, delivery of and training on the use of the equipment, and technical assistance
- Headquarters of the Assistive Technology Unit at the Assessment and Adjustment Center of the San Juan Region
- Areas of Assistive Technology at the Assessment and Adjustment Centers of Bayamón (North), Ponce (South), Arecibo (North Central), Caguas (East Central), and Mayagüez (West) Regions
- Assistive Technology staff that addresses the following needs:
  - Computer access
  - Communication
  - Alternative aid for cognitive deficit
  - Independent living
  - Environmental controls
  - Visual
- Audiology Clinic (North and East Central Regions) with up-to-date assistive technology equipment for independent living and to facilitate communication between deaf and partially deaf consumers.
- Professionals specialized and certified in assistive technology who render these services.
- Opportunities for professional development to maintain up to date the knowledge of human resources providing assistive technology services.



Moreover, VRA established a collaboration agreement with the Puerto Rico Assistive Technology Program (PRATPR) to offer training to agency's personnel on modern technologies and equipment. The VRA may refer consumers for assistive technology services that are not available at the agency.

(2) Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture;

For programs conducted by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture, the VRA plans to explore and establish cooperative relationships. These programs often provide vital resources and opportunities in rural areas that can be instrumental in developing community-based employment options for individuals with disabilities.

(3) Non-educational agencies serving out-of-school youth;

The VRA intends to work closely with non-educational agencies that serve out-of-school youth. This cooperation will focus on identifying and creating employment opportunities in integrated settings for youth with disabilities, ensuring they have access to appropriate vocational rehabilitation services and support.

(4) State use contracting programs;

Collaboration with state use contracting programs will be a key focus for the VRA. These programs often provide employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. The VRA will work to ensure these opportunities are maximized and align with the goal of competitive integrated employment.

(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 VRA will coordinate with the state agency responsible for administering the State Medicaid plan to develop employment opportunities for Medicaid beneficiaries. This collaboration will involve sharing information and resources to assist individuals with

disabilities in accessing vocational rehabilitation services that lead to competitive integrated employment.

(6) State agency responsible for providing services for individuals with developmental disabilities;

Active participation in the State Council on Developmental Disabilities (SCDD) meetings and collaborative efforts to promote employment for individuals with developmental disabilities are key components of the VRA's strategy. Sharing resources like employer lists and supporting SCDD's efforts will be crucial in developing competitive integrated employment opportunities.

(7) State agency responsible for providing mental health services;

The VRA's role in the Advisory Council of Substance Abuse and Mental Health of Puerto Rico involves participating in planning, reviewing, and advocating for high-quality integrated service systems. Collaborating with entities like ASSMCA and staying involved in the development and implementation of state plans for mental health and substance abuse services are pivotal to the VRA's strategy.

(8) Other Federal, State, and local agencies and programs outside the workforce development system; and

The VRA plans to engage with a variety of other federal, state, and local agencies and programs outside the workforce development system. The goal is to harness these collaborations to develop more community-based, integrated employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

(9) Other private nonprofit organizations.

Engagement with private nonprofit organizations is also a key part of the VRA's strategy. These organizations often have unique insights and resources that can be instrumental in developing and implementing effective employment strategies for individuals with disabilities.

Through these collaborations, the VRA aims to enhance the spectrum and quality of employment opportunities available to individuals with disabilities, fostering an inclusive and integrated workforce environment.

#### VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION CERTIFICATIONS AND ASSURANCES CERTIFICATIONS

| States must provide written and signed certifications that: |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.                                                          | The Vocational Rehabilitation Administration 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, <sup>10</sup> and its State Plan supplement under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act;                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 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 Department of Labor and Human Resources <sup>11</sup> 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 <sup>12</sup> , the Rehabilitation Act, 34 CFR 361.13(b) and (c), and all applicable regulations <sup>13</sup> , policies, and procedures |

<sup>10</sup> Public Law 113-128.

<sup>11</sup> All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> 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 CFR part 361.

| States must provide written and signed certifications that: |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                             | 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;                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 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 <sup>14</sup> , the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations <sup>15</sup> , 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 <b>administration of the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan;</b> |
|                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

<sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>15</sup> Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in footnote 4, as well as Supported Employment program regulations at 34 CFR part 363.

| States must provide written and signed certifications that: |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 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 conduct 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.                                                          | María M. Gómez-García 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;                                                                                                                                               |
|                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 8.                                                          | The administrator has the authority to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and the supplement for Supported Employment services;                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

**States must provide written and signed certifications that:**

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:**

[14] Public Law 113-128.

[15] Unless otherwise stated, "Rehabilitation Act" means the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by WIOA, signed into law on July 22, 2014.

[16] All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

[17] 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.

[18] 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.

[19] 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.

[20] Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in footnote 6.

Additional Comments on the Certifications from the State:

**Certification for Contracts, Grants, Loans, and Cooperative Agreements:**

The undersigned certifies, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

- (1) No Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid, by or on behalf of the undersigned, to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of an agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with the awarding of any Federal contract, the making of any Federal grant, the making of any Federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement.
- (2) If any funds other than Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions.
- (3) The undersigned shall require that the language of this certification be included in the award documents for all subawards at all tiers (including subcontracts, subgrants, and contracts under grants, loans, and cooperative agreements) and that all subrecipients shall certify and disclose accordingly. This certification is a material representation of the fact upon which reliance was placed when this transaction was made or entered into. Submission of this certification is a prerequisite for making or entering this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required certification shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

### **Statement for Loan Guarantees and Loan Insurance**

The undersigned states, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

If any funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this commitment providing for the United States to insure or guarantee a loan, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions. Submission of this statement is a prerequisite for making or entering this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required statement shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

### **Certification Regarding Lobbying — Supported Employment**

Certification for Contracts, Grants, Loans, and Cooperative Agreements The undersigned certifies, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

- (1) No Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid, by or on behalf of the undersigned, to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of an agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with the awarding of any Federal contract, the making of any Federal grant, the making of any Federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement.
- (2) If any funds other than Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this Federal contract, grant, loan, or



cooperative agreement, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions.

- (3) The undersigned shall require that the language of this certification be included in the award documents for all subawards at all tiers (including subcontracts, subgrants, and contracts under grants, loans, and cooperative agreements) and that all subrecipients shall certify and disclose accordingly. This certification is a material representation of the fact upon which reliance was placed when this transaction was made or entered into. Submission of this certification is a prerequisite for making or entering this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required certification shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

#### **Statement for Loan Guarantees and Loan Insurance**

The undersigned states, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

If any funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this commitment providing for the United States to insure or guarantee a loan, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions. Submission of this statement is a prerequisite for making or entering this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required statement shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

#### **Footnotes**

Certification 1 Footnotes

\*Public Law 113-128.

\*\* Unless otherwise stated, "Rehabilitation Act" means the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by WIOA, signed into law on July 22, 2014.

#### Certification 2 Footnotes

\* All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

\*\* No funds under title 1 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.

\*\*\* 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 3485; and the State VR Services Program regulations.

#### Certification 3 Footnotes

\* No funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

\*\* Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in \*\*\* under Certification 2 footnotes

#### Certification Signature

|                       |                                            |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Signatory information | Enter Signatory information in this column |
| Name of Signatory     | María M. Gómez -García                     |
| Title of Signatory    | Administrator                              |

|                       |                                            |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Signatory information | Enter Signatory information in this column |
| Date Signed           |                                            |

## 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:

| The State Plan must provide assurances that: |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.                                           | <b>Public Comment on Policies and Procedures:</b> 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. |
|                                              | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 2.                                           | <b>Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement:</b> The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR                                                                             |

| <b>The State Plan must provide assurances that:</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                     | 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 C.F.R. 76.140.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|                                                     | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 3.                                                  | <p><b>Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan:</b> The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to:</p> <p>(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>(b) either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(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.</p> <p>(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 conducting the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3).</p> <p>(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.</p> |

**The State Plan must provide assurances that:**

- (f) as applicable, the shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act.
- (g) statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act.
- (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.
- (i) all required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act.
- (j) the requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act.
- (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.
- (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).
- (m) the submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act.

| The State Plan must provide assurances that: |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                              | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 4.                                           | <p><b>Administration of the Provision of VR Services:</b> The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(E) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>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 established by the State for the order of selection as set out in section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>d) determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>e) comply with the requirements for the development of an individualized plan for employment in accordance with section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>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.</li> </ul> |

**The State Plan must provide assurances that:**

- 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.
- 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.
- (i) meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act if the State elects to construct, under exceptional circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs.
- (j) with respect to students with disabilities, the State:
  - (i) has developed and will implement,
    - (A) strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and
    - (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
  - (ii) has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15), 101(a)(25), and 113).
  - (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.

| <b>The State Plan must provide assurances that:</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5.                                                  | <p><b>Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement to the State plan:</b></p> <p>(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.</p> <p>(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.</p>                  |
|                                                     | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 6.                                                  | <p><b>Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program (Title VI):</b></p> <p>(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.</p> |



| <b>The State Plan must provide assurances that:</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                     | <p>(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.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|                                                     | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 7.                                                  | <p><b>Provision of Supported Employment Services:</b></p> <p>(a) The designated State agency assures that it will provide supported employment services as defined in section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(b) The designated State agency assures that</p> <p>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 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.</p> |