

WIOA STATE PLAN FOR THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI FY-2018

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## OVERVIEW

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Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the Governor of each State must submit a Unified or Combined State Plan to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Labor that outlines a four-year strategy for the State’s workforce development system. The publicly-funded workforce development system is a national network of Federal, State, regional, and local agencies and organizations that provide a range of employment, education, training, and related services and supports to help all job-seekers secure good jobs while providing businesses with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. States must have approved Unified or Combined State Plans in place to receive funding for core programs. WIOA reforms planning requirements, previously governed by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), to foster better alignment of Federal investments in job training, to integrate service delivery across programs and improve efficiency in service delivery, and to ensure that the workforce system is job-driven and matches employers with skilled individuals. One of WIOA’s principal areas of reform is to require States to plan across core programs and include this planning process in the Unified or Combined State Plans. This reform promotes a shared understanding of the workforce needs within each State and fosters development of more comprehensive and integrated approaches, such as career pathways and sector strategies, for addressing the needs of businesses and workers. Successful implementation of many of these approaches called for within WIOA requires robust relationships across programs. WIOA requires States and local areas to enhance coordination and partnerships with local entities and supportive service agencies for strengthened service delivery, including through Unified or Combined State Plans.

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### OPTIONS FOR SUBMITTING A STATE PLAN

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A State has two options for submitting a State Plan — a Unified State Plan or a Combined State Plan. At a minimum, a State must submit a Unified State Plan that meets the requirements described in this document and outlines a four-year strategy for the core programs. The six core programs are—

- the Adult program (Title I of WIOA),
- the Dislocated Worker program (Title I),
- the Youth program (Title I),
- the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act program (Title II),
- the Wagner-Peyser Act program (Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by title III), and
- the Vocational Rehabilitation program (Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by Title IV).

Alternatively, a State may submit a Combined State Plan that meets the requirements described in this document and outlines a four-year strategy for WIOA’s core programs plus one or more of the Combined Plan partner programs. When a State includes a Combined State Plan partner program in its Combined State Plan, it need not submit a separate plan or application for that particular program. If included, Combined State Plan partner programs are subject to the “common planning elements” (Sections II and III of this document) where specified, as well as the program-specific requirements for that program where such planning requirements exist separately for the program. The Combined State Plan partner programs are—

- Career and technical education programs authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (20 U.S.C. 2301 et seq.)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.)
- Employment and Training Programs under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (Programs authorized under section 6(d)(4) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2015(d)(4)))
- Work programs authorized under section 6(o) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2015(o))
- Trade Adjustment Assistance for Workers Programs (Activities authorized under chapter 2 of Title II of the Trade Act of 1974 (19 U.S.C. 2271 et seq.))
- Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program (Programs authorized under 38, U.S.C. 4100 et seq.)
- Unemployment Insurance Programs (Programs authorized under State unemployment compensation laws in accordance with applicable Federal law)
- Senior Community Service Employment Program (Programs authorized under Title V of the Older Americans Act of 1965 (42 U.S.C. 3056 et seq.))
- Employment and training activities carried out by the Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Community Services Block Grant Program (Employment and training activities carried out under the Community Services Block Grant Act (42 U.S.C. 9901 et seq.))\*
- Reintegration of Ex-Offenders Program (Programs authorized under section 212 of the Second Chance Act of 2007 (42 U.S.C. 17532))

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\* States that elect to include employment and training activities carried out under the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Act (42 U.S.C. 9901 et seq.) under a Combined State Plan would submit all other required elements of a complete CSBG State Plan directly to the Federal agency that administers the program. Similarly, States that elect to include employment and training activities carried by the Department of Housing and Urban Development and programs authorized under section 6(d)(4) and 6(o) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 that are included would submit all other required elements of a complete State Plan for those programs directly to the Federal agency that administers the program.

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## HOW STATE PLAN REQUIREMENTS ARE ORGANIZED

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The major content areas of the Unified or Combined State Plan include strategic and operational planning elements. WIOA separates the strategic and operational elements to facilitate cross-program strategic planning.

- The **Strategic Planning Elements** section includes analyses of the State's economic conditions, workforce characteristics, and workforce development activities. These analyses drive the required vision and goals for the State's workforce development system and alignment strategies for workforce development programs to support economic growth.
- The **Operational Planning Elements** section identifies the State's efforts to support the State's strategic vision and goals as identified in the Strategic Planning Elements section. This section ensures that the State has the necessary infrastructure, policies, and activities to meet its strategic goals, implement its alignment strategy, and support ongoing program development and coordination. Operational planning elements include:

- State Strategy Implementation,
- State Operating Systems and Policies,
- Assurances, and
- Program-Specific Requirements for the Core Programs, and
- Program-Specific Requirements for the Combined State Plan partner programs. (These requirements are available in a separate supplemental document, Supplement to the Workforce and Innovation Act (WIOA) Unified and Combined State Plan Requirements. The Departments are not seeking comments on these particular requirements).

When responding to Unified or Combined State Plan requirements, States must identify specific strategies for coordinating programs and services for target populations.\* States must develop strategies that look beyond strategies for the general population and develop approaches that also address the needs of target populations.

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\* Target populations include individuals with barriers to employment, as defined in WIOA Sec. 3, as well as veterans, unemployed workers, and youth.

### **Governor's Certification**

Link: [https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Governors\\_Letter.pdf](https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Governors_Letter.pdf)

### **Introduction**

The state of Mississippi has opted to submit a Combined Plan to meet the requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. This Combined Plan is built around Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant's pledge that every Mississippian who wants a job should be able to find a job. Governor Bryant's pledge calls for a clear understanding of the opportunities and challenges that workers face in an increasingly globalizing and rapidly changing economy that places pressure on the current and prospective workforce to gain more academic credentials and higher levels of skill. His pledge also calls for a clear understanding of the opportunities and challenges businesses face to remain competitive.

Mississippi's Combined Plan includes the six required state programs—the Adult Program, the Dislocated Worker Program, the Youth Program, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program, the Wagner-Peyser Act Program, and the Vocational Rehabilitation Program—along with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Unemployment Insurance (UI), Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program (JVSG), and Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP).

Governor Bryant challenged all workforce and education stakeholders to develop a workforce plan centered on an effective and efficient state workforce development system designed to meet the demands of Mississippi's current and future job seekers and businesses. Mississippi's State Workforce Investment Board was tasked with soliciting input from the public, business community, workforce stakeholders, and educational entities. The process began in July 2014 with the establishment of a task force to conduct a study on workforce development needs in Mississippi. The findings and recommendations of the task force study were used as a common framework in the development of the workforce plan as prescribed by WIOA (see Appendix A). Governor Bryant met with education and workforce stakeholders to explain the importance of their work and

encourage their engagement in the process, and a planning document was developed that clearly outlined how each party would be involved (see Appendix A). Working groups were established to seek input for the development of the strategic and operational aspects of the workforce plan. Open meetings were held to encourage wide public participation in the process. A focus group was conducted to gather input from the business community. A website was created to provide regular updates on the process and another opportunity for public participation. These activities resulted in a Combined Plan wherein the scope is to facilitate the integration of state and local resources aimed at reorienting and realigning programs and institutions to support a vibrant economy that offers all Mississippians—especially the most vulnerable—an opportunity for a higher quality of life.

The foundation for Mississippi's Combined Plan was rooted in the economic and workforce analysis prescribed by WIOA. Mississippi has and will continue to have a positive economic outlook. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, 2015) reveal several encouraging facts. The state has experienced continuous growth in total employment since 2009. Mississippi has also experienced rapid growth in its number of new businesses, with more than 2,100 new establishments in the last three years alone. As a result, the unemployment rate has declined from 10.4 percent in 2010 to 6.7 percent in May 2015. Similarly, underemployment reached a peak of 17.6 percent in 2010 but has been trending downward, reaching 13.4 percent in 2015. The current economic environment is creating opportunities for the establishment of new and better jobs. Advanced manufacturing is emerging as a key sector in the state. In fact, data from the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange show that advanced manufacturing was the biggest job creator in the state, with more than 21,000 job openings in 2014 alone.

Economic and workforce analysis clearly shows that the state is in an excellent position to improve its total workforce participation rate by increasing worker skills that are in demand by employers. Specifically, the state has a workforce participation rate of 55 percent, among the lowest in the country. Analysis reveals that the state's largest skill gap is in middle-skill jobs—those requiring more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year college degree, often in combination with some level of technical proficiency. Providing Mississippians with training and education opportunities aimed at closing the skill gap will improve their ability to pursue jobs that better match their credentials and full-time employment aspirations. This approach will also provide employers with a workforce that possesses the skills and core competencies required for businesses to remain competitive in a global economy.

The state's strategic vision is to create a workforce system that acts and functions as an ecosystem where all parts are connected and line up to achieve common goals so that every Mississippian has the opportunity to be work- or career-ready and to secure his or her dream job right here at home. Currently, the complexity of Mississippi's workforce system and the sheer number of education, training, and employment support service activities geared to address barriers to employment pose a challenge to the state. Under Mississippi's Combined Plan, from the moment one enters the education and workforce system, he or she will be presented with the necessary tools to choose and pursue a career pathway that is relevant to current and future labor markets. Similarly, from the moment current and prospective businesses enter into a partnership with Mississippi's education and workforce system, resources will be immediately aligned to cultivate the sustainable, high-performance workforce critical for maintaining and expanding businesses' long-term economic viability, in turn creating better and more sustainable employment opportunities for Mississippians.

The state's primary strategy is to follow a career pathway model that facilitates the integration of programs and improvement of efficiency in service delivery across partners. This model is known as the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model. The state is in the process of reimagining its One-Stop workforce delivery system to create 1) Comprehensive One-Stop Centers, 2) Affiliate One-Stop Centers, 3) Virtual Access One-Stop Centers, 4) Call Center Support, and 5) Sector Training Plus Comprehensive One-Stop Centers. The policies and regulations will be established for the new WIOA Combined Plan Partners' workforce ecosystem to improve technology integration and capitalize on the state's nation-leading longitudinal data system.

Operationally, the state will undertake the following activities to implement its Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model:

1. Align WIOA Combined Plan Partners in state education, training, and workforce around the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model, a data-driven roadmap designed to guide Mississippians from any state of work-readiness into gainful employment.
2. Build on the state's current information technology infrastructure to coordinate and align the case management activities of all WIOA Combined Plan Partners in education, training, workforce, and supportive services to realize greater efficiency in service delivery, reduce duplication of effort, and ensure that every Mississippian receives the highest level of coordinated assistance in connecting to the labor market.
3. Build on the state's current physical network of WIOA Combined Plan Partners in workforce, education, and supportive service partner offices to ensure that every Mississippian has access to staff members who understand the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model and take a job-focused approach to case management.
4. Develop performance measures and other measures of socioeconomic mobility that give the state workforce system the ability to assess program effectiveness and pursue a data-driven approach to strategic planning.
5. Engage in continuous research to understand the workforce needs of Mississippi's employers in the context of local and regional economic sectors, making the results of this analysis available for economic development and other strategic workforce planning purposes.
6. Provide a common vision for WIOA Combined Plan Partners for state workforce, training, education, and supportive services through coordinating entities such as the State Workforce Investment Board and Mississippi's four local workforce development boards.

Following Governor Bryant's leadership will allow the state to develop and implement the most comprehensive WIOA workforce system in the country. Mississippi's system will serve people from all walks of life with any work experience and skill needs, such as individuals who seek training after being laid off for several years, those who are preparing for their first job or postsecondary education, and people who pursue training during or after work to improve their skills. The system will also serve those in need of help with childcare or transportation, as well as those who need to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills or improve their English language skills.

### **Mississippi Combined Plan**

The state of Mississippi has opted to submit a Combined Plan. The plan includes the six required state programs, along with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Unemployment Insurance (UI), Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program (JVSG),

and Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP). The main focus of the plan is to improve the economic opportunities of all job seekers, especially those with low skills.

Mississippi is in an excellent position to implement the proposed Combined Plan. Over the last decade or so, the state has created a cultural and political environment that fosters cooperation and integration across education and workforce programs. In 2004, the state passed the Mississippi Comprehensive Workforce Training and Education Consolidation Act. The main goal of the act was to reduce fragmentation and duplication of services and to promote performance-based management. The state has developed and implemented one of the country's most integrated technology-based workforce systems, commonly known as Mississippi Works. The system fully integrates UI, TAA, Adults, Dislocated Workers, Youth, Veterans, Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC), and SCSEP. Mississippi Works is fully interoperable with other case management systems, such as those for Rehabilitation Services, Adult Education, and TANF. The state has also developed and implemented one of the most comprehensive and advanced integrated data systems in the country: LifeTracks. The development of this system began in 2005, and the system has been fully operational for the last seven years. In 2012, the Mississippi Legislature created the State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) Governing Board for the management and oversight of data sharing and data use. Board members include representatives from each workforce and education sector in the state. The SLDS Governing Board has developed a clear set of rules that define the scope of LifeTracks and ensure data integrity, security, confidentiality, and privacy (see Appendix B). Mississippi's plan includes two major components: 1) Combined Plan programs and 2) Strategic programs, which will increase the impact of the Combined Plan. As shown in Tables 1 and 2, these various programs are administered by the Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES), Mississippi Community College Board (MCCB), Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS), Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS), Mississippi Department of Education (MDE), Mississippi Development Authority (MDA), and Mississippi Department of Corrections (MDOC).

Table 1: Combined Plan Programs - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Table1.jpg>

Table 2: Strategic Programs - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Table2.jpg>

### **Mississippi Local Workforce Development Areas**

Mississippi has four designated local workforce development areas (see Figure 1) that are generally aligned with the planning and development district structure in the state in accordance with the Mississippi Comprehensive Workforce Training and Education Consolidation Act of 2004. Planning and development districts serve as the fiscal agents to manage funds and to oversee and support local workforce development boards aligned with the areas and local programs and activities as delivered by the One-Stop employment and training system.

Figure 1: Local Workforce Development Areas - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Figure1.png>

In accordance with WIOA requirements (section 106) and Mississippi's Local Workforce Development Area Designation Policy (see Appendix C), Governor Phil Bryant received and approved requests for initial designation from the four local workforce development boards: Delta, Mississippi Partnership, Southcentral Mississippi Works, and Twin Districts. Prior to submitting the initial designation requests to Governor Bryant, the boards posted the requests on their websites for a public comment period. These areas met the three criteria for initial designation: (1) they were designated as local areas for the purposes of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 prior to the two-year period preceding the date of enactment of WIOA; (2) they have performed

successfully; and (3) they have sustained fiscal integrity. Subsequent designation of local workforce development areas and the definition of regions will take place according to Mississippi's Local Workforce Development Area Designation Policy in compliance with all relevant sections of WIOA. In 2017, the State Workforce Investment Board invested in the development and implementation of regional sector strategy plans. Local Workforce Development Boards were awarded funds to form a public/ private partnership and develop a plan that addresses the workforce needs in their respective regional economies. A skilled and educated workforce was the prevailing need identified in the planning process. Each LWDB selected target sectors and developed goals and activities to implement the plans.

## **Mississippi's Economic and Demographic Regions**

### *Local Workforce Development Areas as Regions*

The four local workforce development areas (LWDAs) in Mississippi were originally defined by the State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB) by direction of the Governor following the guidelines set forth in the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, Section 116. These boundaries, however, are not simply jurisdictional; they follow significant demographic and economic boundaries. Each LWDA contributes to Mississippi's economic sector goals, identified by the Mississippi Development Authority's (MDA) target industries (Table 3).

Table 3. Mississippi LWDAs and MDA Target Industries - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Table3.jpg>

New and emerging industries are defined as industries with no presence or a smaller presence in 1990 that grew by more than 200 percent by 2010. Established industries are defined as industries that had a larger presence in 1990 with little or no growth by 2010.

The Delta LWDA is known for its agricultural production. Analyzing jobs in Mississippi by location quotient (the concentration of jobs in a geographical area relative to the national average of jobs in this industry), 12 of the 13 top crop production and food manufacturing counties in Mississippi during 2015 are in the Delta LWDA. While the fertile land of the Delta that supports agribusiness defines the Delta LWDA, the area is also diversifying in healthcare with service providers like Mid-Delta and pharmaceutical manufacturers/preparers such as Baxter and PharMEDium.

The Mississippi Partnership LWDA is known as a manufacturing hub. Seven of the top 10 manufacturing counties in Mississippi are in the Mississippi Partnership LWDA. Industries like plastics and rubber manufacturing, transportation equipment manufacturing, and furniture manufacturing are growing and shifting from low-skill manufacturing to middle-skill, advanced manufacturing operations in this LWDA. Large manufacturing employers such as Cooper Tires, Yokohama, Toyota, Stark Aerospace, Airbus Helicopters, Aurora Flight Sciences, Ashley Furniture, and Lane Furniture all have locations in the Mississippi Partnership LWDA. The Southcentral Mississippi Works LWDA includes the state capital and is known for its presence in sectors such as healthcare, energy, and agribusiness. Eleven of the top 20 Mississippi counties for forestry and logging; wood product manufacturing; oil and gas extraction; hospitals, nursing, and residential care facilities; and social assistance fall within the Southcentral Mississippi Works LWDA. Because of a strong hospital system and medical education focus, the Southcentral Mississippi Works LWDA serves as a healthcare hub for the entire state. The presence of oil and natural gas deposits in the southwestern part of Mississippi give Southcentral Mississippi Works its strength in the energy sector. The Southcentral Mississippi Works LWDA is also becoming a key hub for the automotive industry with large manufacturers such as Nissan and Continental Tire. The Twin Districts LWDA, located in the southeastern part of the state, is successful in several sectors, including

manufacturing, healthcare, and tourism. Within manufacturing, top industries in this LWDA include transportation equipment manufacturing and electrical equipment, appliance, and component manufacturing. The top industry within the agribusiness sector in the Twin Districts LWDA is wood product manufacturing. Within the tourism sector, many are employed in the amusement, gambling, and recreation industries in this area. The presence of the Gulf Coast as a tourist attraction and hub of international business and the Pine Belt in southern Mississippi help give the Twin Districts LWDA its unique economic identity.

#### *Sub-Regions within the Four Local Workforce Development Areas*

While each of the four WIOA LWDAs has a strong overall economic identity, some economic and demographic variability exists within these areas (see Table 4) relevant to any training or supportive efforts.

Within each of the four LWDAs, entities such as economic development councils (EDCs) and public utilities manage target industry regions. With vital information on available sites, buildings, and workforce demographics, EDCs assist companies considering Mississippi as a potential location. The presence of EDCs can be useful in identifying subtle differences of economic or industry focus within an LWDA. In addition, one of Mississippi's utility companies, Mississippi Power, manages a target industry region within a single LWDA, Twin Districts. In areas such as the Delta LWDA, where the economic development councils have a more single-minded mission and cover the entirety of the LWDA as well as parts of other LWDAs, it can be helpful to focus on metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas to understand regional variations.

Table 4. Economic Variability within LWDAs by EDC and Public Utility Industry Focus - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Table4.jpg>

It is also important to capture social differences, along with economic differences, throughout the regions of the four LWDAs, which is perhaps best measured by the presence or absence of metropolitan and micropolitan areas. A metropolitan statistical area is defined by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) as an urbanized area of 50,000 or higher in population with an adjacent territory that has a high degree of social and economic integration with the core. Micropolitan statistical areas are defined by OMB as having at least 10,000 but less than 50,000 in population in addition to an adjacent territory that has a high degree of social and economic integration with the core area through commuting. By examining metropolitan and micropolitan areas, regions can be defined by the social and economic importance of a municipality. *Delta Local Workforce Development Area* The Delta LWDA serves as a connection to three of Mississippi's regional neighbors: Tennessee, Arkansas, and Louisiana. Within the Delta LWDA, Tunica County represents part of the Memphis metropolitan statistical area, which spans the three states of Mississippi, Tennessee, and Arkansas (see Figure 2). Tunica County represents a region of the Delta that has a high connection to Memphis within the Delta LWDA, though nearly 90 percent of its residents remain in the county for work. This implies that the connection to Memphis might be more of a social connection. Within the Delta, there are also five micropolitan areas representing six counties. These areas represent more local importance within the county, with more than 80 percent of residents remaining in their county for work and potentially drawing non-core residents for work, who leave their county for work at a rate of 42.7 percent. Non-core areas are counties with no metropolitan or micropolitan areas. The Delta represents an area of sparse population, as Tunica County, the metropolitan county, reported a population density of 22.2 people per square mile, The micropolitan areas in the Delta have a higher population density (41.7 people per square mile), and the non-core areas have the lowest population density (21.4 people per square mile).

Figure 2. Mississippi's Metropolitan, Micropolitan, and Non-Core Areas - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Figure2.jpg>

In sum, the Delta LWDA is driven by an economic goal of supporting agriculture and agribusiness in order to support the area, as led by the Delta Council and Mississippi Delta Developers Association. In the northern part is Tunica County, the only metropolitan county in which nearly 90 percent of residents work in the county. In the northern and central portion of this LWDA are five micropolitan areas covering six counties with the highest average population density and more than 80 percent of residents that work in the county. In the northeast (three counties) and southern (four counties) portions of this LWDA are seven counties that fall into a non-core classification, with more than 40 percent of residents commuting outside their county for work.

#### *Mississippi Partnership Local Workforce Development Area*

While the North Mississippi Industrial Development Association (NMIDA) provides an overall focus (particularly on advanced manufacturing) to the Mississippi Partnership LWDA, there are two smaller EDCs that highlight a more specific concentration in this LWDA: the Golden Triangle Development Link (GTR LINK) and Innovate Mississippi. GTR LINK is composed of three counties (Lowndes, Oktibbeha, and Clay Counties) that are home to the three cities that comprise the Golden Triangle area (Columbus, Starkville, and West Point, respectively). This organization's target industries represent the importance of advanced manufacturing within this sub-region. Innovate Mississippi counties - Choctaw, Montgomery, and Webster - have not identified target industries. The Mississippi Partnership LWDA serves as a connection to three of Mississippi's regional neighbors: Tennessee, Arkansas, and Alabama. The Mississippi Partnership LWDA serves as a connection to three of Mississippi's regional neighbors: Tennessee, Arkansas, and Alabama. The majority of the counties that comprise the Memphis metropolitan statistical area lie in the Mississippi Partnership LWDA, making this LWDA the home of most of Mississippi's Memphis commuters. While Tupelo is a micropolitan area, it displays characteristics similar to a metropolitan area. The Tupelo area has a high economic and social impact, as Itawamba (52.6 percent) and Pontotoc (43.3 percent). Counties have high commuting rates. Both of these counties are part of the Tupelo micropolitan statistical area. Tupelo and the surrounding counties form a manufacturing core area, with a high number of jobs in the rubber products manufacturing, transportation manufacturing, and furniture manufacturing industries. The other micropolitan areas are relatively self-contained within their county in relation to Tupelo, though Columbus and Starkville form two of the vertices of the Golden Triangle in the southern part of the LWDA. The non-core areas rely on the neighboring metropolitan and micropolitan areas for work and training opportunities, as 39.6 percent of residents in these non-core areas commute outside their county for work.

In sum, the Mississippi Partnership LWDA is focused on several phases of manufacturing, specifically advanced manufacturing. Within advanced manufacturing, the EDCs have emphasized aerospace and automotive manufacturing among others. The demographics of the Mississippi Partnership LWDA point to a few clusters in the northwestern, central, and southern parts of the LWDA. There are some non-core areas in the northeastern, western, and central parts of this LWDA as well.

#### **SOUTHCENTRAL MISSISSIPPI WORKS LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AREA**

The Southcentral Mississippi Works LWDA is served by two EDCs that divide the area into two nearly separate regions within southwest Mississippi: the Greater Jackson Alliance (GJA) and

Southwest Mississippi Partnership (SWMSP). GJA is a regional alliance organized to develop and implement a marketing strategy to promote Greater Jackson and to enhance cooperation between the various governmental jurisdictions in Greater Jackson. This area is focused on its strongest industry, healthcare, and interested in expanding into new industries. SWMSP unites 10 counties in southwest Mississippi toward a regional economic development vision. SWMSP has targeted metal fabrication, plastics, contact centers, and food processing as key industries. Metal fabrication could help support some new industries in Mississippi, such as semiconductor manufacturing. It is also worth noting the division of the Southcentral Mississippi Works LWDA by metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. The Southcentral Mississippi Works LWDA serves as a major connection point to Louisiana. The Jackson metropolitan statistical area consists of six counties in the northeastern part of this LWDA. The presence and size of this metropolitan area are represented in its population density (118.0 people per square mile), with nearly 75 percent of residents remaining in their county for work. There are also four micropolitan statistical areas that help define this region, with a lower population density (56.4 people per square mile) but a similar percentage of residents who stay in their county for work (74.4 percent). Additionally, there are five non-core counties clustered in the southeastern and southwestern parts of this LWDA. The lack of metropolitan and micropolitan areas in these counties leads to higher percentages of residents leaving their county for work (35.8 percent), with long average commute times (37.8 minutes). Many people in these counties are likely to commute to border metropolitan or micropolitan counties for work or training. In sum, the Southcentral Mississippi Works LWDA sees a strong regional divide in terms of economic focus, as evidenced by regional boundaries that show minimal overlap, and of demographics, as evidenced by the range between population densities in the metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. Within the Jackson area, there is a stronger focus on healthcare and technology, while there is a stronger focus on food processing and manufacturing in the more sparsely populated areas of southwest Mississippi.

#### *Twin Districts Local Workforce Development Area*

The Twin Districts LDWA differs from the other LDWAs in that there are counties not served by a regional EDC. There are two main EDCs that serve nine counties in the Twin Districts LWDA: the Mississippi Gulf Coast Alliance for Economic Development, which is comprised of the three coastal counties, and the Mid-Mississippi Development District (MMDD), which serves six counties in the central part of the LWDA. The Mississippi Gulf Coast Alliance for Economic Development has identified target industries that align well with those of MDA. The alliance's target industries are aerospace, defense, advanced materials, and energy. MMDD is focused on advanced manufacturing and healthcare.

The Twin Districts LWDA is also unique from the other LWDA's in that there are two metropolitan statistical areas in this LWDA. The Twin Districts LWDA serves as a connection to Alabama and Louisiana as well as an international port along the Gulf Coast. The two metropolitan statistical areas, Gulfport-Biloxi-Pascagoula and Hattiesburg, have a very high population density (125.4 people per square mile), and only 27.1 percent of residents of these counties leave their county for work. The ability to stay within the same county to work leads to a shorter average commute time (34.8 minutes) compared to the other counties in this LWDA. There are three micropolitan areas in this LWDA (Picayune, Laurel, and Meridian), with a percentage of residents leaving their county for work (27.2 percent) and average commute time (33.7 minutes) similar to those of the LWDA's metropolitan areas. There are also 10 non-core counties spread throughout the Twin Districts LWDA. These non-core areas form a cluster in the southeast and make up the entire western border of the LWDA. Counties in the non-core areas of the Twin Districts LWDA have the lowest population

density (37.1 people per square mile), highest percentage of people leaving their county for work (29.1 percent), and the longest average commute time (39.3 minutes). The variation among metropolitan, micropolitan, and non-core areas is relatively small due to some of the longest commuting times. The economy of the Twin Districts LWDA relies on several industries, with a strong focus on advanced manufacturing and energy, particularly along the coastal part of the LWDA. In the growing area of clean energy, a 450-acre, 52-megawatt solar farm is being created near Hattiesburg, MS that will eventually power 6,500 homes. The metropolitan, micropolitan, and non-core areas show less variation than those in other LWDA in terms of commuting times and residents leaving their county for work. Finally, the state has also classified regions that cross LWDA boundaries in efforts to make larger impacts across Mississippi.

#### *Regions Crossing Local Workforce Development Area Boundaries Economic Development Councils*

While there are a number of regions that fall within the LWDA boundaries, there are some regions that cross these boundaries, sometimes as part of a larger mission to serve Mississippi. Within the Delta and Mississippi Partnership LWDA, there are three EDCs that serve more than one LWDA and sometimes spill into three LWDA. Within the Delta LWDA, there are two EDCs that spill beyond the Delta LWDA and cover 20 counties in northwest Mississippi: the Mississippi Delta Developers Association (MDDA) and the Delta Council (DC). These EDCs share a goal of increasing economic development in northwest Mississippi and helping to solve common problems in this area. The MDDA aids the Delta LWDA by assisting with relocation for companies, including listing available buildings and sites, transportation maps, incentives at local, state, and federal levels, financing programs, and labor and training information. The DC serves 18 counties in the Delta region by providing a nexus for collaboration for agricultural, business, and professional leadership and solving common problems experienced in the area by way of several economically focused committees, including committees for aquaculture, ginning and cotton quality improvement, and rice and small grains, among others. All of the committees reflect the Delta LWDA's commitment to agribusiness, which is a target industry of the MDDA.

North Mississippi Industrial Development Association (NMIDA) is the largest of the three EDCs, with an area that surpasses the Mississippi Partnership LWDA boundaries in order to serve the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) territory in Mississippi. NMIDA serves 29 of the 36 counties within the TVA territory. NMIDA helps companies looking to locate businesses in Mississippi through services such as providing information on available sites and buildings, transportation, and incentives, among others. NMIDA mainly targets advanced manufacturing with a few other targets, such as bioenergy and biofuels. Bioenergy and biofuels align somewhat with ethyl alcohol manufacturing, which was identified as a new industry at the national level by NSPARC. Within the automotive sector, synthetic rubber manufacturing could become a larger component of manufacturing in Mississippi. This industry was also identified by NSPARC as a new industry to Mississippi.

#### *Mississippi Community College Consortia*

Mississippi's Workforce Enhancement Training (WET) fund derives from employer unemployment insurance taxes and is a state funding source for workforce training. In order to establish wide-ranging consortia to encourage collaboration among community colleges in the areas of workforce education and training, a portion of the WET fund transferred in 2013 was allocated to establish a collaborative consortia grant. In 2013, House Bill 932 created an \$8,000,000 transfer to the WET fund, and \$1,500,000 of that transfer was allocated to the collaborative consortia grant. For each approved consortium, there would be \$500,000 available. Three consortia have been recommended

and approved by workforce directors on the Mississippi Community College Board: the Southern Mississippi Alliance for Workforce Solutions, Mississippi Corridor Consortium, and the Crossroads. These three consortia marshal community college resources to provide training and education to Mississippians within the districts of the collaborating community college and, in some cases, to give focus to specific industries important to a consortium's region (see Table 5).

### *Utilities*

Two of Mississippi's utility companies, Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and Entergy, manage target industry regions spanning several LWDAs. Entergy spans the Delta and Southcentral Mississippi Works LWDAs. TVA covers the Delta and Mississippi Partnership LWDAs and parts of the Twin Districts LWDA.

Table 5. Economic Regions Spanning Multiple LWDAs - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Table5.jpg>

The Mississippi Corridor Consortium is led by Itawamba Community College (see Figure 3), with the top priority of training residents of these areas to address the transitional condition of the area's workforce needs as determined through relationships with local businesses. Regionally, workforce opportunities continue the transition from low-skill manufacturing jobs to middle-skill advanced manufacturing and technology-related occupations. The Mississippi Crossroads Consortium is led by Holmes Community College and committed to assisting with the development of a population of potential employees for employers who are looking for individuals who can demonstrate skills, keep up with the fast pace of change, and show dedication to lifelong learning. In order to help train job seekers in the area of healthcare, the Mississippi Crossroads Consortium is seeking healthcare-related training aids, which will be identified by East Mississippi Community College. This focus on healthcare as well as advanced manufacturing follows the state trends as well as MDA target industries. The newly formed South Mississippi Alliance for Workforce Solutions has set a mission of investigating, developing, and delivering education and training for citizens and industries in the five community college service districts through demand-driven, innovative, traditional, and non-traditional formats to advance the South Mississippi workforce. Industries specified by this consortium are manufacturing and healthcare, with the goal of developing credentials in each of these industries specific to this consortium area.

### *The Southern Automotive Corridor*

There is a growing presence of automotive manufacturing throughout southern states, such as Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia, with large employers, like Toyota, Nissan, and Honda, employing many Southerners. This corridor speaks to the business-friendly climate of Mississippi and the South in general and to a commitment to middle-skill careers.

Figure 3. Cross-Area Regions in Mississippi - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Figure3.jpg>

The Mississippi Corridor Consortium is top left, the Crossroads Consortium is top right, and the Southern Mississippi Alliance for Workforce Solutions is lower left. In the lower right is the Southern Automotive Corridor.

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## I. WIOA STATE PLAN TYPE

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**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.

**Unified State Plan.** This plan includes the Adult Program, Dislocated Worker Program, Youth Program, Wagner-Peyser Act Program, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program, and Vocational Rehabilitation Program. No

**Combined State Plan.** This plan includes the Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, Wagner-Peyser Act, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, and Vocational Rehabilitation programs, as well as one or more of the optional Combined State Plan partner programs identified below. Yes

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### COMBINED PLAN PARTNER PROGRAM(S)

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Indicate which Combined State Plan partner program(s) the State is electing to include in the plan.

Career and technical education programs authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (20 U.S.C. 2301 et seq.) No

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.) Yes

Employment and Training Programs under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (Programs authorized under section 6(d)(4) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2015(d)(4))) No

Work programs authorized under section 6(o) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2015(o)) No

Trade Adjustment Assistance for Workers Programs (Activities authorized under chapter 2 of title II of the Trade Act of 1974 (19 U.S.C. 2271 et seq.)) Yes

Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program (programs authorized under 38, U.S.C. 4100 et. seq.) Yes

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

Senior Community Service Employment Program (Programs authorized under title V of the Older Americans Act of 1965 (42 U.S.C. 3056 et seq.)) Yes

Employment and training activities carried out by the Department of Housing and Urban Development No

Community Services Block Grant Program (Employment and training activities carried out under the Community Services Block Grant Act (42 U.S.C. 9901 et seq.)) No

Reintegration of Ex-Offenders Program (Programs authorized under section 212 of the Second Chance Act of 2007 (42 U.S.C. 17532)) No

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## II. STRATEGIC ELEMENTS

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The Unified or Combined State Plan must include a Strategic Planning Elements section that analyzes the State's current economic environment and identifies the State's overall vision for its workforce development system. The required elements in this section allow the State to develop data-driven goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce and to identify successful strategies for aligning workforce development programs to support economic growth. Unless otherwise noted, all Strategic Planning Elements apply to Combined State Plan partner programs included in the plan as well as to core programs.

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### A. ECONOMIC, WORKFORCE, AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES ANALYSIS

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The Unified or Combined State Plan must include an analysis of the economic conditions, economic development strategies, and labor market in which the State's workforce system and programs will operate.

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#### 1. ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE ANALYSIS

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##### 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. This must include-

##### I. EXISTING DEMAND INDUSTRY SECTORS AND OCCUPATIONS

Provide an analysis of the industries and occupations for which there is existing demand.

##### II. EMERGING DEMAND INDUSTRY SECTORS AND OCCUPATION

Provide an analysis of the industries and occupations for which demand is emerging.

##### III. EMPLOYERS' EMPLOYMENT NEEDS

With regard to the industry sectors and occupations identified in 1 and 2 above, provide an assessment of the employment needs of employers, including a description of the knowledge, skills, and abilities required, including credentials and licenses.

### **Economic Analysis**

#### *Mississippi Population Trends*

Mississippi is a state of approximately 3 million people and has experienced an average annual population growth of 0.6 percent since 1950 (see Figure 4). Of the four local workforce development areas, the Delta area is the least populated and, over the last decade, was the only area that experienced significant population decline. In contrast, the Twin Districts is the most populated area with more than 1 million residents. The second most populous area is the Mississippi Partnership with approximately 900,000 residents, followed by Southcentral Mississippi Works with approximately 800,000 residents. In the last decade, the Southcentral Mississippi Works area experienced the fastest population growth at 8.4 percent. The populations

of the Twin Districts and Mississippi Partnership areas grew by approximately 5.0 percent over the same period.

According to the American Community Survey, approximately 60 percent of the state population is white, and 37.4 percent and 2.9 percent are African-American and Hispanic, respectively. Asians and American Indians account for the smallest share of the population (1.6 percent collectively). Of the four local workforce development areas, the Delta and Southcentral Mississippi Works areas have the largest representations of African-American residents at 66.9 and 48.6 percent, respectively. In the Twin Districts and Mississippi Partnership areas, African-Americans account for 27.3 percent and 29.2 percent of the population, respectively. The Twin Districts and Mississippi Partnership areas are home to more Hispanics than the other two areas with approximately 3 percent and 4 percent, respectively. Mississippi has become one of the new Hispanic destinations in the country, and its Hispanic population is expected to grow at a much faster rate when compared to counterpart populations in established destination states.

### *Current Industry Structure*

Table 6 reports the employment numbers for Mississippi's current industry structure. Across the state, manufacturing employs 140,000 individuals, accounting for 12.7 percent of total employment. More significantly, Mississippi Works Labor Exchange data show that in 2014 manufacturing was the largest job creator in Mississippi with 21,415 job openings. Manufacturing not only provides the largest number of job opportunities but also offers high-wage opportunities. Since 2012, more than 300 new manufacturing establishments have opened in the state, and 50 of those are advanced manufacturers that pay higher wages than traditional manufacturers. Moreover, recently attracted advanced manufacturing jobs pay even more than existing advanced manufacturing jobs in the state — about \$5,000 more, or an annual average of \$51,000.

Table D2 (Appendix D) reports a detailed description of subsectors in manufacturing. Transportation equipment is the largest subsector with more than 25,000 people employed, accounting for 18 percent of total employment in manufacturing. This subsector includes major employers such as Toyota, Nissan, and Ingalls. The next largest subsector is food manufacturing with approximately 23,000 people employed. Furniture is the third largest subsector with more than 18,000 people employed. Machinery, fabricated metal, and wood products each account for more than five percent of total employment in manufacturing. Combined, these six manufacturing subsectors account for approximately 70 percent of total employment in manufacturing. Of the four local workforce development areas, Mississippi Partnership and Twin Districts have the largest numbers of manufacturers in the state, with 40 percent and 35 percent of total employment in manufacturing, respectively.

As a sector, wholesale and retail trade employs the highest number of people in Mississippi at 170,000, which accounts for 15.4 percent of total state employment (see Table 6). Within this sector, more than 37,000 are employed in general merchandise stores, followed by approximately 18,000 in food and beverage stores. Table D1 (Appendix D) reports subsector details for this industry.

Healthcare and accommodation/leisure are two of the largest sectors in the state, accounting for approximately 15 and 12 percent of total state employment, respectively (see Table 6). Combined, these two sectors provide economic opportunities to more than 299,000 people in the state. Healthcare opportunities are most prevalent in the Southcentral Mississippi Works area, which accounts for 36 percent of the sector's employment in the state. The Mississippi Partnership and

Twin Districts areas each account for 28 percent of healthcare employment in the state; the remaining 8 percent of state healthcare jobs are in the Delta area. The largest number of opportunities for accommodation/leisure is in the Twin Districts area, which accounts for almost 38 percent of all jobs in this sector, followed by the Southcentral Mississippi Works (26 percent), Mississippi Partnership (23 percent), and Delta (13 percent) areas.

Natural resources, though not a large sector in the state, was the second largest job creator according to Mississippi Works Labor Exchange statistics, with more than 21,000 job openings in 2014. This sector is most prevalent in the Twin Districts area, which accounts for 35 percent of all natural resources jobs in the state. The Southcentral Mississippi Works and Delta areas account for 30 percent and 23 percent of all natural resources jobs in the state, respectively. The Mississippi Partnership area accounts for 12 percent of state employment in this sector. Detailed descriptions of the healthcare, accommodation/leisure, and natural resources subsectors are reported in Tables D3-D5 (Appendix D).

Figure 4: Mississippi Population Trends - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Figure4.jpg>

Table 6: Employment by Industry - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Table6.jpg>

### *Current Occupations*

The top 10 occupations in wholesale and retail trade account for approximately 66 percent of all jobs in this industry (see Table D6, Appendix D). Retail salespersons is the occupation with the largest demand in the sector. Currently, more than 36,000 individuals are employed in this occupation. Cashiers represent the next largest occupation in the manufacturing sector with more than 28,000 employed. More than 12,000 individuals are currently employed as stock clerks and order fillers.

The top 10 occupations in manufacturing account for more than 37 percent of all jobs—more than 52,000—in this industry (see Table D7, Appendix D). Team assemblers is the occupation with the largest demand in the sector. Currently, more than 14,000 individuals are employed in this occupation. Meat processing represents the next largest occupation in the manufacturing sector with almost 8,000 employed. Approximately 10,000 individuals are currently employed as first-line supervisors or welders, cutters, solderers, and brazers.

The top 10 occupations in accommodation/leisure account for approximately 60 percent of all jobs in this industry (see Table D8, Appendix D). The typical occupations in this sector are waiters and waitresses, food preparers and servers, and fast food and restaurant cooks.

The top 10 occupations in healthcare account for almost 35 percent of all jobs in this industry (see Table D9, Appendix D). The vast majority of the top jobs are in nursing, including Registered Nurse (RN), Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN), and Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA). An appreciable number of jobs in the sector are also in home care and childcare.

The top 10 occupations in natural resources account for 58 percent of all jobs in this industry (see Table D10, Appendix D). The top occupation in this sector is farmworkers and laborers.

### *New and Emerging Sectors*

There are three major sectors that are clearly emerging in the state: advanced manufacturing, healthcare support, and tourism (the full analysis is reported in Tables D11-13, Appendix D). Advanced manufacturing accounts for approximately 83,000 jobs in the manufacturing sector as a

whole. Of those, more than 25,000 are in transportation, including automotive, and are concentrated in the northeastern and central areas of the state. Other top subsectors in advanced manufacturing include furniture, machinery, electrical, and chemical. These subsectors are primarily concentrated in the eastern part of the state.

The healthcare support sector accounts for approximately 13,000 jobs that are primarily concentrated in the western half of the state. There are more than 400 establishments in the state that support this industry, including facilities for general warehousing and storage, medical equipment and supply wholesale, pharmaceutical preparation manufacturing, and surgical appliance and medical instrument manufacturing.

The tourism sector provides economic opportunities to more than 187,000 people in the state. This industry covers the entire state and is supported by approximately 10,000 establishments. Mississippi has truly become a tourist attraction and is providing economic opportunities in areas such as the Delta, one of the richest historical regions in the country.

#### *Occupations in Emerging Industries*

The top 10 occupations within advancing manufacturing account for approximately 39 percent of all jobs in the industry (see Table D14, Appendix D). Of all occupations, team assemblers are at the top with more than 11,000 employed, followed by welders, upholsterers, and first line supervisors that, combined, employ almost 10,000 people.

The top 10 occupations within healthcare support account for almost 55 percent of all jobs in the industry (see Table D15, Appendix D). Of these, laborers and industrial truck and tractor operators account for approximately 28 percent of the industry's occupations.

The top 10 occupations within tourism account for approximately 45 percent of all jobs in the industry (see Table D16, Appendix D). Waiters and waitresses are the largest occupation, accounting for approximately 10 percent of all occupations in the industry, followed by food preparers and cooks that, combined, account for 19 percent of the sector's occupations.

#### *Employers' Employment Needs*

Information on employers' employment needs was derived from three sources of data. First, as part of the effort to acquire input from the business community, a focus group was conducted with representatives from established and emerging industries. More than 20 employers participated in the focus group. Second, information was gathered from the state's Priority One project, which is administered by the Mississippi Development Authority. Monthly, more than 100 employers are contacted to identify pressing workforce needs. The third source of data was the state's most recent wage and benefits survey. This survey asks relevant questions about the skills and knowledge required for the business to succeed.

Across these three sources of data, a general consensus is that businesses are expecting to grow and that recruitment and retention of qualified workforce is a critical issue for sustainability, viability, and growth. On the whole, businesses reported needing workers with labor and trade skills and those with basic work skills (e.g., reading, writing, appropriate workplace conduct). The general consensus among businesses is that employees, across the board, lack core competency skills such as:

- Critical Thinking/Problem Solving - Exercise sound reasoning and analytical thinking; obtain, interpret, and use knowledge, facts, and data; demonstrate originality and inventiveness.
- Oral/Written Communication - Articulate thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively; demonstrate public speaking skills; communicate new ideas to others through writing and editing.
- Teamwork/Collaboration - Build collaborative relationships; work in team structure; negotiate and manage conflicts.
- Information Technology Application - Select and use appropriate technology; apply computing skills to problem solving.
- Leadership - Leverage the strengths of others; use interpersonal skills and emotions effectively; organize, prioritize, and delegate work.
- Professionalism/Work Ethic - Demonstrate personal accountability, effective work habits, integrity, and ethical behavior; act responsibly; learn from mistakes.
- Career Management - Identify and articulate skills, strengths, and experiences; identify areas for professional growth and self-advocacy; explore job options and pursue opportunities.

Specifically, when asked about the competencies desired in a potential employee at low-, middle-, and high-skill levels, 93 percent rated dependability and reliability as the most important qualities for low-skill employees, 77.6 percent reported that initiative and a willingness to learn were the most important qualities for middle-skill employees, and 72 percent of participants specified leadership, communication, and interpersonal skills as the most important qualities for high-skill employees.

Employers also indicated that they are not fully aware of the resources and services available to them. Thirty-nine percent of employers stated that their employees receive training from community colleges, technical schools, or vocational schools; 37 percent reported that their employees receive training from universities; and the remainder indicated that their employees receive external training from other federal programs. Mississippi employers would like to expand their use of community colleges and universities in the delivery of training for basic trades and skills along with fundamental competency skills for low-, middle-, and high-skill workers.

## B. WORKFORCE ANALYSIS

The Unified or Combined State Plan must include an analysis of the current workforce, including individuals with barriers to employment, as defined in section 3 of WIOA.\* This population must include individuals with disabilities among other groups\*\* in the State and across regions identified by the State. This includes: 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; farmworkers (as defined at section 167(i) of WIOA and Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 35-14); 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. \*\* Veterans, unemployed workers, and youth, and others that the State may identify.

## I. EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT

Provide an analysis of current employment and unemployment data, including labor force participation rates, and trends in the State.

## II. LABOR MARKET TRENDS

Provide an analysis of key labor market trends, including across existing industries and occupations.

## III. EDUCATION AND SKILL LEVELS OF THE WORKFORCE

Provide an analysis of the educational and skill levels of the workforce.

## IV. SKILL GAPS

Describe apparent 'skill gaps'.

### **Workforce Analysis**

A review of workforce indicators was conducted in early 2018. Changes in unemployment, population trends, and workforce participation rates were noted. The changes further reinforce the state's goals and strategies outlined in the plan.

#### *Employment*

During the Great Recession, the state, like the nation, experienced a dramatic loss of jobs. According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) for the 2009-2014 period, the number of employed Mississippians hit a low in 2010 but increased slightly in 2011 before starting a consistent upward trend (see Figure 5). Unlike the state, the Delta area experienced a decline in the number of persons employed over the six-year period, while the remaining local workforce development areas followed the state trend in employment. The number of non-farm jobs in Mississippi rose in January, 2018 to 1,162,600, the most jobs ever recorded in Mississippi.

#### *Unemployment*

After struggling with a high unemployment rate, Mississippi is now experiencing a recovery that offers new economic opportunities for workers and job seekers. According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Mississippi's unemployment rate has dropped from 10.4 percent in 2010 to 4.6 percent in January 2018 (see Figure 6). This is the lowest level of unemployment ever recorded in Mississippi. Similar unemployment rate trends can be found in Mississippi's local workforce development areas. The unemployment rate in the Mississippi Partnership area was the lowest in the state in January 2018 at 4.1 percent. The Southcentral Mississippi and Twin Districts areas had unemployment rates similar to the state-level statistic at 4.3 percent and 4.6 percent, respectively. Clearly, these three areas represent a stronger economic climate.

#### *Underemployment*

Following a trend similar to that of the unemployment rate, Mississippi's underemployment rate reached a peak of 17.6 percent in 2010 but has been trending downward, reaching a low of 13.4 percent in May 2015. The declining underemployment rate indicates that more Mississippians are finding employment, moving out of low-wage jobs into gainful employment, finding jobs that match their skill level, and/or benefiting from workforce training services. A decreasing share of underemployed workers also potentially indicates that employers are showing confidence in Mississippi's workforce, establishing new jobs and looking for qualified employees.

### *Workforce Participation Rate*

Despite an improved economic outlook, Mississippi faces some vulnerabilities that provide challenges for its progress. As is the case in other states, the long-term unemployed in Mississippi become discouraged and drop out of the workforce, contributing to the decline of workforce availability in the state (see Figure 7). In the Twin Districts area, the workforce participation rate has remained fairly constant at 59 percent. The Mississippi Partnership and Southcentral Mississippi Works areas have workforce participation rates of 59.6 percent and 59.3 percent, respectively. The Delta area has the lowest workforce participation rate at 52.3 percent.

Upon further analysis, data show that those with less than a high school education are the most vulnerable and most likely to become discouraged workers. Those with any credentials beyond high school in Mississippi, as in the rest of the country, are more likely to be attached to the labor market (see Figure 8).

Additionally, the workforce participation rate varies by age group. In Mississippi, youth (ages 16 to 19) have one of the lowest workforce participation rates at 24.6 percent, while young adults (ages 20 to 24) have a 58.8 percent workforce participation rate (see Figure 9). These findings likely reflect the barriers that young people face in finding employment, even among those who are enrolled in education or training programs.

Figure 5: Number Employed - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Figure5.jpg>

Figure 6: Unemployment Rate - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Figure6.jpg>

Figure 7: Workforce Participation Rate - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Figure7.jpg>

Figure 8: Workforce Participation Rate by Education - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Figure8.jpg>

Figure 9: Workforce Participation Rate by Age - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Figure9.jpg>

Tables 7 and 8 provide figures on individuals with barriers, as defined by WIOA, who are at risk of being unemployed or underutilized. Tables E1-E4 in Appendix E report more details on individuals who face different employment barriers, including those with disabilities, those receiving TANF, those receiving SNAP, and ex-offenders. Individuals with disabilities have an 80-percent employment rate and face the reality of earning inadequate incomes. Currently, there are more than 37,000 individuals on TANF. Of those, almost 8,000 are work eligible, and their employment rate is about 65 percent. TANF recipients who transition into the workforce have median annual earnings of less than \$10,000. There are almost 350,000 work-eligible SNAP recipients. Their employment rate is approximately 46 percent, and their median earnings are approximately \$14,000 annually. There were almost 10,000 individuals released from the correctional system in 2014. Almost 40 percent of ex-offenders were able to find employment within one year of their release. Their median annual earnings were approximately \$16,000. Further analysis (results not shown) also shows that ex-offenders who fail to find employment within one year are likely to reenter the correctional system within three years.

Table 7: Populations with Barriers to Employment - [https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/table7\\_2018.jpg](https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/table7_2018.jpg)

Table 8: Unemployment & Workforce Participation Rates of Vulnerable Populations - [https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/table8\\_2018.jpg](https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/table8_2018.jpg)

### *Labor Market Trends*

A comprehensive labor market analysis identified three groups of industries: established in decline, established growing, and new and emerging. This analysis was primarily focused on high-demand and high-growth areas in growing and new and emerging industries. This analysis used Bureau of Labor Statistics data and Mississippi Works Labor Exchange administrative data. The former was used to produce 10-year projections and the latter to produce current yearly openings. Results of this analysis are reported in Tables F1-F5, Appendix F.

Advanced manufacturing is expected to generate almost 5,000 new jobs, mostly for team assemblers. In 2014, 3,018 new advanced manufacturing jobs were opened. Some of the major employers in advanced manufacturing are Nissan, Toyota, Yokohama, Ashley Furniture, and Howard Industries.

More than 2,000 jobs are expected to be created in the next 10 years in the healthcare support industry. Most of these are related to transporting medical supplies. In 2014, 1,808 new healthcare support jobs were opened. Some of the major employers in healthcare support are Versant, Teleflex, and Anda Pharmaceuticals.

Tourism is expected to have more than 12,000 new jobs over the next 10 years, with the largest demand in food preparation, cooks, and line supervisors. In 2014, 18,934 new tourism jobs were opened. Some of the major employers in tourism are Beau Rivage Resorts, Gold Strike Casino Resort, and Horseshoe Casino and Hotel.

Over the next 10 years, well-established industries in the state are projected to see job growth approaching 57,000 new jobs. Of those, more than 26,000 will be filled by the top 20 occupations, including nursing and elementary and postsecondary teachers.

The analysis shows that approximately 90 percent of the jobs created in advanced manufacturing will be middle-skill jobs (see Figure 10). The analysis also shows that approximately 80 percent of the jobs in healthcare support will be middle-skill jobs. Even the established industries will create jobs that will tend to require middle skills (71 percent). In contrast, the vast majority of tourism jobs created are projected to require low skills.

#### *Education and Skill Levels*

According to the American Community Survey, for the Mississippi population ages 25 and older, 18.5 percent have less than a high school education, 30.5 percent have completed high school, and 22.7 percent have some college. Those with associate and bachelor's degrees account for 8.1 percent and 12.8 percent of the population, respectively. The remaining 7.3 percent have a graduate or professional degree. Of the four local workforce development areas, the Delta area has the largest segment of the population with less than a high school education (26.7 percent).

Data from the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange reveal that more than 150,000 individuals sought employment assistance in 2015 (see Table 9). Of those, more than 61 percent were low-skill job seekers with high school education or less. Another 19 percent had some college education. An appreciable number of job seekers, in the magnitude of more than 10,000, had a two-year associate degree, and approximately 12,000 had a four-year degree. Almost 7,000 had an occupational skills certificate. These data clearly show that a large segment of Mississippi's workforce has low skills and could benefit from skill upgrades.

Figure 10: Mississippi Middle-Skill Demand - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Figure10.jpg>

Table 9: Education and Skill Levels of Current Job Seekers - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Table9.jpg>

### *Skill Gaps*

Current data show that 66.3 percent of jobs in Mississippi fall within the definition of middle-skill, but only 37.1 percent of the state's workforce has the requirements to fill a middle-skill job (see Figure 11). In contrast, Mississippi has more workers than available jobs in the low-skill category. This oversupply of labor also exists for high-skill jobs that require college credentials and beyond. Given that there is a middle-skill gap, the availability of such jobs indicates that many Mississippians could attain gainful employment by seeking additional education and training.

A supply and demand analysis reveals that Mississippi has an appreciable skill gap (see Table 10). In fiscal year 2015, there was a demand of almost 29,000 jobs in new and emerging sectors and established high-growth, high-demand sectors. During the same time period, approximately 3,000 individuals were prepared for these middle-skill jobs through the community college system. In fiscal year 2015, the overall skill gap was approximately 26,000.

Figure 11: Mississippi Middle-Skill Jobs - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Figure11.jpg>

Table 10: Gap Between Current Supply and Demand for Middle-Skill Occupations in New and Established Sectors - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Table10.jpg>

## 2. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES ANALYSIS

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The Unified or Combined State Plan must include an analysis of the workforce development activities, including education and training in the State, to address the education and skill needs of the workforce, as identified in *Education and Skill Levels of the Workforce* above, and the employment needs of employers, as identified in *Employers' Employment Needs* 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 and optional one-stop delivery system partners.\*

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\* 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.

### *WIA System*

When examining adult, dislocated worker, and youth training activities in Mississippi, it becomes evident that the majority of education and training provided by the core programs are for jobs in

the healthcare sector. Specifically, 937 individuals in 2014 received education and training in the areas of nursing (RN, LPN, and CNA), radiography, pharmacy technicians, phlebotomy, dental hygiene, physical therapy, and respiratory care. The second largest education and training activity was for truck driving, with 436 receiving training. Another 190 received training in manufacturing-related skills. Almost 1,700 individuals received on-the-job training (OJT). The vast majority of WIOA Title I and III system activities are geared toward staff-assisted services such as labor market information, job search, and job referral rather than education and training activities.

### *TANF Education and Training Activities*

TANF Work Program (TWP) activities include vocational education training, jobs skills training directly related to employment, education directly related to employment, and secondary school attendance. These programs are available to each participant and will be tracked. All require supervision by faculty, instructors, or supervisors, and each program has minimum requirements. Each type of training includes monitoring and attendance reporting of participants. Case managers will determine the appropriate amount of face-to-face contact needed. In some cases, if allowable classroom hours are not sufficient to meet the monthly federal participation requirements, actual hours spent in supervised and unsupervised study sessions and assessments will be reported and counted.

Vocational education training offers a sequence of courses directly related to the preparation of individuals for employment in current or emerging occupations that do not require an advanced degree. Allowable programs include vocational associate degree programs, postsecondary educational programs, instructional certificate programs, industry skill certifications, non-credit course work, WIN Job Center training offerings, short-term and employer-needs training from the Mississippi Community College Board (MCCB), Job Corps training offerings, Basic Skills Education and English as a Second Language (ESL), and distance learning programs. Vocational education cannot exceed a 12 month lifetime maximum.

Job skills training directly related to employment involves training or education for job skills that provide an individual the ability to obtain employment or to advance or adapt to the changing demands of the workplace. Job skills training can include customized training to meet the needs of a specific employer or training that prepares an individual for employment, including literacy and language instruction, if necessary, to enable the participant to perform a specific job or engage in a specific job training program.

Education directly related to employment involves educational activities related to a specific occupation, job, or job offer for individuals aged 20 or older who have not received a high school diploma or a certificate of high school equivalency. These activities may include educational courses designed to provide the knowledge and skills for specific occupations or work settings, Adult Education, ESL, literacy skills, and supervised homework and study activities.

Secondary school attendance involves attendance at a secondary school or in a course of study that leads to a high school equivalency (HSE) diploma. This is an allowable activity for individuals age 20 and older who do not have a high school diploma or an HSE diploma. Participation in this activity is not restricted to individuals for whom obtaining an HSE diploma is a prerequisite for employment. Minor parents (younger than age 20) who have not completed secondary school or received an HSE diploma are encouraged to pursue a diploma.

### *Internships*

In addition to the workforce education and training activities delivered within community college classrooms, transitional programs such as internships and apprenticeships are essential components of the workforce education and training system in the state.

Internships have been identified as one of the most important types of non-credit training that Mississippi job seekers can use to attain the skills for gainful employment. Many of the internship opportunities offered by employers in fiscal year 2014 required middle skills. The number of middle-skill internships could increase in the future with growing relationships between community colleges and employers in Mississippi.

The Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES) provides a Veterans Internship Program (VIP) to help veterans transition to the civilian workplace. The program is designed to connect businesses seeking qualified job candidates with military veterans seeking transition to the civilian workplace. The Twin Districts area designed the pilot program with funding from the U.S. Department of Labor. Through the program, eligible veterans receive resume preparation assistance, interpersonal skills training, and paid work experience in high-demand occupations. Worksites are chosen based on current hiring opportunities, appropriate compensation rates, and available occupations. Employers' willingness to train and mentor veterans through planned, structured, and meaningful learning experiences was critical to their participation. The pilot VIP program began at the Columbia Workforce Investment Network (WIN) Job Center, providing 10 veterans with enhanced job skills and new skills to help them compete in the current job market. Businesses were given an opportunity to learn how valuable military skills translate to civilian jobs. The 12-week internship included between 20 and 40 hours per week of paid experience. Eight (two of whom were disabled veterans) of the 10 veterans in the pilot program were hired permanently.

One-Stop Center operators offer an Adult Internship Program in the Mississippi Partnership area that provides interns with practical work experience and leadership skills while they seek full-time employment. The program provides businesses an opportunity to try out potential applicants in real work settings. The program responds to the need of individuals to acquire relevant work experience and interpersonal skills. In addition, some community colleges partner with local businesses to provide specialized training programs that may include a two-year associate degree, a cutting-edge curriculum, and paid work experience. Each of these community college and business partners will vary on the hours per week and the wage provided. However, the paid work experience is at a minimum of three days or 16 hours per week, with wages starting at \$14 per hour and potentially increasing to \$20 per hour. When possible, some community colleges provide interns an eight-hour shift for the purpose of experiencing a full day's work. At the end of the corresponding academic semesters, participating industries are reimbursed approximately \$2,500 per intern to help offset wages. Reimbursement to companies is administered through the corresponding local workforce development area.

#### *Special Programs for SNAP Recipients, Seniors, and People with Disabilities*

The 2014 Farm Bill authorized funds for 10 pilot Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) projects designed to reduce dependency on public assistance and increase work efforts. As a grantee, the Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) partnered with the State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB), Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES), employers, and community colleges to develop and implement the state's first SNAP E&T pilot program.

The Mississippi Works Career Assessment Program (Smart Start Pathway Class) is a four-week course that prepares participants for future employment or postsecondary education. The course includes career planning, job skills training, education, wraparound services, and life skills. At the end of the course, the participant is provided with a voucher to implement a career plan through one of three pathways: 1) an academic pathway focused on high school equivalency attainment or career-technical education, 2) a life skills pathway, or 3) a work pathway in which students can participate in subsidized or unsubsidized employment or additional career training. The goal is to connect or reconnect SNAP participants to a middle-skill job pathway. Participants will be selected from counties within five community college districts (Itawamba Community College, Mississippi Delta Community College, East Mississippi Community College, Jones County Junior College, and Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College). These five community colleges are representative of the socioeconomic context of the state and include both metropolitan and rural areas. The target population for the pilot includes approximately 80,000 work-eligible SNAP recipients residing in the five community college districts.

The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) is a community service and work-based, job-training program for older Americans. Authorized by the Older Americans Act, the program provides training for low-income, unemployed seniors. Participants also have access to employment assistance through American Job Centers. SCSEP participants gain work experience in a variety of community service activities at nonprofit and public facilities, including schools, hospitals, childcare centers, and senior centers. SCSEP is administered in 81 counties in Mississippi. Nationally, this program has provided more than 40 million community service hours to public and nonprofit agencies, allowing them to enhance and provide needed services. Participants work an average of 20 hours per week and receive the federal minimum wage, which is currently \$7.25. Also, limited fringe benefits are provided. This training serves as a bridge to unsubsidized employment opportunities for participants. Participants must be at least 55 and unemployed with a family income of no more than 125 percent of the federal poverty level. Enrollment priority is given to veterans and qualified spouses, then to individuals who are older than 65, have a disability, have low literacy skills or limited English proficiency, reside in a rural area, are homeless or at risk of homelessness, have low employment prospects, or have failed to find employment after using services through the American Job Center system.

Mississippi Goodworks, of Goodwill Industries, collaborates with the government and industry to provide jobs for people with disabilities or other disadvantages. These services give participants a chance for practical, paid work experience while giving local businesses and government agencies valuable high-quality production services. Additionally, Goodwill Industries has a contract with the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, OVR, and OVBR to provide job evaluation and training. Through its contracted services, Goodworks has generated approximately \$2.5 million in salaries and payroll taxes annually. It employs 135 people who have barriers to employment, such as those with physical and emotional disabilities, individuals in 12-step programs, and ex-offenders.

#### *Dropout Prevention and Recovery*

A special focus of workforce activities is in dropout prevention and dropout recovery, especially in relation to youth. Mississippi is committed to providing comprehensive services to eligible youth, especially individuals with significant barriers to employment or individuals at risk of falling out of the education pipeline. The Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES) provides comprehensive services to youth through an integrated system of education, workforce training, skills development, and job-readiness services. These services are designed to assist eligible youth

to receive the educational and employment skills, training, and support needed to achieve academic and employment success as they transition into the workforce and/or postsecondary education.

Dropout prevention activities are also part of youth program efforts in the state. Services to eligible youth are delivered through a network of youth providers. Independent contractors may competitively bid for youth funds and deliver local workforce development area Youth Program services that include counseling, occupational skills training, leadership development, guidance, follow-up work-readiness training, internships, job placement, pre-employment training, work experience, high school equivalency preparation and achievement, employment referral to on-the-job training, and individual training accounts.

Innovative approaches used by youth providers include the Counseling to Career (C2C) youth programs, and Career Connections. The C2C program provides one-on-one counseling that helps youth develop a personalized individual service strategy that leads to short- and long-term academic and/or career goals. C2C counselors provide tutoring services to youth in need of basic skill development through reading, math, and language education and develop educational workshops, mock interviews, mentoring, and community service projects. Counselors will also assist youth with finding jobs with local employers and, if applicable, make referrals to additional services.

The primary goal of the Career Connections program is to equip youth with the education and skills needed to take advantage of new job opportunities in high-growth labor markets. Educators partner directly with industries to expand career-specific learning for Career Connections participants in areas such as professional development, mock interviews, resume writing, dual enrollment options, and postsecondary education options.

In addition to the services provided to eligible youth through MDES, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) offers several dropout prevention strategies. MDE-approved dropout prevention programs include the following:

- **Career academies** incorporate academic and technical skills, small-size classes, and collaboration among teachers. Currently utilized in nine school districts across the state, these programs allow students to receive industry-recognized credentials at no cost. In some districts, these programs are open to all high school students, while others have been implemented as pocket academies, which accommodate a cohort of students. Key characteristics of the career academy include: 1) a smaller learning community of students linked to a common set of teachers; 2) cohort scheduling and common planning; 3) physical space shared by one academy; 4) integrated curricula focused on the selected academy concept; 5) advisory groups; 6) strong community and industry connections; and 7) dual credit/dual enrollment options.
- **Dual credit/dual enrollment** allows high school students to simultaneously earn college academic or career/technical credit and credit toward a high school diploma. Mississippi Works dual credit/dual enrollment policy—a key element of Governor Phil Bryant's 2012 legislative agenda—provides high school students at risk of dropping out with the opportunity to complete their education while learning a skill or trade. Additionally, Mississippi Code 37-15-38, Section 19, allows the local school districts to work with local community colleges to connect successful students to college-level coursework.
- **Jobs for Mississippi Graduates** is a program designed to keep young people in school through graduation and to provide work-based learning experiences that will lead to career

advancement opportunities or enrollment in a postsecondary institution. Students receive follow-up services for 12 months after graduation. Students are targeted for services based on a number of barriers to staying in school through graduation and/or transitioning from school to a career. The program serves approximately 2,100 students per year. Governor Phil Bryant is a strong advocate of Jobs for Mississippi Graduates and has championed the program's expansion into a significant number of additional schools under his administration.

Community-based organizations are also heavily engaged in dropout prevention and recovery. Jobs for Mississippi Graduates (JMG) is an affiliate of the Jobs for America's Graduates Program. For 25 years, JMG has worked in partnership with local school districts, area industry leaders, and community colleges to support recent graduates, students at risk of dropping out of high school, and students who need assistance in the transition from school to work. JMG operates 65 program sites across Mississippi and serves 2,100 individuals per year from 13-24 years of age. Students receiving services from JMG graduate at a rate of 90 percent or greater and enroll in post secondary educational institutions at a rate of 35% and are employed directly in the workforce at a rate of 21%.

The Mississippi Scholars program is managed by the Public Education Forum of Mississippi and partners with local business leaders to prepare high school students for a successful transition to college, university coursework, or technical training necessary to compete in the 21st century job market. Since its inception in 2003, the Mississippi Scholars program has recognized more than 25,000 graduating seniors from more than 160 high schools for completing the program. Additionally, the Mississippi Scholars Tech Master program was designed to encourage high school students to pursue a career and technical coursework.

Another dropout prevention strategy focuses on improving college completion rates. In 2014, at Governor Phil Bryant's urging, the Mississippi Legislature passed SB 2563, requiring community colleges and universities to develop plans to address teen pregnancy on their campuses and its associated barriers to education, such as childcare, transportation, and financial aid. Because Mississippi's teen pregnancy rate is highest among girls ages 17 to 19, and because teen pregnancy affects a woman's ability to complete her education, obtain a good job, and earn sufficient family wages, the passage of SB 2563 is a significant step toward increasing college completion rates and the skill level of Mississippi workers.

Dropout recovery is another element of the strategy to improve economic opportunities for low-skill job seekers. For individuals who became disconnected from the education pipeline and are unable to attach themselves to the workforce, basic skill remediation is often necessary before job placement. It is nearly impossible for individuals lacking proper math, reading, writing, communication, teamwork, and computer skills to be competitive in today's labor market. Adult Education (AE) programs provide adults with the education needed for functional literacy before they move on to employment or additional education and training. AE programs administered through the Mississippi Community College Board (MCCB) are designed to offer opportunities that will enhance the skills and abilities of individuals preparing for the workforce or additional educational activities.

AE provides services throughout the state through local grantees at 15 community colleges, four public schools, one community-based organization, and all state correctional facilities. In addition to assessing an individual's educational needs in reading, math, and writing, AE serves as the

foundation on which workforce education is fundamentally based. The Office of Adult Education conducted a grant competition for eligible providers under WIOA following the guidelines received from the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE). Awards are distributed annually based on funding received from OCTAE.

Building off of the dropout recovery strategies of AE programs, the Mississippi Integrated Basic Education and Skill Training (MI-BEST) initiative led by the Mississippi Community College Board incorporated a career pathway model within the delivery of basic education. MI-BEST primarily targets high school dropouts, low-income individuals, and other students by accelerating their transition from basic skills education to postsecondary programs of study. MI-BEST incorporates contextualized learning by concurrently delivering AE and career and technical education (CTE) classes using a team-teaching approach. In addition, MI-BEST provides low-skill, undereducated, and low-wage workers opportunities to enter career pathways with the appropriate level of instruction, leading to postsecondary degrees and/or credentials and, ultimately, self-sufficiency.

Through MI-BEST, Mississippi joins a growing number of states implementing best practices designed to recover and accelerate postsecondary credential attainment among high school dropouts and other nontraditional students. Participants in the MI-BEST program must earn a Career Readiness Credential at any level, earn a Smart Start Credential, and continue on-the-job training. Upon completion of this program, students have the skills and credentials to enter the workforce at the middle-skill level.

#### *Employment Services*

In addition to the core services administered by Combined Plan Partners, Mississippi's workforce system offers a variety of employment services to ensure all job seekers have the resources and tools to secure gainful employment.

#### *All Job Seekers*

Job search, job referral, and provision of labor market information are the key supportive services offered to all job seekers by the Mississippi Department of Employment Security through the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange, which connects job seekers to employers through both web and mobile applications. Job seekers can 1) build a profile using a wizard-style intake form; 2) automatically generate a resume; 3) search for and apply online to openings; 4) receive emails or text messages when new openings match the job seeker's criteria; 5) receive real-time feedback through an innovative gap analysis that helps a job seeker determine how well matched he or she is for a particular position; and 6) access easy-to-understand labor market analysis. For job seekers who lack computer skills, One-Stop Center staff can also log into the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange to assist job seekers in applying for positions through a "staff-assisted referral" or other Wagner-Peyser services.

#### *Postsecondary Students*

Mississippi's higher learning institutions offer career center support on all eight public university campuses: Alcorn State University, Delta State University, Jackson State University, Mississippi State University, Mississippi University for Women, Mississippi Valley State University, The University of Mississippi, and The University of Southern Mississippi. These centers provide students with information about career development, coordinate career fairs, develop partnerships with employers that lead to internships and cooperative education possibilities, and provide instruction in resume creation and interview techniques.

As an extension of campus career centers, the Mississippi Department of Employment Security offers MSGradJobs.com, an online job search application allowing students in all Mississippi postsecondary institutions (public and private universities and community colleges) to receive weekly email messages containing job matches that correlate with the students' academic majors. Students may sign up individually for this service, or they may be connected directly with the system through a growing list of direct university and community college partners. Since the system launch in mid-2013, 601,661 emails have been sent to 15,232 registered students representing 41 Mississippi institutions (four-year and community colleges) and 148 out-of-state institutions in the United States and abroad.

A sister site, MSTechJobs.com, focuses on ensuring that students in Mississippi's community colleges are notified about openings in high-demand, middle-skill occupations.

Another example of coordinated outreach to postsecondary students is Get On The Grid, an initiative led by the Mississippi Energy Institute and made possible by numerous public and private partners. The initiative's purpose is to promote educational and occupational opportunities in the energy and advanced manufacturing sectors. Through its website GetOnTheGridMS.com, students can explore careers through videos and connect with training providers via a searchable database.

#### *Ex-Offenders*

To address barriers to employment faced by ex-offenders, the Mississippi Department of Corrections and the Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES) partnered to create the "Employment Connections" system that enables an offender to create a pending workforce profile in the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange prior to release. Upon release, this profile goes live, and the offender is given an information sheet containing credentials to log into the system and the address of the nearest job center. MDES operates an innovative, automated Work Opportunity Tax Credit processing system that enables Mississippi employers to quickly apply for and receive tax credits that encourage the hiring of persons from several at-risk groups, including ex-offenders. In fiscal year 2014, more than 45,000 Mississippi employers took advantage of the tax credit program and hired more than 16,000 Mississippians within targeted populations. MDES also administers the Federal Bonding Program that allows employers to hire, with limited liability, at-risk job applicants such as ex-offenders. Employers are insured for theft, forgery, larceny, or embezzlement by the bonded employee, thus reducing the barriers many employers face in hiring ex-offenders.

#### *Supportive Services*

In addition to employment services, Mississippi's workforce system offers a variety of supportive services to ensure that job seekers who face a wide variety of challenges have the resources and tools to secure gainful employment.

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for a particular position; and 6) access easy-to-understand labor market analysis. For job seekers who lack computer skills, One-Stop Center staff can also log into the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange to assist job seekers in applying for positions through a "staff-assisted referral" or other Wagner-Peyser services.

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A sister site, MSTechJobs.com, focuses on ensuring that students in Mississippi's community colleges are notified about openings in high-demand, middle-skill occupations.

### *Job Seekers Who Face Barriers to Employment*

In order to assist job seekers who face the greatest barriers to employment, Mississippi's workforce system offers services to mitigate childcare needs, transportation needs, and needs arising from disability.

- Childcare services are provided by the Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) in connection with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Work Program, and the Child Care Certificate Program. For participants who lose TANF eligibility due to earned income, MDHS also administers the Transitional Child Care Program to mitigate childcare barriers that may otherwise prevent these new workers from succeeding in their attempts to become self-sufficient. MDHS administers an additional federally funded program, the Child Care Certificate Program, which assists parents who meet income and work requirements in paying for preschool tuition. As of 2014, there are 7,646 Transitional Child Care participants receiving childcare assistance. Additionally, in 2014 TANF transferred \$17,353,516 to the MDHS Division of Early Childhood Care and Development for assistance with childcare needs.
- Transportation services are provided by MDHS, the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS), and the Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT). To participants in the TANF Work Program, MDHS provides transportation in the form of a bus pass or monthly work allowance. For participants who lose TANF eligibility due to earned income, MDHS also administers the Transitional Transportation Program. From

October 2013 to September 2014, MDHS provided a total of \$12,840,420 to 4,345 participants in these programs. MDOT's transit programs provide capital assistance, operating assistance, and administration for four Federal Transit Administration (FTA) programs: 1) the Rural Area Formal Grants Program; 2) the Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program; 3) the Job Access and Reverse Commute Program; and 4) the New Freedom Program. These programs address transportation needs for low-income individuals, those living in rural areas, seniors, those needing transportation for work opportunities, and those with disabilities.

Services to address the needs of those with disabilities are coordinated by MDRS. MDRS's Assistive Technology program assists workers and employers in applying technological solutions that enable MDRS clients to succeed vocationally. Through the Success Through Assistive Rehabilitative Technology (START) program, MDRS operates a device training and loan program and works with the T.K. Martin Center for Technology and Disability at Mississippi State University to apply a multidisciplinary approach to removing barriers that affect individuals with disabilities vocationally. MDRS also assists MDES in ensuring the accessibility of its One-Stop Centers.

#### *Pilots*

In addition to the supportive services described above, several state agencies are currently studying innovative models of barrier mitigation through pilot programs.

MDHS launched an innovative Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education and Training (SNAP E&T) pilot program in March of 2016 that enrolls study participants in intensive, wraparound services while they pursue training for middle-skill employment in five community college districts. This wraparound model for supportive services features navigators, counselors who regularly meet with the participant to assist in career planning, and the use of a four-week intensive Career Assessment Program (CAP). CAP integrates basic skills and work-readiness activities with assessments designed to discover barriers and connect at-risk persons with the labor market prior to training. As part of the wraparound services, study participants will have access to childcare and transportation vouchers as well as vouchers for equipment such as steel-toed boots or personal safety equipment required for transitional employment.

#### *Employer-Focused Activities*

The Workforce Enhancement Training (WET) fund, established by the Mississippi Legislature in 2004, provides financial support for community colleges to work collaboratively with state businesses to design and implement specialized short-term training programs to teach the skills that employees need to be productive and up-to-date in their jobs. There are approximately 100,000 participants (who can be enrolled in more than one program), with the Safety and Medical/Healthcare programs each accounting for the greatest share of participants at roughly 40,000 each. The Industrial Production and Quality Control Management programs also have a large number of participants at approximately 18,000 each. These job-training programs include the following:

- **Pre-employment training** allows local community colleges to deliver basic instruction to applicants. During the course of instruction, businesses evaluate the applicants to identify and hire trainees that best meet their needs.

- **Train the trainer** reimburses (limited) travel costs to businesses that send employees for specialty training not currently offered by the state’s community college system. Once trained, the employees train other business employees on the learned specialty skills.
- **Applicant assessment** allows community colleges to assist local businesses in evaluating the basic skills of applicants.
- **Customized training** offers the development and delivery of training that meets a specific business need via a community college trainer.
- **Customized industry-based training** allows the community college to assist businesses in identifying and securing a training provider when the training is not provided by a local college.
- **Career readiness certification** confirms to employers that an individual has the basic workplace skills and abilities required for 21st century jobs.

### *Public-Private Partnerships*

In recent years, partnerships between public and private entities have resulted in many successful career awareness programs. Get On The Grid and Mississippi Scholars are two recent examples.

Get On The Grid, an initiative led by the Mississippi Energy Institute and made possible by numerous public and private partners, promotes educational and occupational opportunities in the energy and advanced manufacturing sectors. Through its website [GetOnTheGridMS.com](http://GetOnTheGridMS.com), students can explore careers through videos and connect with training providers and companies via a real-time database. Get On The Grid also offers educator resources to encourage interactive career exploration in the classroom.

Sponsored by the Mississippi Economic Council (MEC) and the State Chamber of Commerce, Mississippi Scholars is a program that encourages high school students to take a more rigorous course of study, including STEM-focused coursework, to prepare for success in university coursework or technical training necessary to compete in the 21st century job market. Mississippi Scholars is managed by an MEC affiliate, the Public Education Forum of Mississippi, and benefits from partnerships with local business leaders working through local chambers of commerce and other community, business, and economic development organizations. Since its inception in 2003, the Mississippi Scholars program has recognized more than 30,000 graduating seniors, representing high schools in 90 school districts statewide, for completing the program.

MEC added a second track, Mississippi Scholars Tech Master, which recognizes high school students who take a specific course of study aimed at more immediate career-readiness. In addition to coursework, Mississippi Scholars Tech Master students must meet attendance and performance standards aimed to prepare them for either direct entry into careers or further study and certification not necessarily requiring a four-year college approach. Mississippi Scholars Tech Master is now offered in 75 school districts and has recognized more than 1,000 high school graduates in its pilot phase and its first full-year ramp-up. Projections indicate that by the end of the first five full years of operation, the Mississippi Scholars Tech Master program will recognize 7,500 graduating seniors a year—about 25 percent of the annual statewide graduating class.

## **B. THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES**

Provide an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the workforce development activities identified in (A) above.

## **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats**

After a series of meetings and input from all parties, a consensus was formed that the current workforce system is structured to:

- Deliver education and training to prepare individuals for jobs and careers.
- Upgrade, maintain, and fine-tune the skills of the incumbent workforce.
- Connect individuals to jobs and offer supportive services.
- Support business retention, expansion, and recruitment.
- Maintain and improve integration of education and workforce data in order to produce high-quality labor market information.

There was also clear agreement on the opportunities and challenges facing Mississippi's current workforce development system.

### *General Strengths*

- Contains all of the necessary elements of a future-ready workforce ecosystem: education delivery services, job placement services, supportive services, and a robust system to collect and disseminate labor market information.
- Recognizes that workforce development is shared responsibility with roles for educational partners, including K-12 schools, two-year colleges, and four-year universities; workforce support services; and public and privately administered programs by employers, business and industry associations, communities, and faith-based partners.
- Provides cross-agency support services that promote education, professional development, and training, especially through the services provided by the Mississippi Department of Education, community colleges, and Institutions of Higher Learning.
- Connects people to jobs through agency services and innovative use of technology.
- Leverages the system of Planning and Development Districts (PDDs) across the state to ensure that projects and programs are developed in line with regional long-range plans.
- Integrates community-based organizations (CBOs) into the slate of statewide services.

### *Program-Specific Strengths*

- Title I, Title III, UI, TAA, and SCSEP: The Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES) administers training funds for Youth, Adult, and Dislocated workers in partnership with community colleges and other training providers managed by an eligible training provider list (ETPL). These services are accessible throughout the state's four local workforce development areas through a network of local WIN Job Centers operated by local partners or by MDES on behalf of local partners. All case-management activities for the administration of workforce training and employment services are recorded in the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange system, bringing consistency to data collection and performance tracking. MDES provides essential labor market support services through connecting and reconnecting people with jobs. MDES provides the technological platform and expertise to bridge job seekers effectively with employers and other workforce stakeholders. Technologically, MDES leverages the strength of a web-services connection between its Unemployment Insurance case management system, ReemployMS, and its Employment Services system, the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange. The efficiencies

realized by this connection between UI and Employment Services has informed the development of the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module that will enable all Combined Plan Partners to realize the benefits of electronic referrals and electronically coordinated case management according to a common career pathway model. Another key strength of the MDES technology portfolio is its robust self-service capability that allows participants to access employment and unemployment services through web and mobile applications from any location.

- Title II, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Programs (AEFLA): The Mississippi Community College Board delivers adult education services through a large, statewide network of contractors providing literacy, equivalency, and other training to adults in need of a high school education. AE providers work closely with community groups and local job centers to ensure that workforce area residents are aware of class availability. Key to meeting the training needs of Mississippi's workforce, AE programs have the ability to reach into rural communities and provide training toward high school equivalency prerequisites supportive of further training for middle-skill occupations. In addition, AE classes serve as an effective intake for MI-BEST training that combines equivalency training with community college workforce training.
- Title IV, Vocational Rehabilitation Services: The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitative Services (MDRS) assists Mississippians who face barriers to access the labor market through specialized training and workforce supports. MDRS professional staff provide expertise in assisting those with disabilities to enter in-demand occupations, and MDRS already assists other Combined Plan Partners in assessing the accessibility of their respective service delivery systems.
- TANF: The Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) implements programs to assist individuals and families to become self-sufficient. MDHS administration of TANF cash assistance and the TANF work program helps meet the financial needs of vulnerable individuals and families while providing funds for workforce training activities and supportive services such as transportation and childcare. In addition, MDHS administers the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), a program serving about 20 percent of Mississippi's population. SNAP Education and Training funds provide support for community college training and will provide a key source of additional allocated and matching funds to assist the most vulnerable Mississippians in accessing training for in-demand occupations while providing funds to assist with food security and to overcome barriers such as childcare and transportation.
- Other Supportive Programs: The Mississippi Department of Transportation coordinates a network of public and specialized transportation agencies that help provide access to jobs, education, and training opportunities.

#### *General Weaknesses*

- Ineffective matching of incumbent workers and job seekers to career pathways.
- Ineffective matching of college students with career-strengthening opportunities, such as experiential education and co-ops.
- Suboptimal system coordination to inform training and education programs to keep them on the leading edge of workforce expectations.
- Competing visions and interests across sectors, programs, and agencies.

### *Program Specific Weaknesses*

- Title I, Title, III, UI, TAA, and SCSEP: These programs, administered by MDES, are currently administered without the benefit of technology that allows MDES to directly refer individuals to training providers. MDES staff must manually assist participants to access supportive services provided by Combined Plan Partners. There is currently no automated way to ensure that participants in workforce-related training programs are able to move from a local job center to training providers or to other Combined Plan Partners. This limitation may result in discontinuities and jeopardize the clarity required for career pathways to be navigated from multiple entry and exit points. Further, while certain Title I programs require an individual employment plan, such a plan is not currently held in common with other state partners, limiting the capacity of the entire workforce and training system to serve participants comprehensively with an overall career goal in mind.
- Title II, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Programs (AEFLA): Current AE resources, administered by the Mississippi Community College Board's network of providers, are focused predominately on training by regulation. In order to provide career counseling and other supportive services, MCCB must connect its participants with services from other Combined Plan Partner programs, such as Wagner-Peyser for job search assistance; TANF for assistance with childcare, transportation, and cash assistance; and SNAP for food assistance. AE case management data are accessed by staff only; participants have no self-service option for accessing career plans. In addition, there is no formal, automated technology that organizes and tracks referrals from AE providers to other Combined Plan Partners.
- Title III, Wagner Peyser Services: Despite the great strengths of the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange in fostering connections between job center staff, participants, and employers, the system currently interfaces directly only to the MDES Unemployment Insurance management system. Referrals to other Combined Plan Partner services are currently based on paper forms, meaning that system-wide analysis of effectiveness in meeting the needs of vulnerable job seekers is difficult to automate.
- Title IV, Vocational Rehabilitation Services: As with other Combined Plan programs, Vocational Rehabilitation case management is conducted in an agency-specific system that does not interface directly with other Combined Plan Partner systems. While MDRS provides a nearly complete combination of supportive, training, and labor market services to a certain subset of workforce participants, there is currently no technology to support the connection of MDRS participants to TANF, Unemployment Insurance services, or even to the extensive labor market services provided by local WIN job centers.
- TANF: Currently there is no way for TANF case workers to create a formalized, electronic referral to a local WIN job center. TANF work requirements are sometimes met without providing candidates with career counseling that takes into account labor market needs. In previous years, TANF had no resources designed to improve participant soft/necessary skills, but WIOA will provide access to the "Smart Start Pathway Class" to address these barriers to employment. Further, the computer systems used to manage TANF cases do not provide participants with a self-service interface to access career planning documentation.

### *Opportunities*

- To develop a responsive and proactive workforce ecosystem built on collaboration between statewide leaders, regional experts, and local developers.
- To dynamically support state and local efforts with regard to business retention, expansion, and recruitment.
- To adapt education and training programs to meet current needs and emerging opportunities.
- To develop cross-program performance metrics to enable improved monitoring of workforce development programs to gauge progress in achieving performance benchmarks.
- To expand technology to meet the unified technology requirements of WIOA and other federal initiatives.

### *Threats*

- Too complex and hard to navigate.
- Insufficient feedback mechanism to inform education and workforce partners so that they can adapt to changes in the workforce ecosystem.
- Not nimble enough to adapt to changing federal regulations regarding the development of cross-program, cross-agency performance metrics.

## C. STATE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CAPACITY

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

### **Development Capacity**

The state's capacity rests in the supportive nature of its cultural and political environment, the strength of its technology and data systems, its programmatic capacity to support the success of vulnerable individuals, and the distribution of its physical infrastructure.

#### *Political and Cultural Capacity*

For more than a decade, the state has worked to create a cultural and political environment to foster cooperation and integration across education and workforce programs. In 2004, the state passed the Mississippi Comprehensive Workforce Training and Education Consolidation Act. The main goal of the act was to reduce fragmentation and duplication of services and to promote performance-based management.

#### *Technology and Data Capacity*

To date, the state has developed and implemented one of the most integrated technology-based workforce systems in the country, commonly known as Mississippi Works. The system fully integrates Unemployment Insurance, Trade Adjustment Assistance, Adults, Dislocated Workers, Youth, Veterans, Work Opportunity Tax Credit, and Senior Community Service Employment Program. Mississippi Works is fully interoperable with other case management systems such as those in use for Rehabilitation Services, Adult Education, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. The state has also developed and implemented one of the country's most comprehensive and advanced integrated data systems, commonly known as LifeTracks, to advance performance-based management. The development of this system began in 2005, and the system has been fully operational since 2009. In 2012, the Mississippi Legislature created the State Longitudinal Data

System (SLDS) Governing Board for the management and oversight of data sharing and data use. Board members include representatives from each workforce and education sector in the state. The SLDS Governing Board has developed a clear set of rules that define the scope of the system along with those ensuring data integrity, security, confidentiality, and privacy (see Appendix B).

#### CAPACITY TO SUPPORT THE SUCCESS OF VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Mississippi's capacity to support those with barriers to employment will greatly expand under the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model. In cooperation with the Mississippi Community College Board, all Combined Plan Partners will be able to refer participants with the greatest barriers to employment to a "Smart Start Pathway Class" designed to fully assess a participant's work skills and assist the participant to overcome attitudinal or other soft-skills challenges. Further, all partners will collect a basic set of diagnostic information from WIOA participants allowing for an automated assessment of participant needs. No longer will participants be left to navigate the workforce or social services system alone, responsible to follow up with word-of-mouth referrals to supportive or workforce training programs. No matter which Combined Plan Partner the participant visits first, he or she will be fully assessed and connected with supportive services that will enable the participant to have the best possible opportunity to succeed in training for or entering in-demand occupations.

#### *Physical Infrastructure Capacity*

The workforce system also relies on infrastructure with multiple points of access provided by WIOA Combined Plan Partners.

*WIN Job Centers.* Job centers in Mississippi have been branded under the Workforce Investment Network (WIN) and are known as WIN Job Centers. There are 45 centers across the state, and most Mississippi residents are within 30 miles of a center. These centers provide easy access to employment services, such as education and training for workers, human resource assistance for businesses, and information for economic developers. In support of Mississippi businesses, WIN Job Centers offer a vast array of services, including providing E-Verify, hosting job fairs, posting jobs, screening potential workers, communicating meaningful data about Mississippi's labor market, and providing training services — all at no cost to businesses and workers. The "WIN in Mississippi" system gathers and produces meaningful information to identify business needs and employee skill levels.

Beyond its own physical job centers, the Mississippi Department of Employment Security serves workforce customers via e-WIN Access Points. e-WIN Access Points bring workforce services to more people in areas not served by a full-time WIN Job Center. Each location provides at least one public computer with Internet access and a trained e-WIN Access Point Ambassador to assist job candidates. These ambassadors have a personal connection to the nearest WIN Job Center management, staff, and key partners. e-WIN Access Points are available in all Mississippi Department of Human Services county offices, in some correctional facilities, and in other locations such as public libraries.

*Rehabilitation Services Local Offices.* The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS), Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (OVRB) provide vocational rehabilitation services through a variety of local offices, affiliates, and itinerant teachers. MDRS operates 10 district offices and provides services through 42 physical locations throughout Mississippi. The AbilityWorks division of MDRS is a network of 17 community

rehabilitation programs that provide vocational assessment, job training, and work experience for individuals with disabilities. Three MDRS work locations are WIN Job Centers.

*Human Services County Offices.* The Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) maintains offices in all 82 counties of the state and employs roughly 3,800 Mississippians. The 82 county offices are divided among 13 regions. A regional director is responsible for oversight of the counties within each region. At the state office, staff provide support for policy, procedures, training, and technical assistance needed for program administration.

In addition to county offices, the field division of MDHS is responsible for programs that ensure nutrition and other basic needs are met for low- and medium-income individuals and families in Mississippi. The field division has offices in each county of the state under the guidance of a county director. Staff development and training within MDHS county offices are focused on supporting professional growth by providing training programs and workshops based on the specific needs of the agency office.

MDHS also supports Mississippi Access to Care (MAC) centers. MAC centers are accessible places located throughout the state where older individuals and individuals with disabilities, as well as their families and representatives, can obtain unbiased information and assistance for locating long-term care services and applying for benefits. The centers provide a central source of reliable, objective information about a broad range of programs and services. MAC centers also help people understand and evaluate the various options available, regardless of income or eligibility, for publically funded long-term care.

*Adult Basic Education Access Points.* The Mississippi Community College Board (MCCB) offers Adult Education (AE) through a variety of physical locations, including 15 community colleges, four public schools, one community-based organization, and all correctional facilities.

**Implications of Economic and Workforce Analysis** The preceding economic and workforce analysis provides a solid direction for developing strategies to improve the economic opportunities for those who have become discouraged from entering into the labor force and for those who have entered the workforce but struggle to cross over the poverty line. The analysis suggests that discouraged workers must overcome two challenges to lessen the likelihood of dropping out of the workforce. First, they have to obtain the credentials to regain the confidence needed to secure a good job. Second, they have to be able to develop necessary (soft) skills along with their competencies to meet employer expectations of a workforce willing to learn.

To meet these challenges, learning about life skills and work environment expectations is the first step to moving successfully into the workforce. In this regard, the state developed mechanisms to assess when it is appropriate for job seekers to enroll in an eight-week intensive Smart Start Pathway Class (this class is fully described below under step three of “Goal 2: Strengthen Interagency Partnerships”). Next, the job seeker has the opportunity to be prepared to earn educational credentials or skills necessary to align his or her aspirations with labor market expectations. The analysis also suggests that many will be required to have work experience before they are fully work-ready. A proven strategy for gaining experience is to provide subsidized employment opportunities such as apprenticeships and internships. Similarly, the working poor must be able to upgrade their credentials and improve their skills in order to improve their socioeconomic conditions. A suggested strategy is to engage the working poor in on-the-job training and opportunities for occupational education (e.g., MI-BEST) that are sensitive to the need to balance work schedules with upgrading education and skills.

The analysis also suggests that many of these individuals rely on public assistance in terms of SNAP and TANF and barrier mitigation such as childcare and transportation vouchers. Leveraging public assistance to meet workforce needs requires a great deal of coordination, as many of these services are administered by agencies disconnected from the workforce system. To overcome these barriers, the state developed an overall strategy to engage in common case management aimed at real-time referral. This case management strategy is fully described below under “Goal 2: Strengthen Interagency Partnerships,” and the information technology that makes this strategy possible is described in the section titled “State Operating Systems and Policies.”

To maximize the effectiveness of any strategy aimed at improving the quality of life for low-income individuals, the state recognizes it must engage in systemic change. This change calls for the creation of an ecosystem that aligns resources and services across agencies to achieve system (or statewide) outcomes. The analysis suggests the two most important system outcomes are improving workforce participation rates and increasing the number of people with more than a high school credential. The importance of these system outcomes is shown in Figure 12. This figure provides a national context, showing that states with higher rates of individuals with more than high school credentials also have higher labor force participation rates. Figure 12: U.S. Education and Labor Force Participation Rate by State - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Figure12.jpg> Mississippi must meet the challenge of an economy that puts, more than ever, an emphasis on attaining more than high school credentials. Our state’s low labor force participation rate is not necessarily due to a lack of job opportunities. On the contrary, there are more than 329,000 middle-skill jobs not filled by our current workforce. In order to fill those middle-skill jobs, the state needs to be able to increase the number of people in the workforce who possess middle-skill credentials. Mississippi has a considerably large low-skill workforce that, if adequately educated, could close that gap. Of the state’s 432,000 workers ages 16-64 with low skills, only about 197,000 have jobs. This means that Mississippi has more than 235,000 low-skill individuals who need to be able to enter the workforce. If Mississippi is to close the gap between its current labor force participation rate (55.8 percent) and the national average (62.7 percent), the state needs to close its skill gap by half (add roughly 155,000 people into the workforce) in the next four years.

The key strategy outlined in the Mississippi Combined WIOA Plan is to go beyond program-specific performance metrics and use tools that will allow the state to gauge how a change in one program impacts the change of another program. The state will engage in an ongoing evaluation process using specific data tools such as dashboards, pathway evaluators, and supply-demand models. This is fully described under “Goal 4: Develop Cross-Program Performance Metrics.”

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## B. STATE STRATEGIC VISION AND GOALS

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The Unified or Combined State Plan must include the State’s strategic vision and goals for developing its workforce and meeting employer needs in order to support economic growth and economic self-sufficiency. This must include—

### 1. VISION

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Describe the State’s strategic vision for its workforce development system.

The state’s strategic vision is to create a workforce system that acts and functions as an ecosystem where all parts are connected and line up to achieve common goals and wherein every Mississippian has the opportunity to be work- or career-ready and to secure his or her dream job

right here at home. From the moment one enters the education and workforce system, he or she will be presented with the necessary tools to choose and pursue a career pathway that is relevant to current and future labor markets. Similarly, from the moment current and prospective businesses enter into a partnership with Mississippi's education and workforce system, resources will be immediately aligned to cultivate the sustainable, high-performance workforce critical for maintaining and expanding businesses' long-term economic viability, in turn creating better and more sustainable employment opportunities for Mississippians.

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## 2. GOALS

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Describe the goals for achieving this vision based on the above analysis of 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 of employment\* and other populations.\*\*
- B. Goals for meeting the skilled workforce needs of employers.

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\* 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. 35-14); 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.

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

WIOA Combined Plan Partners will realize this vision by achieving seven goals:

1. Work together to develop policies that will coordinate service delivery with all WIOA Combined Plan Partners.
2. Strengthen interagency partnerships.
3. Develop defined, articulated pathways across educational sectors (K-16+) to create a pipeline for the workforce.
4. Develop cross-program performance metrics.
5. Continue to invest in integrated technology to meet the unified technology requirements of the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and other federal initiatives.
6. Engage partners to establish the plan to remain abreast of changing industry needs and the metrics to measure outcomes to realize the potential of the state's workforce programs and delivery systems.

7. Draft and communicate a unified vision/message.

*Strategies* Goal 1: Work Together to Develop Policies That Will Coordinate Service Delivery with WIOA Combined Plan Partners. Policies are developed to determine functionality of the entire ecosystem. These policies determine the allocation of funding toward shared service delivery and infrastructure costs. The State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB), through the SWIB WIOA Board Committee, will work with a planning and communications group comprised of executive directors from each of the WIOA Combined Plan Partners identified in this plan and other representatives from the SWIB. Local workforce development boards are responsible for certification, operation, and oversight of the One-Stop Centers. Memorandums of understanding (MOUs) detail each partner's role, the resources provided, and expectations for the One-Stop Center. Goal 2: Strengthen Interagency Partnerships. There are two main strategies to address this goal. The first strategy creates career pathways that provide different on- and off-ramps for job seekers with different needs. The second reimagines the state's One-Stop Center delivery system.

Figure 13 presents the flow of the career pathway model that will strengthen interagency partnerships. This model is known as the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model. This model includes six steps designed to synchronize activities within and between Combined Plan Partners. While operationalizing the model requires the use of a unifying technology infrastructure that allows all agencies to make and receive inter-agency referrals and manage common case data (see "State Operating Systems and Policies" below), the model may be described procedurally as follows: Figure 13: Proposed Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model -

<https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Figure13.jpg> Step 1: Point of Entry - - All participants enter the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model through a Combined Plan Partner's intake. For example, a participant may visit a local Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) office and begin speaking with a staff member about the TANF program. Combined Plan Partners perform intake procedures to collect two types of information: (1) basic registration information used to determine program-specific eligibility and support WIOA reporting and (2) answers to a diagnostic instrument composed of questions submitted by each Combined Plan Partner. Next, the partner performs an agency-specific assessment of the participant's immediate needs and works with the participant to create an initial Individualized Success Plan. This initial Individualized Success Plan outlines the Combined Plan Partner services, describes supportive services, and tentatively identifies the subsequent pathway that will bring the participant from his or her current state of work-readiness to unsubsidized employment. The Individualized Success Plan may contain referrals to other Combined Plan Partner programs or Strategic Partner programs.

A participant becomes part of the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model when a Combined Plan Partner enrolls the eligible participant into a Combined Plan Partner program such as UI benefits or TANF. From that point forward, all the resources of Mississippi's workforce system will be aligned to efficiently support the participant in a process designed to bring the participant through a pathway that leads to a career. After a participant receives Combined Plan Partner services and is ready to consider work and pathway options, the partner will ensure that the participant receives a workforce assessment that helps the participant align his or her occupational goals to labor market

realities. For some partners such as Unemployment Insurance or TANF, enrollment in and referral to workforce assessment will occur in rapid succession. For other partners, such as the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, agency services may require an extended period of time to bring the participant into a state of readiness for workforce assessments. The Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model accommodates the differences between partner agencies necessitated by each partner's mission. Step 2: Workforce Assessment - Once he or she is ready for a workforce assessment, the participant may be referred to a local One-Stop Operator or Youth Provider, or if the intake agency has the internal capacity to provide workforce assessment services, he or she may immediately receive these services from the intake agency. Assessment will include registration into the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange, system generation of a Career-Ready Report Card, and revisiting the participant's Individualized Success Plan in order to specify entry into one of three defined career pathways. This assessment may also include an approved work-readiness assessment instrument as needed. Step 3: Pathway Activities - The Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model includes three main pathways:

- **Smart Start Pathway Class** - Participants requiring the most intensive assistance to become job-ready are referred to the Smart Start Pathway Class. The Smart Start Pathway Class is a 45-hour course of study focusing on essential skills needed to become work- or career-ready in middle-skill jobs by addressing the needs identified by employers. The goal of this class is to further identify participant barriers to self-sufficiency. Participation in the Smart Start Pathway Class requires individuals to commit to an assessment process that models a typical work environment and includes an opportunity to develop good workplace habits. Failure to meet program requirements as a result of extenuating circumstances (e.g., drug and alcohol abuse, physical abuse, psychological abuse, etc.) that emerge during the class could cause the participant to exit the Smart Start Pathway by referral to specific treatment resources. The participant may then reenter the Smart Start Pathway after treatment. The Smart Start Pathway Class is also designed to train and educate individuals in need of basic education and job-readiness skills. Literacy challenges are one key indicator the Smart Start Pathway Class may be preferred for a given participant. Pathway activities indicated by the participant's Individualized Success Plan may include Adult Education classes or enrollment in a high school equivalency program. Exit criteria for the Smart Start Pathway Class includes certain scores on approved assessment instruments.
- **Career Tech Pathway** - The Career Tech Pathway is designed to provide technical and career training and education in high-demand job skills or specific job skills that fit the current or future needs of local labor markets. Entry into this pathway is determined by a work-readiness assessment. Based on the assessment, recommended workforce preparation activities for an individual may include enrollment in the Mississippi Integrated Basic Education and Skill Training (MI-BEST) program or in a community college to work toward a postsecondary degree or credential. Necessary skill attainment activities may also be recommended for individuals in this pathway. Exit criteria for the Career Tech Pathway may include the attainment of certain industry-recognized credentials approved by the State Workforce Investment Board, Mississippi Community College Board, or the

Mississippi Department of Education or certain scores on approved assessment instruments.

- **Work-Ready Pathway** - The Work-Ready Pathway is designed for individuals who possess both basic skills and a level of academic and/or technical skill that place them in a position to enter directly into the workforce. These individuals will begin interactive work search immediately after generating an Individualized Success Plan. Other activities available to individuals in this pathway include job referrals, resume preparation, interview techniques, and other professional development training activities.

Step 4: Workforce Reassessment - Upon completion of activities in any pathway and meeting the pathway's exit criteria, participants will meet again with either the intake agency or the coordinating One-Stop Center or Youth Provider to reassess the current Individualized Success Plan and determine the participant's next step. Assessment may be conducted using a work-readiness test or by other criteria. Pathway completers are then directed to another pathway (e.g., a participant who completes the Smart Start Pathway Class will often be referred to the Career Technical Pathway) or to an exit strategy that will transition the participant from the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model into unsubsidized work. Step 5: Exit Strategy - Participants who have satisfactorily exited from any pathway, in consultation with the intake partner or the coordinating One-Stop Center or Youth Provider, may then be directed to an exit strategy such as transitional employment programs or postsecondary degree programs. Transitional employment programs such as subsidized work experience, internships, apprenticeships, or on-the-job training give participants the work experience that is vital for entering or reentering the labor market. Because the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model aims to be a true K-16 pathway, the model also accommodates exit strategies for participants who emerge as capable of either two- or four-year postsecondary degree work to prepare for in-demand occupations. For example, a youth participant may reconnect with the education and training system via the Smart Start Pathway Class and become ready for further degree work at one of Mississippi's community colleges. Some participants (e.g., those on the Work-Ready Pathway) may be ready to directly enter unsubsidized employment and may not require a transitional exit strategy. Step 6: Unsubsidized Employment - Participants who successfully complete an exit strategy are supported throughout their journey with the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model. They have marketable specialized skills and basic and necessary skills and are ready to work. Their Individualized Success Plans may be revisited at any time, but they will have been reconnected with the incentives and benefits that come through gainful employment. The Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model sets forth the general shape of the coordination of Combined Plan Partner programs and Strategic Partner programs under Mississippi's WIOA implementation. To make this model a concrete reality, the operational section of this Combined Plan details how Mississippi will commit technological, physical, administrative, and financial resources to ensure that partners have a workable operational framework.

ONE-STOP CENTER DELIVERY SYSTEM The One-Stop Center delivery system is one key to the success of the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model. Mississippi One-Stop Centers are managed by local workforce development boards according to policies set by the Mississippi Department of Employment Security. The unified intake process of the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model allows for more organized

enrollment, formalized referrals to partner programs, and co-delivery of services. The procedures and physical environment of a restructured One-Stop Center model supports the goals of the pathway system and the needs of each local area and are a physical manifestation of the procedures established for intake and referral in the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module. Three types of caseworkers assist job seekers in the revised One-Stop Center model: cross-trained counselors, walk-around counselors, and partner counselors. Cross-trained counselors received training designed by the State Workforce Investment Board that provides an understanding of the full portfolio of support and training services administered by all Combined Plan and Strategic Partners. Walk-around counselors receive specialized training in how to assist job seekers to use the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange and staff One-Stop resource rooms, monitor participant use of the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange, and offer assistance and guidance as needed. Other Combined Plan Partner counselors correspond to current single-agency counselors who are specially trained to understand the intricacies of individual agency programs.

When a job seeker enters a One-Stop Center, he or she is greeted and directed to an appropriate starting point:

- New customers are assigned to a computer workstation in the center's resource room. Staff assist the customer with accessing the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange online system, and the customer begins the process of registration and profile creation.
- Existing customers seeking caseworker assistance are directed to a cross-trained counselor who accesses the customer's account to assess the customer's current status, update the customer's career plan, and collaborate with the customer to help redirect the customer toward reemployment activities or create referrals to partner counselors from other WIOA Combined Plan Partners.
- Existing customers seeking to use the resource room are assigned a workstation, and walk-around counselors ensure customer activities are likely to result in effective work search.

New customers who have registered, received a Work-Ready Report Card, and created an Individualized Success Plan may then be referred back to a cross-trained counselor who accesses the participant's newly created profile in Mississippi Works and determine next steps based on the participant's Individualized Success Plan.

If the participant's Individualized Success Plan indicates a need for referral to other Combined Plan Partner programs, the cross-trained counselor may assist the participant in connecting directly with relevant partner counselors. Combined Plan Partner counselors receive these referrals via staff dashboards and may act upon referrals by contacting the participant and starting processes that may result in enrolling the participant in additional programs based on agency-specific eligibility determination. Referrals are assigned the status of "pending" upon creation, and all WIOA Combined Plan Partners have the ability to create a referral to another partner. Referrals generated in a One-Stop Center are visible to that center's counselors, and referrals generated automatically through self-service are addressed by the One-Stop Center or Combined Plan Partner office nearest to the participant's address.

After referrals are made, the client meets with case managers from all relevant programs to determine the supportive services necessary to lead the client to gainful employment. Ideally, all meetings with Combined Plan Partners take place in a single visit that begins with registration and ends with a clear sense of how to take the next steps included in the Individualized Success Plan. If meetings must be scheduled on subsequent days, the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange system sends automated reminders to participants about upcoming meetings.

Under Mississippi's WIOA implementation, the One-Stop Center system includes five models of service delivery: 1) Comprehensive One-Stop Centers, 2) Affiliate One-Stop Centers, 3) Virtual Access One-Stop Centers, 4) Call Center Support, and 5) Sector Training Plus Comprehensive One-Stop Centers.

- **Comprehensive One-Stop Centers** - Comprehensive One-Stop Centers physically house the consortium of Combined Plan Partners designated by the State Workforce Investment Board and local workforce development boards (LWDBs). One staff member from each of the Combined Plan Partners is co-located in each of the comprehensive centers. Each of the four local workforce development areas will house at least one Comprehensive One-Stop Center that provides access to the services of the Combined Plan programs and other partners. Decisions to create additional Comprehensive One-Stop Centers beyond the required four centers will be made by all Combined Plan Partners. Each Comprehensive One-Stop Center is strategically designed to meet the workforce needs of the job seekers and employers based on the geography, population, and industry requirements of the area. Comprehensive One-Stop Center staff are expected to have a working knowledge of all programs and services offered through the One-Stop Center and be able to provide clients with the information necessary to make informed decisions. Within a Comprehensive One-Stop Center, cross-trained staff provide fully assisted service to all participants, including but not limited to assisting clients in Mississippi Works Labor Exchange profile development, providing knowledge about individual programs, and referring clients to the appropriate resources. Comprehensive One-Stop Centers also include computer stations that provide virtual, self-service access to workforce and education resources. Additionally, all Comprehensive One-Stop Centers provide career services and access to training services. All One-Stop Center clients, regardless of core service eligibility, have access to general career services. These services include eligibility of services, outreach, intake and orientation, initial assessment, labor exchange services, referrals to programs, labor market information, performance information, training cost information, supportive service information, unemployment insurance information and assistance, financial aid information, and follow-up services. Comprehensive One-Stop Centers are also required to provide access to training services aligned with regional sector strategies. These services may include occupational skills training, on-the-job training, incumbent worker training programs that combine workforce training with related instruction, skill upgrading and retraining, entrepreneurial training, transitional jobs training, job-readiness training provided in combination with other training, Adult Education and literacy activities, and customized training. Additional services may be provided to clients if cross-trained staff determine the services to be appropriate for an individual to obtain or retain employment. These services

include comprehensive assessment, individualized career plan, career planning and counseling, short-term prevocational services, internships and work experience, workforce preparation activities, financial literacy training, out-of-area job search, and English language acquisition. In the time since the WIOA plan was first submitted, all four workforce development areas have successfully established comprehensive centers.

- **Affiliate One-Stop Centers** - Unlike the Comprehensive One-Stop Centers, Affiliate One-Stop Centers do not require a staff representative from all of the WIOA Combined Plan Partners. However, each Affiliate One-Stop Center must include staff from at least two Combined Plan Partner programs. The primary purpose of Affiliate One-Stop Centers is to provide the core services that will meet the needs of local areas while maintaining a direct lifeline to the larger comprehensive centers. The flexibility of the Affiliate One-Stop Center structure allows for the unique, customized inclusion of multiple access points. Access to services within affiliate centers may include fully assisted service, partially assisted service, self-service, or a combination of all three. Fully assisted service describes one-on-one assistance with a qualified, cross-trained counselor. Partially assisted service involves the presence of a trained counselor who may provide assistance if necessary but who is not required to provide one-on-one support. Affiliate centers may also include computer stations to facilitate self-service access. Self-service access simply requires Internet access and does not include the assistance of trained counselors or staff.
- **Virtual Access One-Stop Centers** - A key mode of service delivery is virtual access. In line with the concept of a universally accessible workforce system, virtual access provides participants with self-service access to services of the core programs and partners via the Internet. As long as an individual has Internet access through a computer or mobile phone, he or she can connect directly to the services provided through One-Stop Centers.
- **Call Center Support** - For participants who lack computer access, the Mississippi Department of Employment Security operates a call center staffed to assist with most One-Stop services.
- **Sector Training Plus Comprehensive One-Stop Centers** - One aspiration of the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model is the development of Sector Training Plus Comprehensive One-Stop Centers throughout the state that cater especially to sector-related training needs. These Sector Training Plus Comprehensive One-Stop Centers will provide access to all of the services represented in the comprehensive centers as well as sector-focused workforce training. These centers will be strategically placed according to sector needs across the state, as industry sector laborsheds often overlap the boundaries of workforce areas.

Mississippi's revised One-Stop Center model, and especially the Comprehensive One-Stop Center, serves as a physical expression of the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model, but participants who first encounter the system via self-service, Combined Plan Partner offices, or even through informal referrals from Strategic Partners still receive a consistently high level of service coordinated to produce outcomes with efficiency and without duplication of effort. *One-Stop Center Staff Training*. Within the reimagined One-Stop Center, employees and staff are required to know essential characteristics of the

services offered by all Combined Plan Partner and Strategic Partner programs. Cross-program professional development provides working knowledge about individual programs, specific contact information for area experts (communication plan), and the relationships among programs. To accomplish this task, all Combined Plan Partners developed easy-to-reference fact sheets to be compiled into a resource page accessible in the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange system. A strategic plan to distribute resources and provide training to One-Stop Center staff were developed and implemented by curriculum experts. Training resources are made available through the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange system to facilitate training at local offices. As programs and policies change, this adaptable online training program provides ongoing training opportunities to staff. This continuing education model, Mississippi Works University, helps maintain an individual staff member's understanding of the Mississippi workforce ecosystem and support his or her growth within the system. As programs and policies change, this adaptable online training program will provide ongoing training opportunities to staff. This continuing education model, Mississippi Works University, will help to maintain an individual staff member's understanding of the Mississippi workforce ecosystem and support his or her growth within the system. *Additional Physical Access Points.* In order to reach more Mississippians and improve access, Mississippi Department of Human Services county offices and community colleges are used along with existing job centers to provide access to counselors who are familiar with the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model. With the combined network of MDHS county offices, One-Stop Centers, community colleges, and correctional facility access points, no Mississippian is more than 30 miles from a physical location where they may get help in securing gainful employment. Goal 3: Develop Defined, Articulated Pathways across Educational Sectors (K-16+) to Create a Pipeline for the Workforce. To effectively define career pathways, Mississippi will pursue sector strategies. The state has identified sectors that fall naturally within geographic regions. All employers in the regions will be enrolled in Mississippi Works so that job postings are made available in real time to education and training providers. The state economic development agency—the Mississippi Development Authority—and the Mississippi Economic Development Council (MEDC) have existing partnerships that bridge employers and education and training providers across the state. Community colleges function as an intermediary to coordinate the alignment of K-16 with employer needs in the region, state, and beyond.

Another strategy is to align sector strategies with secondary career technical education initiatives to advance career pathways for high school graduates. Following recommendations from the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) has adopted a framework to enhance its career technical education programs to prepare high school graduates for post-secondary credentialing and, ultimately, for high-skill, high-demand jobs in the state. The focus of this framework is to line up workforce needs with secondary and postsecondary student preparation. As a result, a seamless system of career education and labor market opportunities for high school students can be developed in line with sector strategy goals of the state.

An additional strategy is to identify internship opportunities with employers across the state. The Institutions of Higher Learning board has already developed a central office to coordinate these efforts and has contacted several businesses to identify critical areas for which employers would like to have interns. The state has also modified its technology to

allow employers to post internships on the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange. Currently, in the high-growth, high-demand sectors, the typical areas that employers identify as critical for internships include engineering and management. Goal 4: Develop Cross-Program Performance Metrics. In addition to existing eligible training provider required reports, three data tools will be developed to fully assess overall performance of the state workforce system: dashboards, pathway evaluators, and supply and demand analysis. *Dashboards.* Dashboards will help answer questions such as the following: do participants complete skill training? Do they get jobs? How much do they earn? Creating these dashboards will help identify programs that have strong outcomes and warrant expansions as well as those that have weak outcomes and are in need of improvement or reevaluation. *Pathway Evaluator Tools.* Pathway evaluator tools help answer two important questions. First, do people with different needs have sufficient access to appropriate programs? Second, what pathways achieve the best employment and earnings outcomes for job seekers with different training and educational needs and varying life and work experiences? For example, some individuals who might seek training might have been laid off after several years in the workforce, whereas others might be preparing for their first job or postsecondary education. Still others might be pursuing training during or after work to improve their skills.

Creating these pathway evaluator tools will help identify strategies that will best align supporting services, education, and training to prepare individuals with different needs for middle-skill jobs. Ultimately, this will help determine the extent to which the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model allows programs to work together to help people with different needs. *Supply and Demand Analysis.* Supply and demand analyses helps address questions about skill gaps and provide information to direct resources so that they better meet employer demand. This type of analysis will assess the extent to which education and training systems are aligned with economic strategies and growth of economic opportunities in the state. Goal 5: Continue to Invest in Integrated Technology to Meet the Unified Technology Requirements of the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Other Federal Initiatives. The strategy builds on and leverages current technology, such as Mississippi Works, to create a common intake and catalog of services, interagency case management dashboards, and an integrated physical data model for performance measures. In doing so, the state will be better able to align programs and services and improve the efficiency of the system as a whole. The ultimate goal is to create a fully integrated state system that will be able to respond in real time. Until real-time reporting is possible, the State Workforce Investment Board will create a schedule that designates the frequency that Combined Plan Partners must submit data to the State Longitudinal Data System (LifeTracks) for WIOA reporting. Goal 6: Engage Partners to Establish the Plan to Remain Abreast of Changing Industry Needs and the Metrics to Measure Outcomes to Realize the Potential of the State's Workforce Programs and Delivery Systems. The strategy is to capitalize on the State Longitudinal Data System infrastructure where research questions and policy can be developed. The state has already created the scientific capacity that creates basic knowledge to inform continuous system improvement. This capacity will be expanded by identifying critical research areas important to the economic development of the state. Goal 7: Draft and Communicate a Unified Vision/Message. This strategy will include three components. One component is to further develop the "Mississippi Works" branding of the state workforce system as a marketing tool for economic development. The second component is to improve awareness of the

opportunities and resources the system provides to job seekers and employers to increase confidence in the value proposition of the system. The third component consists of creating awareness of career opportunities early in the K-16 pipeline. Combined, these components will create a holistic image of the system through a unified message.

### 3. PERFORMANCE GOALS

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

In order to assess performance a full four quarters after program exit, projected baseline figures for WIOA core programs were based on program year 2012 (July 2012-June 2013) data. WIOA mandates six performance measures, as identified in Appendix G, for its core programs. Performance number baselines were calculated using the following methodology:*Employment, Quarter 2.* This employment measure is the percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program in question; the measure for youth also includes the percentage who were in education or training activities during the second quarter after exit.*Employment, Quarter 4.* This employment measure is the percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program in question; the measure for youth also includes the percentage who were in education or training activities during the fourth quarter after exit. *Median Earnings, Quarter 2.* This measure identifies the median earnings of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program. *Credential Attainment Rate (except Wagner-Peyser).* The credential attainment rate is expressed as the percentage of participants who obtained a recognized postsecondary credential or a secondary school diploma, or its recognized equivalent, during participation in or within one year of exit from the program. A participant who has obtained a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent is only included in this measure if the participant is also employed or is enrolled in an education or training program leading to a recognized postsecondary credential within one year after program exit. Other measures for which baseline calculations are not required to be computed in this document are: MEASURABLE SKILL GAINS (EXCEPT WAGNER-PEYSER). Measurable skill gains are expressed as the percentage of participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains, which are defined as documented academic, technical, occupational, or other forms of progress toward such a credential or employment. *Effectiveness in Serving Employers.* Per current WIOA requirements, Mississippi will choose two of three options proposed for measuring effectiveness in serving employers for data collection and reporting during PY 2016 and PY 2017. During the Mississippi WIOA implementation process, the relative merits of the proposed measures—employee retention rate, repeat business customer rate, and employer penetration rate—will be discussed and measures will be selected based on state needs and employer feedback.

Agencies administering the WIOA core programs will be required to provide data for WIOA federal reporting, and the State Workforce Investment Board may establish other metrics to be used internally for strategic planning.

Most performance indicators rely on the concept of the "exit" that, under current DOL regulations, occurs when an active participant goes 90 days without receiving a service under a relevant program. In order to calculate the cross-agency participation periods necessary to determine when an exit occurs for co-enrolled participants, the State Workforce Investment Board will work to establish a procedure for maintaining a list of standardized services provided by each agency that impact participation periods. This list of standardized services will enable the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module to receive service delivery data from each agency, determine whether a given service is relevant to WIOA reporting, and calculate a revised expected exit date in real time. *Performance Projections* Appendix G contains projected performance numbers for PY2018 and PY2019. Because the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model was specifically formulated to address Mississippi's workforce development needs, its implementation is expected to result in increased performance for all programs. Two factors, however, have motivated the state to project performance at the baseline level for the next two program years. First, given the shape of Mississippi's recovery from the Great Recession, we do not currently expect to see appreciable gains in employment for the next two program years. Second, the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model targets gains in middle skill employment that will require several program years beyond implementation to realize.

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#### 4. ASSESSMENT

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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 and other feedback to make continuous or quality improvements.

The WIOA system will be assessed in terms of system processes, system outcomes, and long-term individual outcomes. To assess system processes, an evaluation tool will be developed that will address the efficiency of the model and its implementation. System outcomes will be assessed using the proposed data tools: dashboards, pathway evaluators, and supply and demand analyses. This approach will be augmented with other common performance metrics. Long-term individual outcomes will be assessed in terms of socioeconomic mobility within five years of receiving training or other services from the system. The State Longitudinal Data System will be used to assess long-term individual outcomes.

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#### C. STATE STRATEGY

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The Unified or Combined State Plan must include the State's strategies to achieve its strategic vision and goals. These strategies must take into account the State's economic, workforce, and workforce development, education and training activities and analysis provided in Section (a) above. Include discussion of specific strategies to address the needs of populations provided in Section (a).

1. DESCRIBE THE STRATEGIES THE STATE WILL IMPLEMENT, INCLUDING INDUSTRY OR SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS RELATED TO IN-DEMAND INDUSTRY SECTORS AND OCCUPATIONS AND CAREER PATHWAYS, AS REQUIRED BY WIOA SECTION 101(D)(3)(B), (D). "CAREER PATHWAY" IS DEFINED AT WIOA SECTION

3(7) AND INCLUDES REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP. "IN-DEMAND INDUSTRY SECTOR OR OCCUPATION" IS DEFINED AT WIOA SECTION 3(23).

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Our career pathway strategies are aligned with our first three goals:

**Goal 1:** Work Together to Develop Policies That Will Coordinate Service Delivery with WIOA Combined Plan Partners. Policies are developed to determine functionality of the entire ecosystem. These policies determine the allocation of funding toward shared service delivery and infrastructure costs. The State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB), through the SWIB WIOA Board Committee, will work with a planning and communications group comprised of executive directors from each of the WIOA Combined Plan Partners identified in this plan and other representatives from the SWIB. Local workforce development boards are responsible for certification, operation, and oversight of the One-Stop Centers. Memorandums of understanding (MOUs) detail each partner's role, the resources provided, and expectations for the One-Stop Center.

**Goal 2:** Strengthen Interagency Partnerships. There are two main strategies to address this goal. The first strategy creates career pathways that provide different on- and off-ramps for job seekers with different needs. The second reimagines the state's One-Stop Center delivery system.

Figure 13 presents the flow of the career pathway model that will strengthen interagency partnerships. This model is known as the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model. This model includes six steps designed to synchronize activities within and between Combined Plan Partners. While operationalizing the model requires the use of a unifying technology infrastructure that allows all agencies to make and receive inter-agency referrals and manage common case data (see "State Operating Systems and Policies" below), the model may be described procedurally as follows:

Figure 13: Proposed Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model -

<https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Figure13.jpg>

Step 1: Point of Entry - - All participants enter the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model through a Combined Plan Partner's intake. For example, a participant may visit a local Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) office and begin speaking with a staff member about the TANF program. Combined Plan Partners perform intake procedures to collect two types of information: (1) basic registration information used to determine program-specific eligibility and support WIOA reporting and (2) answers to a diagnostic instrument composed of questions submitted by each Combined Plan Partner. Next, the partner performs an agency-specific assessment of the participant's immediate needs and works with the participant to create an initial Individualized Success Plan. This initial Individualized Success Plan outlines the Combined Plan Partner services, describes supportive services, and tentatively identifies the subsequent pathway that will bring the participant from his or her current state of work-readiness to unsubsidized employment. The Individualized Success Plan may contain referrals to other Combined Plan Partner programs or Strategic Partner programs.

A participant becomes part of the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model when a Combined Plan Partner enrolls the eligible participant into a Combined Plan Partner program such as UI benefits or TANF. From that point forward, all the resources of

Mississippi's workforce system will be aligned to efficiently support the participant in a process designed to bring the participant through a pathway that leads to a career. After a participant receives Combined Plan Partner services and is ready to consider work and pathway options, the partner will ensure that the participant receives a workforce assessment that helps the participant align his or her occupational goals to labor market realities. For some partners such as Unemployment Insurance or TANF, enrollment in and referral to workforce assessment will occur in rapid succession. For other partners, such as the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, agency services may require an extended period of time to bring the participant into a state of readiness for workforce assessments. The Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model accommodates the differences between partner agencies necessitated by each partner's mission. Step 2: Workforce Assessment - Once he or she is ready for a workforce assessment, the participant may be referred to a local One-Stop Operator or Youth Provider, or if the intake agency has the internal capacity to provide workforce assessment services, he or she may immediately receive these services from the intake agency. Assessment will include registration into the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange, system generation of a Career-Ready Report Card, and revisiting the participant's Individualized Success Plan in order to specify entry into one of three defined career pathways. This assessment may also include an approved work-readiness assessment instrument as needed. Step 3: Pathway Activities - The Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model includes three main pathways:

- **Smart Start Pathway Class** - Participants requiring the most intensive assistance to become job-ready are referred to the Smart Start Pathway Class. The Smart Start Pathway Class is a 45-hour course of study focusing on essential skills needed to become work- or career-ready in middle-skill jobs by addressing the needs identified by employers. The goal of this class is to further identify participant barriers to self-sufficiency. Participation in the Smart Start Pathway Class requires individuals to commit to an assessment process that models a typical work environment and includes an opportunity to develop good workplace habits. Failure to meet program requirements as a result of extenuating circumstances (e.g., drug and alcohol abuse, physical abuse, psychological abuse, etc.) that emerge during the class could cause the participant to exit the Smart Start Pathway by referral to specific treatment resources. The participant may then reenter the Smart Start Pathway after treatment. The Smart Start Pathway Class is also designed to train and educate individuals in need of basic education and job-readiness skills. Literacy challenges are one key indicator the Smart Start Pathway Class may be preferred for a given participant. Pathway activities indicated by the participant's Individualized Success Plan may include Adult Education classes or enrollment in a high school equivalency program. Exit criteria for the Smart Start Pathway Class includes certain scores on approved assessment instruments.

- **Career Tech Pathway** - The Career Tech Pathway is designed to provide technical and career training and education in high-demand job skills or specific job skills that fit the current or future needs of local labor markets. Entry into this pathway is determined by a work-readiness assessment. Based on the assessment, recommended workforce preparation activities for an individual may include enrollment in the Mississippi Integrated Basic Education and Skill Training (MI-BEST) program or in a community college to work toward a postsecondary degree or credential. Necessary skill attainment activities may also be recommended for individuals in this pathway. Exit criteria for the Career Tech Pathway may include the attainment of certain industry-recognized credentials approved by the

State Workforce Investment Board, Mississippi Community College Board, or the Mississippi Department of Education or certain scores on approved assessment instruments.

- **Work-Ready Pathway** - The Work-Ready Pathway is designed for individuals who possess both basic skills and a level of academic and/or technical skill that place them in a position to enter directly into the workforce. These individuals will begin interactive work search immediately after generating an Individualized Success Plan. Other activities available to individuals in this pathway include job referrals, resume preparation, interview techniques, and other professional development training activities.

Step 4: Workforce Reassessment - Upon completion of activities in any pathway and meeting the pathway's exit criteria, participants will meet again with either the intake agency or the coordinating One-Stop Center or Youth Provider to reassess the current Individualized Success Plan and determine the participant's next step. Assessment may be conducted using a work-readiness test or by other criteria. Pathway completers are then directed to another pathway (e.g., a participant who completes the Smart Start Pathway Class will often be referred to the Career Technical Pathway) or to an exit strategy that will transition the participant from the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model into unsubsidized work. Step 5: Exit Strategy - Participants who have satisfactorily exited from any pathway, in consultation with the intake partner or the coordinating One-Stop Center or Youth Provider, may then be directed to an exit strategy such as transitional employment programs or postsecondary degree programs. Transitional employment programs such as subsidized work experience, internships, apprenticeships, or on-the-job training give participants the work experience that is vital for entering or reentering the labor market. Because the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model aims to be a true K-16 pathway, the model also accommodates exit strategies for participants who emerge as capable of either two- or four-year postsecondary degree work to prepare for in-demand occupations. For example, a youth participant may reconnect with the education and training system via the Smart Start Pathway Class and become ready for further degree work at one of Mississippi's community colleges. Some participants (e.g., those on the Work-Ready Pathway) may be ready to directly enter unsubsidized employment and may not require a transitional exit strategy. Step 6: Unsubsidized Employment - Participants who successfully complete an exit strategy are supported throughout their journey with the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model. They have marketable specialized skills and basic and necessary skills and are ready to work. Their Individualized Success Plans may be revisited at any time, but they will have been reconnected with the incentives and benefits that come through gainful employment. The Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model sets forth the general shape of the coordination of Combined Plan Partner programs and Strategic Partner programs under Mississippi's WIOA implementation. To make this model a concrete reality, the operational section of this Combined Plan details how Mississippi will commit technological, physical, administrative, and financial resources to ensure that partners have a workable operational framework.

**One-Stop Center Delivery System** The One-Stop Center delivery system is one key to the success of the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model. Mississippi One-Stop Centers are managed by local workforce development boards according to policies set by the Mississippi Department of Employment Security. The unified intake process of the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model allows for more organized

enrollment, formalized referrals to partner programs, and co-delivery of services. The procedures and physical environment of a restructured One-Stop Center model supports the goals of the pathway system and the needs of each local area and are a physical manifestation of the procedures established for intake and referral in the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module. Three types of caseworkers assist job seekers in the revised One-Stop Center model: cross-trained counselors, walk-around counselors, and partner counselors. Cross-trained counselors received training designed by the State Workforce Investment Board that provides an understanding of the full portfolio of support and training services administered by all Combined Plan and Strategic Partners. Walk-around counselors receive specialized training in how to assist job seekers to use the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange and staff One-Stop resource rooms, monitor participant use of the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange, and offer assistance and guidance as needed. Other Combined Plan Partner counselors correspond to current single-agency counselors who are specially trained to understand the intricacies of individual agency programs.

When a job seeker enters a One-Stop Center, he or she is greeted and directed to an appropriate starting point:

- New customers are assigned to a computer workstation in the center's resource room. Staff assist the customer with accessing the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange online system, and the customer begins the process of registration and profile creation.
- Existing customers seeking caseworker assistance are directed to a cross-trained counselor who accesses the customer's account to assess the customer's current status, update the customer's career plan, and collaborate with the customer to help redirect the customer toward reemployment activities or create referrals to partner counselors from other WIOA Combined Plan Partners.
- Existing customers seeking to use the resource room are assigned a workstation, and walk-around counselors ensure customer activities are likely to result in effective work search.

New customers who have registered, received a Work-Ready Report Card, and created an Individualized Success Plan may then be referred back to a cross-trained counselor who accesses the participant's newly created profile in Mississippi Works and determine next steps based on the participant's Individualized Success Plan.

If the participant's Individualized Success Plan indicates a need for referral to other Combined Plan Partner programs, the cross-trained counselor may assist the participant in connecting directly with relevant partner counselors. Combined Plan Partner counselors receive these referrals via staff dashboards and may act upon referrals by contacting the participant and starting processes that may result in enrolling the participant in additional programs based on agency-specific eligibility determination. Referrals are assigned the status of "pending" upon creation, and all WIOA Combined Plan Partners have the ability to create a referral to another partner. Referrals generated in a One-Stop Center are visible to that center's counselors, and referrals generated automatically through self-service are addressed by the One-Stop Center or Combined Plan Partner office nearest to the participant's address.

After referrals are made, the client meets with case managers from all relevant programs to determine the supportive services necessary to lead the client to gainful employment.

Ideally, all meetings with Combined Plan Partners take place in a single visit that begins with registration and ends with a clear sense of how to take the next steps included in the Individualized Success Plan. If meetings must be scheduled on subsequent days, the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange system sends automated reminders to participants about upcoming meetings.

Under Mississippi's WIOA implementation, the One-Stop Center system includes five models of service delivery: 1) Comprehensive One-Stop Centers, 2) Affiliate One-Stop Centers, 3) Virtual Access One-Stop Centers, 4) Call Center Support, and 5) Sector Training Plus Comprehensive One-Stop Centers.

- **Comprehensive One-Stop Centers** - Comprehensive One-Stop Centers physically house the consortium of Combined Plan Partners designated by the State Workforce Investment Board and local workforce development boards (LWDBs). One staff member from each of the Combined Plan Partners is co-located in each of the comprehensive centers. Each of the four local workforce development areas will house at least one Comprehensive One-Stop Center that provides access to the services of the Combined Plan programs and other partners. Decisions to create additional Comprehensive One-Stop Centers beyond the required four centers will be made by all Combined Plan Partners. Each Comprehensive One-Stop Center is strategically designed to meet the workforce needs of the job seekers and employers based on the geography, population, and industry requirements of the area. Comprehensive One-Stop Center staff are expected to have a working knowledge of all programs and services offered through the One-Stop Center and be able to provide clients with the information necessary to make informed decisions. Within a Comprehensive One-Stop Center, cross-trained staff provide fully assisted service to all participants, including but not limited to assisting clients in Mississippi Works Labor Exchange profile development, providing knowledge about individual programs, and referring clients to the appropriate resources. Comprehensive One-Stop Centers also include computer stations that provide virtual, self-service access to workforce and education resources. Additionally, all Comprehensive One-Stop Centers provide career services and access to training services. All One-Stop Center clients, regardless of core service eligibility, have access to general career services. These services include eligibility of services, outreach, intake and orientation, initial assessment, labor exchange services, referrals to programs, labor market information, performance information, training cost information, supportive service information, unemployment insurance information and assistance, financial aid information, and follow-up services. Comprehensive One-Stop Centers are also required to provide access to training services aligned with regional sector strategies. These services may include occupational skills training, on-the-job training, incumbent worker training programs that combine workforce training with related instruction, skill upgrading and retraining, entrepreneurial training, transitional jobs training, job-readiness training provided in combination with other training, Adult Education and literacy activities, and customized training. Additional services may be provided to clients if cross-trained staff determine the services to be appropriate for an individual to obtain or retain employment. These services include comprehensive assessment, individualized career plan, career planning and counseling, short-term prevocational services, internships and work experience, workforce preparation activities, financial literacy training, out-of-area job search, and English language acquisition. In the time since the WIOA plan was first

submitted, all four workforce development areas have successfully established comprehensive centers.

- **Affiliate One-Stop Centers** - Unlike the Comprehensive One-Stop Centers, Affiliate One-Stop Centers do not require a staff representative from all of the WIOA Combined Plan Partners. However, each Affiliate One-Stop Center must include staff from at least two Combined Plan Partner programs. The primary purpose of Affiliate One-Stop Centers is to provide the core services that will meet the needs of local areas while maintaining a direct lifeline to the larger comprehensive centers.

The flexibility of the Affiliate One-Stop Center structure allows for the unique, customized inclusion of multiple access points. Access to services within affiliate centers may include fully assisted service, partially assisted service, self-service, or a combination of all three. Fully assisted service describes one-on-one assistance with a qualified, cross-trained counselor. Partially assisted service involves the presence of a trained counselor who may provide assistance if necessary but who is not required to provide one-on-one support. Affiliate centers may also include computer stations to facilitate self-service access. Self-service access simply requires Internet access and does not include the assistance of trained counselors or staff.

- **Virtual Access One-Stop Centers** - A key mode of service delivery is virtual access. In line with the concept of a universally accessible workforce system, virtual access provides participants with self-service access to services of the core programs and partners via the Internet. As long as an individual has Internet access through a computer or mobile phone, he or she can connect directly to the services provided through One-Stop Centers.

- **Call Center Support** - For participants who lack computer access, the Mississippi Department of Employment Security operates a call center staffed to assist with most One-Stop services.

- **Sector Training Plus Comprehensive One-Stop Centers** - One aspiration of the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model is the development of Sector Training Plus Comprehensive One-Stop Centers throughout the state that cater especially to sector-related training needs. These Sector Training Plus Comprehensive One-Stop Centers will provide access to all of the services represented in the comprehensive centers as well as sector-focused workforce training. These centers will be strategically placed according to sector needs across the state, as industry sector laborsheds often overlap the boundaries of workforce areas.

Mississippi's revised One-Stop Center model, and especially the Comprehensive One-Stop Center, serves as a physical expression of the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model, but participants who first encounter the system via self-service, Combined Plan Partner offices, or even through informal referrals from Strategic Partners still receive a consistently high level of service coordinated to produce outcomes with efficiency and without duplication of effort. One-Stop Center Staff Training. Within the reimagined One-Stop Center, employees and staff are required to know essential characteristics of the services offered by all Combined Plan Partner and Strategic Partner programs. Cross-program professional development provides working knowledge about individual programs, specific contact information for area experts (communication plan), and the relationships among programs. To accomplish this task, all Combined Plan Partners

developed easy-to-reference fact sheets to be compiled into a resource page accessible in the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange system. A strategic plan to distribute resources and provide training to One-Stop Center staff were developed and implemented by curriculum experts. Training resources are made available through the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange system to facilitate training at local offices. As programs and policies change, this adaptable online training program provides ongoing training opportunities to staff. This continuing education model, Mississippi Works University, helps maintain an individual staff member's understanding of the Mississippi workforce ecosystem and support his or her growth within the system. As programs and policies change, this adaptable online training program will provide ongoing training opportunities to staff. This continuing education model, Mississippi Works University, will help to maintain an individual staff member's understanding of the Mississippi workforce ecosystem and support his or her growth within the system. Additional Physical Access Points. In order to reach more Mississippians and improve access, Mississippi Department of Human Services county offices and community colleges are used along with existing job centers to provide access to counselors who are familiar with the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model. With the combined network of MDHS county offices, One-Stop Centers, community colleges, and correctional facility access points, no Mississippian is more than 30 miles from a physical location where they may get help in securing gainful employment.

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 IN REGARD TO WEAKNESSES IDENTIFIED IN SECTION II(A)(2).

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Our last four goals relate to strategies for aligning the mission of all WIOA partners around WIOA goals through integrated customer service:

**Goal 3: Develop Defined, Articulated Pathways across Educational Sectors (K-16+) to Create a Pipeline for the Workforce.**

To effectively define career pathways, Mississippi will pursue sector strategies. The state has identified sectors that fall naturally within geographic regions. All employers in the regions will be enrolled in Mississippi Works so that job postings are made available in real time to education and training providers. The state economic development agency—the Mississippi Development Authority—and the Mississippi Economic Development Council (MEDC) have existing partnerships that bridge employers and education and training providers across the state. Community colleges function as an intermediary to coordinate the alignment of K-16 with employer needs in the region, state, and beyond.

Another strategy is to align sector strategies with secondary career technical education initiatives to advance career pathways for high school graduates. Following recommendations from the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) has adopted a framework to enhance its career technical education programs to prepare high school graduates for post-secondary credentialing and, ultimately, for high-skill, high-demand jobs in the state. The focus of this framework is to

line up workforce needs with secondary and postsecondary student preparation. As a result, a seamless system of career education and labor market opportunities for high school students can be developed in line with sector strategy goals of the state.

An additional strategy is to identify internship opportunities with employers across the state. The Institutions of Higher Learning board has already developed a central office to coordinate these efforts and has contacted several businesses to identify critical areas for which employers would like to have interns. The state has also modified its technology to allow employers to post internships on the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange. Currently, in the high-growth, high-demand sectors, the typical areas that employers identify as critical for internships include engineering and management.

#### **Goal 4: Develop Cross-Program Performance Metrics.**

In addition to existing eligible training provider required reports, three data tools will be developed to fully assess overall performance of the state workforce system: dashboards, pathway evaluators, and supply and demand analysis. Dashboards will help answer questions such as the following: do participants complete skill training? Do they get jobs? How much do they earn? Creating these dashboards will help identify programs that have strong outcomes and warrant expansions as well as those that have weak outcomes and are in need of improvement or reevaluation. Pathway evaluator tools will help answer two important questions. First, do people with different needs have sufficient access to appropriate programs? Second, what pathways achieve the best employment and earnings outcomes for job seekers with different training and educational needs and varying life and work experiences? For example, some individuals who might seek training might have been laid off after several years in the workforce, whereas others might be preparing for their first job or postsecondary education. Still others might be pursuing training during or after work to improve their skills.

Creating these pathway evaluator tools will help identify strategies that will best align supporting services, education, and training to prepare individuals with different needs for middle-skill jobs. Ultimately, this will help determine the extent to which the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model allows programs to work together to help people with different needs.

Supply and demand analysis tools help address questions about skill gaps and provide information to direct resources so that they better meet employer demand. This type of analysis will assess the extent to which education and training systems are aligned with economic strategies and growth of economic opportunities in the state.

#### **Goal 5: Continue to Invest in Integrated Technology to Meet the Unified Technology Requirements of the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Other Federal Initiatives.**

The strategy builds on and leverages current technology, such as Mississippi Works, to create a common intake and catalog of services, interagency case management dashboards, and an integrated physical data model for performance measures. In doing so, the state will be better able to align programs and services and improve the efficiency of the system as a whole. The ultimate goal is to create a fully integrated state system that will be able to respond in real time. Until real-time reporting is possible, the State Workforce Investment

Board will create a schedule that designates the frequency that Combined Plan Partners must submit data to the State Longitudinal Data System (LifeTracks) for WIOA reporting.

**Goal 6: Engage Partners to Establish the Plan to Remain Abreast of Changing Industry Needs and the Metrics to Measure Outcomes to Realize the Potential of the State's Workforce Programs and Delivery Systems.**

The strategy is to capitalize on the State Longitudinal Data System infrastructure where research questions and policy can be developed. The state has already created the scientific capacity that creates basic knowledge to inform continuous system improvement. This capacity will be expanded by identifying critical research areas important to the economic development of the state.

**Goal 7: Draft and Communicate a Unified Vision/Message.**

This strategy will include three components. One component is to further develop the "Mississippi Works" branding of the state workforce system as a marketing tool for economic development. The second component is to improve awareness of the opportunities and resources the system provides to job seekers and employers to increase confidence in the value proposition of the system. The third component consists of creating awareness of career opportunities early in the K-16 pipeline. Combined, these components will create a holistic image of the system through a unified message.

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### III. OPERATIONAL PLANNING ELEMENTS

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

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#### A. STATE STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

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The Unified or Combined State Plan must include—

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##### 1. STATE BOARD FUNCTIONS

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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 carried out).

In accordance with section 101(d) of WIOA, the Mississippi State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB) will establish and operate through a SWIB WIOA Board Committee, whose membership will meet WIOA state board composition requirements, to perform the following services for the Governor:

1. Development, implementation, and modification of the state plan.
2. Collaboration with educational boards (MBE, MCCB, IHL), partners, and service providers to review statewide policies, statewide programs, and recommendations on actions that should be taken by the state to align workforce development programs in a manner that supports a comprehensive and streamlined workforce development system, including the review and provision of comments on state plans.
3. Collaboration with educational boards (MBE, MCCB, IHL), partners, and service providers in the development and continuous improvement of the workforce development system in the state, including:
  - a. Identification of barriers and means for removing barriers to better coordinate, align, and avoid duplication among the programs and activities carried out through the system.
  - b. Development of strategies to support the use of career pathways for the purpose of providing individuals, including low-skill adults, youth, and individuals with barriers to employment (including individuals with disabilities), with workforce investment activities, education, and supportive services to enter or retain employment.
  - c. Development of strategies for providing effective outreach to and improved access for individuals and employers who could benefit from services provided through the workforce development system.
  - d. Development and expansion of strategies for meeting the needs of employers, workers, and job seekers, particularly through industry or sector partnerships related to in-demand industry sectors and occupations.

- e. Identification of regions, including planning regions, for the purposes of section 106(a), and the designation of local areas under section 106 after consultation with local boards and chief elected officials.
  - f. Development and continuous improvement of the One-Stop Center delivery system in local areas, including providing assistance to local boards, One-Stop operators, One-Stop partners, and providers for planning and delivering services, including training services and supportive services, to support effective delivery of services to workers, job seekers, and employers.
  - g. Development of strategies to support staff training and awareness across programs supported under the workforce development system.
4. Collaboration with educational boards (MBE, MCCB, IHL), partners, and service providers for the development and updating of comprehensive state performance accountability measures, including state-adjusted levels of performance, to assess the effectiveness of the core programs in the state as required under section 116(b).
  5. Collaboration with educational boards (MBE, MCCB, IHL), partners, and service providers for the identification and dissemination of information on best practices, including best practices for:
    - a. Effective operation of One-Stop Centers, relating to the use of business outreach, partnerships, and service delivery strategies, including strategies for serving individuals with barriers to employment.
    - b. Development of effective local boards, which may include information on factors that contribute to enabling local boards to exceed negotiated local levels of performance, sustain fiscal integrity, and achieve other measures of effectiveness.
    - c. Effective training programs that respond to real-time labor market analysis.
    - d. Utilize direct assessment and/or prior learning assessment to assess competencies for efficient placement into employment or education pathways.
  6. Collaboration with educational boards (MBE, MCCB, IHL), partners, and service providers for the development and review of statewide policies affecting the coordinated provision of services through the state's One-Stop delivery system described in section 121(e), including the development of:
    - a. Objective criteria and procedures for use by local boards in assessing the effectiveness and continuous improvement of One-Stop Centers.
    - b. Guidance for the allocation of One-Stop Center infrastructure funds under section 121(h).
    - c. Policies relating to the appropriate roles and contributions of entities carrying out One-Stop partner programs within the One-Stop delivery system, including approaches to facilitating equitable and efficient cost allocation in the system.
  7. Collaboration with educational boards (MBE, MCCB, IHL), partners, and service providers for the development of strategies for technological improvements to facilitate access to, and improve the quality of, services and activities provided through the One-Stop delivery system, including such improvements to:

- a. Enhance digital literacy skills (as defined in section 202 of the Museum and Library Services Act (20 U.S.C. 9101); referred to in this Act as “digital literacy skills”).
  - b. Accelerate the acquisition of skills and recognized postsecondary credentials by participants.
  - c. Strengthen the professional development of providers and workforce professionals.
  - d. Ensure such technology is accessible to individuals with disabilities and individuals residing in remote areas.
8. Collaboration with educational boards (MBE, MCCB, IHL), partners, and service providers for the development of strategies for aligning technology and data systems across One-Stop partner programs to enhance service delivery and improve efficiencies in reporting on performance accountability measures (including the design and implementation of common intake, data collection, case management information, performance accountability measurement and reporting processes, and the incorporation of local input into such design and implementation to improve coordination of services across One-Stop partner programs).
9. Development of allocation formulas for the distribution of WIOA Combined Plan program funds to local areas for employment and training activities for adults and youth workforce investment activities as permitted under sections 128(b)(3) and 133(b)(3).
10. Preparation of the annual reports described in paragraphs (1) and (2) of section 116(d).
11. Collaboration with educational boards (MBE, MCCB, IHL), partners, and service providers for the development of the statewide workforce and labor market information system described in section 15(e) of the Wagner-Peyser Act (29 U.S.C. 491-2(e)).
12. Collaboration with educational boards (MBE, MCCB, IHL), partners, and service providers for the development of other policies that may promote statewide objectives for, and enhance the performance of, the workforce development system in the state.?

Mississippi's State Workforce Investment Board president is appointed by the Governor, and the board works through a committee structure. Committees include an executive committee (appointed by the board president), several standing committees, and *ad hoc* committees created to address specific needs. The board conducts three in-person meetings per year and makes use of electronic communication between meetings. Meeting notes are posted on the State Workforce Investment Board website (swib.ms.gov).

The following sections contain a description of how each Combined Plan Partner will implement Mississippi's seven WIOA strategies.

## 2. IMPLEMENTATION OF STATE STRATEGY

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Describe how the lead State agency with responsibility 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 Section II(c). above. This must include a description of—

### A. CORE PROGRAM ACTIVITIES TO IMPLEMENT THE STATE'S STRATEGY

Describe the activities the entities carrying out the respective core programs will fund to implement the State's strategies. Also 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.

In this and subsequent sections, the role of the following State agencies will be described:

- Mississippi Department of Employment Security - Title I, Title III, UI, TAA, Veterans, SCSEP The Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES) administers core programs and services for adults, dislocated workers, and youth (WIOA Title I) and core programs and services covered in the Wagner-Peyser Act (WIOA Title III). MDES also administers four additional Mississippi Combined Plan programs: Trade Adjustment Assistance (Title II-Chapter 2 of the Trade Act of 1974), services for veterans (Chapter 41 of Title 38 United States Code), programs authorized under state unemployment compensation law (Title 71 of the Mississippi Code of 1972), and Senior Community Service Employment Programs (Title V of the Older Americans Act of 1956).
- Mississippi Community College Board - Title II Adult Education The Mississippi Community College Board (MCCB) administers core programs and services listed in the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (WIOA Title II). In addition, MCCB provides advisory oversight to Mississippi's 15 community colleges.
- Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services - Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation Services The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) administers core programs and provides services to Mississippians with disabilities under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (WIOA Title IV).
- Mississippi Department of Human Services - TANF The Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) administers the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, a Combined Plan Program in Mississippi's WIOA strategy.

*MDES: Core Program Activities to Implement State Strategy*

The Mississippi Department of Employment Security will undertake the following activities to implement the state's seven strategies:

1. To work together to develop policies that will coordinate service delivery with WIOA Combined Plan Partners, MDES will participate in shared governance, with regard to WIOA Combined Plan programs, through the State Workforce Investment Board.
2. To strengthen interagency partnerships, MDES will:
  - i. Adopt the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model in its approach to case management.
  - ii. Support the co-enrollment of any Combined Plan Partner participant into Wagner-Peyser once the participant has received partner services and is referred for work or training-related services.
  - iii. Design and implement the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module, in consultation with the State Workforce Investment Board, to coordinate case management data across WIOA partners.

- iv. Set policies to govern the structure and service delivery model of One-Stop Center operations, as well as create policies to govern the creation and operation of Comprehensive, Sector Training Plus, and Affiliate One-Stop Centers.
- v. Conduct staff training to ensure that One-Stop Center staff receive cross training in Combined Plan programs and fully understand the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model.
- vi. Modify the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange to enable participants to access their Individualized Success Plans, including any partner agency-specific addenda to their plans.
- vii. Modify the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange to allow staff to edit Individualized Success Plans and create/view formalized referrals to/from other Combined Plan Partner programs.
- viii. Support integration efforts to enable other Combined Plan Partners to interface with the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module to share data related to the intake of WIOA participants, delivery of services to WIOA participants, WIOA participant Individualized Success Plans, and electronic referrals to Combined Plan Partners.
- ix. Staff Comprehensive One-Stop Centers with at least one Rapid Response staff member.
- x. Staff Comprehensive One-Stop Centers with at least one staff member from Youth Services.
- xi. Modify the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange to receive referrals sent by other Combined Plan Partners.
- xii. Share system infrastructure costs.
- xiii. Continue outreach efforts to assist long-term unemployed and newly unemployed individuals.
- xiv. Include engagement with activities of the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway as an aspect of any Combined Plan program's participation compliance requirements, where applicable.

3. To develop defined, articulated pathways across educational sectors (K-16+) to create a pipeline for workforce, MDES will:

- i. Modify the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange to be able to generate a Work-Ready Report Card on the basis of workforce profile information, labor market information, and sector analysis data. The Work-Ready Report Card will enable direction of participants toward training aligned with employer labor market needs.
- ii. Continue to support, develop, and promote MSGradJobs.com and MSTechJobs.com to connect four-year college and technical students with work opportunities, respectively.

4. To develop cross-program performance metrics, MDES will:

- i. Work closely with the Mississippi State Longitudinal Data System Governing Board to provide data necessary for workforce analysis.
- ii. Ensure that all participants receiving services from MDES will create a profile through the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange.

5. To continue to invest in integrated technology to meet the unified technology requirements of the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and other federal initiatives, MDES will support maintenance and ongoing development of the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange, the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module, MSGradJobs.com, MSTechJobs.com, and the GrantTrak financial tracking system.

6. To engage partners to establish the plan to remain abreast of changing industry needs and the metrics to measure outcomes to realize the potential of the state's workforce programs and delivery systems, MDES will continue to participate in the Mississippi LifeTracks system, contributing workforce data and unemployment insurance wage data necessary to address issues related to the production and valuation of human capital.

7. To draft and communicate a unified vision/message, MDES will:

- i. Participate in system-wide efforts to increase awareness of the Mississippi workforce system among employers and job seekers.
- ii. Participate in activities designed to market the state to prospect businesses.
- iii. Participate in efforts designed to make students in K-16 aware of occupations and Mississippi career pathways.
- iv. Participate in efforts to increase employer awareness of One-Stop Center employer services.

*MCCB: Activities to Implement State Strategy*

The MCCB will undertake the following activities to implement the state's seven WIOA strategies:

1. To work together to develop policies that will coordinate service delivery with WIOA Combined Plan Partners, MCCB will participate in shared governance, with regard to WIOA Combined Plan programs, through the State Workforce Investment Board.

2. To strengthen interagency partnerships, MCCB will:

- i. Provide a cross-trained Adult Education (Title II) representative in four Comprehensive One-Stop Centers.
- ii. Monitor and act upon referrals from One-Stop Centers or Youth Providers to the Smart Start Pathway Class.
- iii. Refer Smart Start Pathway Class completers back to the referring One-Stop Center or Youth Provider for further workforce assessment and pathway or exit strategy direction.
- iv. Share system infrastructure costs.
- v. Include engagement with activities of the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model as an aspect of any Combined Plan program's participation compliance requirements, where applicable.

3. To develop defined, articulated pathways across educational sectors (K-16+) to create a pipeline for workforce, MCCB will:

4. Align Smart Pathway Class curriculum with employer/labor market needs.

- ii. Partner with K-12 providers to enroll dropouts in high school equivalency classes.
4. To develop cross-program performance metrics, MCCB will:
- i . Partner with the Mississippi State Longitudinal Data System Governing Board to provide data necessary for workforce analysis.
  - ii. Interface with the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module to transmit all assessment outcome scores and service enrollments, thus enabling the calculation of skill gains and cross-program participation periods.
5. To continue to invest in integrated technology to meet the unified technology requirements of the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and other federal initiatives, MCCB purchased the Laces system so the Adult Education system can easily exchange data with the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module to share service enrollments, assessment outcomes, modifications to participants' common profiles, and modifications to participants' Individualized Success Plans in compliance with WIOA requirements.
6. To engage partners to establish the plan to remain abreast of changing industry needs and the metrics to measure outcomes to realize the potential of the state's workforce programs and delivery systems, MCCB will continue to leverage the Mississippi LifeTracks system to determine priorities for training and align the Smart Start Pathway Class with labor market needs.
7. To draft and communicate a unified vision/message, MCCB will participate in system-wide efforts to increase awareness of the Mississippi workforce system among employers and job seekers.

*MDRS: Activities to Implement State Strategy*

MDRS will undertake the following activities to implement the state's seven strategies:

- 1. To work together to develop policies that will coordinate service delivery with WIOA Combined Plan Partners, MDRS will participate in shared governance, with regard to WIOA Combined Plan programs, through the State Workforce Investment Board.
- 2. To strengthen interagency partnerships, MDRS will:
  - i. Adopt the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model in its approach to case management.
  - ii. Interface the AwareVR case management system with the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module to coordinate case management data across WIOA partners.
  - iii. Provide a Vocational Rehabilitation services staff representative in the four Comprehensive One-Stop Centers to ensure that Vocational Rehabilitation services are aligned with other Combined Plan programs.
  - iv. Assist One-Stop Center providers with accessibility assessments and train One-Stop Center staff in the use of assistive technologies as needed.
  - v. Refer work-ready participants for workforce assessment and pathway determination by One-Stop Center operators or Youth Providers.

- vi. Share system infrastructure costs.
  - vii. Include engagement with activities of the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway as an aspect of any Combined Plan program's participation compliance requirements, where applicable.
3. To develop defined, articulated pathways across educational sectors (K-16+) to create a pipeline for workforce, MDRS will:
- i. Assist eligible students with disabilities to secure assistive technologies or services needed to enable classroom access, as appropriate.
  - ii. Assist graduating secondary students with disabilities to access job transition services.
  - iii. Continue employer outreach activities.
4. To develop cross-program performance metrics, MDRS will:
- i. Work closely with the Mississippi State Longitudinal Data System Governing Board to provide data necessary for workforce analysis.
  - ii. Interface with the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module to transmit all assessment outcome scores and service enrollments to enable the calculation of skill gains and cross-program participation periods.
5. To continue to invest in integrated technology to meet the unified technology requirements of the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and other federal initiatives, MDRS will interface AwareVR with the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module to share service enrollments, assessment outcomes, modifications to participants' common profiles, and modifications to participants' Individualized Success Plans.
6. To engage partners to establish the plan to remain abreast of changing industry needs and the metrics to measure outcomes to realize the potential of the state's workforce programs and delivery systems, MDRS will continue to participate in the Mississippi LifeTracks system, contributing data necessary to address issues related to the production and valuation of human capital.
7. To draft and communicate a unified vision/message, MDRS will participate in system-wide efforts to increase awareness of the Mississippi workforce system among employers and job seekers.

*MDHS: Activities to Implement State Strategy*

MDHS will undertake the following activities to implement the state's seven strategies:

- 1. To work together to develop policies that will coordinate service delivery with WIOA Combined Plan Partners, MDHS will participate in shared governance, with regard to WIOA Combined Plan programs, through the State Workforce Investment Board.
- 2. To strengthen interagency partnerships, MDHS will:

- i. Adopt the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model in its approach to case management.
- ii. Interface relevant legacy data systems (e.g., MAVERICS) with the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module to coordinate case management data across WIOA partners.
- iii. Provide a TANF-trained MDHS staff representative in the four Comprehensive One-Stop Centers to ensure that TANF is aligned with other Combined Plan programs.
- iv. Refer work-eligible TANF participants to MDES affiliates (e.g., One-Stop operators and some Youth Providers) for Wagner-Peyser services through the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module.
- v. Participate in strategies to leverage TANF transportation and childcare supportive services to enable participation in pathway activities and exit strategy training or transitional work.
- vi. Include engagement with activities of the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway as an aspect of any Combined Plan program's participation compliance requirements, where applicable.

3. To develop defined, articulated pathways across educational sectors (K-16+) to create a pipeline for workforce, MDHS will:

- i. Refer TANF recipients to a One-Stop Center or Youth Provider who will assist TANF recipients in connecting with training that meets employer labor market needs.
- ii. Ensure that job matches between area employers and work-eligible TANF or SNAP recipients occur within the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange.

4. To develop cross-program performance metrics, MDHS will:

- i. Work closely with the Mississippi State Longitudinal Data System Governing Board to provide participant data necessary for workforce analysis.
- ii. Interface with the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module to transmit all assessment outcome scores and service enrollments, thus enabling the calculation of skill gains and cross-program participation periods.

5. To continue to invest in integrated technology to meet the unified technology requirements of the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and other federal initiatives, MDHS will interface MAVERICS and other TANF-relevant case management systems with the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module to share service enrollments, assessment outcomes, modifications to participants' common profiles, and modifications to participants' Individualized Success Plans.

6. To engage partners to establish the plan to remain abreast of changing industry needs and the metrics to measure outcomes to realize the potential of the state's workforce programs and delivery systems, MDHS will continue to participate in the Mississippi LifeTracks system, contributing data necessary to address issues related to the production and valuation of human capital.

7. To draft and communicate a unified vision/message, MDHS will participate in system-wide efforts to increase awareness of the Mississippi workforce system among employers and job seekers.

#### B. ALIGNMENT WITH ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE THE PLAN

Describe how the activities identified in (A) will be aligned with programs and activities provided by 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.

##### *MDES: Alignment with Activities Outside of the Plan*

Mississippi Combined Plan Partners include workforce, education, and human services partners linked by a common data system. One-Stop Center and Youth operators in Mississippi make use of the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange to coordinate programs not explicitly included in the Combined Plan. With regard to the few state partners who operate outside of the unifying case management information technology system that links together Combined Plan Partners, MDES will coordinate at the local level through participation in local workforce development boards and at the state level through participation in the State Workforce Investment Board and in the Mississippi SLDS Governing Board. The SLDS Governing Board brings together all data-contributing workforce, human services, and educational entities throughout the state to enable data-driven strategic planning.

In addition to coordinated alignment through boards, MDES will continue fruitful point-to-point alliances. For example, MDES has partnered with Mississippi Department of Corrections (MDOC) to address prisoner recidivism. MDOC operates pre-release and post-release occupational skills training programs to transition ex-offenders to the workforce. The MDOC/MDES partnership created the Employment Connections project designed to allow offenders who are nearing release to create a workforce profile in the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange that "goes live" upon release. As part of reentry activities, offenders are given a print-out with information for logging into the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange and finding the nearest One-Stop Center.

MDES has also formed relationships with individual educational institutions, such as community colleges and both public and private universities in Mississippi, to connect campus career centers with the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange through MSGradJobs.com and MSTechJobs.com, which will focus even more specifically on the needs of community college graduates with specialized, in-demand technical skills.

##### *MCCB: Alignment with Activities Outside of the Plan*

Mississippi Combined Plan Partners include workforce, education, and human services partners linked by a common data system. Even One-Stop Center and Youth operators in Mississippi make use of the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange to coordinate programs not explicitly included in the Combined Plan. With regard to the few state partners who operate outside of the unifying information technology system that links together Combined Plan Partners, MCCB will collaborate and participate in the State Workforce Investment Board,

local workforce development boards, and Mississippi State Longitudinal Data System Governing Board.

*MDRS: Alignment with Activities Outside of the Plan*

Mississippi Combined Plan Partners include workforce, education, and human services partners linked by a common data system. Even One-Stop Center and Youth operators in Mississippi make use of the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange to coordinate programs not explicitly included in the Combined Plan. With regard to the few state partners who operate outside of the unifying information technology system that links together Combined Plan Partners, MDRS will coordinate activities through its participation in the State Workforce Investment Board and local workforce development boards and through the Mississippi State Longitudinal Data System Governing Board.

*MDHS: Alignment with Activities Outside of the Plan*

Mississippi Combined Plan Partners include workforce, education, and human services partners linked by a common data system. Even One-Stop Center and Youth operators in Mississippi make use of the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange to coordinate programs not explicitly included in the Combined Plan. With regard to the few state partners who operate outside of the unifying information technology system that links together Combined Plan Partners, MDRS will coordinate activities through its participation in the State Workforce Investment Board and local workforce development boards and through the Mississippi State Longitudinal Data System Governing Board.

### 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 and 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.

*MDES: Coordination, Alignment, and Provision of Services to Individuals*

The Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model (described above in "State Strategic Vision, Goals, and Strategies") provides the blueprint for Combined Plan Partner coordination, and the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module provides the information technology infrastructure required to ensure that all provided services are aligned to the blueprint.

MDES plays a key role in the creation of this coordinated system, taking the lead in developing the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module and in training One-Stop Center and Youth Providers to use the MDES case management system, the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange.

Within the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model itself, MDES-affiliated One-Stop Centers or Youth Providers are the key coordinating entities that receive a referral for workforce assessment. These coordinating entities will contact each participant and set up

an appointment so that each participant will execute a full workforce system registration in the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange, generate a Work-Ready Report Card that aligns the participant's expectations to the local labor market, and finalize his or her Individualized Success Plan to choose an initial pathway. If the initial pathway is the Smart Start Pathway Class or the Career Tech Pathway, the One-Stop Center or Youth Provider staff member will create a referral to the partner responsible for the pathway. If the initial pathway is the Work-Ready Pathway, the staff member will coordinate the activities that will be delivered by the designated MDES-affiliated One-Stop Center or Youth Provider responsible for the Work-Ready Pathway in that local area.

Once a participant meets the exit criteria of a given pathway, he or she will be referred back to the MDES-affiliated One-Stop Center or Youth Provider for further evaluation. Staff will reevaluate the participant's Individualized Success Plan, administer any relevant assessments, and either refer the participant to another pathway or designate an exit strategy such as transitional employment or enrollment in an educational institution.

In addition to referrals to pathway programs and exit strategies, MDES-affiliated staff may create referrals to other partners to coordinate supportive services as needed. Because each service enrollment comes from a Common Service Catalog, staff will know whether the participant is already receiving supportive services in a particular category such as childcare or transportation. The Individualized Success Plan itself contains a living list of participant barriers to employment along with prescribed remedies for these barriers through supportive services.

The WIOA services that MDES administers will address the workforce and training needs of every eligible individual. Through Wagner-Peyser services, MDES provides job search, referral, and placement services to all eligible Mississippi workers. MDES funds *adult* training programs administered by local workforce development boards based on the needs of each local workforce development area. To serve *dislocated workers*, MDES coordinates Rapid Response services that assist employers and employees affected by layoffs or plant closures. MDES serves *youth* through specially trained Youth Providers who connect youth to targeted youth programs, other eligible core programs, and education and training opportunities based on the specific needs of the individual. In addition, there are two employment outreach groups: Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVER) and Disabled Veteran Outreach Specialists (DVOP). To fill job openings, LVER staff work directly with businesses, and DVOP staff work directly with unemployed or underemployed *veterans*.

#### *MCCB: Coordination, Alignment, and Provision of Services to Individuals*

MCCB's Adult Education (AE) services play the key role in establishing and conducting the Smart Start Pathway Class in the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model. This class will consist of 45 hours of intensive career development, assessment, and basic skills development. Career enrichment activities are oriented toward in-demand, middle-skill occupations. MCCB and the State Workforce Investment Board established the Smart Pathway curriculum and established pathway exit criteria that may include certain assessment score levels. After participants meet exit criteria from AE classes or complete the Smart Class Pathway, MCCB's AE providers will refer participants to a One-Stop Center or Youth Provider to perform workforce evaluation or workforce reevaluation.

As the administrative/fiscal agent for WIOA Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) services, MCCB funds local programs to provide services to eligible individuals who are 16 years old, are not enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under the MS Compulsory School Attendance Law, are basic skills deficient, do not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, or are English language learners. AE courses will likely serve as the Combined Plan Partner entry point for individuals who lack basic skills such as literacy. AE remediation is offered at 15 community college campuses, four public schools, one community-based organization and all state correctional facilities. AE providers identify the most appropriate starting point for the participant.

*MDRS: Coordination, Alignment, and Provision of Services to Individuals*

MDRS works with the Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) and Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) to serve clients with disabilities and leverage resources to serve more clients. MDRS does not operate a specific career pathway, but its local offices will often be the entry point for Mississippi workers who require vocational rehabilitation services to access the labor market. As appropriate in the rehabilitation process, MDRS will refer the participant to a One-Stop Center or Youth Provider to perform a workforce assessment and direct the participant to an appropriate career pathway.

MDRS provides supportive services that will be included explicitly in Individualized Success Plans and coordinated with supportive services offered by other partners to avoid duplication.

*MDHS: Coordination, Alignment, and Provision of Services to Individuals*

MDHS serves individuals and families through several economic assistance programs that address barriers to work such as food security, transportation, and childcare.

The TANF program, a Combined Plan Partner program, provides benefits for families with needy children under age 18. The TANF program is designed to help needy families achieve self-sufficiency through employment and training activities provided by the TANF Work Program (TWP). TANF supportive services, such as assistance with childcare and transportation expenses, are available to help adults in the family prepare for employment and to promote self-sufficiency. These supportive service enrollments will be transmitted to the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module to ensure that no other Combined Plan Partners provide overlapping services.

The SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) program, a Strategic Partner program, was created to provide access to the necessary skills, training, or experience to increase an eligible recipient's ability to obtain gainful employment. The services provided by the SNAP E&T program include a career assessment by a career and technical advisor, assistance with grant and scholarship applications, enrollment in career education and training programs, assistance with eligible tuition expenses not covered by federal or state grants or scholarships, and other education, training, work, and employment services.

MDHS also administers the Community Service Block Grant that provides core funding to reduce poverty, revitalize low-income communities, and empower low-income families to become self-sufficient.

**D. COORDINATION, ALIGNMENT AND PROVISION OF SERVICES TO EMPLOYERS**

Describe how the entities carrying out the respective core programs, any Combined State Plan partner program included in this plan, 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.

*MDES: Coordination, Alignment, and Provision of Services to Employers*

The Mississippi Department of Employment Security will coordinate and align its services to employers through the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange technology. The Mississippi Works Labor Exchange system empowers employers to explore labor matches through the candidate search function. Employers can find candidates who seem promising and target passive job seekers who may be interested in a career change. The interactive search allows employers to search for candidates by keyword, highest level of education, occupational experience, and proximity. Clicking on a search result brings the employer to a candidate's detail page.

A candidate's detail page maintains the job seeker's anonymity but contains information about the candidate's education, experience, and skills. If an employer is sufficiently interested in a candidate, he or she can issue a "Job-Vite" to the candidate. A Job-Vite is an invitation to apply for a particular position sent by an employer to a promising candidate. Job seekers are notified about Job-Vites by email or text message (SMS) and can decline a Job-Vite or respond positively by simply applying to the position.

The Mississippi Works Labor Exchange also provides convenient tools for employers to manage the application process, including the ability to set interview times and the status of applications. Providing good tools to employers is a way to attract them to enter job orders into the system. Employers who list jobs provide an indication of what skills are in demand; this information, in turn, informs data-driven prioritization of training and workforce development activities. Workforce data of this type provide the hub around which the whole state's economic success rotates because they become a primary source of actionable, strategic data. To encourage the entry of job orders into the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange, MDES has developed a business relations team charged with recruiting businesses to post job listings through MDES and Mississippi Works.

*MCCB: Coordination, Alignment, and Provision of Services to Employers*

MCCB coordinates AE courses through a variety of local providers. Some courses are sponsored by employers and conducted at employer worksites. Local employers also often serve as a source of initial referral of an employee to adult education classes.

*MDRS: Coordination, Alignment, and Provision of Services to Employers*

MDRS works with employers to determine needs for open positions. MDRS uses this information to put together a mix of training and assistive technologies that enable clients to meet job demands. In addition, MDRS coordinates on-the-job training with employers and provides the training that enables an existing worker or trainee to use assistive technologies or other accommodations to fulfill job requirements.

*MDHS: Coordination, Alignment, and Provision of Services to Employers*

Beyond the alignment with employers made possible by the data analysis and sector strategies of the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model, MDHS staff engage employers directly. This engagement takes the form of direct contact with employers to check on job openings and the efforts of county directors to form relationships with community employers who are able to hire TANF or SNAP recipients with work requirements. MDHS will work with the Mississippi Department of Employment Security to enter local job openings into the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange and refer work-eligible SNAP or TANF recipients to these openings via the system to ensure that records of these labor matches are captured by the system and thus available to inform ongoing labor market research.

Under the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model, all TANF or SNAP recipients will be referred to One-Stop Centers or Youth Providers to perform workforce assessment and begin an appropriate pathway strategy.

#### E. PARTNER ENGAGEMENT WITH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Describe how the State's Strategies will engage the State's community colleges and area career and technical education schools, as partners in the workforce development system to create a job-driven education and training system. WIOA section 102(b)(2)(B)(iv).

##### *MDES: Partner Engagement with Educational Institutions*

MDES aligns with community colleges in the provision of training services to youth and adults under WIOA Title I. Often this alignment occurs through One-Stop Affiliate Centers organized and administered by community colleges. These Affiliate One-Stop Centers use the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange to administer individual training accounts and record WIOA services into which trainees are enrolled.

##### *MCCB: Partner Engagement with Educational Institutions*

In conducting the Smart Start Pathway Class, MCCB will be able to align local AE providers with services provided by its 15 member community colleges. These community colleges provide career and technical training and administer AE, high school equivalency, and Career Readiness Certificate (CRC) programs.

##### *MDRS: Partner Engagement with Educational Institutions*

MDRS engages eligible students through transition counselors and special education teachers. This outreach helps create pathways from education to work by arranging internships and other transitional employment for students with special needs prior to graduation.

##### *MDHS: Partner Engagement with Educational Institutions*

Through the SNAP E&T pilot program, MDHS works directly with five community college providers responsible for Career Assessment Program (CAP) courses that reconnect SNAP recipients with the labor market. In non-pilot community college districts, MDHS coordinates the use of SNAP E&T funds to support approved training activities designed to connect participants with work. MDHS refers TANF and SNAP recipients with work eligibility to One-Stop Centers or Youth Providers for assessment and to connect them with

pathways that may lead to training through Adult Education partners, community colleges, public universities, or other training providers.

#### **F. PARTNER ENGAGEMENT WITH OTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROVIDERS.**

Describe how the State's Strategies will engage the State's other education and training providers, including providers on the state's eligible training provider list, as partners in the workforce development system to create a job-driven education and training system.

##### *MDES: Partner Engagement with Other Education and Training Providers*

MDES supports the work of local workforce development areas by maintaining an electronic Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) that establishes an approved list of service providers that may receive Title I (Youth, Adult, and Dislocated), TAA, SCSEP, and other training funds to serve customers enrolled in MDES programs. All local One-Stop centers use MDES technology, the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange, to administer training accounts and record training services provided to participants by eligible training providers. In addition, the MDES Mississippi Works Labor Exchange, through a Workforce Data Quality Initiative Grant, will soon provide self-services to customers, with links to training information for all occupations allowing a participant to see, in the context of viewing a job order, what kind of training courses will be appropriate for the given job. The database supporting this self-service feature will contain all relevant providers, including community colleges, private training institutions (e.g., commercial truck driving training programs), and institutions of higher learning.

##### *MCCB: Partner Engagement with Other Education and Training Providers*

In addition to the provision of Adult Education training courses, MCCB member colleges provide training to customers with Individual Training Accounts through Title I, TANF recipients, SNAP E&T participants, and participants receiving rehabilitative services. All MCCB member colleges and AE contractors are listed in the MDES Eligible Training Provider List. MCCB members also assist the training efforts of some larger employers who operate specialized training programs.

##### *MDRS: Partner Engagement with Other Education and Training Providers*

MDRS works directly with community colleges and other specialized training providers to provide occupational training for participants enrolled in rehabilitative services. MDRS participants enrolled in WIOA Title I training will receive training through courses listed in the MDES Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) based on labor market needs in each local area. Training funded by PELL, TANF, or other partner funds may come from any provider meeting MDRS policies.

##### *MDHS: Partner Engagement with Other Education and Training Providers*

MDHS works directly with community colleges and other training providers, including MCCB/AE, to provide occupational training for participants enrolled in TANF. TANF participants enrolled in WIOA Title I training will receive training through courses listed in the MDES Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) based on labor market needs in each local area. Through a SNAP E&T pilot program, some SNAP recipients will receive training through five participating community colleges that includes necessary (soft skills) training

and occupational training. Training funded by PELL, TANF, or other partner funds may come from any provider meeting MDHS's policies.

### G. LEVERAGING RESOURCES TO INCREASE EDUCATIONAL ACCESS

Describe how the State's strategies will enable the State to leverage other Federal, State, and local investments that have enhanced access to workforce development programs at the above institutions, described in section (E).

#### *MDES: Leveraging Resources to Increase Educational Access*

MDES's community college Affiliate One-Stop Centers will leverage WIOA training funds with Pell Grants and other supportive services provided by Combined Plan Partners as indicated on the participant's Individualized Success Plan.

#### *MCCB: Leveraging Resources to Increase Educational Access*

Adult Education funding is distributed according to the targeted needs of an area and how many instructors are needed. Funding for AE programs is provided through a competitive grant award and is based on the annual appropriation from the Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education. Grantees are aligned with system-wide goals and labor market needs of local program areas and have the capability to provide Smart Start Pathway Class services throughout the state. MCCB member community colleges also provide training through the state's Workforce Enhancement Training (WET) fund, a state funding source derived from employer unemployment insurance taxes that also may be used to administer approved workforce-readiness assessment instruments.

#### *MDRS: Leveraging Resources to Increase Educational Access*

MDRS leverages a variety of funds to better serve the training and education needs of clients. Sources of leveraged funds include client health insurance, Medicaid waiver programs, Pell Grants, WIOA Title I individual training accounts (ITA), Social Security insurance, Social Security disability insurance, and WIOA partner funds through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

#### *MDHS: Leveraging Resources to Increase Educational Access*

MDHS will assist work-eligible SNAP or TANF recipients who enroll in approved training programs to leverage WIOA Title I, Pell, E&T Matching Funds, and other training resources to support training.

### H. IMPROVING ACCESS TO POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIALS

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

#### *MDES: Improving Access to Postsecondary Credentials*

WIOA training services often lead to recognized credentials such as high school equivalency, Career Readiness Certificates, and certificates from partner community colleges. Local workforce development boards will determine strategies for credential attainment based

upon area employer requirements. *MCCB: Improving Access to Postsecondary Credentials*  
ABE courses lead directly to several recognized postsecondary credentials, including the high school equivalency and the Career Readiness Certificate (CRC).

#### MCCB: IMPROVING ACCESS TO POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIALS

AE courses lead directly to several recognized postsecondary credentials, including the high school equivalency, the National Career Readiness Certificate (CRC), and the Smart Start Credential.

Two MCCB member community colleges operate Affiliate One-Stop Centers that coordinate with the Mississippi Department of Employment Security through the use of the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange

to provide Adult, Youth, and Dislocated Worker training.

#### *MDRS: Improving Access to Postsecondary Credentials*

For participants who require a postsecondary credential to attain a career goal, MDRS will develop an Individualized Success Plan that captures the supportive services, partner referrals, and any MDRS-specific addenda required to achieve the goal. In line with informed client choice, MDRS will then refer the participant for workforce evaluation at a One-Stop Center or Youth Provider that will help to develop the participant's Individualized Success Plan further and create a pathway referral to move the participant

closer to attaining the credential.

#### *MDHS: Improving Access to Postsecondary Credentials*

Supportive services provided under TANF will enable work-eligible TANF recipients to overcome barriers to training, and will help recipients earn high school equivalency, Career Readiness Certificates, or other Adult Education credentials. Supportive services provided under SNAP will enable work-eligible SNAP recipients to overcome barriers to training and help recipients earn high school equivalency, Career Readiness Certificates, or other Adult Education credentials.

### I. 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.

#### *MDES: Coordinating with Economic Development Strategies*

MDES will coordinate with economic development strategies by supporting the Mississippi Development

Authority's efforts to market the state workforce system to prospect businesses. This support may take the form of live demonstrations of the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange or of responding to ad hoc data analysis requests designed to demonstrate the regional availability of workers with specialized skills. MDES will also continue to provide workforce and unemployment insurance data to the Mississippi LifeTracks data clearinghouse to enable sector and pathway analysis that will guide the activities of local workforce development boards to align training goals with regional needs.

*MCCB: Coordinating with Economic Development Strategies*

MCCB and its member community colleges participate directly in efforts by the Mississippi Development Authority to recruit prospect businesses to Mississippi by developing specialized work training programs leading to credentials that meet the needs of targeted sectors. Institutions then coordinate with the Mississippi Department of Employment Security to ensure that applicants receive credit for these credentials within the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange when applying to partner employers.

*MDRS: Coordinating with Economic Development Strategies*

MDRS will coordinate with economic development strategies by assisting Mississippi Development Authority projects and providing technical assistance in accessibility assessments to prospective employers of workers with disabilities.

*MDHS: Coordinating with Economic Development Strategies*

MDHS will coordinate with economic development strategies by supporting training and education pathways for TANF and SNAP recipients that meet State Workforce Investment Board sector priorities.

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## B. STATE OPERATING SYSTEMS AND POLICIES

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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. THE STATE OPERATING SYSTEMS THAT WILL SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STATE'S STRATEGIES. THIS MUST INCLUDE A DESCRIPTION OF—

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A. 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.).

In order to execute the data collection, strategic planning, administration, and coordinated implementation of the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model, Mississippi Combined Plan partners will interface with the Mississippi Department of Employment Security's "Mississippi Works" technology system.

*Coordinated Implementation*

Mississippi Works technology consists of several systems with complementary roles. Figure 14 depicts the five main sub-systems.

Figure 14: Mississippi Works Technology System -  
<https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Figure14.jpg>

The five sub-systems of Mississippi Works are:

- Mississippi Works Labor Exchange - The Mississippi Works Labor Exchange is an award-winning web and mobile system used by Mississippi Department of

Employment Security agency staff, job seekers, and employers to coordinate all Department of Labor programs such as Wagner-Peyser, Youth Services, Adult and Dislocated Worker Services, Trade Adjustment Assistance, and others. In Mississippi's WIOA implementation, the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange will serve as the web and mobile interface that participants themselves will use to access any documents or plans generated during case management under the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model. The system was developed in Mississippi through a partnership between the Mississippi Department of Employment Security and the National Strategic Planning and Analysis Research Center (NSPARC) at Mississippi State University. Mississippi Works Labor Exchange already supports the calculation of common participation periods across what have become WIOA Title I, WIOA Title III, and Trade-related programs. The system also disseminates labor market information.

- MSGradJobs.com - MSGradJobs.com connects four-year college students who seek career assistance in Mississippi's university career centers with employers who post jobs in the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange.
- MSTechJobs.com - MSTechJobs.com will connect community college students who seek career assistance in Mississippi's community college career centers with employers who post jobs in the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange.
- MDES/MDOC Employment Connections - The Employment Connections system allows offenders nearing release from Mississippi Department of Corrections facilities to create a pending workforce profile in the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange that "goes live" when the offender is released. As part of exit activities, the offender's profile will be injected into the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange, and the offender will be given a flyer detailing his or her Mississippi Works Labor Exchange username and password along with the address of the nearest One-Stop Center.
- Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module - Under development to meet the needs of Mississippi's WIOA implementation, a new component of Mississippi Works, the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module, will be responsible for storing cross-agency data related to:
  - WIOA participant registration.
  - Services rendered to WIOA participants.
  - Referrals created for a participant from one WIOA partner to another.
  - Work search activity records from the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange.
  - WIOA participant Individualized Success Plans.

Of the five sub-systems, the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module serves as the data system required to operate Mississippi's pathway model.

#### **B. DATA-COLLECTION AND REPORTING PROCESSES USED FOR ALL PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING THOSE PRESENT IN ONE-STOP CENTERS\*.**

Ultimately, data collection for all programs and activities will be accomplished through the integration of partner systems with the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module. The State Workforce Investment Board will create a phased transition plan under which Combined Plan Partners will agree to a scheduled sharing of case management data with the Mississippi State Longitudinal Data System clearinghouse. This process will enable

data analysis and reporting during the creation of the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module and during integration efforts to make all partner systems interoperable. After a period of transition, real-time data sharing from partner systems to the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module will automate the sharing of case management data and allow for real-time labor market analysis. Data sharing will be conducted according to the clear set of rules developed by the SLDS Governing Board that ensure data integrity, security, confidentiality, and privacy (see Appendix B).

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

## 2. THE STATE POLICIES THAT WILL SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STATE'S STRATEGIES (E.G., 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.

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To guide the establishment, implementation, and maintenance of quality workforce development services, the state has developed a number of policies that outline legislative, regulatory, and service quality requirements within Mississippi's workforce system. Core agency policies and systems will comply with data collection, reporting processes, information management, integrated service delivery, and performance management requirements outlined by WIOA and respective federal and state legislation. As the primary developer of WIOA-related state policies, the Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES) develops state policies and their adjoining communication plans. These documents are disseminated to local workforce development boards and used to provide guidance for the implementation process at the local workforce development area level. The state will continue to encourage coordination among WIOA Combined Plan and Strategic Partner agencies to strengthen the alignment between the Governor's vision and the strategies needed to meet that vision.

To establish funding guidelines for partner contributions to the One-Stop delivery system, partners will be developing a unified business plan, in coordination with local workforce development boards, that will specify formulae or procedures for funding coordinated delivery of services to participants. This document will specify how an individualized business plan will be developed to accompany each participant's individual WIOA Success Plan when such a plan involves services from more than one Combined Plan Partner. Appendix J contains the Office of the Governor's guidelines for the creation of Local Workforce Development Board WIOA plans. Each local board will be required to describe how service delivery will be coordinated across all Combined Plan Partner programs at the local level in accordance with labor market realities and development goals. In addition, local boards will describe how funds will be allocated in accordance with the business plan and how funds will be allocated to support shared infrastructure costs.

## 3. STATE PROGRAM AND STATE BOARD OVERVIEW

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### 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.

Workforce development activities in Mississippi have been on a 10-year trajectory toward cooperation and partnership. The Governor's Office has successfully encouraged a unified, jobs-focused approach to workforce and reemployment services by its creation of and support for the Mississippi Works system of technology and services. Many of the agencies that will be WIOA partners are already linked together as "Proud Partners of Mississippi Works." The current agency structure has produced notable agency-to-agency partnerships such as the MDES/MDOC Corrections Connection job search program for ex-offenders. WIOA implementation will provide an opportunity to enrich those connections.

Figure 15 depicts the state agency structure under which workforce-related services are administered by the agencies that will be Combined Plan and Strategic Partners under WIOA.

The Governor appoints the chair of the State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB).

The Governor appoints the executive directors of Mississippi Department of Corrections, Mississippi Development Authority, Mississippi Department of Human Services, and Mississippi Department of Employment Security.

The Mississippi Community College Board, Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, and Mississippi Department of Education are governed by separate boards that appoint each agency's executive director.

MCCB, Office of Adult Education, offers Adult Education services through its 15 member colleges and local programs approved through a formal request-for-application process.

MDRS provides services to the community via a combination of its own offices and through contracting organizations.

MDHS provides services to individuals and families through a network of 82 county offices.

MDOC manages a network of state and private correctional facilities.

Figure 15: State Agency WIOA Organization - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Figure15.jpg>

MDES works closely with local partners, the four local workforce development areas, and the 10 Planning and Development Districts to deliver services via a network of WIN Job Centers and local Youth Providers.

The Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and Speaker of the House appoint members of the Mississippi Board of Education (MBOE), and MBOE appoints a superintendent to oversee operations of MDE. MDE delivers services through a network of local school districts that operate K-12 schools.

Finally, various community-based organizations such as Jobs for Mississippi Graduates and Goodwill's Mississippi Goodworks specialize in working directly with clients in cooperation with various agencies. These agencies coordinate with Combined Plan Partners through local workforce development boards or through contracts created with Combined Plan Partners.

## B. STATE BOARD

Provide a description of the State Board, including—

Mississippi's State Workforce Investment Board, through its WIOA Board Committee, consults with the Governor's Office to establish and promote state workforce priorities in consultation with Combined Plan Partners. The State Workforce Investment Board, through its WIOA Board Committee, is also responsible for ensuring that Mississippi's Combined Plan is executed and for reviewing and approving any agency-specific regulations created by partners that may impact WIOA Combined Plan programs.

### **2018 State Workforce Investment Board WIOA Board Committee**

#### Member Organizational Affiliation Member Name

1. Mayor Billy Hewes
2. Supervisor Paul Watson
3. Labor Rep Nominated by Labor Federation Terrance Nellum
4. Labor Rep Nominated by Labor Federation Darius Johnson
5. Labor Rep from Joint Apprentice Program Garry Mercer
6. Youth Activities Rep Jackie Beasley
7. Youth Activities Rep Mary Graham
8. Business & Industry Ron Aldridge
9. Business & Industry Brad Bounds
10. Business & Industry Charles Evers
11. Business & Industry Michael Hall
12. Business & Industry Wesley Clay
13. Business & Industry Ed Langton
14. Business & Industry J.R. Jones
15. Business & Industry Joe Morton
16. Business & Industry Lex Taylor
17. Business & Industry Michael Thomas
18. Business & Industry Robert Clark
19. Business & Industry Charles Holder
20. ED Employment Security Mark Henry
21. ED Rehab Services Chris Howard
22. ED Community Colleges Andrea Mayfield
23. ED DHS John Davis

24. Governor or designee Laurie Smith

25. Senator (non-voting) Terry Burton

26. House 1 (non-voting) Donnie Bell

## I. MEMBERSHIP ROSTER

Provide a membership roster for the State Board, including members' organizational affiliations.

The State Workforce Investment Board's WIOA Board Committee is composed as follows:

2018 State Workforce Investment Board WIOA Board Committee -

[https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/SWIB\\_Board\\_2018.jpg](https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/SWIB_Board_2018.jpg)

## II. BOARD ACTIVITIES

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

The State Workforce Investment Board will conduct in-person meetings three times annually and will conduct other business through electronic means. The board is responsible for the development, implementation, and modification of Mississippi's Combined Plan and for the convening of meetings with all relevant programs, required partners, and stakeholders. The board consults with the Governor to ensure that Mississippi's Combined Plan is carried out in a transparent manner and in consultation with representatives of local boards, chief elected officials, businesses, representatives of labor organizations, community-based organizations (CBOs), adult and youth education and workforce development providers, institutions of higher education, disability service entities, youth-service programs, and other stakeholders with an interest in the services provided by the core programs and any optional program included in Mississippi's Combined Plan, as well as the general public, including individuals with disabilities. State Workforce Investment Board activities will also include coordinating economic and workforce data analysis activities with the Mississippi State Longitudinal Data System Governing Board to ensure that local economic developers have access to detailed information to formulate sector strategies in local areas. Further, the State Workforce Investment Board will oversee the creation of training modules to be used for continuing education of One-Stop Center staff through the Mississippi Works University online learning system.

*Local Workforce Development Boards* Mississippi is divided into four local workforce development areas. Local workforce development boards are board-administered, WIOA Strategic Partners responsible for regional and local development of workforce programs and the local implementation and oversight of One-Stop Centers. Local workforce development boards provide workforce-related education and training strategies for youth by contracting with local youth service providers.

The location of the Comprehensive One-Stop Centers and strategic partnership details are determined by the local workforce development board in each local workforce development area based on targeted industries in the area and the needs of the workforce. This approach will ensure that the services provided by the One-Stop Centers are aligned with data-driven sector strategies set by the State Workforce Investment Board. The local workforce

development boards are responsible for memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with strategic partners. These MOUs will describe the programs offered, detail the expectation of services for all involved partners, and address funding for support staff for each center. Appendix J contains the Office of the Governor's guidelines for the creation of Local Workforce Development Board WIOA plans. Each local board will be required to describe how service delivery will be coordinated across all Combined Plan Partner programs at the local level in accordance with labor market realities and development goals.

Local workforce development boards have the option to include additional Affiliate One-Stop Centers with any subset of Combined Plan Partners as long as they include at least two partners. Local workforce development boards also have the flexibility to include additional partners in Affiliate One-Stop Centers. While local workforce development boards ultimately decide the logistics of affiliate centers, the WIOA law specifically identifies the following approved federally funded partners: employment and training programs administered by the Social Security Administration, including Ticket to Work and the Self Sufficiency Program; employment and training programs carried out by the Small Business Administration; Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) programs; Client Assistance Program; and programs authorized under the National and Community Service Act of 1990.

Local workforce development boards are also responsible for ensuring that local activities and local sector targets are in line with state-level sector analysis. The Mississippi LifeTracks system will constantly update web-accessible reports that feature dashboard numbers, pathway analysis, and supply and demand analysis to ensure that economic developers in Mississippi have a near real-time picture of the labor market. Sector analysis revealed laborshed zones that transcend local workforce development area boundaries and allow local workforce development boards to serve as intermediaries to connect local employers and training providers to meet labor market demands. Employers will communicate labor demand in real time by posting job orders in Mississippi Works Labor Exchange.

Performance Coordinators assist Local Workforce Development Boards in support of coordinated case management when participants receive services from more than one Combined Plan Partner and to monitor active cases to ensure that plans are drafted so as to maximize the allocation of resources to best serve participants and employers. This function will be carried out by persons or entities to be determined during Combined Plan Partner WIOA implementation discussions. *Mississippi State Longitudinal Data System (LifeTracks)* Mississippi's State Longitudinal Data System (LifeTracks) was created to help meet data needs for reporting requirements and to answer critical policy questions relevant to education, workforce, and economic development. The Governing Board for the system consists of the executive directors of all data-contributing agencies in Mississippi, all of which are either Combined Plan Partner agencies or Strategic Partner agencies under WIOA. LifeTracks will play an integral role in combined WIOA reporting during Year One of Mississippi's WIOA implementation. Because all Combined Plan Partners currently contribute data to the LifeTracks system, and because LifeTracks was created, in part, for the purpose of assisting state agencies with reporting and strategic planning, Mississippi will be able to meet its reporting requirements efficiently even while the Mississippi Department of Employment Security completes development and testing of the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module. Further, LifeTracks will play a continuing

role in the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model by coordinating with the State Workforce Investment Board to produce a state WIOA system reporting page on the Lifetracks.ms.gov website that contains dashboard statistics, pathway analysis, and supply/demand analysis numbers that will enable state and local economic development professionals to organize all career pathway training around data-driven sector strategies in laborsheds that often cross local workforce development area boundaries.

LifeTracks is built upon the clearinghouse model that relies on strong partnerships and coordination between strategic partners. Mississippi's data clearinghouse is the National Strategic Planning and Analysis Research Center at Mississippi State University. The clearinghouse includes data from early childhood entities (e.g., Head Start); Mississippi Department of Education (MDE); all 15 community colleges and the Mississippi Community College Board; all eight public universities and the Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL); Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES); Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS); Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS); Mississippi Department of Corrections (MDOC); Mississippi Development Authority (MDA); Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH); and Mississippi Division of Medicaid (DOM). The clearinghouse includes data from 2000 to the present. Partners regularly transmit data through a secure transfer according to SLDS Governing Board rules and regulations and via memoranda of understanding (MOUs). The state data clearinghouse developed and manages Mississippi's online SLDS reporting system, LifeTracks ([www.lifetracks.ms.gov](http://www.lifetracks.ms.gov)). All data are stored in a state-of-the-art data center built for managing large databases and hosting mission critical systems. The Mississippi SLDS also has access to one of the most powerful computing systems in the country for high-performance computations and complex modeling. *Distribution of Funds for Core Programs* Funds will be distributed according to WIOA requirements along with factors developed by the State Workforce Investment Board. These additional factors will be developed to ensure that funds are allocated in accordance with the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model and the implementation of the One-Stop Center system. Local workforce development areas will also be required to develop a business plan that clearly outlines how funding streams from multiple programs will be aligned with the activities of the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model. As a result, Mississippi job seekers from every part of the state will have the opportunity to take advantage of an efficient, coordinated, and tailored workforce system.

#### 4. ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION OF PROGRAMS AND ONE-STOP PROGRAM PARTNERS

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##### A. ASSESSMENT OF CORE PROGRAMS

Describe how the core programs will be assessed each year based on State performance accountability measures described in section 116(b) of WIOA. This State assessment must include the quality, effectiveness, and improvement of programs broken down by local area or provider. Such state assessments should take into account local and regional planning goals.

All Combined Plan Partners will provide data required for WIOA federal reporting to the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module, and local workforce development boards and the State Workforce Investment Board may establish other

metrics to be used internally for strategic planning. A common participation period occurs when an individual is co-enrolled in more than one WIOA core program. Under these conditions, the client's performance will be measured under all appropriate programs two and four quarters after exit from all programs.

Based on legislation and proposed rules, WIOA reporting appears to involve tracking data needed to compute eight primary indicators:

- Percent employed 2nd quarter after exit (Adult).
- Placement in employment or education 2nd quarter after exit (Youth).
- Percent employed 4th quarter after exit (Adult).
- Placement in employment or education 4th quarter after exit (Youth).
- Median earnings 2nd quarter after exit (all programs).
- Credential attainment up to one year after exit (all programs except Wagner-Peyser).
- Measurable skill gains (all programs except Wagner-Peyser).
- Effectiveness in serving employers (all programs).

Several indicators rely on the concept of the "exit" that, under current DOL regulations, occurs when an enrolled participant goes 90 days without receiving a service under a relevant program. In order to calculate the cross-agency participation periods necessary to determine when an exit occurs for co-enrolled participants, the State Workforce Investment Board will assist in establishing a procedure for maintaining a Common Service Catalog, which will capture services provided by each Combined Plan agency and whether each service impacts participation periods. This list of standardized services will enable the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module to receive service delivery data from each agency, determine whether a given service is relevant to WIOA reporting, and calculate a revised expected exit date in real time.

## B. ASSESSMENT OF ONE-STOP PROGRAM 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. Such state assessments should take into account local and regional planning goals.

Assessment of One-Stop Partner programs will take place according to 1) WIOA performance measures and 2) specific longitudinal measures of socioeconomic mobility and program effectiveness set by the State Workforce Investment Board. Data for assessment will initially be provided through a coordinated schedule of data transfers to the State Longitudinal Data System, LifeTracks. Once all coordinated technologies are operational and Combined Plan Partners begin submitting real-time data to the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module, assessment of all partner programs will be able to occur in near real time.

## C. PREVIOUS ASSESSMENT RESULTS

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.

Previous assessment results, based on WIOA performance measures, were computed for 1) all WIOA core programs, 2) Unemployment Insurance, and 3) Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Employer retention was computed as a percentage of those employed in Q2 who had the same employer in Q4. Table 11 contains the results for fiscal year 2011-2012, and Table 12 contains results for fiscal year 2012-2013. These two fiscal years are the most recent years available based on wage data and the need to calculate measures four quarters from participant exit.

Table 11: Assessment Results of Combined Plan Programs, FY2011-2012 (July 1, 2011-June 30, 2012) - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Table11.jpg>

Table 12: Assessment Results of Combined Plan Programs, FY2012-2013 (July 1, 2012-June 30, 2013) - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Table12.jpg>

During the period covered by this performance analysis, the Mississippi Department of Employment Security had already completed a transition to viewing all of its programs in the context of employment services. All participants registering for Unemployment Insurance benefits, Adult services, Dislocated Worker services, and Youth services joined Wagner-Peyser participants in completing a workforce profile in the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange as a part of overall agency intake. Employment performance measures for Q2 and Q4 demonstrate the benefits of the reemployment mindset in producing consistently good employment outcomes for participants in programs that partner with employment services.

In addition, in the first quarter of 2014, MDES restructured its weekly UI recertification procedures to provide access to its UI system, ReemployMS, through a link from each participant's Mississippi Works Labor Exchange personal dashboard. This process resulted in a weekly engagement with job recommendations provided to each UI recipient on his or her Mississippi Works Labor Exchange dashboard. Usage of the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange nearly doubled between the fourth quarter of calendar year 2013 and the third quarter of calendar year 2014.

These performance results emphasize the positive impact on employment that may be realized through partnership strategies that involve participants in any state workforce or supportive program with concurrent reemployment activities. This observation forms the foundation of the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model, a roadmap for ensuring that every form of assistance provided by partner agencies includes reemployment assistance to support reconnecting participants with the Mississippi labor market.

Evaluations and research projects conducted within or across WIOA core programs will be coordinated with local boards and state agencies through the State Longitudinal Data System Governing Board. See Appendix B for rules governing the work of the Mississippi SLDS board.

#### D. EVALUATION

Describe how the State will conduct evaluations and research projects on activities 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.

Evaluations and research projects conducted within or across WIOA core programs will be coordinated with local boards and state agencies through the State Longitudinal Data System Governing Board. See Appendix B for rules governing the work of the Mississippi SLDS board.

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## 5. DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS FOR CORE PROGRAMS

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Describe the methods and factors the State will use in distributing funds under the core programs in accordance with the provisions authorizing such distributions.

### A. FOR TITLE I PROGRAMS

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 MDES Office of Grant Management writes a WIOA Communication each year to inform the Local Workforce Development Areas of distribution of funds for Title I programs serving youth, adult, and dislocated workers. Funds are distributed through the Notice of Funds Availability process in the MS Works GrantTrak financial tracking module. Appendix H provides a sample WIOA Allocation Communication.

#### II. ADULT AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH WIOA SECTION 133(B)(2) OR (B)(3),

The MDES Office of Grant Management writes a WIOA Communication each year to inform the Local Workforce Development Areas of distribution of funds for Title I programs serving youth, adult, and dislocated workers. Funds are distributed through the Notice of Funds Availability process in the MS Works GrantTrak financial tracking module. Appendix H provides a sample WIOA Allocation Communication.

#### III. DISLOCATED WORKER EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH WIOA SECTION 133(B)(2) AND BASED ON DATA AND WEIGHTS ASSIGNED.

The MDES Office of Grant Management writes a WIOA Communication each year to inform the Local Workforce Development Areas of distribution of funds for Title I programs serving youth, adult, and dislocated workers. Funds are distributed through the Notice of Funds Availability process in the MS Works GrantTrak financial tracking module. Appendix H provides a sample WIOA Allocation Communication.

### B. FOR TITLE II:

#### I. MULTI-YEAR GRANTS OR CONTRACTS

Describe how the eligible agency will award multi-year grants or contracts on a competitive basis to eligible providers in the State, including how eligible agencies will establish that eligible providers are organizations of demonstrated effectiveness.

The Mississippi Community College Board, Office of Adult Education (OAE) is the state's Eligible Agency for Adult Education. OAE is responsible for administering funds to eligible providers, and providing program/performance oversight to grantees. OAE will provide funding to eligible local entities for the provision of adult education services through a competitive Request for Application (RFA) process. The RFA is the mechanism through which OAE will identify, assess, and award multi-year grants to eligible providers throughout the state. An eligible provider is an organization that has demonstrated effectiveness in providing adult education activities to eligible individuals and may include:

- A local education agency;
- A community-based or faith-based organization;
- A volunteer literacy organization;
- An institution of higher education;
- A public or private nonprofit agency;
- A library;
- A public housing authority;
- A nonprofit institution with the ability to provide adult education and literacy services;
- A consortium or coalition of agencies, organizations, institutions, libraries, or authorities described above; and
- A partnership between an employer and an entity described above.

**Eligible individual** means an individual who has attained 16 years of age; who is not enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under State law; and who is basic skills deficient; does not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and has not achieved an equivalent level of education; or is an English language learner.

The Office of Adult Education ensures all eligible providers have direct and equitable access to apply and compete for grants. The grant competition is publicized through a variety of print and electronic media throughout the state. Information is shared via the MCCB Office of Communications and Public Relations in the form of a formal press release, a posting on the MCCB website, social media outlets, and other means of available communication.

The Office of Adult Education awards funds to eligible providers for the delivery of adult education services, which are academic instruction and education services below the postsecondary level that increase an individual's ability to:

- Read, write and speak English and perform mathematics or other activities necessary for the attainment of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent;
- Transition to postsecondary education and training; and
- Obtain employment.

In accordance with federal regulation, eligible providers may receive adult education funding for the delivery of any of the following adult education and literacy activities:

- Adult education;
- Literacy;
- Workplace adult education and literacy activities;
- Family literacy activities;
- English language and acquisition activities;
- Integrated English literacy and civics education;
- Workforce preparation activities; or
- Integrated education and training.

The Mississippi Community College Board will use the following process to distribute funds to approved applicants:

1. Not less than 82.5 percent of the grant funds to award grants and contacts under section 231 and to carry out section 225, Programs for Corrections Education and Other Institutionalized Individuals, of which not more than 20 percent of such amount shall be available to carry out section 225;
2. Shall not use more than 12.5 percent of the grant funds to carry out state leadership activities under section 223; and
3. Shall use not more than 5 percent of the grant funds, or \$85,000, whichever is greater, for administrative expenses of the eligible agency.

Federal funds may be used to increase the level of nonfederal funds that would be available in the absence of federal funds, and, in no case, replace those nonfederal funds. Federal funds must not be used for the purpose of supplanting, only for supplementing.

See Program Specific Requirements for Core Programs, Title II, Adult Education and Literacy Programs for additional details regarding the processes for distribution of funds and the request for application process.

## II. ENSURE DIRECT AND EQUITABLE ACCESS

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 procedure for all eligible providers.

Please see the section above.

## C. TITLE IV VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

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.

Vocational Rehabilitation General and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind operate under the same administrative structure within the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services as a Combined State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency. These programs report to a common administrative director. They share programmatic staff as well as agency

resources to eliminate overlap and unnecessary duplication. Funds are allocated for both programs based on average cost per client served in each program and with consideration of additional costs for facility accessibility and training cost requirements for blind individuals.

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## 6. PROGRAM DATA

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### 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 postsecondary 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 the State's goals for achieving integration and any progress to date.

#### I. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S PLANS TO MAKE THE MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS FOR THE CORE PROGRAMS INTEROPERABLE TO MAXIMIZE THE EFFICIENT EXCHANGE OF COMMON DATA ELEMENTS TO SUPPORT ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION.

Combined Plan Partners currently use a variety of agency-specific data systems to manage service delivery and case management data. Every Combined Partner data system shares data regularly with Mississippi LifeTracks, the state longitudinal data system. Because Mississippi already aligns all Combined Plan Partner data through the LifeTracks data clearinghouse, Mississippi's partners will be able to fulfill all data alignment responsibilities under WIOA in the near term while undertaking software development efforts to connect to the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module that enables real-time partner data integration.

#### *Interoperability*

All current Combined Plan Partner data systems will either 1) be modified from their current state of interoperability to support real-time, cross-program data exchanges with the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module through the use of web services; 2) be replaced by systems that support such data exchanges; or 3) be replaced by direct use of the user interface provided by the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module.

Combined Plan Partner data systems to be integrated include, by agency:

- MDES - The Mississippi Works Labor Exchange is the current workforce management software system used by the Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES) to administer, track, and report case management activities for Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth services; Title III Wagner-Peyser services; Senior Community Service Employment Program services (SCSEP); Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) services; Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program services; and other workforce services. Mississippi Works is a mature, real-time, integrated web and mobile solution providing labor exchange services to job

seekers and employers and allowing MDES One-Stop partner staff to perform case management activities. The system was developed in Mississippi through a partnership between MDES and the National Strategic Planning and Analysis Research Center (NSPARC) at Mississippi State University (MSU). Mississippi Works currently supports the calculation of common participation periods across what have become all WIOA Title I and Title III programs. Mississippi Works already supports web services as a way to integrate with external systems. In addition, MDES administers the state Unemployment Insurance system using ReemployMS, a modern web application that supports web services. Currently, Mississippi Works and ReemployMS integrate to 1) ensure that participant contact information remains updated in both systems, 2) allow ReemployMS to fetch job matches for unemployment insurance benefits recipients, 3) allow workforce staff using the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange to access the UI status of a participant, and 4) allow workforce staff to log into both applications with one set of credentials (single sign-on).

- MDRS - The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (OVRB) administers vocational rehabilitation services using a commercial software package, AwareVR, created by Alliance Enterprises. This modern web application allows for complete program-specific case management of OVR/OVRB participants. AwareVR supports web services, making interoperability with the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module possible.
- MCCB - The Mississippi Community College Board administers Adult Education services via the Literacy, Adult and Community Education System (LACES), a web-based software system created by Literacy PRO Systems, specifically for Title II, Adult Education programs. The system allows MCCB and its affiliate instructors to enroll students and track performance through pre- and post-tests using a basic education-level assessment. In addition, the system allows MCCB to spot poorly attended classes before funds are spent inefficiently on instruction for few students.
- MDHS - The Mississippi Department of Human Services administers the TANF program through several legacy applications, including MAVERICS and JAWS. MAVERICS supports case management data such as intake and eligibility information, and JAWS supports TANF Work Program data. These systems do not inherently support web services, but various enterprise solutions exist to allow a modern, intermediate application to interface with such systems. This intermediate application, developed in Java, would be able to implement and consume web services on behalf of the legacy application. In addition, MDHS is in the process of a multi-year system modernization effort that will reduce the agency's reliance on legacy applications for case management.

Figure 16 illustrates how all WIOA Combined Plan Partners will interface with the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module in order to ensure that agencies are coordinated not only for the purposes of reporting and performance measurement but also in their approaches to individual case management.

Figure 16: Data Exchanged Between Partners and the Common Module - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Figure16.jpg>

During the course of case management activities, each Combined Plan Partner will generate participant data such as participant records (basic information), information on services given to the participant, information on assessment outcomes, and any referrals to partner programs. These data items will be passed from Combined Plan Partner systems to the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module. In addition, Combined Plan Partners will receive any referrals submitted by other Plan Partners. Information in the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module will be used to compute Combined Plan Partner performance measures for reporting to the Department of Labor and also to conduct data-driven in-state strategic planning.

In order to exchange program data, the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module will provide two, real-time interfaces: a human interface and a machine interface. Agencies without interoperable case management systems will be able to log in to a user-friendly portal to initiate or update WIOA-relevant enrollments, services, assessments, Individualized Success Plans, and referrals for existing or new participants. Agencies able to modify their internal systems to take advantage of web services can use the machine interface to ensure that data are reported properly and in real time while enabling their staff to continue to use familiar case management technology. Figure 17 illustrates the way that agency caseworkers will access the common intake system either directly through a human user interface or via their own agency's internal system.

Figure 17: Conceptual Model of Agency System Integration - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Figure17.jpg>

## 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.

While all Mississippi Combined Plan Partners will serve participants in ways that fit best with each partner's focus and in terms of each partner's programmatic rules, several data artifacts of case management will be standardized to ensure that agencies are able to align their intake and service delivery processes efficiently to avoid duplication.

- Common Intake Profile and Identifier - The Mississippi Works Common Intake Profile is the basic unit of identification for a participant who begins to receive services through any Mississippi Combined Plan Partner. Each profile will have a Mississippi Works ID number that will be generated to allow the correlation of participant profiles with future data exchanges of services, referrals, Individualized Success Plans, and other participant attributes. There is no wrong door in the Smart Start Career Pathway Model; a participant may begin at any partner and be referred at any point to other partners for training and supportive services needed to fulfill the participant's career pathway into middle-skill employment.
- Diagnostic Checklist and Decision Tree - Along with the common intake profile, each Combined Plan Partner will collect, during intake, answers to a diagnostic checklist composed of questions submitted by all Combined Plan Partners. Upon receiving the diagnostic checklist from the Combined Plan Partner system, the Common Intake and Reporting Module will compare the diagnostic checklist to a decision tree that will automatically generate electronic referrals on behalf of the participant to any relevant Combined Plan Partner. For instance, a positive answer to the diagnostic

checklist question "Have you recently lost a job?" may generate a referral to the Mississippi Department of Employment Security, which administers Unemployment Insurance.

- Agency-to-Agency Referrals - Agency-to-agency referrals are electronic records created in the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module to connect a participant who receives services from one WIOA Combined Plan Partner to another partner. The benefit of a formalized referral process is that it enables follow-ups, assessments of partner cooperation, and greater accountability for participants who have work search requirements associated with Combined Plan Program enrollments. Referrals will have several attributes, including the referring partner, the recipient partner, the recommended partner service, status, an urgency rating, and staff notes. All new referrals will receive the status "pending." Combined Plan Partner staff in local partner offices and Comprehensive One-Stop Centers will access a real-time list of referrals for participants in their local area. Clicking on a referral will allow the staff member to change the status of a referral (from "pending" to "in-process"), view the participant's Individualized Success Plan, view the referring agency's referral note, and access contact information so that the partner can contact the individual for a phone or in-person interview. Once a participant receives a service through the agency that received the referral, the referral will change to "resolved." If the participant is ineligible or does not need the services offered by the partner, the partner can mark the referral "closed without services" and choose a reason from a drop-down list to indicate why the participant received no services as a result of the referral.
- Common Individualized Success Plans - Individualized plans exist under various names in each Combined Plan Partner's toolkit for case management. For instance, Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, OVR, and OVRB clients complete an "Individualized Plan for Employment" with a staff member, and Mississippi Department of Employment Security participants in the Trade Adjustment Assistance program complete an "Individual Employment Plan." The Common Individualized Success Plan, under Mississippi's WIOA implementation, will be an electronic record stored in the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module that captures information common to current plans, such as goals, skills and experience, barriers, barrier mitigation strategies, referrals to supportive services, and participant rights/responsibilities. In addition, the plan will capture agency addenda for each agency serving the participant and will allow cross-agency case notes. This plan will accommodate planning elements unique to one or more agencies but not common to all. As a participant receives referrals, these elements will be attached to his or her Individualized Success Plan. Participants who have created accounts in the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange will be able to review and print their own Common Individualized Success Plan, along with any referrals and agency addenda. The Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module will allow agency staff to consult and modify relevant portions of any participant's Common Individualized Success Plan. Agency-specific addenda from a partner agency, however, will be modifiable only by staff in the relevant agency.
- Common Service Catalog - In order to ensure the most efficient alignment of services and avoid duplication in service delivery, the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module will support the maintenance of a catalog of partner services. This

common catalog of services will contain services offered by all Common Plan Partners as well as supportive services from Strategic Partners. Each service will be categorized. For example, childcare services offered by the Mississippi Department of Human Services under TANF may be categorized as a "Childcare Barrier Mitigation Service." Likewise, childcare services offered by a community college Strategic Partner may also be categorized as a "Childcare Barrier Mitigation Service." When agency staff attempt to create a referral that suggests a service already being offered to the participant, the system will be able to detect the potential service duplication and allow the agency staff or system to take the appropriate action. Agency collaboration in maintaining and updating the common catalog of services will ensure that complementary services will be categorized differently and duplicative services will be categorized identically.

- Common Assessment Catalog - In order to enable the computing of improvements in assessment outcomes such as literacy or numeracy scores or work-readiness, the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module will support the maintenance of a catalog of possible assessments. Each assessment will be categorized and consist of one or more numerically expressed scores. For example, Adult Education service delivery makes use of an assessment of basic education level. Assessment scores are expressed as grade-level equivalency in several categories (reading, math, applied math, and language). The catalog would categorize the assessment as literacy/numeracy measurements and specify that scores will be expressed by a collection of four scaled numerical scores. Agency collaboration in maintaining and updating the common catalog of assessments will ensure that reported outcomes from different agencies administering assessments at different points in the participant's pathway can be compared properly to assess measurable gains in areas such as literacy, numeracy, work-readiness, and other measurable participant attributes.
- Common Credential Catalog - In order to enable the tracking and reporting of credential attainment, the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module will support the maintenance of a catalog of possible credentials. Credentials attained, such as industry-recognized certifications or academic certificates, will be reported by education or training partners during a participant's pathway progress. Agency collaboration with education and training providers to maintain and update the Common Credential Catalog will support efforts to assess whether Combined Plan Partners are supporting the attainment of credentials. The Common Credential Catalog will also provide a valuable source of data that enables participants to explore credential options within the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange.
- Work-Ready Report Card - For participants on the Work-Ready Pathway, creation of a workforce profile in the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange will culminate with the automatic generation of a Work-Ready Report Card. Based on the participant's education, experience, driver's license class, location, and other profile information, the Work-Ready Report Card will clearly help the participant understand his or her skill level, experience level in the occupations appropriate for the skill level, likely career transitions based on the participant's previous experience, and labor market information (average salary, demand projections, and number of current job openings) for each occupation within the participant's skill level. The Work-Ready

Report Card will also contain aspirational information about the preparation needed to be competitive for other occupations that may be in higher skill levels.

In addition to informational content, the Work-Ready Report Card will offer several actionable options, including, for example, “I’d like to find training to qualify for a better paying job,” “I’d like to see job openings for which I’m already qualified,” or “I need help with childcare while I’m at work.” Answering these questions will enable the participant to begin building the Mississippi Department of Employment Security agency-specific addenda to his or her Individualized Success Plan. Other questions will be designed to make the participant aware of cost-of-living issues relevant to occupation choice. The Work-Ready Report Card will also be available to any participant with a completed profile in the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange, even those who registered in previous years, and it will be dynamic, taking into account current labor market information and any changes to a participant’s profile.

Using a common profile, enabling agency-to-agency referrals, collaborating on a participant’s Individualized Success Plan, operating via a common service catalog, and reporting assessment results via a common outcome catalog will enable a high degree of coordination and efficiency in WIOA case management. Figure 18 puts these elements together to demonstrate how data are collected and used at each point along a participant’s engagement with the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model.

At nearly every step in the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model, data will be generated by Common Plan Partners and transmitted to the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module. The following material below describes each of the 18 data exchanges depicted in Figure 18. Numbers below correspond to the labels in Figure 18.

In addition to data generated during the participant’s route through the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model, any transitional employment or final, unsubsidized employment will generate wage records captured by the Mississippi Department of Employment Services Unemployment Insurance system. These data, wage records, will be correlated with data on WIOA service enrollments in the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module to calculate WIOA performance measures such as “Employed in the Second Quarter after Exit.”

Figure 18: Data Created and Aligned in the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/Figure18.jpg>

*Combined Plan Programs Point of Entry 1.* When a participant first encounters a Combined Plan Partner to receive Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth services, Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) services, Title III Wagner-Peyser services, Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services, Unemployment Insurance (UI) services, Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) services, Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) services, Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program services, or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), he or she will pass through a program-specific intake procedure that will collect the minimal amount of information required to create an initial Common Intake Profile. In addition, the participant will answer a questionnaire composed of diagnostic questions submitted by each Combined Plan Partner. As the partner program’s system transmits the intake profile and diagnostic question to the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module, the common system will either create a new

Common Intake Profile or, if the participant has been registered previously, update the existing participant's Common Intake Profile with the newly collected information. The common system will respond to the Combined Plan Partner system with a Mississippi Works ID number that will enable future web service calls to transmit participant data by reference to a unique identifier. Based on answers provided to the diagnostic questions, the common system will automatically create electronic referrals to Combined Plan Partner services based on a decision tree. For example, if the participant signifies that he or she has recently lost a job, a referral may be made to MDES for Unemployment Services. 2. When a Combined Plan Partner enrolls the participant in a service, the partner's case management system will transmit a service enrollment to the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module. This service enrollment will reference both the participant's Mississippi Works ID and the unique identifier of the service itself, as listed in the Common Service Catalog. 3. Some Combined Plan Partners will perform workforce-readiness assessments. Any assessments will be transmitted to the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module as an Assessment Outcome. Assessment Outcomes are any measureable attribute, such as a test score, that WIOA partners wish to associate with a participant in order to gauge future improvements. In the case of a basic education level assessment, which is expressed as a grade level, the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module will allow all subsequent grade-level scores to be entered as outcomes to be assessed for improvements relevant to WIOA performance measures. Assessment Outcomes will reference the Mississippi Works ID of the participant and the Common Assessment Catalog ID of the assessment and will include the participant's earned score. 4. Combined Plan Partners often create agency-specific individual plans, and at the time of initial enrollment, basic plan elements such as overall goal and barriers to employment will be used to populate an initial Individualized Success Plan with an attached agency-specific addendum. The plan will then be transmitted to the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module. 5. Once a participant has received core services from a Combined Plan Partner and is ready to pursue a workforce pathway, the Combined Plan Partner will either create and transmit a referral to workforce assessment services or provide these workforce services itself. For instance, MDHS (TANF) customers will be referred for workforce assessment services, and the referral will appear on staff dashboards in Mississippi Works Labor Exchange software in use at all One-Stop Centers and Youth Providers. *Workforce Assessment* 6. As a first step in workforce assessment, the participant will register with the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange. This step will transmit a service record to the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module and change the status of the workforce assessment referral to "resolved." 7. Registration in the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange will lead automatically to the generation of a Work-Ready Report Card. The Work-Ready Report Card will be a living data object, automatically adapting to labor market information and accessible to partner agencies through the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module via a web service call. 8. Depending upon local workforce development area policies, some providers may perform an initial assessment of the participant using an assessment instrument included in the Common Assessment Catalog. Assessment Outcomes will be transmitted to the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module via a web service call. 9. Working together with a One-Stop Center or Youth Provider staff member, or a staff member from any intake agency, the participant will further refine his or her Individualized Success Plan to reflect an initial pathway destination (either the Smart Start Pathway Class, Career Tech, or Work Ready Pathway). The revised

Individualized Success Plan will be transmitted to the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module. 10. A referral will be generated to the Combined Plan Partner responsible for the initial pathway destination. The referral will be transmitted to the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module and will be visible on staff dashboards in the relevant Combined Plan Partner's case management system. *Pathway* 11. The participant will begin pathway-specific activities under the oversight of a Combined Plan Partner. During pathway activities, a number of data elements may be generated and transmitted to the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module, including service enrollments, earned credentials, or assessment outcomes. 12. Once the participant has completed pathway activities and has met the pathway's exit criteria, any assessment scores generated during exit assessment will be transmitted to the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module. 13. Exiting participants will be referred back to the workforce assessment partner (One-Stop Center or Youth Provider) that initially referred the participant to the pathway. This referral will be recorded in the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module and will appear on staff dashboards in the Mississippi Works Labor Exchange software in use at all One-Stop Centers and Youth Providers. *Workforce Reassessment* 14. After a pathway is completed, the participant will be assessed again by a One-Stop Center or Youth Provider partner to update the participant's Individualized Success Plan and determine next steps. The revised Individualized Success Plan will be transmitted to the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module. 15. Reassessment will either determine that the participant needs to enter another pathway and begin the Pathway->Reassessment loop again or that the participant is ready to enter an exit strategy that will connect the work-ready participant to unsubsidized employment. Following the exit path, a referral to an exit strategy will be created and transmitted to the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module. Depending upon which exit strategy is chosen, staff for the relevant Combined Plan Partner will be notified of the referral. *Exit Strategy* 16. During the participant's exit strategy, any service enrollments into Common Service Catalog services will be transmitted to the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module. 17. Some exit strategies involve two- or four-year credential attainment or the attainment of other recognized credentials from the Common Credential Catalog. Earned credential records will be transmitted to the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module. 18. Some exit strategies will involve further assessments. Assessment outcome records will be transmitted to the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module. Some credentials such as the Career Readiness Certificate (CRC) are awarded based on assessments. In the case of the CRC, both assessment and credential records will be created and transmitted to the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module. *Fiscal and Management Accountability Information System - GrantTrak* The Mississippi Department of Employment Security is currently in the process of creating a GrantTrak application that facilitates the tracking of awarded grant funds. This application will allow MDES to track grants received from DOL and to allocate the funds to local workforce development boards or to Planning and Development Districts, which will further track funds spent to serve WIOA participants. At the end of the life cycle of a given grant, GrantTrak generates ETA 9130 reports from the initiation to the close-out of the funds for DOL reporting. GrantTrak features automatic notifications of funds availability, reminders for deadlines, data validation, report generation, personnel approvals, and attachment/uploading of supporting documents that capture, for instance, approval signatures from local elected officials.

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.

The State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB) will ensure the alignment of technology and data systems through collaboration with three state entities: the Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES), the State Longitudinal Data System (LifeTracks) Governing Board, and the National Strategic Planning and Analysis Research Center (NSPARC) at Mississippi State, the state data clearinghouse.

MDES will develop the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module according to SWIB priorities, and SWIB will convene committees of all Combined Plan Partners to inform the creation of the initial Common Assessment Catalog, Common Service Catalog, and Common Credential Catalog that will support cross-agency coordination of case management.

The State Longitudinal Data System Governing Board, consisting of representatives from all state data-contributing agencies, will work with SWIB to conduct data analysis and performance assessments and assist with federal reporting initially based on scheduled data delivery until real-time sharing is possible through the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module.

NSPARC serves the SLDS Governing Board by operating the state data clearinghouse. NSPARC will assist MDES in the development of the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module and in the integration activities necessary to make Combined Plan Partner systems interoperable with the common system.

IV. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S PLANS TO DEVELOP AND PRODUCE THE REPORTS REQUIRED UNDER SECTION 116, PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM. (WIOA SECTION 116(D)(2)).

Until real-time reporting is possible, the SWIB will create a schedule for designating the frequency that Combined Plan Partners must submit data to the State Longitudinal Data System (LifeTracks) for WIOA reporting. In addition, the State Workforce Investment Board will create a transition plan to guide the transition from scheduled data sharing to real-time data sharing through the Mississippi Works Common Intake and Reporting Module. Reports will be created by 1) correlating all agency service enrollments to determine the cohort of exiters, 2) correlating exiters with employment outcomes through state and Wage Record Interchange System wage data, 3) correlating exiters with skill gains through agency assessment reports, and 4) correlating exiters with credential attainment through agency credential reports.

*Planning Note:* States should be aware that Section 116(i)(1) requires the core programs, local boards, and chief elected officials to establish and operate a fiscal and management accountability information system based on guidelines established by the Secretaries of Labor and Education. States should begin laying the groundwork for these fiscal and management accountability requirements, recognizing that adjustments to meet the elements above may provide opportunity or have impact on such a fiscal and management accountability system.

## B. ASSESSMENT OF PARTICIPANTS' POST-PROGRAM SUCCESS

Describe how lead State agencies will use the workforce development system to assess the progress of participants who are exiting from core programs in entering, persisting in, and completing postsecondary education, or entering or remaining in employment. States may choose to set additional indicators of performance.

In addition to making use of WIOA performance measures to assess the post-program success of WIOA participants, the State Workforce Investment Board will determine additional, specific longitudinal measures of socioeconomic mobility. Through the State Longitudinal Data System (LifeTracks), education, workforce, and other measures of well-being will be tracked not only in the second and fourth quarters after exit from WIOA-related services but also in the five to 10 years after exit to reveal economic and workforce trends, which will enable the state to more effectively compare actual outcomes with desired outcomes. Results for relevant measures will be available, in the aggregate, to all Mississippians via the LifeTracks online reporting website (LifeTracks.ms.gov) and will be used by the State Workforce Investment Board to further improve and coordinate Combined Plan Partner activities. In particular, this analysis will be used to ensure that combined activities support outcome improvements for all sub-populations, including veterans, persons with disabilities, at-risk youth, and other vulnerable Mississippians.

## 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 for workforce and labor market information, consistent with Federal and State law. (This Operational Planning element applies to core programs.)

Mississippi uses quarterly wage record information to measure progress on state and local performance measures. Currently, the Mississippi Department of Employment Security has a data sharing agreement with the National Strategic Planning and Analysis Research Center at Mississippi State University to provide performance reporting through the ETA 9090 and the WIA Standardized Reporting Data (WIASRD) reports. State UI wage records and Wage Record Interchange System (WRIS) data are transferred to the National Strategic Planning and Analysis Research Center via a Mississippi Department of Employment Security secure web file server. Safeguards are in place to ensure that the National Strategic Planning and Analysis Research Center deletes all WRIS quarterly wage data after the ETA 9090 and the WIASRD reports are generated and delivered to the Mississippi Department of Employment Security. State UI wage records, however, are stored by the National Strategic Planning and Analysis Research Center on behalf of and for the use of the statewide longitudinal data system, Mississippi LifeTracks, for which the National Strategic Planning and Analysis Research Center is the state data clearinghouse.

## 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. 1232g) and other applicable Federal laws.

The state of Mississippi has made large efforts to ensure privacy protection. In order to protect the privacy of Mississippians, all partners that will provide and share data in collaboration efforts, through Mississippi Works and other aligned technologies, have agreed on a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to ensure security of sensitive information. All partners expressly agree to abide by all applicable federal, state, and local laws regarding confidential information and to adhere to the same standards of confidentiality as state employees, including but not limited to:

- 29 U.S.C. 2935; as amended by WIOA - reports, recordkeeping, and investigations.
- 29 U.S.C. 2871(f)(3); as amended by WIOA - regarding confidentiality.
- 20 CFR Part 603 - safeguards and security requirements regarding disclosed information under Unemployment Compensation.
- 42 U.S.C. 503 - regarding state laws governing Unemployed Insurance operations.
- 20 CFR 617.57(b) - regarding disclosure of information under the Trade Act.
- 29 U.S.C. 49I-2(a)(2); as amended under WIOA - regarding information to be confidential under the Wagner-Peyser Act.
- The Privacy Act (5 U.S.C. 552).
- The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (20 U.S.C. 1232g).
- 34 CFR 361.38 - protection, use, and release of personal information of Vocational Rehabilitation Services participants.
- HIPAA: 45 CFR 164.500 - 164.534.
- 2 CFR 200.303 - regarding reasonable measures to safeguard protected personally identifiable information.

Each partner will ensure that the collection and use of any information, systems, or records that contain personally identifiable information will be limited to purposes that support the programs and activities described by relevant memorandums of understanding (MOUs) as part of the Mississippi workforce development system and Statewide Longitudinal Data System Rules and Regulations (see Appendix B) as provided for in Miss. Code Ann. §37-154-1 and §37-154-3.

Each partner will ensure that access to software systems and files under its control that contain personally identifiable information will be limited to authorized staff members who are assigned responsibilities in support of the services and activities provided as part of the Mississippi workforce development system and who must access the information to perform those responsibilities. Each partner expressly agrees to take measures to ensure that no personally identifiable information is accessible by unauthorized individuals.

## 7. PRIORITY OF SERVICE FOR VETERANS

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Describe how the State will implement and monitor the priority of service provisions for veterans in accordance with the requirements of the Jobs for Veterans Act, codified at section 4215 of 38 U.S.C., which applies to all employment and training programs funded in whole or in part by the Department of Labor. States should also describe the referral process for veterans determined to have a significant barrier to employment to receive services from the Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) program's Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist.

To ensure veterans receive consideration for all opportunities for which they qualify, the Mississippi Department of Employment Security will ensure 1) covered persons are aware of their entitlement to priority of service, 2) covered persons are aware of the full array of employment, training, and placement services available through One-Stop Centers and all service points, and 3) that all applicable eligibility requirements for these programs are understood and applied.

MDES will also utilize the following to provide priority of service:

- Referral of qualified veterans to new job openings, especially Federal Contractor job orders, prior to all non-veteran job referral activity.
- Veteran placement at the top of WIOA waiting lists (ITAs and OJT) for limited training funds.

MDES management will monitor priority of service by reviewing quarterly performance reports, manager reports, and MS Works reports. MDES management will monitor priority of service in covered programs at two levels. Workforce Investment Network (WIN) Job Centers will continue to use established protocol of identifying targeted groups. At the state level, management will continue to analyze performance reports, manager reports, and MS Works reports. WIN Job Center services are made available and provided to eligible veterans, transitioning service members, VA VR & E Chapter 31 veterans, Native American Veterans, other groups targeted for special consideration, and veterans with significant barriers to employment through outreach activities performed by Disabled Veteran Outreach Specialists (DVOPs). MDES will continue to encourage non-DOL program partners to focus on providing priority of service to targeted groups for special consideration.

DVOPs are integrated into the WIN Job Center service delivery system at the local job center level. Eligible veterans and eligible spouses with significant barriers to employment are identified by intake forms or by electronic registration and referred to or assigned to DVOPs after other One-Stop Center staff complete initial service intake. DVOPs will be cross-trained to understand the full complement of WIOA and Combined Plan Partner programs that may be available. In instances when a DVOP is not available or has reached the predetermined caseload, another One-Stop Center staff will provide services to veterans and eligible spouses as appropriate.

#### 8. ADDRESSING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

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Describe how the one-stop delivery system (including one-stop center operators and the one-stop delivery system partners), will comply with section 188 of WIOA (if applicable) and applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.) with regard to the physical and programmatic accessibility of facilities, programs, services, technology, and materials for individuals with disabilities. This also must include a description of compliance through providing staff training and support for addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities. Describe the State's one-stop center certification policy, particularly the accessibility criteria.

The technical assistance guide for one-stop certification issued by MDES addresses accommodations for persons with disabilities. The guide recommends that all sites give priority to ensuring that persons with disabilities are provided with assistive devices to

enable access to all services. The guide recommends that an accessibility assessment be performed at each site by an appropriate Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) specialist. The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services will provide technical assistance and consultation for ADA compliance.

9. ADDRESSING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS.

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Describe how the one-stop delivery system (including one-stop center operators and the one-stop delivery system 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.

The Mississippi Department of Employment Security specifies its policies for assisting Limited English Proficiency individuals in its “Limited English Proficient (LEP) Individuals Policy Statement and Procedures.” This document establishes policies designed to ensure the accessibility of all services to individuals with limited English proficiency in One-Stop centers, Youth Providers, and any recipients of federal financial assistance. Staff will first determine an individual’s primary language using “I Speak” language posters. Using printed “I Speak” resources, staff will then inform the LEP individual that interpreter services are available at no cost. If the LEP individual cannot understand written or verbal English, staff can access several options for interpretation: local partner interpreter services; Language Line Interpreter Services; and the individual’s own interpreter, if requested. Policies also specify that vital documents will be translated into appropriate languages.

## IV. COORDINATION WITH STATE PLAN PROGRAMS

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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.

### *Overview of Steps Taken to Align Agencies*

The process began in July 2014 with the establishment of a SWIB task force to conduct a study on workforce development needs in Mississippi. A poll of SWIB members during the February 2015 SWIB meeting recommended using the findings of the task force study as a common framework in the development of the workforce plan as prescribed by WIOA (see Appendix A). To kick off the development of the workforce plan, Governor Bryant met with education and workforce stakeholders to encourage their participation in the process. A planning document was developed that clearly outlined how each party would be involved (see Appendix A). Working groups were established to seek input for the development of the strategic and operational aspects of the workforce plan. Open meetings provided ample opportunity for the public to contribute to the process. A focus group was conducted to gather input from the business community. A website was created to provide regular updates on the process and to provide an additional avenue for the public to participate.

Throughout the process, local workforce development areas participated through the Mississippi Association of Workforce Areas (MAWA), which was established as a 501(c) 3 organization in June 2006. MAWA's mission is to share information and to engage in education and training activities that address common problems within Mississippi's four local workforce development areas. Each WIOA workforce director is a member of MAWA. The State Workforce Investment Board met regularly with MAWA during the development of the Combined Plan. MAWA provided input for the following key areas: cross-program alignment of program services, coordination of business outreach, sector strategies, performance, and the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model. MAWA was also represented in each workgroup and provided comments on the initial draft of the Combined Plan. In addition, local workforce development boards were tasked with updating and seeking input from chief elected officials in their respective areas on the development of the Combined Plan.

### *Mississippi WIOA Planning Document*

The Mississippi WIOA Planning Document was created to inform the public about Mississippi's strategic plan to create an integrated workforce development system and to provide insight into the processes developed by the state to comply with the requirements of WIOA. This document provided a general overview of WIOA's content, goals, and requirements, including its required components and planning elements. The document also informed Mississippians about the state-created planning workgroups, identifying each workgroup's members and detailing each workgroup's roles and responsibilities in developing Mississippi's Combined Plan. Strategies to engage the business sector and the public in the planning process were also disclosed in the document. A list of an additional set of operating groups was provided in the document. These operating groups consisted of the Office of the Governor, State Workforce Investment Board, Subject Matter Experts, Management Team, Data Team, Compliance Team, and Public Relations Team. The

document revealed the communication plan, a critical component of the planning process designed to provide a systematic method of communication and a consistent exchange of information across all involved parties. The strategy for writing Mississippi's Combined Plan was presented in the document, discussing how the gathered input and information were collected and written. The document concluded with a timeline of meetings and collaborations relevant to the process of developing Mississippi's Combined Plan in order to ensure its timely completion and submission.

### *Planning Workgroups*

In efforts to support the Governor's vision of an integrated workforce ecosystem and collaboration across stakeholders statewide, seven planning workgroups reflecting the two major planning elements (i.e., strategic planning and operational planning) of the WIOA were established. Each of these workgroups was tasked with specific roles and responsibilities to help focus efforts on critical components of the WIOA. A chair and a vice chair were selected from each group to help align internal workgroup activities. The seven planning workgroups were organized as follows:

#### Strategic Planning Workgroups

- Planning and Communication Workgroup
- Aligned and Integrated Technology Workgroup
- Sector Strategies Workgroup

#### Operational Planning Workgroups

- One-Stop Operations Workgroup
- Career Pathways and Assessment Workgroup
- Performance and Accountability Workgroup
- Employer Engagement Workgroup

*Strategic Planning Workgroups* The workforce groups organized under the Strategic Planning Element worked collaboratively on identifying strategies and goals for bringing the Governor's vision of a unified workforce ecosystem to fruition. These workgroups included the Planning and Communication Workgroup, the Aligned and Integrated Technology Workgroup, and the Sector Strategies Workgroup.

#### 1. Planning and Communication

The Planning and Communication Workgroup managed the planning process of Mississippi's Combined Plan. The primary responsibility was to ensure that the other workgroups remained on task and on time with meeting deadlines. Communication facilitation was another responsibility of this workgroup, as it was tasked with effectively communicating with the other entities throughout the planning process. This group communicated with other workgroups as well as with stakeholders to ensure that the public voice was heard on the overarching vision for the state's revitalized workforce development system in order to create a vibrant economic climate for Mississippi.

#### 2. Aligned and Integrated Technology

The primary task of the Aligned and Integrated Technology Workgroup was to understand the WIOA requirements, leverage resources, and integrate Mississippi Works ([mississippiworks.org](http://mississippiworks.org)) as the foundation of the WIOA technology requirements. In order to meet the demands of today and the goals of tomorrow, technology must be used to bring Mississippians together to create a renewed and stronger workforce. This workgroup developed strategies to align the various agency systems to meet the WIOA unified technology requirement and universal profile incorporated into Mississippi's Combined Plan. Six core programs are already under the Mississippi Works technology umbrella, a comprehensive system used by job seekers to apply for work, identify their barriers to employment, and follow through with an integrated case management system. Mississippi Works is working with technology vendors to ensure every Combined Plan Partner is compliant with the new law.

### 3. Sector Strategies

The Sector Strategies Workgroup was tasked with using data and analysis of the current and projected job market and economic conditions to develop strategies focused on linking job seekers to gainful employment. By identifying regional and local employment deficits, this group created strategies and approaches for training, development, and education programs that teach job seekers the skills necessary to address the needs of Mississippi's employers. This workgroup met to confirm that the appropriate economic data and analyses were easily accessible for informed decision making pertaining to the development and implementation of Mississippi's Combined Plan. Analyzing workforce, employment, and unemployment data, labor market trends, and the educational and skills level of Mississippi's workforce allowed this workgroup to develop sector-based workforce strategies. The group also discussed regional sector strategies, with an emphasis on how these strategies connected to the state's overall plan. To make the best use of state resources, the workgroup concurred that the state should focus on targeted sectors backed by solid data analysis to make the biggest impact. In addition, data analysis will provide a clear-cut picture of which sectors are the best return on investment. This workgroup also established how all state and regional sector strategies would link to the career pathways element of the operational component of Mississippi's Combined Plan to ensure that Mississippians are prepared to fill the state's available jobs. If additional funding is invested in specific sector strategies, then the workforce ecosystem should promote opportunities in these sectors, which would result in a strategy that is mutually beneficial to employers and job seekers. Advancing Mississippi's workforce participants so they can have gainful employment and become self-sufficient is the highest measure of success. The performance measures mandated in the WIOA provide Mississippi with an opportunity to improve its focus and align workforce training resources more effectively across all programs.

*Operational Planning Workgroups* The workforce groups organized around the Operational Planning Element worked collaboratively to implement the strategies conceived by the workgroups in the strategic planning element. Each Operational Planning Workgroup was charged with specific roles and responsibilities to help focus their efforts on implementation of the goals and strategies developed by the Strategic Planning Workgroups. The Operational Planning Workgroups include the One-Stop Operations Workgroup, Career Pathways and Assessment Workgroup, Performance and Accountability Workgroup, and Employer Engagement Workgroup. Each of these workgroups first met in

June 2015 to discuss specific focus areas and strategize about methods to achieve the Governor's vision of a workforce ecosystem.

## 1. One-Stop Operations

The goal of the One-Stop Operations Workgroup was to design a comprehensive workforce development system that encourages cross-program alignment of services in a seamless, coordinated, service-delivery model that accommodates all job seeker and employer customers. The workgroup developed a One-Stop System that provides access to all program services through a network of physical locations and a virtual environment. This system will allow individuals to have access to all appropriate programs at any point of entry into the system. In order to ensure the efficiency of the One-Stop system, the One-Stop Operations Workgroup implemented a clearinghouse where all programs communicate and are fully integrated.

The One-Stop Operations Workgroup met to discuss ideas for cross-program alignment of all services in a seamless model that best accommodates job seekers and employers. Various tiers of One-Stop Centers were developed. Sector Training Plus Comprehensive One-Stop Centers will provide access to all Combined Plan Partner services and to in-house career and technical education. Comprehensive One-Stop Centers will provide access to all of the Combined Plan Partner services in one place to assist the customer and provide referrals for career and technical education. A minimum of one Comprehensive One-Stop Center will be located in each of Mississippi's four local workforce development areas. In order to provide Mississippi job seekers with the education, training, and skills to meet the demands of Mississippi employers, a network of Affiliate One-Stop Centers will offer basic services and refer the customer to a Sector Training Plus or Comprehensive One-Stop Center if the affiliate center is unable to meet the customer's needs. Access points located throughout each local workforce development area would provide virtual access to job seekers. This workgroup also noted that in order for the Sector Training Plus, Comprehensive, and Affiliate One-Stop Centers to be successful, there is a critical need for a staff of skilled counselors who are cross-trained on all of the programs and services to best meet the needs of the job seeker. Another objective of the One-Stop Operations Workgroup was to develop a strategy to find job seekers who are not currently in the system, identify the services they need, and ultimately move the needle to increase Mississippi's workforce participation rate.

## 2. Career Pathways and Assessment

The Career Pathways and Assessment Workgroup was responsible for the design and implementation of career-readiness plans that allow Mississippians to gain the necessary training or education to move directly into careers that are in demand in the 21st century and in their respective local workforce development areas. This process includes individualized education and training plans with multiple entry and exit points that ultimately track the job seeker's progress through the workforce ecosystem. The workgroup discussed strategies that included cross-program, non-duplicative assessments of education, skills, and assets. The workgroup also agreed on a need for a common assessment instrument for entry into the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model, the statewide integrated pathway model. The state-approved measure will be a recognized credential for the state of Mississippi and will assess a job seeker's trainability.

To support this effort, there is also an individualized plan in place for every job seeker in the workforce pipeline.

The Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model will guide job seekers through aligned resources and support to help them find a job and increase Mississippi's workforce participation rate. The overarching goal of the state's integrated workforce pathway model is creating opportunities for Mississippians to receive higher skills and higher wages as they progress through the workforce pipeline.

### 3. Performance and Accountability

The Performance and Accountability Workgroup was tasked with developing a reporting system that will support the performance evaluation process. WIOA increases accountability and places stronger emphasis on results through the establishment of common employment outcome measures across all WIOA programs included in Mississippi's Combined Plan. The workgroup reviewed the six performance indicators mandated by WIOA and discussed how each measurement impacts each core program.

Currently, each program has its own definition of a "participation period" within the workforce system. Under WIOA, a common measurement is required across programs with well-defined entry and exit points. Median earnings of participants is another performance indicator that core programs must determine. Although job seekers can choose their own path, the workforce system will need to counsel job seekers on obtaining higher-level skills to meet the overarching goal of closing the middle-skill gap. Mississippi will be measured on its performance in educating and training workers under WIOA to meet the needs of employers seeking middle-skill workers.

The law also requires Mississippi to measure incremental steps or benchmarks that job seekers must take to obtain a recognized postsecondary credential or a secondary school diploma (or its recognized equivalent). Therefore, the workforce system must not only enroll low-skill job seekers into a training program but also ensure that the training program is successful and show evidence of putting people on a path to obtain higher credentials that result in higher wages.

The final performance indicator will be determined by the Department of Labor (DOL), which will establish parameters for employer participation. Mississippi will develop a plan with the understanding that the plan will be modified once DOL issues guidelines.

The workgroup determined that all of the performance indicators will be communicated through the technology developed by the Mississippi Department of Employment Security, which is already in place. A conceptual policy plan and timeline were developed to outline how all of the systems will share data, create reports, etc. Additional components to develop for this shared system will include a dashboard that allows workforce partners to view the status of performance indicators calculated in near real time and a notification system to ensure continuous progress.

### 4. Employer Engagement

The Employer Engagement Workgroup was tasked with designing a systematic approach to grow employer engagement and offer solutions on how to manage it. WIOA emphasizes engaging employers across the workforce system to align training with needed skills and

match employers with qualified workers. There are 55,000 employers across Mississippi, but the current system is only engaged with 25 percent. The workgroup is committed to increasing employer involvement for Mississippi's workforce system of the future and developing strategies to increase employer engagement.

One strategy is to assign each employer a project manager since most companies prefer one point of contact. To avoid duplication and to streamline the process, the committee created a checklist of what information is needed from employers so that everything is addressed at one time. The group decided to contact employers less but in a more valuable way.

Understanding the needs of the employer, referring them to the appropriate workforce partner, and ultimately following through on requests bring considerable value and will increase credibility and participation. When employers experience the positive benefits of the workforce system, they will be more inclined to participate. In addition, employers who help the system should be given priority of service.

Another strategy that will add value for both employers and workforce partners is tracking the engagement progress through technology similar to Mississippi Works. This technology will be designed to streamline the efforts of workforce partners making cold calls and referrals by allowing workforce partners to view data in a secure and centralized system to see who is involved with employer engagement. This strategy will allow Mississippi to have a better understanding of the needs of employers, which in turn directly impacts how the state trains and directs job seekers.

To be continuously effective, workforce partners recognize the need for ongoing professional development and training for themselves. The workgroup strategized that workforce partners should meet on a regular basis and provide cross-training of programs so all of the core agencies will have common knowledge of the services and programs that are offered. This strategy will enhance the referral process and keep the lines of communication open and the sharing of ideas ongoing. This workgroup will identify a curriculum and/or certificate program as well as a coordinator to start this process.

A final strategy from this workgroup identified internships as a win-win for both the employer and job seeker. Mississippi's Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) and community colleges are working with MDES to match job seekers who are looking for internships. There is an effort to give job seekers both work experience and experience related to their field of study. An internship allows job seekers an opportunity to demonstrate their ability and connect with potential employers.

#### *Input from Mississippi Businesses*

On July 8, 2015, Mississippi conducted a focus group with business representatives to obtain additional input on the plan. The purpose of this focus group was to gauge the interest of businesses in public partnership and determine the needs of Mississippi businesses. Involving the business community enabled the planning workgroups to incorporate a business sector perspective into the planning and implementation of Mississippi's Combined Plan and create momentum for increasing business and industry involvement in the workforce ecosystem. Participants were invited by the State Workforce Investment Board Executive Director. Feedback from attendees was first captured by an online survey, and the results were immediately shared with the focus group. This initial input provided a baseline discussion on the effectiveness of the current workforce system in

meeting industry needs and the identification of barriers experienced by employers in locating skilled employees. Strategies to ensure that Mississippi has a successful and thriving business climate were also discussed.

#### *Communication Plan*

Communication was critical to the planning process and to successfully fulfilling the requirements of WIOA. To facilitate communication throughout the entire planning process, a plan was developed to maintain a systematic method of communication across all parties and to ensure a consistent flow of information across all involved parties. The Office of the Governor provided overall guidance and leadership in the implementation of WIOA. The chairman of the SWIB Task Force served as the point of contact between the Governor's Office and the SWIB. Communications between the general public, Internal Workgroup, Subject Matter Experts, the Strategic Planning and Operational Planning Workgroups, and the SWIB Task Force was coordinated through the SWIB via the executive director of the SWIB. The Management Team, as part of the Internal Workgroup, coordinated all activities and maintained communication with the SWIB. The remaining teams of the Internal Workgroup, specifically the Compliance Team and Public Relations Team, maintained communications with each other to ensure a smooth and consistent flow of information and that the writing of Mississippi's Combined Plan remained on schedule. Subject Matter Experts interacted with the teams of the Internal Workgroup. Any information submitted by the Strategic Planning or Operational Planning Workgroups was shared with the SWIB and all members of the other workgroups.

#### *State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB) Website*

To ensure transparency and compliance with WIOA, the SWIB website ([swib.ms.gov](http://swib.ms.gov)) added a section titled Mississippi Works: WIOA. The purpose of this website was to keep Mississippians informed about the state's strategic plan to create an integrated workforce development system and a process to meet the requirements of WIOA. The Mississippi WIOA Planning Document and the SWIB Workforce Development Needs Study were posted to the website. Information and membership for the Strategic Planning Workgroups and the Operational Planning Workgroups were also available on the website. Dates, times, and locations of upcoming WIOA planning meetings were listed on the website. Beginning on June 15, 2015, a weekly newsletter was posted to the website. These newsletters summarized the progress being made on the development of Mississippi's Combined Plan. These items remained on the website until the plan review and comment period ended on September 28, 2015.

#### *Open Meetings*

All planning workgroup meetings were open to the public. Three public forums were held at different stages in the development of Mississippi's Combined Plan in order to invite comments on the plan from the general public. Notice of these public meetings was announced in *The Clarion Ledger* and posted on the websites of the SWIB and involved state agencies (e.g., Mississippi Department of Rehabilitative Services). The initial public forum allowed all concerned individuals the opportunity to voice their comments and concerns regarding the development of the state's plan. The information collected from the initial public forum was collated and provided to the WIOA plan writing team. The second public forum focused on plan implementation. The comments and suggestions from the second

public forum were also provided to the WIOA plan writing team. The final public forum was held on September 18, 2015, to reveal the final plan and allow for final comments. Any comments submitted at the final public forum were collated and placed on the SWIB website for public viewing.

### **Overview of Process to Designate Local Workforce Development Areas**

In accordance with the requirements of section 106 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Mississippi's Local Workforce Development Area Designation Policy (Appendix C), Governor Phil Bryant received and approved requests for initial designation from the four local workforce development boards: Delta, Mississippi Partnership, Southcentral Mississippi Works, and Twin Districts. Prior to submitting the initial designation requests to Governor Bryant, the boards posted the requests on their websites for a public comment period. These areas met the three criteria for initial designation: (1) they were designated as local areas for the purposes of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 prior to the two-year period preceding the date of enactment of WIOA; (2) they have performed successfully; and (3) they have sustained fiscal integrity.

Subsequent designation of local workforce development areas will take place according to Mississippi's Local Workforce Development Area Designation Policy and in compliance with all relevant sections of WIOA.

## V. COMMON ASSURANCES (FOR ALL CORE PROGRAMS)

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The Unified or Combined State Plan must include assurances that—

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. (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; (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; 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 carry out 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 be in compliance with WIOA section 188, Nondiscrimination, as applicable; Yes
8. The Federal funds received to carry out 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 carrying out 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 Department of Labor. Yes

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## VI. PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR CORE PROGRAMS

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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.

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### PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES UNDER TITLE I-B

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The Unified or Combined State Plan must include the following with respect to activities carried out under subtitle B--

#### A. ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

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##### 1. REGIONS AND LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AREAS

###### A. IDENTIFY THE REGIONS AND THE LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AREAS DESIGNATED IN THE STATE.

The state has redesignated four local workforce development areas. Each of the four local workforce development areas have also been identified as regions.

Map of Regions - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/RegionsLocalWorkforceAreas.png>

B. DESCRIBE THE PROCESS USED FOR DESIGNATING 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 WIOA. THIS MUST INCLUDE A DESCRIPTION OF HOW THE STATE CONSULTED WITH THE LOCAL BOARDS AND CHIEF ELECTED OFFICIALS IN IDENTIFYING THE REGIONS.

WIOA Policy 1 (15-007 Local Workforce Designation Policy, Appendix I2A) outlines the process used for designating local areas. The policy was developed in consultation with the State Workforce Investment Board and posted on websites for public comment. The policy defines performed successfully as meeting or exceeding the adjusted levels of performance for each performance goal for two consecutive years immediately preceding the enactment of the WIOA. See Appendix I2A for a full description of the process. Sustained fiscal integrity is defined as the administration of WIA programs for the two consecutive years immediately preceding the enactment of WIOA with no formal determination of misexpended funds or gross negligence. Each local workforce area submitted a request for initial designation supported by documentation of successful performance and sustained fiscal integrity.

###### C. PROVIDE THE APPEALS PROCESS REFERRED TO IN SECTION 106(B)(5) OF WIOA RELATING TO DESIGNATION OF LOCAL AREAS.

Regions are aligned with the four local workforce development areas. The state identified regions using the following data: common labor markets, common economic development

areas; community college districts; geography, population density; commuting patterns and sufficiency of Title II providers. The analysis is included in the combined plan. Planning meetings were held with local boards and chief elected officials. Specific Appeals process information is provided in the Local Workforce Area Designation Policy provided in Appendix I2A.

**D. PROVIDE THE APPEALS PROCESS REFERRED TO IN SECTION 121(H)(2)(E) OF WIOA RELATING TO DETERMINATIONS FOR INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING.**

State entities responsible for the administration of Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, TANF, WP, AE, and Rehabilitation Services have agreed to physically co-locate in at least one comprehensive center in each workforce area. An MOU will be developed to describe roles and responsibilities and shared cost for infrastructure. The State will develop a WIOA policy to establish an appeals process related to determinations for infrastructure funding. The appeals process will be incorporated in the WIOA one-stop certification policy.

**2. STATEWIDE ACTIVITIES**

**A. PROVIDE STATE POLICIES OR GUIDANCE FOR THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM AND FOR USE OF STATE FUNDS FOR WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES.**

Mississippi Senate Bill 2958 of the 2014 Mississippi Regular Legislative Session amended Section 71-5-353, Mississippi Code of 1972 to provide that money in the state workforce investment board bank account shall be used for administration of state workforce investment board business, grants related to training, and other projects as determined appropriate by the state workforce investment board.

**B. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE INTENDS TO USE GOVERNOR'S SET ASIDE FUNDING. 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 ALSO SHOULD DESCRIBE ANY LAYOFF AVERSION STRATEGIES THEY HAVE IMPLEMENTED TO ADDRESS AT RISK COMPANIES AND WORKERS**

The 2015 allocation for Governor's Set Aside Funding is 10%. WIOA provides these funds to be used for "statewide employment and training activities" (WIOA Section 134). Statewide activities include required and allowable activities. Funds must be reserved for mandatory activities before optional activities are funded.

Mississippi plans to use the funding primarily for mandatory statewide WIOA activities as follows:

- Administering Mississippi's WIOA system. This activity happens at MDES and is capped at 5% of the total WIOA allocation. Included costs are accounting, staffing, policy and procedure issuance, monitoring and audit, planning, grant management and liaison with USDOL and the local areas. Most states use the full 5% amount to carry out these functions.
- Operating the State's management information systems. In the past, the largest expense within the state's Governor's reserve has been the MIS system. USDOL requires complex and ever changing performance and reporting tracking for all

WIOA programs. Over 100 data elements are collected from every participant, each data element is validated and entered into the MIS system and reports are delivered to USDOL and the four local workforce development areas.

- Incentive grants and technical assistance for local areas. Historically, each of the four local workforce development areas has been awarded funds each year for coordination, technical assistance and performance.
- Eligible Training Provider information (ETPL). WIOA requires that states maintain and disseminate a list of every approved training program, including detailed performance information such as student completion and employment rates. Customers of all the WIN Job Centers use this list and the performance information to select their training program. Youth programs are also tracked statewide.
- Evaluation and continuous improvement. All statewide WIOA programs are to be evaluated with a goal for continuous improvement. Evaluation activities are conducted using the MSWorks System and on-site monitoring of all programs.
- Operating the WIN Job Centers. To date, funding for the Centers has come from other sources.

Any expenditures from the Governor's Set Aside Funding will be in compliance with Section 134 of the WIOA.

The Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES) is the lead agency for Rapid Response services in Mississippi. The State also allocates a share of available Rapid Response funds to local workforce development areas based on mass layoff or plant closure activity. Each workforce area has designated a staff member as their Rapid Response and dislocated worker program coordinator. Local area boards will develop plans that describe how the State and local areas coordinate Rapid Response services to address each area's specific labor market needs.

The MDES responds to both the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act (WARN) and non-WARN events, that is, events involving fewer than 50 individuals. MDES receives official WARN notices of impending closures or mass layoff events from the affected business. To ensure that assistance and services are provided to as many dislocated workers as possible, MDES also established a policy to respond to non-WARN events, regardless of the number of individuals affected. MDES may learn of non-WARN events from the media, partner agencies, local economic development offices, WIN Job Center and local workforce area staff, businesses, affected workers, community college rapid response coordinators, and other local sources.

Within 24 hours of the receipt of a WARN or non-WARN notice, the MDES staff contacts the company to discuss available Rapid Response services and offers assistance to the company and the affected workers. An on-site visit with the company representative and, when appropriate, the union or employee representative, is scheduled as soon as possible.

The State developed an employee survey form to determine the specific assistance needed by the affected workers. The survey is provided to the employer during the on-site visit for immediate distribution to the workers. The form collects information on the employees' education and skill levels, work history, employment assistance needs, and training interests. After compiling and analyzing the information provided by the employees, the team identifies the workers' specific needs and coordinates with the local area and

community college to facilitate the delivery of services from the appropriate partner agencies.

Working in coordination with local workforce development areas and WIN Job Center staff, a plan of action is developed to deliver services to the affected dislocated workers. Whenever possible, Rapid Response services are delivered on-site prior to layoff, onsite at the company and on company time. Providing services on-site is dependent upon the company's willingness to allow workers to attend sessions during work hours and the availability of meeting space at the site.

When MDES learns of a layoff or closure, MDES immediately notifies the Mississippi Development Authority, the state's economic development agency, and informs them that a company may be in need of assistance. The local economic development staff is in a position to assist the employer in exploring options that may help them to avert the layoff. In addition, if it is evident that a closure will occur, local economic development staff may be able to market the site to employers who will be moving to the area.

MDES has developed a comprehensive, integrated Management Information System that includes Rapid Response and Trade Adjustment Assistance Act programs. A file is maintained for each Rapid Response event that includes a checklist that describes all services provided, names of company contacts, copy of the WARN notice, and information on any follow-up activities. The file contains information on each closure or layoff event, and each individual affected. It provides individual contact information and the skills of the affected workers. A quarterly WARN report is also maintained that lists all WARN and non-WARN activities, name and location of each company, type of company affected, number of workers, services provided, and if the event is trade related.

**C. IN ADDITION, DESCRIBE THE STATE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES TO PROVIDE RAPID RESPONSES IN CASES OF NATURAL DISASTERS INCLUDING COORDINATION WITH FEMA AND OTHER ENTITIES.**

Because MDES serves as the lead agency for Rapid Response in the state, it is uniquely positioned to provide mandated services in the case of natural disasters. Rapid Response staff are part of the agency's disaster response team. Staff assists in the identification of businesses adversely affected and workers who lost jobs as a result of the disaster. This information is important for the development of requests for National Dislocated Worker Grant funds. Rapid Response staff also assist in disseminating information on emergency unemployment insurance and reemployment services available. The agency disaster response team works with FEMA and other appropriate state and federal agencies to develop strategies for addressing natural disasters to ensure rapid access to the broad range of assistance.

**D. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE PROVIDES EARLY INTERVENTION (E.G., RAPID RESPONSE) TO WORKER GROUPS ON WHOSE BEHALF A TRADE ADJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE (TAA) PETITION HAS BEEN FILED. (SECTION 134(A)(2)(A).) THIS DESCRIPTION MUST INCLUDE HOW THE STATE DISSEMINATES BENEFIT INFORMATION TO PROVIDE TRADE-AFFECTED 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 TRADE-AFFECTED 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.

The Mississippi Department of Employment Security administers the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Act.

Providing early intervention to worker groups on whose behalf a TAA petition has been filed:

- The MDES leads Rapid Response efforts across the state. When working with a business to provide Rapid Response services, the MDES staff activates team efforts locally. The Team includes a rapid response coordinator from the appropriate Local Workforce Area, a representative of the local WIN Job Center representing Wagner-Peyser, and staff representative from the Trade Adjustment Assistance department. Whenever possible, the team conducts on-site presentations at the business location. Every effort is made to provide information sessions prior to the commencement of the lay-offs and/or plant closure. The presentation consists of an overview of the benefits and services that can be expected from each of the partner groups.
- During these sessions, the Rapid Response team emphasizes how the partner agency staff representatives will be working together as a team to offer the customer individualized comprehensive reemployment benefits and services.
- Once a petition is approved, additional sessions with affected workers are scheduled to provide information about TAA services only. These sessions give the workers the opportunity to ask detailed questions or questions directly related to the workers' individual needs. The sessions may be set up through the employer if the place of business is still open or through TAA staff at the nearest WIN Job Center or at another location.
- When an individual enters the WIN Job center and is identified as Trade eligible, a Trade case manager provides them with an orientation to explain available Trade benefits and services.

Funds are used for staff to monitor, identify and communicate with worker groups that file a TAA petition.

## B. ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKER PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

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### 1. WORK-BASED TRAINING MODELS

If the State is utilizing 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.

The state is utilizing alternative training models to include on-the-job training, incumbent working training, internships, and transitional jobs. The training strategy is included in the plan.

## 2. REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP

Describe how the State will incorporate Registered Apprenticeship into its strategy for service design and delivery (e.g., job center staff taking applications and conducting assessments).

The State received two Registered Apprenticeship (RA) Grants, Accelerator and Expansion. Through a collaborative effort with the Mississippi Department of Employment Security, Mississippi Community College Board, and the Mississippi Development Authority, the Mississippi Apprenticeship Program (MAP) initiative will expand RA programs in Mississippi. MAP is positioning RA as a viable pathway that aligns our workforce and educational systems, strengthens economic competitiveness for our businesses, and makes good-paying jobs more accessible for our citizens. The three major project goals of the initiative are to expand RA Sponsors, expand state capacity to support RA, and target and increase the participation and completion rates of diverse populations in RA.

## 3. TRAINING PROVIDER ELIGIBILITY PROCEDURE

Provide the procedure, eligibility criteria, and information requirements for determining training provider initial and continued eligibility, including Registered Apprenticeship programs (WIOA Section 122).

The State will continue to use its current web-based Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) system for the registration, initial eligibility, and continued eligibility of all WIOA training service providers, including Registered Apprenticeship programs. State Policy Number 9 describes these processes in detail. (Appendix I3A) The State office will work with the Office of Apprenticeship to identify Registered Apprenticeship sponsors. The Local Workforce Development Areas will reach out to the Registered Apprenticeship sponsors in their respective areas. The state will use the current web based application processes for the registration of Apprenticeship sponsors and their program(s) of study. Apprenticeship sponsors will not be required to meet the state's minimum performance standards published in state policy, will be granted automatic approval, and will not be required to meet continued eligibility requirements. WIA ETPs were sent a letter requesting signature on a revised Certificate of Assurances to ensure their transition from WIA to WIOA.

## 4. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR THE PRIORITY FOR PUBLIC ASSISTANCE RECIPIENTS, OTHER LOW-INCOME INDIVIDUALS, AND INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE BASIC SKILLS DEFICIENT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF WIOA SEC. 134(C)(3)(E), WHICH APPLIES TO INDIVIDUALIZED CAREER SERVICES AND TRAINING SERVICES FUNDED BY THE ADULT FORMULA PROGRAM.

A description of how the State will implement and monitor the priority for public assistance recipients, other low-income individuals, or individuals who are basic skills deficient is

provided in Priority of Service for WIOA Adult Program Participants, State Policy 7 (Appendix I3B).

5. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S CRITERIA REGARDING LOCAL AREA TRANSFER OF FUNDS BETWEEN THE ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKER PROGRAMS.

The State empowers the local areas to determine their need to transfer funds between the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs based on workforce demands and needs of the each local area.

The State's criteria regarding local area transfer of funds is provided in the State's WIOA Allocation Policy, Policy 11 (Appendix I3C).

C. YOUTH PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

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With respect to youth workforce investment activities authorized in section 129 of WIOA,—

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 TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION 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 IN AWARDING SUCH GRANTS OR CONTRACTS.\*

\* Sec. 102(b)(2)(D)(i)(V)

The State met with the local workforce development area directors to discuss the RFP process for youth providers. In this meeting, requirements were outlined to include performance indicators. The State then provided two draft RFPs to the directors to be used in developing the areas' RFPs. The State reviewed the RFPs prepared by the local workforce development boards and the rating tools. The rating tools were designed to ensure awareness and capacity to meet WIOA performance indicators.

2. DESCRIBE THE STRATEGIES THE STATE WILL USE TO ACHIEVE IMPROVED OUTCOMES FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH AS DESCRIBED IN 129(A)(1)(B), INCLUDING HOW IT WILL LEVERAGE AND 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.

The State is implementing a WIOA Common Intake and Reporting System that will capture common participant information for the four core programs. The system will align resources and generate automatic referrals among the core programs.

Using a no wrong door policy, all participants will develop an individualized success plan that coordinates the optimum blend of services and funding to achieve their goals for success. This success plan also indicates which of the pathways in the Smart Start Pathways Model to which the participant will be assigned. A connection to a career pathway must be included as part of a youth's individual service strategy or MS Smart Start Success plan. This model is an integrated compilation of programs and services intended to develop basic,

technical and employability skills; provide continuous education and training; and work supports that lead to high-demand jobs in targeted sectors.

3. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL ENSURE THAT ALL 14 PROGRAM ELEMENTS DESCRIBED IN WIOA SECTION 129(C)(2) ARE MADE AVAILABLE AND EFFECTIVELY IMPLEMENTED, INCLUDING QUALITY PRE-APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS UNDER THE WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAM ELEMENT.\*

\* Sec. 102(b)(2)(D)(i)(I)

Services to eligible youth are delivered through a network of youth providers. The local workforce areas competitively procure independent contractors to deliver youth services.

The State and LWDAs require these contractors to ensure that these services include all 14 program elements outlined in WIOA Section 129(c)(2). The State's participant tracking system, MSWorks, has been modified to capture all 14 program elements.

Innovative approaches used by youth providers include the Counseling to Career (C2C) youth programs, Out of School Youth Work Experience, and Career Connections.

C2C provides one to one counseling that helps to develop a personalized individual service strategy that leads to short term and long term employment. Career Connections offers four types of training designed to equip youth with the education and skills to take advantage of new and increasing job opportunities in high growth labor markets.

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 THE STATE WILL ENSURE THAT LOCAL AREAS WILL HAVE A POLICY FOR THESE CRITERIA.

The state includes in Transitional Policy Number 13 - WIOA Youth Eligibility a definition for youth requiring additional assistance. Youth requiring additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program or to secure and hold employment is defined as an in-school or out-of-school youth who is low income, and meets one of the following criteria:

- Lacking relevant work experience to secure or hold employment;
- Lacking credential related to local or regional targeted sectors; or
- In need of an ITA to complete the Start Smart or Career Technical Pathway.
- Criteria defined by local board and included in the local plan.

The WIOA Youth Eligibility Policy, Transition Policy Number 13 is provided in Appendix I3F.

5. INCLUDE THE STATE DEFINITION, AS DEFINED IN LAW, FOR NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL AND ATTENDING SCHOOL AS SPECIFIED IN WIOA SECTION

129(A)(1)(B)(I) AND SECTION 129(A)(1)(C)(I). IF STATE LAW DOES NOT DEFINE “NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL” OR “ATTENDING SCHOOL,” INDICATE THAT IS THE CASE AND PROVIDE THE STATE POLICY FOR DETERMINING WHETHER A YOUTH IS ATTENDING OR NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL.

Alternative education is defined as a specialized structured curriculum that may:

- Provide academically rigorous preparation for work and/or post-secondary education;
- Assist with the transition to work and/or post-secondary education;
- Address the youth’s barriers to work and/or education.

Some examples include:

- Alternative high schools;
- Juvenile boot camps;
- Wilderness treatment.

6. IF USING THE BASIC SKILLS DEFICIENT DEFINITION CONTAINED IN WIOA SECTION 3(5)(B), INCLUDE THE STATE DEFINITION WHICH MUST FURTHER DEFINE HOW TO DETERMINE IF AN INDIVIDUAL IS UNABLE TO COMPUTE OR SOLVE PROBLEMS, OR READ, WRITE, OR SPEAK ENGLISH, AT A LEVEL NECESSARY TO FUNCTION ON THE JOB, IN THE INDIVIDUAL’S FAMILY, OR IN SOCIETY. IF NOT USING THE PORTION OF THE DEFINITION CONTAINED IN WIOA SECTION 3(5)(B), INDICATE THAT IS THE CASE.

State law does not define “not attending school.”

Pursuant to MS Code §37-13-91, a parent, guardian or custodian of a compulsory-school-age child in this state shall cause the child to enroll in and attend a public school or legitimate nonpublic school for the period of time that the child is of compulsory-school-age. A “compulsory-school-age child” means a child who has attained or will attain the age of six (6) years on or before September 1 of the calendar year and who has not attained the age of seventeen (17) years on or before September 1 of the calendar year; and shall include any child who has attained or will attain the age of five (5) years on or before September 1 and has enrolled in a full-day public school kindergarten program. Provided, however, that the parent or guardian of any child enrolled in a full-day public school kindergarten program shall be allowed to disenroll the child from the program on a one-time basis, and such child shall not be deemed a compulsory-school-age child until the child attains the age of six (6) years.

Mississippi is using the basic skills deficient definition as contained in WIOA, as follows: (5) BASIC SKILLS DEFICIENT.—The term “basic skills deficient” means, with respect to an individual— (A) who is a youth, that the individual has English reading, writing, or computing skills at or below the 8th grade level on a generally accepted standardized test; or (B) who is a youth or adult, that the individual is unable to compute or solve problems, or read, write, or speak English, at a level necessary to function on the job, in the individual’s family, or in society.

#### D. SINGLE-AREA STATE REQUIREMENTS

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In States where there is only one local workforce investment area, the governor serves as both the State and 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).)
2. THE ENTITY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DISBURSAL OF GRANT FUNDS, AS DETERMINED BY THE GOVERNOR, IF DIFFERENT FROM THAT FOR THE STATE. (WIOA SECTION 108(B)(15).)
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).)
4. A DESCRIPTION OF THE ROLES AND RESOURCE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE ONE-STOP PARTNERS.
5. THE COMPETITIVE PROCESS USED TO AWARD THE SUBGRANTS AND CONTRACTS FOR TITLE I ACTIVITIES.
6. HOW TRAINING SERVICES OUTLINED IN SECTION 134 WILL BE PROVIDED THROUGH INDIVIDUAL TRAINING ACCOUNTS AND/OR THROUGH CONTRACTS, AND HOW SUCH TRAINING APPROACHES WILL BE COORDINATED. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL MEET INFORMED CUSTOMER CHOICE REQUIREMENTS REGARDLESS OF TRAINING APPROACH.
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 CARRY OUT THE REVIEW OF LOCAL APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED UNDER TITLE II CONSISTENT WITH WIOA SECS. 107(D)(11)(A) AND (B)(I) AND WIOA SEC. 232.
8. COPIES OF EXECUTED COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WHICH DEFINE HOW ALL LOCAL SERVICE PROVIDERS WILL CARRY OUT THE REQUIREMENTS FOR INTEGRATION OF AND ACCESS TO THE ENTIRE SET OF SERVICES AVAILABLE IN THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM, INCLUDING COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH ENTITIES ADMINISTERING REHABILITATION ACT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES.

Mississippi is not a single area state.

#### E. WAIVER REQUESTS (OPTIONAL)

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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 AS A RESULT OF THE WAIVER AND HOW THOSE GOALS RELATE TO THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN;
2. DESCRIBES THE ACTIONS THAT THE STATE OR LOCAL AREA, AS APPROPRIATE, HAS UNDERTAKEN TO REMOVE STATE OR LOCAL STATUTORY OR REGULATORY BARRIERS;
3. DESCRIBES THE GOALS OF THE WAIVER AND THE EXPECTED PROGRAMMATIC OUTCOMES IF THE REQUEST IS GRANTED;
4. DESCRIBES HOW THE WAIVER WILL ALIGN WITH THE DEPARTMENT'S POLICY PRIORITIES, SUCH AS:
  - i. SUPPORTING EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT;
  - ii. CONNECTING EDUCATION AND TRAINING STRATEGIES;
  - iii. SUPPORTING WORK-BASED LEARNING;
  - iv. IMPROVING JOB AND CAREER RESULTS, AND
  - v. 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
  6. DESCRIBES THE PROCESSES USED TO:
    - i. MONITOR THE PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING THE WAIVER;
    - ii. PROVIDE NOTICE TO ANY LOCAL BOARD AFFECTED BY THE WAIVER;
    - iii. PROVIDE ANY LOCAL BOARD AFFECTED BY THE WAIVER AN OPPORTUNITY TO COMMENT ON THE REQUEST;
    - iv. ENSURE MEANINGFUL PUBLIC COMMENT, INCLUDING COMMENT BY BUSINESS AND ORGANIZED LABOR, ON THE WAIVER.
    - iv. COLLECT AND REPORT INFORMATION ABOUT WAIVER OUTCOMES IN THE STATE'S WIOA ANNUAL REPORT
7. 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;

Mississippi is not submitting a request for waivers as part of its I-B Operational Plan.

TITLE I-B ASSURANCES

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The State Plan must include assurances that:

1. The State has implemented a policy to ensure Adult program funds provide a priority in the delivery of training services and individualized career services to individuals who are low income, public assistance recipients and basic skills deficient; Yes
2. The State has implemented a policy to ensure local areas have a process in place for referring veterans with significant barriers to employment to career services provided by the JVSG program's Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist; Yes
3. The state established a written policy and procedure that set forth criteria to be used by chief elected officials for the appointment of local workforce investment board members. Yes
4. The State established written policy and procedures to ensure local workforce investment boards are certified by the governor every two years in accordance with WIOA section 107(c)(2). Yes
5. Where an alternative entity takes the place of a State Board, the State has written policy and procedures to ensure the alternative entity meets the definition under WIOA section 101(e) and the legal requirements for membership. No
6. The State established a written policy and procedure for how the individuals and entities represented on the State Workforce Development Board help to determine the methods and factors of distribution, and how the State consults with chief elected officials in local areas throughout the State in determining the distributions. Yes
7. The State will not use funds received under WIOA Title I to assist, promote, or deter union organizing in accordance with WIOA section 181(b)(7). Yes
8. The State distributes adult and youth funds received under WIOA equitably throughout the State, and no local area suffers significant shifts in funding from year-to-year during the period covered by this plan. Yes
9. If a State Workforce Development Board, department, or agency administers State laws for vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, that board, department, or agency cooperates with the agency that administers Wagner-Peyser services, Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and Youth Programs under Title I. Yes
10. The State agrees to report on the impact and outcomes of its approved waivers in its WIOA Annual Report. No
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

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**PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR WAGNER-PEYSER PROGRAM  
(EMPLOYMENT SERVICES)**

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All program-specific requirements provided for the WIOA core programs in this section must be addressed for either a Unified or Combined State Plan.

A. EMPLOYMENT SERVICE PROFESSIONAL STAFF DEVELOPMENT.

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1. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL UTILIZE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES FOR EMPLOYMENT SERVICE STAFF TO ENSURE STAFF IS ABLE TO PROVIDE HIGH QUALITY SERVICES TO BOTH JOBSEEKERS AND EMPLOYERS.

MDES utilizes a one hour weekly staff meeting to share information and train staff. Quarterly managers meetings are held to provide training to management staff. In addition, MDES provides access to online learning opportunities for all MDES staff. Staff can take unlimited online courses from any internet connected computer. Courses include subject matter such as customer service, attitude and ethics. Each MDES staff member has an Individual Development Plan on file that includes the requirements to complete training online or in person.

2. DESCRIBE STRATEGIES DEVELOPED TO SUPPORT TRAINING AND AWARENESS ACROSS CORE PROGRAMS AND THE UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (UI) PROGRAM, AND THE TRAINING PROVIDED FOR EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND WIOA STAFF ON IDENTIFICATION OF UI ELIGIBILITY ISSUES AND REFERRAL TO UI STAFF FOR ADJUDICATION.

All Wagner-Peyser staff are cross trained to identify Unemployment Insurance eligibility issues and participate in training along with WIOA staff. Wagner-Peyser management works closely with Unemployment Insurance management to provide continuous training to staff on updated policy information.

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.

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Wagner-Peyser staff will provide staff assisted services to help Unemployment Insurance claimants file online. Resource rooms with internet access are available in all one-stop centers to UI claimants and resource room attendants are available to assist claimants during the filing process.

C. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S STRATEGY FOR PROVIDING REEMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE TO UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE CLAIMANTS AND OTHER UNEMPLOYED INDIVIDUALS.

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MDES operates several programs for providing reemployment assistance to UI claimants. The Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) and Keep Mississippi Working (KMW) programs are initiatives in Mississippi to provide intensive career services to help reconnect UI beneficiaries with work as quickly as possible. Services to claimants in the programs include: labor market information, development of an Individual Employment Plan, orientation of services and programs offered, registration in MDES' workforce technology system, job match, skills gap analysis and soft skills training.

D. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE W-P FUNDS TO SUPPORT UI CLAIMANTS, AND THE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN W-P AND UI, AS APPROPRIATE, INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING:

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1. COORDINATION OF AND PROVISION OF LABOR EXCHANGE SERVICES FOR UI CLAIMANTS AS REQUIRED BY THE WAGNER-PEYSER ACT;

MDES Wagner-Peyser staff are cross trained to provide staff-assisted services to Unemployment Insurance claimants. The integrated workforce technology system is designed to allow UI claimants to utilize self-assisted services from any location.

2. REGISTRATION OF UI CLAIMANTS WITH THE STATE'S EMPLOYMENT SERVICE IF REQUIRED BY STATE LAW;

MDES has an integrated workforce registration system that captures common ES and UI data elements and provides real time triage.

3. ADMINISTRATION OF THE WORK TEST FOR THE STATE UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION SYSTEM, INCLUDING MAKING ELIGIBILITY ASSESSMENTS (FOR REFERRAL TO UI ADJUDICATION, IF NEEDED), AND PROVIDING JOB FINDING AND PLACEMENT SERVICES FOR UI CLAIMANTS; AND

MDES Wagner-Peyser staff are cross-trained and have a process in place to administer the work test including making eligibility assessments for UI claimants. Wagner-Peyser staff provide staff assisted reemployment services to UI claimants. UI claimants also have access to self-service labor exchange features in the workforce technology system.

As potential availability issues are detected by WIN Job Center staff during interviews with individuals receiving Unemployment compensation, they reported to UI staff for adjudication.

4. PROVISION OF REFERRALS TO AND APPLICATION ASSISTANCE FOR TRAINING AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES.

MDES Wagner-Peyser staff are cross-trained to provide referrals and application assistance for training and education programs and resources. MDES utilizes a one hour weekly staff meeting to share information with partners and to train staff.

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 WIOA. THE AOP MUST INCLUDE--

1. ASSESSMENT OF NEED

Provide an assessment of the unique needs of farmworkers in the area based on past and projected agricultural and farmworker activity in the State. Such needs may include but are not limited to: employment, training, and housing.

Due to the low number of migrant and seasonal farm workers in Mississippi, it is considered a non-significant state relative to the Migrant and Seasonal Farm Worker (MSFW) program. The estimated number of MSFWs during the peak season in the state is 2500. This is based on data supplied by the WIOA Title 1 section 167 National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) grantee, other MSFW organizations, employer organizations, and federal and/or state agency data sources such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Employment and Training Administration (ETA).

Spring, summer, and fall represent the planting to harvest seasons in the 30 to 39 counties where the majority of crops are grown. The number of seasonal farmworkers remains constant during these months with more migrant workers coming in during the harvest season (fall).

The Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES) entered into a non-financial cooperative agreement with the Mississippi Delta Council for Farm Workers Opportunities, Inc. (MDC), which is the state's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) 167 Grantee. MDES and MDC work together to identify major labor intensive crop activity relative to MSFWs. MDC, in its outreach team efforts, has identified that the Delta and semi-Delta counties in the state are where 90% of MSFWs reside and work. There are small pockets of MSFWs throughout the state involved in agricultural production throughout; however, most of the labor intensive crops are produced in the Delta. The top five crops include: cotton, corn, soy beans, sweet potatoes, and rice. Other important crops include wheat, milo, peanuts, and catfish. Dairy and poultry farming are located in the hilly section of the state. The coastal and southeastern areas include tree farming (timber).

Agricultural employers in the state are predominantly focused on hiring local workers. In instances where they are unable to obtain an adequate workforce, employers turn their focus to hiring foreign workers. However, when there is a scarcity of agricultural workers, they utilize MSFWs and the H-2A and H-2B Foreign Labor program.

Agricultural employers are challenged to meet a constantly evolving market demand for commodities, which affects their economic viability. Agriculture in the state is impacted by market demand and also by natural disasters, such as the recent flooding in the Mississippi Delta region.

An assessment of migrant, seasonal and year-round farm worker characteristics indicates that migrant and seasonal workers are predominately Hispanic during the peak season, while year-round workers are predominately African American. Typically, migrant and seasonal workers speak Spanish and year-round workers speak English. MDC, the state NFJP 167 grantee, has bilingual staff available to assist Hispanic workers.

**A. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITY IN THE STATE MEANS: 1) IDENTIFYING THE TOP FIVE LABOR-INTENSIVE CROPS, THE MONTHS OF HEAVY ACTIVITY, AND THE GEOGRAPHIC AREA OF PRIME ACTIVITY; 2) SUMMARIZE THE AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS' NEEDS IN THE STATE (I.E. ARE THEY PREDOMINANTLY HIRING LOCAL OR FOREIGN WORKERS, ARE THEY EXPRESSING THAT THERE IS A SCARCITY IN THE AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE); AND 3) IDENTIFYING ANY ECONOMIC, NATURAL, OR OTHER FACTORS THAT ARE AFFECTING AGRICULTURE IN THE STATE OR ANY PROJECTED FACTORS THAT WILL AFFECT AGRICULTURE IN THE STATE.**

Please see the section above.

**B. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF FARMWORKERS MEANS SUMMARIZING MIGRANT AND SEASONAL FARM WORKER (MSFW) CHARACTERISTICS (INCLUDING IF THEY ARE PREDOMINANTLY FROM CERTAIN COUNTRIES, WHAT LANGUAGE(S) THEY SPEAK, THE APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF MSFWs IN THE STATE DURING PEAK SEASON AND DURING LOW SEASON, AND WHETHER THEY TEND TO BE MIGRANT, SEASONAL, OR YEAR-ROUND**

FARMWORKERS). THIS INFORMATION MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT DATA SUPPLIED BY WIOA SECTION 167 NATIONAL FARMWORKER JOBS PROGRAM (NFJP) GRANTEES, OTHER MSFW ORGANIZATIONS, EMPLOYER ORGANIZATIONS, AND STATE AND/OR FEDERAL AGENCY DATA SOURCES SUCH AS THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR (DOL) EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ADMINISTRATION.

Please see the section above.

## 2. OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

The local offices outreach activities must be designed to meet the needs of MSFWs in the State and to locate and contact MSFWs who are not being reached through normal intake activities. Describe the State agency's proposed strategies for:

Through the MOU agreement with MDC, the MDES is able to achieve many of the state's outreach goals for ensuring appropriate services are provided for MSFWs. As the MDC interacts with MSFW and assesses their needs, they identify those who will benefit from WIN Job Center services and make referrals to the local center. Services provided to MSFWs in the WIN Job Center include information on unemployment insurance, assessment, counseling, job referrals, job development contacts, training, support services and job placement assistance. Appropriate assessments for each MSFW that registers at the WIN Job Center are conducted, to determine the specific employment and training needs of that worker so they are able to advance their skills and become competitive in a local job market.

As a MSFW non-significant state, Mississippi assigns one half-time State Workforce Agency (SWA) staff position to outreach activities. The SWA staff person coordinates with the MDC to ensure that appropriate outreach activities are carried out. The State SWA staff, as well as staff of the MDC which conducts the outreach to MSFW, attend appropriate conferences and training, as well as participate in DOL conference calls relative to outreach activities. The SWA staff provides appropriate training to local one-stop staff as appropriate. SWA staff also coordinates with the MDC regarding outreach and other activities.

### A. CONTACTING FARMWORKERS WHO ARE NOT BEING REACHED BY THE NORMAL INTAKE ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED BY THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE OFFICES.

Please see the section above.

B. PROVIDING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO OUTREACH WORKERS. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE MUST INCLUDE TRAININGS, CONFERENCES, ADDITIONAL RESOURCES, AND INCREASED COLLABORATION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS ON TOPICS SUCH AS ONE-STOP CENTER SERVICES (I.E. AVAILABILITY OF REFERRALS TO TRAINING, SUPPORTIVE SERVICES, AND CAREER SERVICES, AS WELL AS SPECIFIC EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES), THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE COMPLAINT SYSTEM, INFORMATION ON THE OTHER ORGANIZATIONS SERVING MSFWs IN THE AREA, AND A BASIC SUMMARY OF FARMWORKER RIGHTS, INCLUDING THEIR RIGHTS WITH RESPECT TO THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT.

Please see the section above.

C. INCREASING OUTREACH WORKER TRAINING AND AWARENESS ACROSS CORE PROGRAMS INCLUDING THE UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (UI) PROGRAM AND THE TRAINING ON IDENTIFICATION OF UI ELIGIBILITY ISSUES.

Please see the section above.

D. PROVIDING STATE MERIT STAFF OUTREACH WORKERS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES TO ENSURE THEY ARE ABLE TO PROVIDE HIGH QUALITY SERVICES TO BOTH JOBSEEKERS AND EMPLOYERS.

Please see the section above.

E. COORDINATING OUTREACH EFFORTS WITH NFJP GRANTEE AS WELL AS WITH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COMMUNITY SERVICE AGENCIES AND MSFW GROUPS.

Please see the section above.

3. SERVICES PROVIDED TO FARMWORKERS AND AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS THROUGH THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM.

Describe the State agency's proposed strategies for:

A. PROVIDING THE FULL RANGE OF EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICES TO THE AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITY, BOTH FARMWORKERS AND AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS, THROUGH THE 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;
- ii. HOW THE STATE SERVES AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS AND HOW IT INTENDS TO IMPROVE SUCH SERVICES.

Staff in each MDES local one-stop and MDC work cooperatively to ensure information on each agency's services is available to MSFWs upon entering local offices. This includes MDES Grievance Procedures, which are available for dissemination to the farm workers in the language prevalent among the farm worker population in that area through such means as posters, pamphlets, use of the media, and workshops. A cooperative and coordinated effort is achieved to minimize the duplication of services and to maximize the number of MSFWs that are contacted.

MDC is considered a non-profit, not an advocacy group. The groups MDC works with are described below.

The Mississippi Delta Council for Farm Workers Opportunities, Inc. (MDC\FWOI) was organized in 1971 as a private non-profit corporation chartered to operate programs to assist migrants and seasonal farm workers in the State of Mississippi. Its two primary objectives are: to help farm workers seek alternatives to agricultural labor; and to improve the agricultural lifestyle of those who wish to remain in agriculture.

As the WIOA Title 1 section 167 grantee, MDC receives a grant from the Department of Labor to address the needs of MSFW related to employment or personal needs. Some of the agencies MDC partners with to meet the personal needs of MSFW are Delta Housing and

community action agencies, which offer assistance with paying utility bills, local food banks supplement food needs, health departments/agencies help with free or low cost health and dental care, the local community college offers training and certification opportunities. MDC also provides pesticide training and farm safety training to MSFW's and makes referrals to agricultural employers for job opportunities. MDC refers MSFWs to the WIN Job Centers as appropriate for other job certifications.

Outreach and resource materials are translated into languages other than English so that Limited English Proficient (LEP) clients can understand and access one-stop services. Local WIN Job Centers have access to translators via an 800 telephone number and a listing of local individuals who can provide translation services at no cost to the individual.

As a MSFW non-significant state, Mississippi strives to ensure that employment and training services required under WIOA Title I are provided to MSFWs at the WIN Job Center. As previously mentioned, services provided to MSFWs in the WIN Job Center includes information on unemployment insurance, assessment, counseling, job referrals, job development contacts, training, support services and job placement assistance. Appropriate assessments for each MSFW that registers at the WIN Job Center are conducted, to determine the specific employment and training needs of that worker. WIN Job Center customers are able to advance their skills and become competitive in a local, regional and global economy.

The MDC works with local partner agencies to ensure that each customer has access to a variety of services to complement the ones offered by the WIN Job Centers. Some of the agencies MDC partners with are Delta Housing and community action agencies, which offer assistance with paying utility bills, local food banks supplement food needs, health departments/agencies help with free or low cost health and dental care, the local community college offers training and certification opportunities. The state's WIN Job Centers also offer job certifications. MDC also provides pesticide training and farm safety training to MSFW's and makes referrals to agricultural employers for job opportunities.

MDES is able to reach out to agricultural employers for job development, assistance with job orders and to ensure that the agricultural employers are able to secure a reliable labor force. MDES strives to offer technical assistance to agricultural employers in a continued effort to meet their needs and requirements. Upon initial contact with the SWA, the agricultural employer is able to register their job order with the state's WIN Job Center. The job order includes the agricultural employer's requirement of job specifications, number of required workers and length of employment. The MDES is then able to job match applicants tailored to the specific requirements of the agricultural employer. Appropriate referrals of applicants are made to the employer.

#### **B. MARKETING THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE COMPLAINT SYSTEM TO FARMWORKERS AND OTHER FARMWORKER ADVOCACY GROUPS.**

Please see the section above.

#### **C. MARKETING THE AGRICULTURAL RECRUITMENT SYSTEM TO AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS AND HOW IT INTENDS TO IMPROVE SUCH PUBLICITY.**

Please see the section above.

## 4. 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 upon/increase collaboration with existing partners and in establishing new partners over the next four years (including any approximate timelines for establishing agreements or building upon existing agreements).

The State Monitor Advocate works for the MDES, and was afforded the opportunity to review and comment on the Program Year 2016 AOP.

The Mississippi AOP for Program Year 2016 was reviewed by the 167 NFJP grantee, and at the discretion of the NFJP other interested groups affiliated with the NFJP were given an opportunity to comment on the state AOP.

The plan was posted on the MDES public web site available to the public for review and comment. Although solicited, no additional information and no comments were received.

MDES submits an AOP in accordance with Department of Labor directives each year. However, no AOP was required by the Department of Labor for Program Year 2015, due to the implementation of WIOA. MDES will complete an AOP for Program Year 2017 in accordance with DOL guidance.

The most recent data we have was included in the 2016 AOP, and is PY 2016 data.

Previous year's history based on Program Year (PY) 2016 data:

- Approximately 227 agricultural job orders and openings were received.
- There were no agricultural job orders filled entirely by MSFWs.
- Most job orders were filled with a combination of H2A and MSFW applicants totaling 100%.
- There were 464 interstate clearance orders received.
- There were 464 interstate clearance orders initiated.

Based on historical data and previous performance, MDES anticipates achieving the following goals for MSF:

- Approximately 237 agricultural job orders and openings to be received;
- Most job orders filled will be a combination of H2A and MSFW applicants totaling 100%.
- Approximately 1% of the job orders are expected to be filled by MSFWs;
- Project 474 interstate clearance orders to be received and initiated.

### B. REVIEW AND PUBLIC COMMENT.

In developing the AOP, the SWA must solicit information and suggestions from NFJP grantees, other appropriate MSFW groups, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations, and other interested organizations. In addition, at least 45 calendar days before submitting its final AOP, the SWA must provide a proposed plan to NFJP grantees, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations, and other organizations expressing an

interest and allow at least 30 days for review and comment. The SWA must: 1) Consider any comments received in formulating its final proposed AOP; 2) Inform all commenting parties in writing whether their comments have been incorporated and, if not, the reasons therefore; and 3) Transmit the comments and recommendations received and its responses with the submission of the AOP. The AOP must include a statement confirming NFJP grantees, other appropriate MSFW groups, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations and other interested employer organizations have been given an opportunity to comment on the AOP. Include the list of organizations from which information and suggestions were solicited, any comments received, and responses to those comments.

Please see the section above.

### C. DATA ASSESSMENT.

Review the previous four years Wagner-Peyser data reports on performance. Note whether the State has been meeting its goals to provide MSFWs quantitatively proportionate services as compared to non-MSFWs. If it has not met these goals, explain why the State believes such goals were not met and how the State intends to improve its provision of services in order to meet such goals.

Please see the section above.

### D. ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS

The plan must include an explanation of what was achieved based on the previous AOP, what was not achieved and an explanation as to why the State believes the goals were not achieved, and how the State intends to remedy the gaps of achievement in the coming year.

Please see the section above.

### E. STATE MONITOR ADVOCATE

The plan must contain a statement confirming the State Monitor Advocate has reviewed and approved the AOP.

Working together, MDES and MDC estimate approximately 300 MSFWs are served each year.

### WAGNER-PEYSER ASSURANCES

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The State Plan must include assurances that:

1. The Wagner-Peyser Employment Service is co-located with one-stop centers or a plan and timeline has been developed to comply with this requirement within a reasonable amount of time. (sec 121(e)(3)); Yes
2. The State agency is complying with the requirements under 20 CFR 653.111 (State agency staffing requirements) if the State has significant MSFW one-stop centers; Yes
3. If a State Workforce Development Board, department, or agency administers State laws for vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, that board, department, or agency cooperates with the agency that administers Wagner-Peyser services, Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and Youth Programs under Title I; and Yes

4. State agency merit-based public employees provide Wagner-Peyser Act-funded labor exchange activities in accordance with Department of Labor regulations. Yes

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## PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAMS

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The Unified or Combined State Plan must include a description of the following as it pertains to Adult Education and Literacy programs under title II, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA).

### A. ALIGNING OF CONTENT STANDARDS

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Describe how the eligible agency will, by July 1, 2016, align 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)).

In July of 2013, the Mississippi Community College Board (MCCB), Office of Adult Education (OAE) adopted the College and Career Readiness (CCR) Standards for Adult Education disseminated through the Federal Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE). In January of 2016, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) adopted Mississippi College and Career Readiness Standards (<http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/MCCRS/about>) for all K-12 students in the public school system. The standards were reviewed, analyzed and alignment was determined through collaboration efforts between the Office of Adult Education and MDE. The standards are designed to ensure students graduating from high school or seeking their high school equivalency diploma are prepared to enter credit-bearing entry courses in two-year or four-year college programs or enter the workforce. The College and Career Readiness standards reflect a broad agreement among subject matter experts in education about what is desirable for students to know to be prepared for the rigors of postsecondary education and training.

Eligible providers adopted and implemented these standards to maximize the effectiveness of curricula and instruction, and to prepare students for transition to postsecondary education and/or the workforce. In order to ensure all instructors are knowledgeable of the CCR and they understand how to use them effectively to guide classroom instruction, OAE will continue to provide significant levels of professional development to all instructional staff in currently funded programs and to any future adult education grantees.

### B. LOCAL ACTIVITIES

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Describe how the State will, using the considerations specified in section 231(e) of WIOA, 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.

### Adult Education Funding

The Mississippi Community College Board, Office of Adult Education (OAE) is the state's Eligible Agency for Adult Education. The OAE is responsible for administering funds to eligible providers, and providing program/performance oversight to grantees. The OAE provides funding to eligible local entities for the provision of adult education services through a competitive Request for Application (RFA) process. The RFA is the mechanism through which the OAE identifies, assesses, and awards multi-year grants to eligible providers throughout the state. An eligible provider is an organization that has demonstrated effectiveness in providing adult education activities to eligible individuals. To ensure that programs are of high quality, all eligible providers submitting a RFA are required to provide performance data to support the request for funding. Eligible providers may include:

- a local education agency;
- a community-based or faith-based organization;
- a volunteer literacy organization;
- an institution of higher education;
- a public or private nonprofit agency;
- a library;
- a public housing authority;
- a nonprofit institution with the ability to provide adult education and literacy services;
- a consortium or coalition of agencies, organizations, institutions, libraries, or authorities described above; and
- a partnership between an employer and an entity described above.

The Mississippi Community College Board uses the following process to distribute funds to approved applicants: 1. not less than 82.5 percent of the grant funds to award grants and contacts under section 231 and to carry out section 225, Programs for Corrections Education and Other Institutionalized Individuals, of which not more than 20 percent of such amount shall be available to carry out section 225; 2. shall not use more than 12.5 percent of the grant funds to carry out State leadership activities under section 223; and 3. shall use not more than 5 percent of the grant funds, or \$85,000, whichever is greater, for administrative expenses of the eligible agency.

Individuals eligible for adult education services include those who:

1. are at least 16 years of age;
2. are not enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under State law; and
3. are basic skills deficient;
4. do not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and has not achieved an equivalent level of education; or
5. is an English language learner.

The Office of Adult Education ensures all eligible providers have direct and equitable access to apply and compete for grants and the same application process is used for all applicants. Grant competitions are publicized through a variety of print and electronic media throughout the state. Information is shared via the MCCB Office of Communications and Public Relations in the form of a formal press release, a posting on the MCCB website, social media outlets, and other means of available communication.

The Office of Adult Education awards funds to eligible providers for the delivery of adult education services, which are academic instruction and education services below the postsecondary level that increase an individual's ability to:

- read, write and speak English and perform mathematics or other activities necessary for the attainment of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent;
- transition to postsecondary education and training; and
- obtain employment.

In accordance with federal regulation, eligible providers may receive adult education funding for the delivery of any of the following adult education and literacy activities:

- adult education;
- literacy;
- workplace adult education and literacy activities;
- family literacy activities;
- English language and acquisition activities;
- integrated English literacy and civics education;
- workforce preparation activities; or
- integrated education and training.

### **Federal Definitions**

Adult education means academic instruction and education services below the postsecondary level that increase an individual's ability to read, write, speak English, and perform mathematics or other activities necessary for the attainment of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent; transition to postsecondary education and training; and obtain employment.

Literacy means an individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English, compute, and solve problems, at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual, and in society.

Workplace adult education and literacy activities means adult education services and literacy services offered by an eligible provider in collaboration with an employer or employee organization at a workplace or off-site location that is designed to improve the productivity of the workforce.

Family literacy activities means activities that are of sufficient intensity and quality, to make sustainable improvements in the economic prospects for a family and that better enable parents or family members to support their children's learning needs, and that integrate all of the following activities:

1. Parent or family adult education and literacy activities that lead to readiness for postsecondary education or training, career advancement, and economic self-sufficiency.
2. Interactive literacy activities between parents or family members and their children.
3. Training for parents or family members regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in the education of their children.
4. An age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences. See Special Rule for Family Literacy.

*Special Rule for Family Literacy* The Office of Adult Education will not use any funds made available under this title for adult education and literacy activities for the purpose of supporting or providing programs, services, or activities for individuals who are under the age of 16 and are enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under State law, except that the agency may use such funds for such purpose if such programs, services, or activities are related to family literacy activities. In providing family literacy activities under this title, the Office of Adult Education will attempt to coordinate with programs and services that are not assisted under this title prior to using funds for adult education and literacy activities under this title for activities other than activities for eligible individuals.

English language acquisition means a program of instruction is designed to help eligible individuals who are English language learners achieve competence in reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension of the English language; and that leads to attainment of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent; and transition to postsecondary education and training; or employment.

Integrated education and training means a service approach that provides adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities, and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement.

Integrated English literacy and civics education means education services provided to English language learners who are adults, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries, that enables such adults to achieve competency in the English language and acquire the basic and more advanced skills needed to function effectively as parents, workers and citizens in the United States. Such services shall include instruction in literacy and English language acquisition and instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic preparation, and may include workforce training.

Workforce preparation activities mean activities, programs or services designed to help an individual acquire a combination of basic academic skills, critical thinking skills, digital

literacy skills, and self-management skills, including competencies in utilizing resources, using information, working with others, understanding systems, and obtaining skills necessary for successful transition into and completion of postsecondary education or training, or employment.

Federal funds may be used to increase the level of nonfederal funds that would be available in the absence of federal funds, and, in no case, replace those nonfederal funds. Federal funds must not be used for the purpose of supplanting, only for supplementing.

### **Request for Application**

After considering the census of need for each county within the state, funding allocations were established to ensure all geographical regions of the state have adequate coverage, and that local providers are sufficiently equipped to meet the needs identified for each local workforce region. Further, eligible providers will be required to collaborate with other social services and employment-related providers in the area in order to provide concurrent or supportive services for eligible recipients.

Mississippi will implement a funding formula in non-competition years for federal adult education funds. The formula will be designed to consider the levels of performance in the local programs as compared to established benchmarks as a basis for an increase or decrease in funds.

The grant application collected basic information regarding an eligible provider (e.g. location, service area, the scope of the program, demographics served, fiscal management procedures and audit history). Additionally, each applicant is required to submit a proposed budget, as well as programmatic information regarding statutory requirements. Questions may include the following:

1. Provide the vision and mission of the program or organization. Please include a description of the population that the program will serve, including how the program will meet the needs of persons with barriers to employment (e.g. Displaced Homemaker, Low-income Individual, Individuals with Disabilities, Single Parents, and other individuals as described in the law).
2. Provide a description (and supporting documents, when available) of any cooperative agreements/contracts that the program has with other agencies and service providers for the delivery of adult education and literacy activities. Also, describe ways in which the program coordinates with other service providers to provide wrap-around services to participants (e.g. child care, transportation).
3. Describe how the program will align activities to the Local Plan for WIOA providers and supportive services. Include a description of how the program will promote concurrent enrollment with Title I programs.
4. Describe the methods the program will employ to meet the State adjusted levels of performance. Additionally, describe the program's mechanism and process for collecting and reporting data to assess performance. The description of the program's methods to meet performance measures should focus on efforts to meet or achieve:
  - i. Percentage of participants in unsubsidized employment after program exit;

- ii. Median earnings of program participants;
- iii. Percentage of participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential or a secondary school diploma/equivalent during program participation or after exiting;
- iv. Effective service provided to employers.

5. Describe the program's current and/or future involvement as a local One-Stop Center partner, including how the program will contribute to products or services for One-Stop Center participants—with emphasis on individuals with barriers to employment. Describe how the program's contribution to the One-Stop Center will be coordinated with other core providers, and delivered to Center's participants.

6. Describe the scope of the program's activities, and the delivery of services to ensure that the needs of all eligible participants will be met.

7. Describe the program's ability to meet the 13 considerations used to assess the RFA that are listed below.

### **Assessing the RFA**

The assessment of each grant application involved an intense evaluation of the ability of the eligible provider to meet the literacy needs of the area, and to comply with the expectations and statutes described within the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. At minimum, the review process and scoring rubric will consider the following:

- The ability of the eligible provider to meet the literacy needs and English language needs identified for the population in the area. Particular emphasis will be given to the provider's ability to provide targeted service to individuals with barriers to employment—including low literacy skills and an English language barrier;
- The eligible provider's ability to provide service to individuals with a disability;
- The eligible provider's demonstrated effectiveness in providing literacy instruction, including its ability to meet State-adjusted levels of performance and improve the literacy levels of eligible individuals;
- The eligible provider's alignment with the WIOA Local Plan;
- The depth, intensity, and rigor of the programs and activities offered by the eligible provider. The proposed program must incorporate the basic components of reading instruction. Attention will be given to the extent to which the eligible provider incorporates stringent research in the grant proposal submission and the development of the literacy program itself;
- The extent to which the eligible provider's program is based on intense research and best practices;
- The extent to which the eligible provider demonstrates the effective use of technology for instruction, to include distance education, toward students' improved performance;
- The eligible provider's demonstrated integration of contextualized instruction, to blend literacy skills, and preparation for transition to post-secondary education or entry into the workplace. Particular attention will be given to activities that promote and lead to economic self-sufficiency, and the ability to exercise the full rights of citizenship;

- The qualifications and expertise of the eligible provider’s instructors, counselors, and administrative staff. All instructors must hold (at minimum) a Bachelor’s degree. The eligible provider must also demonstrate its ability and intent to provide high quality professional development to instructors and staff, toward the improvement of student performance;
- The eligible provider’s collaboration with other available education, training, and social service resources in the community. Particularly, the eligible provider should have (or have the means to establish) meaningful partnerships with elementary schools, secondary schools, post-secondary institutions, industry partners, and workforce boards;
- The flexibility of program scheduling offered by the eligible provider, including coordination (when available) with Federal, State, and local support services such as child care, transportation, and mental health services;
- The eligible provider’s information management system; the expectation will be that the eligible provider will use the state-administered designated MIS for all grant related data collection and reporting.
- The demonstrated need within the area occupied by the eligible provider for English language acquisition programs and civics education programs.

#### SPECIAL RULE

Each eligible agency awarding a grant or contract under this section shall not use any funds made available under this title for adult education and literacy activities for the purpose of supporting or providing programs, services, or activities for individuals who are under the age of 16 and are enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under State law, except that such agency may use such funds for such purpose if such programs, services, or activities are related to family literacy activities. In providing family literacy activities under this title, an eligible provider shall attempt to coordinate with programs and services that are not assisted under this title prior to using funds for adult education and literacy activities under this title for activities other than activities for eligible individuals.

#### C. CORRECTIONS EDUCATION AND OTHER EDUCATION OF INSTITUTIONALIZED INDIVIDUALS

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Describe how the State will establish and operate programs under section 225 of WIOA for corrections education and education of other institutionalized individuals, including how it will fund, in accordance with the requirements of title II, subtitle C, any of the following academic programs for:

- 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 carry out 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.

Each eligible agency using funds provided under Programs for Corrections Education and Other Institutionalized Individuals to carry out 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.

From funds made available under section 222(a)(1), the Office of Adult Education will carry out corrections education and education for other institutionalized individuals within correctional institutions by offering a competitive, multi-year Request for Application process specifically for Corrections Education funding. The OAE will not use more than 20 percent of the funds used to award grants and contracts under Section 231 for activities under Section 225.

A correctional institution includes any prison; jail; reformatory; work farm; detention center; or halfway house, community-based rehabilitation center, or any other similar institution designed for the confinement or rehabilitation of criminal offenders. A criminal offender is any individual who is charged with or convicted of any criminal offense.

The funds shall be used for the cost of educational programs for criminal offenders in correctional institutions and for other institutionalized individuals, including academic programs for

- 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 provider that receiveing funds provided under section 225 to carry out a program for criminal offenders within a correctional institution shall give priority to serving individuals who are likely to leave the correctional institution within five (5) years of participation in the program.

#### D. INTEGRATED ENGLISH LITERACY AND CIVICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

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1. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL ESTABLISH AND OPERATE INTEGRATED ENGLISH LITERACY AND CIVICS EDUCATION PROGRAMS UNDER SECTION 243 OF WIOA, FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS WHO ARE ADULTS, INCLUDING PROFESSIONALS WITH DEGREES AND CREDENTIALS IN THEIR NATIVE COUNTRIES.

The Office of Adult Education established and operates Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) programs by offering a competitive, multi-year Request for Application process specifically for Integrated Literacy and Civics Education funds to be held in conjunction with the Adult Education competition. The purpose of this program is to assist immigrants and other individuals who are English language learners in acquiring an understanding of the American system of government, individual freedom, and the responsibilities of citizenship. English language learners who hold degrees and credentials in their native countries are eligible to access all services provided by section 243.

**2. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL FUND, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF TITLE II, SUBTITLE C, AN INTEGRATED ENGLISH LITERACY AND CIVICS EDUCATION PROGRAM AND HOW THE FUNDS WILL BE USED FOR THE PROGRAM.**

The Office of Adult Education will make funds available under section 243 for the delivery of IELCE, in combination with integrated education and training activities, to adults. In the application for funds, OAE will consider whether an eligible provider has demonstrated the need for these types of services in a designated service delivery area. Data sources could include tables from the US Census Bureau, reports from the Office of Immigration Services, documentation of prior participation in these types of services, or other data.

Programs requesting funds will complete a Request for Application (RFA) that includes a budget and narrative describing the program's plans for funds; the ELL population enrolled for the previous fiscal year; and, actual or anticipated ELL population growth based on the Department of Labor statistics. Determination of funding will be based on the program's ability to meet the 13 considerations used to assess the RFA that are listed in the program specific plan. Each program receiving funds under this section shall 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; and
- Integrate with the local workforce development system and its functions to carry out the activities of the program

In the application for funds, OAE will consider whether an eligible provider has demonstrated the need for these types of services in a designated service delivery area. Data sources could include tables from the U.S. Census Bureau reports, reports from the Office of Immigration Services, documentation of prior participation in these types of services or other data.

The term "integrated English literacy and civics education" means education services provided to English language learners who are adults, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries, that enables such adults to achieve competency in the English language and acquire the basic and more advanced skills needed to function effectively as parents, workers, and citizens in the United States. Such services shall include instruction in literacy and English language acquisition and instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation, and may include workforce training.

Eligible providers must demonstrate in their application for funds the manner in which the program will be delivered in combination with integrated and training activities. These activities can be provided directly or through collaboration with WIOA or other community partners. Eligible providers will design programs that deliver the activities under WIOA including the integration of literacy and English language instruction with occupational skills training, including promoting linkages with employers.

Eligible providers must demonstrate their ability to prepare English language learners for unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries and occupation that lead to economic self-sufficiency, and how they will integrate the program with the local workforce development system to carry out the activities of the program.

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#### E. STATE LEADERSHIP

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##### 1. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE THE FUNDS TO CARRY OUT THE REQUIRED STATE LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES UNDER SECTION 223 OF WIOA.

The OAE uses funds made available under section 222(a)(2) for the following adult education and literacy activities to develop or enhance the adult education system of the State. Not more than 12.5 percent of the grant funds made available will be used to carry out State leadership activities under section 223.

*A) The alignment of adult education and literacy activities with other core programs and one-stop partners, including eligible providers, including the development of career pathways to provide access to employment and training services for individuals in adult education and literacy activities.*

The OAE works collaboratively with other core programs and partner agencies to provide comprehensive and wraparound services to program participants. Adult Education provides resources and services through One-Stop Centers (including intake/orientation for Adult Education services, and transition resources), referral processes, and other joint mechanisms developed through agency partnerships. Adult Education is responsible for the development and implementation of the Smart Start Pathway Class which will include assessment and instruction in basic skills, necessary skills and career exploration.

*B) The establishment and operation of high quality professional development programs to improve the instruction provided pursuant to required local activities, 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, and dissemination of information about models and promising practices related to such programs.*

The OAE provides targeted professional development based upon a statewide needs assessment, research regarding best practices, and federal recommendations. The OAE surveys local providers to ascertain areas in which there may be a gap in knowledge or a need for improvement. From these results, the OAE will coordinate and execute broad-based training through a variety of modalities to assist program leaders and teachers in areas such as program improvement, instructional techniques, integrated education and training, college and career readiness standards, transition to postsecondary education and

employment, and the infusion of technology into instruction. Professional Development may include:

- An annual operations meeting, wherein local program administrators are given an overview of changes in policy and related practices, budget management, and reporting requirements;
- An annual statewide professional development conference for a variety of adult education personnel;
- Regional institutes to address instructional needs in the areas of adult education and literacy, ELA, EL/Civics, and more; and
- Webinars/Teleconferences.

*C) The provision of technical assistance to eligible providers of adult education and literacy activities receiving funds under this title, including— 1. The development and dissemination of instructional and programmatic practices based on the most rigorous or scientifically valid research available and appropriate, in reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, English language acquisition programs, distance education, and staff training; 2. The role of eligible providers as a one-stop partner to provide access to employment, education, and training services; and 3. Assistance in the use of technology, including for staff training, to eligible providers, especially the use of technology to improve system efficiencies.*

The OAE provides technical assistance to eligible providers to enhance program effectiveness, increase the ability of providers to meet established performance standards, and fulfill obligations associated with being a one-stop partner. The OAE provides professional development/technical assistance via phone, webinar, teleconference, on-site training, and seminars. Targeted technical assistance focuses on areas of national interest such as recruitment and intake, student engagement, data management and reporting, testing procedures, and transition to postsecondary education and employment. To ensure local providers are adequately equipped to foster continuous improvement and maintain an ability to meet the needs of Mississippi's workforce, OAE:

- i. Delivers technical assistance to increase the ability of instructors to provide impactful instruction and obtain desired results in key areas—including reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, English language acquisition programs, and distance education. Technical assistance incorporates techniques gleaned from contemporary research and resources related to best practices in andragogy. Topics may include integrated education and training, and college and career readiness standards.
- ii. Provides state and local level information regarding the role of adult education as a key component in the delivery of one-stop center services. Training includes resources to enable a local provider to establish, build upon, or maintain effective relationships with other core providers within the local area. Topics may include referral systems, data sharing/reporting, integrating education with occupational training, and transition strategies for post-secondary enrollment or employment.
- iii. Provides training related to the use of technology to improve classroom effectiveness and program outcomes. Training may focus on National Reporting System (NRS) processes and the effective use of the statewide data system in order to maintain accurate student data. The OAE may also provide technical assistance to

prepare instructors and program administrators to identify and utilize technology to enhance classroom experiences.

*D) The monitoring and evaluation of the quality of, and the improvement in, adult education and literacy activities and the dissemination of information about models and proven or promising practices within the State.*

The OAE engages in statewide program monitoring procedures to maintain sufficient knowledge and oversight of local adult education providers. Oversight include continuous data monitoring, in addition to site visits and on-site reviews. Specific attention will be given to programs with low performance. OAE develops targeted technical assistance to meet the specific needs of the program in need of improvement.

The OAE employs at least four methods to monitor programs and evaluate program improvement measures:

**Data Reviews** - OAE conducts frequent and ongoing data reviews using the designated statewide MIS. Areas of review include overall performance and outcomes, assessment data, attendance, and compliance.

**Monitoring Visits** - OAE established a monitoring schedule for all programs. Lower-performing programs are more likely to experience a visitation from their designated regional coordinator. During site-visits, team members will meet with program administrators and/or staff, observe classroom instruction, tour facilities, and meet with stakeholders. Areas of concern are addressed with the program administrator either through informal feedback or in some cases, a formal plan.

**Mid-Year Performance and Comparison Report** - OAE provides a Mid-Year Performance and Comparison Report to each local program halfway through the fiscal year. The report will include year-to-date performance for each of the WIOA performance outcomes. Comparisons to the prior year will be given for enrollment and number of students with a post-test. Local programs are asked to develop written action plans to address areas in need of improvement.

**Self-Assessment** - Each year local program administrators complete a self-assessment of program functions and performance. The rate their program against standards of performance in a variety of categories. Self-assessment data is analyzed for commonalities across regions and the state. Deficiencies are remediated through technical assistance or professional development. The self-assessment corresponds to the areas on the On-Site Program Review.

Any time a program is asked to correct or improve in a particular area, OAE personnel will provide technical assistance, professional development, and other support until it is no longer needed.

The dissemination of information about models and proven or promising practices with the state is accomplished through a variety of avenues. The primary method is through delivery of technical assistance by OAE. Another method is through training sessions with OAE staff members, who understand key practices necessary to build and manage a high performing adult education program. Topics could include: recruitment and retention, local program classroom observations and monitoring, records management, student assessment, and

data management. Further dissemination will occur during adult education state activities, such as program administrator meetings, training, webinars, and teleconference sessions.

## 2. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE THE FUNDS TO CARRY OUT PERMISSIBLE STATE LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES UNDER SECTION 223 OF WIOA, IF APPLICABLE.

The Office of Adult Education reserves the right to use funds made available under section 222(a)(2) for the permissible State leadership activities outlined in section 223 (such as the support of State or regional networks of literacy resource centers; the development and implementation of technology applications; or the development and dissemination of curricula, including curricula incorporating the essential components of reading instruction). Not more than 12.5% of the grant funds made available will be used to carry out these adult education and literacy activities to develop or enhance the adult education system of the State.

### F. ASSESSING QUALITY

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Describe how the eligible agency will assess the quality of providers of adult education and literacy activities under title II and take actions to improve such quality, including providing the activities described in section 223(a)(1)(B) of WIOA.

Local eligible providers are responsible to meet all programmatic goals and outcomes required in their approved RFA. Performance outcomes for each provider must meet or exceed the levels of performance for each of the established National Reporting System benchmarks. The OAE assesses the quality of providers of adult education and literacy activities through data reviews, monitoring visits and performance reports. If a program fails to meet performance goals or other programmatic requirements, specific actions are taken to improve the quality of the program. The OAE uses two plans to take action to improve the quality of the adult education and literacy activities.

1. Corrective Action Plan (CAP) - A CAP will be implemented with programs out of compliance with state and/or federal policies. OAE will provide technical assistance throughout the corrective process, and by the end of a designated timeframe, programs should be able to correct the identified issues and end their respective CAP.
2. Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) - A PIP will be required for programs identified as low-performing when compared to the state performance on federal or state benchmarks. The PIP will include specific action steps, such as student retention, post-testing and assessment, data analysis, training and professional development which is designed to improve program performance.

As a part of both plans, OAE provides ongoing technical assistance, professional development, and other support until the required steps of the plans are completed. The type of technical assistance, professional development, and other support is based upon the specific area(s) of deficiency or need at an individual program.

#### **Evaluating Professional Development**

In order to promote continuous improvement of professional development activities and the impact on student learning outcomes, OAE conducts ongoing and systematic needs

assessment and evaluation processes to not only provide information about the impact of professional development, but to provide data for refining and adjusting professional development activities.

1. Participant evaluations/surveys are collected for all professional development activities. These evaluations reflect the response of participants to the objectives, material, presentation and the trainer providers.
2. Evaluations/surveys are aggregated and evaluated to determine quality of training and adjustments are made according to the results. These results are analyzed for areas in need of improvement and changes are made accordingly.

To support local programs and instructors, a cadre of Program Mentors/Lead Instructors provide ongoing classroom observation, feedback and support to ensure that the objectives of professional development are being effectively implemented in the classroom. Data from the adult education management system are utilized to evaluate and determine if the professional development activities impact student learning outcomes.

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### CERTIFICATIONS

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States must provide written and signed certifications that

1. The plan is submitted by the State agency that is eligible to submit the plan. Yes
2. The State agency has authority under State law to perform the functions of the State under the program. Yes
3. The State legally may carry out each provision of the plan. Yes
4. All provisions of the plan are consistent with State law. Yes
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. Yes
6. The State officer who is submitting the plan, specified by the title in the certification, has authority to submit the plan. Yes
7. The agency that is submitting the plan has adopted or otherwise formally approved the plan. Yes
8. The plan is the basis for State operation and administration of the program. Yes

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### CERTIFICATION REGARDING LOBBYING

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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 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 into 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 into 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.

Applicant's Organization    **Mississippi Community College Board**

Full Name of Authorized Representative:    **Dr. Andrea Mayfield**

Title of Authorized Representative:    **Executive Director**

SF LLL Form – Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (only if applicable)  
(<http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html>). If applicable, please print, sign, and email to OCTAE\_MAT@ed.gov

#### **ASSURANCES**

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The State Plan must include assurances that:

1. The eligible agency will expend funds appropriated to carry out 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 supplement and not supplement provisions).    Yes

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. Yes
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. Yes
4. The Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will be delivered in combination with integrated education and training activities; Yes
5. The Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will be designed to (1) 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 and (2) integrate with the local workforce development system and its functions to carry out the activities of the program; and Yes
6. Using funds made available under title II of WIOA to carry out 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. Yes
7. 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 ). Yes

#### SECTION 427 OF THE GENERAL EDUCATION PROVISIONS ACT (GEPA )

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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 the information to meet the requirements of Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA), consistent with the instructions posted at <https://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/gepa427.doc>.

*“The Department of Education’s General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) 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).”*

*“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, you should determine whether these or other barriers may prevent your students, teachers, etc. from such access or participation in, the Federally-funded project or activity.”*

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission enforces five statutes that prohibit job discrimination by private employers and state and local government agencies:

1. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII),
2. The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA)

3. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 (EPA)

4. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)

5. Sections of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 (CRA) which amended provisions of Title VII, the ADEA, and the ADA.

The Mississippi Community College Board, in its capacity as the coordinating Board of the community and junior colleges of the State of Mississippi, strongly urges each of the colleges to comply fully with federal and state nondiscrimination laws and executive orders which constitute the legal mandate for equal employment opportunity. The Board also strongly urges each community and junior college to ensure that no one shall be excluded from participating in, be denied the benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination in any program or activity of the college on the grounds of race, sex, age, color, creed, national origin, religion, disability, or any other protected group. The Board itself further adheres to the principle of equal educational and employment opportunity as mandated by each of these statutes.

The Office of Adult Education will ensure to the fullest extent possible equitable access to, participation in, and appropriate educational opportunities for all federally funded local adult education programs to include faculty, staff and students with special needs. Activities, programs and services will be accessible to all teachers, students, and other program beneficiaries with special needs allowing them to participate fully in the projects. The Office of Adult Education does not discriminate on the basis of age, color, religion, creed, disability, marital status, veteran status, socio-economic status, national origin, race, gender or sexual orientation in its education and research programs, or its services and activities. It provides reasonable and appropriate accommodations to meet the learning and evaluation needs of a diverse group of students, faculty, community members and other participants.

During the competition for WIOA, AEFLA funds, applicants were required to submit a plan to address the components of GEPA. The Office of Adult Education will monitor each local program to ensure the plan submitted has been implemented at the local funded program.

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#### PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

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The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan\* must include the following descriptions and estimates, as required by section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by WIOA:

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\* Sec. 102(b)(D)(iii) of WIOA

#### A. INPUT OF STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

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All agencies, except for those that are independent consumer-controlled commissions, must describe the following:

1. INPUT PROVIDED BY THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL, INCLUDING INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN, RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COUNCIL'S REPORT, THE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER SATISFACTION, AND OTHER COUNCIL REPORTS THAT MAY HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED AS PART OF THE COUNCIL'S FUNCTIONS;

In matters of program administration and planning, the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind has a strong commitment to seeking the advice of consumers of vocational rehabilitation services, service providers, family members, advocates, employers and others interested in disability issues.

Comprised of representatives of these stakeholder groups, the State Rehabilitation Council makes a major contribution to the VR/VRB program through advice provided during regular SRC business meetings, Policy Committee meetings, and other activities the members determine to be appropriate.

During February and March 2018, OVR/OVRB developed and updated the 2018 State Plan. OVR/OVRB explained to stakeholders the process the State has to comply with the requirements of reauthorization and WIOA. We provided the link to the plan and posted for public comment until March 19<sup>th</sup>. SRC Members and Stakeholders were able to view the modifications to the Combined State Plan, as well as, the Plan as a whole.

The DSU accepts the recommendations from the SRC. Below are the comments and the DSUs response to those comments.

### **SRC Questionnaires**

**1. Do you have any comments or recommendations for input into the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services' Office of Vocational Rehabilitation or Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (OVR/OVRB) service delivery system?**

**SRC Comment:** Very informative report from LaVonda.

**DSU Response:** The State Rehabilitation Council is a very important partner in the success of the VR program in Mississippi and the consumers we serve. Their interest in the policy, procedures, performance, consumer satisfaction and implementation of WIOA has been a key element in our continued pursuit of innovations that provide high quality VR services to the individuals we serve. With input from the SRC, we will continue to strive to improve our service delivery through our programs and services. The SRC's input is greatly appreciated and necessary to ensure that the needs of the people with disabilities remain at the forefront of all our efforts.

SRC Comment:

- Dorothy has worked diligently on making the job fair a success.
- Good job on the upcoming job fair for citizens with disabilities.
- Great report from Dorothy regarding job fairs. Wonderful to have that kind of success.

DSU Response:

OVR/OVRB is proud to have played a part in assisting individuals with disabilities in this state. Our staff is honored to enable our clients the ability to share their skills and talents in Mississippi's workforce and to experience greater independence and self-sufficiency.

SRC Comment:

- Job Developers should get job goals from counselors to seek out jobs that current consumers want.

DSU Response:

VR Counselor and VR Career Counselors provide the Office of Business Development with job goals for each client.

SRC Comment:

- I believe the teams described to evaluate & enhance quality services provision are a new approach that will be successful.

DSU Response:

VR/OVRB appreciates comments and will also feel that that teams will assist in providing quality services to our consumers and also assist in addressing the needs of the staff.

**2. Having heard this quarter's report on the results of consumer satisfaction surveys, do you have any comments or recommendations for input into the service delivery process?**

*SRC Comments:*

- Overall satisfaction remains high this quarter after reviewing the satisfaction survey for the quarter.
- Results are positive on satisfaction surveys. Look forward to hear report from CAP and MDRS on any grievances filed.
- Consumer responses indicate service delivery process is meeting their needs.
- Good report.

*DSU Response:*

VR/OVRB will continue to receive information from our consumers by the Client Assistance Program, internal audits, MSU audits and the Client Services Director's office. While we are very happy with the positive comments our consumers direct to us we also appreciate the negative feedback as this is something we can learn from and strive to improve.

**3. Do you have any comments or recommendations for input in terms of potential service providers or discussions on the performance of service providers currently being used by OVR/OVRB?**

SRC Comments:

- High Quality, Assessable and Confidential - important considerations for providers.

- By satisfaction surveys, consumers seem to be happy with overall providers.
- Increase Internship program as funds allow.

DSU Response:

VR and VRB will continue to strive to meet the demands and requests of our service providers where possible. We also will continue to strive to meet the needs and desires of our consumers.

***Presentation of Information on Policy***

**4A. Do you have any comments or recommendations concerning the Career Counselor Presentation? Business Development?**

SRC Comments:

- LouEllen enhanced her presentation with a colorful handout. I think the career counselor program is very beneficial however there is an overlap in services provided by AbilityWorks.
- More VR counselors with smaller caseloads might alleviate the need for separate career counselors.
- Josh did a great job explaining BDS and the benefit of that program bringing more awareness to MDRS and AW.
- Are the business development professionals starting with career goals of the clients? (when contacting business).
- Having list of IPE goals written?

DSU Response:

Our Career Counselors (VR Counselors) work collaboratively with the caseload carrying counselors to ensure that the individuals we serve are job ready and ready to meet the demands of the opportunities and relationships that have been developed in Mississippi's workforce by our Office of Business Development. The Career Counselor's assist the VR Counselor to prepare clients for job interviews, resume building, etc. AbilityWorks do not provide this type of training/preparation.

**4B. Do you have any comments or recommendations concerning the presentation on services offered at AbilityWorks-Vocational Evaluation?**

SRC Comments:

- Excellent service to lead to the most positive outcomes.
- Very exciting improvements being made for AbilityWorks.
- Good Report.

**DSU Response:**

Our staff that provide services to our clients at AbilityWorks (community rehabilitation programs) received additional training and tools to help ensure that counselors have the

support and services needed to ensure that our consumers are aiming for vocational goals and employment outcomes that are consistent with their strengths, interests, capabilities, resources and informed choice and goals and opportunities that are available in Mississippi's labor market.

**4C. Do you have any comments or recommendations concerning the presentations on the new VR/VRB Teams that have been created?**

- o Find a way to measure the effectiveness of these teams in terms of consumer outcomes.

**DSU's Response**

Our teams will continue to come to the table to work through processes and procedures to ensure that staff has the resources and tools needed to move consumers toward competitive integrated employment opportunities.

We look forward to our continued partnership in ensuring that Mississippi's job seekers with disabilities have access to the highest quality employment and training services that our job fairs and internships provide. We will continue to strive to increase the number of participants in these programs each year.

**Results of 2017 Consumer Satisfaction Survey**

A consumer satisfaction survey is conducted four times per year to determine the consumer satisfaction regarding closed cases during the year.

An outside marketing firm, Wolfgang Frese Survey Research Laboratory of Mississippi State University, conducted the survey for the SRC.

*The ratings for the various services consumers received are presented below using the average (means) score given to each item by all respondents interviewed. If an item did not apply to a particular respondent or if the consumer did not know or refused to rate an item he/she is not included in calculating the average score for that item. The seven items rated are in Table 1 (for exact wording, reference the questionnaire.) Chart 1 is included for an easy visual comparison. The respondents were asked to rate the items (Questions 1-9) on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent. Thus, a high score indicates that the service was good and a low score that it was poor..*

**TABLE 1 - SERVICE RATINGS BY CONSUMER**

*Rate the following items on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent.*

	Number of Counselors	Average Rating (mean)
<b>The help provided by the VR staff at the time you applied for VR services.</b>	1,002	4.69
<b>The help provided by the VR staff during the planning of your services.</b>	998	4.68

	Number of Counselors	Average Rating (mean)
<b>The help provided by the VR staff when you were receiving your VR services.</b>	992	4.69
<b>The help you received from other agencies or service providers.</b>	303	4.42
<b>Your employment outcome.</b>	796	4.49
<b>Employment benefits provided by your new employer.</b>	480	3.90
<b>Overall, how do you rate the services you received?</b>	997	4.69

2. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S RESPONSE TO THE COUNCIL'S INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS; AND

Please see the section above.

3. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S EXPLANATIONS FOR REJECTING ANY OF THE COUNCIL'S INPUT OR RECOMMENDATIONS.

Please see the section above.

**B. REQUEST FOR WAIVER OF STATEWIDENESS**

When requesting a waiver of the statewideness requirement, the designated State unit must identify the types of services to be provided by the program on a non-statewide basis. The waiver request must also include written assurances that:

1. A LOCAL PUBLIC AGENCY WILL PROVIDE THE NON-FEDERAL SHARE OF COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE WAIVER REQUEST;

Does not apply. MDRS has not requested a waiver of statewideness for any VR service.

2. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WILL APPROVE EACH PROPOSED SERVICE BEFORE IT IS PUT INTO EFFECT; AND

Does not apply. MDRS has not requested a waiver of statewideness for any VR service.

3. ALL STATE PLAN REQUIREMENTS WILL APPLY

requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan will apply to the services approved under the waiver.

Does not apply. MDRS has not requested a waiver of statewideness for any VR service.

**C. COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH AGENCIES NOT CARRYING OUT ACTIVITIES UNDER THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM.**

Describe interagency cooperation with and utilization of the services and facilities of agencies and programs that are not carrying out activities through the statewide workforce development system with respect to:

### 1. FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS;

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) collaborates and coordinates services with federal, state and local employment and agencies that contribute to the vocational rehabilitation (VR) of Mississippians with disabilities.

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation has always strived to maximize and improve the level of services afforded to individuals with the most significant disabilities.

OVR's commitment to serving individuals with the most significant disabilities is substantiated by the fact that thus far in FY 2017, 72% of those individuals rehabilitated are classified as significantly disabled.

The methods utilized by VR to expand and improve services to individuals with significant disabilities in our State will be enhanced and ongoing throughout the period FFY 2018 to 2019. These "methods" entail several administrative and programmatic activities intended to facilitate and/or maintain expansion of services for individuals with significant disabilities.

#### COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS:

MDRS and OVR makes a concerted effort to utilize all available resources to provide the highest quality and most cost-effective services to individuals with significant disabilities. Since several organizations provide various services this individuals with disabilities, those resources are tapped, whenever and wherever possible.

In order to accomplish this, OVR relies on many cooperative agreements, memorandums of understanding and contracts with various agencies, organizations and groups.

The entities that OVR is actively involved with include, but is not limited to:

- **Mississippi Department of Education** for the coordination of transition services and local school districts to carry out transition and youth career services plus implement a Transition Specialist in participating local school districts;
- **Hinds Community College for the Deaf Services Program;**
- **Division of Medicaid** to provide seamless, non-duplicated services to individuals who are eligible for both Medicaid and VR services and for maximum utilization of resources between the two agencies;
- **Department of Mental Health (DMH) Planning and Advisory Council** as federally mandated for advice and support. DMH to cover the costs for therapeutic medical services offered at secondary alcohol and drug treatment centers that have been approved by DMH;
- **Department of Mental Health -Bureau of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities** to continue enhancing, expanding, and developing methods to support eligible persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities who express a

desire for competitive integrated employment; establish a state-level work group to address system, policy and funding issues that impede the continuous provision of employment services by MDRS and DMH; engage MDRS staff and DMH providers and stakeholders at the local level in collaboration and cooperation in the accomplishment of the vision and desired outcomes; identify and disseminate best practices including training and funding strategies; and, provide individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities with quality employment services that lead to competitive integrated employment in a non-duplicated and seamless manner;

- **Department of Human Services (DHS)**-Division of Family and Children Services to assess foster care participants who are diagnosed as having physical and/or mental disabilities; DHS-Division of Field Operations to assist TANF recipients who are diagnosed with physical and/or mental disabilities;
- **Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians** for interagency referrals for vocational rehabilitation services, including transition planning, to Choctaw Indians;
- **U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs** to improve work opportunities for veterans with disabilities and coordinate a referral and service delivery process;
- **Warren-Yazoo Mental Health Service-Program** of Assertive Community Treatment (PACT) to facilitate the most effective and efficient process to assist PACT recipients gain access to vocational rehabilitation services;
- **Department of Transportation** to coordinate transportation and related program resources and services at the state level wherever possible and promote maximum feasible coordination at the local level;
- **Institute for Disability Studies** to operate Project Search for students with developmental disabilities and to foster and facilitate the acquisition of jobs by people with disabilities; and, Mississippi State University, T.K. Martin Center to provide for evaluations pertaining to assistive technology, primarily related to seating, positioning and mobility; adaptive driving, including bioptic driving; vehicle modification, and, augmentative and alternative communication;
- **Mississippi State University**, Student Support Services, and the University of Southern Mississippi, Institute for Disability Studies are to operate the Peer Mentoring program to provide self-advocacy training as part of pre-employment transition services for post-secondary students with disabilities, and to assist with the transition of these students into post-secondary education in order to achieve degrees in higher education that allow for successful careers.

## 2. STATE PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT UNDER SECTION 4 OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998;

MDRS administers Mississippi's Project START (Success Through Assistive Rehabilitative Technology), the state program carried out under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998, for education awareness and access to Assistive Technology.

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services operates an Assistive Technology Program to assure the adequate and appropriate utilization of rehabilitation engineering assistance to individuals with disabilities. OVR makes referrals to this program.

The rehabilitation engineering assistance provided includes a range of services to assist individuals with physical and/or cognitive disabilities that can be addressed through modification, alteration or renovation via development or use of technological devices, or by way of other technology-related assistance.

In order to provide timely and quality rehabilitation engineering services, MDRS has Assistive Technology Specialist located throughout the state in MDRS offices.

### 3. PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT BY THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE;

MDRS has developed a relationship with the local office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture to gather information, build relationships, and develop cooperative efforts to provide services to Mississippians with a disability.

### 4. NONEDUCATIONAL AGENCIES SERVING OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH; AND

Some of the noneducational agencies serving out of school youth in which VR has memorandums of understanding as follows:

- Division of Medicaid
- Ms. Dept. of Human Services - Div. of Family and Children Services
- Dept. of Mental Health - Bureau of Intellectual/ Developmental Disabilities
- Institute for Disability Studies
- Ms Dept of Human Services - TANF
- Warren Yazoo Mental Health Services
- Ms Band of Choctaw Indians
- Department of Veteran Affairs

### 5. STATE USE CONTRACTING PROGRAMS.

MDRS has no contracting programs.

### D. COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS

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Describe:

#### 1. DSU'S PLANS

The designated State unit's plans, policies, and procedures for coordination with education officials to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of VR services, including pre-employment transition services, as well as procedures for the timely development and approval of individualized plans for employment for the students.

*Information on the formal interagency agreement with the State educational agency with respect to:*

One of the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services major goals is to emphasize the employment potential if students with disabilities and to improve the outreach and outcomes for students and youth with disabilities.

To accomplish this goal, MDRS will continue to work with local school officials to implement Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) and to facilitate a smooth transition from education to vocational rehabilitation (VR) services and employment. This approach provides a continuum of services directed toward additional post-secondary education or direct entry into the workforce.

VRB works closely with the education system through the VR Transition and Youth Career Services Program. There are approximately 20 VRB Counselors throughout the state who work in preparing students with vision loss for entry into the world of work. They serve as informational resources for teachers and other educational staff as well as provide resources and information about blindness for parents and transitioning youth throughout development of the youth's individualized plan for employment (IPE).

VRB Counselors work closely with parents, education staff, and community service providers to promote development of skills needed for students to become as independent as possible and competitive in terms of employment. In addition to training parents and students about the special education rights and responsibilities, VRB provides educational support by working with the VR Transition Team, school officials, and families to develop and implement the IPE. Goals developed in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) are included in the IPE to facilitate successful completion of those goals.

The IPE is completed during the transition process so it is in place before students exit secondary education. Services prepare students to be confident and competent to maximize their potential to achieve success.

VR works closely with the education system throughout the state. There are between 75 to 85 VR Counselors throughout the state who work in preparing students with disabilities for entry into the world of work.

The goal is to help the youth and students with disabilities achieve a seamless transition from high school into the world of work, community, vocational or post-secondary education, and/or other planned outcomes. OVR administers the VR Transition and Youth Career Services Program as specified in Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended.

District level VR offices and local education districts work together in maintaining local agreements between each VR district office and the local school districts as to how to carry out transition services.

There are nearly 150 of these agreements with various school districts resulting in services to about 440 schools. These agreements are shared with other state agencies, family members, and consumer groups to ensure the seamless transition of services for students. The agreements do not include any specified financial agreement other than the implied cost for serving youth and students with disabilities.

### ***Policies and procedure to facilitate the transition of students from school to receipt of VR services***

Restructuring of the VR Transition and Youth Career Services Program has resulted in additional VR Counselors carrying transition and youth cases, which provides for more individualized services to both eligible and potentially eligible students in school. VR Counselors work with the students, parents, and school personnel as well as attend (IEP) meetings to help identify students that may be able to benefit from transition and youth career services.

Prior to making services available, the VR Counselor uses school documentation, health records, and other pertinent information as deemed appropriate for determining a student with a disability potentially eligible for pre-employment transition services and/or for determination of eligibility for the VR Transition program.

The VR Counselor may then collaborate with the student, family members, school district personnel, and others to provide pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS). MDRS has set aside 15% of its Reserve in order to make the Pre-ETS available to all eligible and potentially eligible students with a disability. Pre-ETS are five required activities that must be made available for students between the ages of 14 to 21 years old. Pre-ETS include the following: a) job exploration counseling; b) work—based learning experiences; c) counseling on enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs; d) workplace readiness training; and, e) instruction in self-advocacy. Pre-ETS should be planned on an eligible student's Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) through informed choice if they were not previously provided by VR prior to the student applying for VR transition services, or if it is determined that additional Pre-ETS are needed.

Transition planning between MDRS and MDE ultimately helps with the successful development and implementation of both the IEP and the IPE.

MDRS through the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind have recently sent Request for Proposals for third party providers to provide Pre-ETS activities in accordance with the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act. At this time, two proposals have been awarded contracts and additional Request for Proposals are being sought.

Transition and youth career services include, but are not limited to, job search skills, work evaluation, development of an IPE, basic money management, social skills, and job readiness training along with continuous counseling and guidance. These services may be performed solely by the VR Counselor, in collaboration with other service providers, or in coordination with an education teaching professional.

The VR Counselor also works with the classroom teacher implementing Pre-ETS services. The VR Counselor is prepared to teach the Pre-ETS curriculum in conjunction with providing the classroom teacher with information, technical assistance, and/or curriculum materials as needed. The VR Counselor supervises the student in this program, documents the student's progress, and shares information with the classroom teacher on a regular basis.

VR continues to emphasize best practices in providing services to youth and students with disabilities in order to provide a seamless transition to subsequent work or other

environments. This emphasis on best practices, in part, is achieved by continuous training of staff working with youth and students with disabilities.

VR assures that, with respect to students with disabilities, the state has developed and implemented strategies to address the needs identified in the FFY 2018 Comprehensive Statewide Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs; strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the state to improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and, has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services.

MDRS also assures that with respect to students the needs identified in the state has developed and will implement new strategies to address the needs identified in the FFY 2018 Comprehensive Statewide Assessment.

## 2. INFORMATION ON THE FORMAL INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT WITH THE STATE EDUCATIONAL AGENCY WITH RESPECT TO:

### A. CONSULTATION AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO ASSIST EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES IN PLANNING FOR THE TRANSITION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM SCHOOL TO POST-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING VR SERVICES;

Mississippi has both a state level agreement, “Memorandum of Agreement for Transition Planning for Secondary Students with Disabilities between the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) and the Mississippi Department of Education” (MDE), and a local level “Agreement of Corporation” with each of our school districts.

The scope of services between MDRS and MDE are described in (d)2. The scope of services between MDRS and the local school districts are intended to serve as a mechanism for OVR/OVRB and the local school districts to clearly specify the plans, policies and procedures for coordinating services to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities, including:

0. Responsibilities of MDRS/OVR
1. Responsibilities of School District
2. Referral Process
3. Joint Development of IEPs and IPES; and
4. Coordination necessary and documentation requirements set forth in section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act, as added by WIOA, with regard to students with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment

This Memorandum of Agreement for Transition Planning for Secondary Students with Disabilities between is made and entered into by and between the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, hereafter referred to as “MDRS,” for and on behalf of its Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind, hereafter referred to as “OVR/OVRB,” and the Mississippi Department of Education, for and on behalf of its Office of Special Education, hereafter referred to as “MDE OSE.”

Both the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (the Rehabilitation Act), as amended by The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), require State Educational Agencies (SEA) and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies to plan and coordinate transition services, as well as pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities through a formal interagency agreement (Section 612(a)(12) of the IDEA and Section 101(a)(11)(D) of the Rehabilitation Act).

A formal interagency agreement is mandated under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 34 CFR 300.154, and section 101(a) (11) (D) of the Rehabilitation Act and its implementing regulations at 34 CFR 361.22 (b). Additional references used in this document include Sections 113 and 511 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Final Regulations: State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program; State Supported Employment Services Program; Limitations on Use of Subminimum Wage. This agreement is designed to improve the cooperative and collaborative efforts between the OVR/OVRB, and MDE OSE to coordinate the receipt of pre-employment transition services, transition services and other vocational rehabilitation (VR) services to students with disabilities who are eligible for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), students who have a 504 plan, and other students with disabilities who are eligible or potentially eligible for services through OVR/OVRB, in order to facilitate their smooth transition from school to post-school employment-related activities and competitive, integrated employment.

It is also the intent of this agreement to serve as a mechanism for OVR/OVRB and MDE OSE to clearly specify the plans, policies and procedures for coordinating services to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities, including:

1. Consultation and technical assistance in the planning for the transition of students with disabilities;
2. Transition planning by OVR/OVRB and educational personnel that facilitates the development and implementation of a student's individualized education plan (IEP);
3. Roles and responsibilities, including financial and programmatic responsibilities of each agency;
4. Procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities;
5. Assessment of students' potential need for transition services and pre-employment transition services;
6. Coordination necessary and documentation requirements set forth in section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act, as added by WIOA, with regard to students with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment.; and an

7. Assurance that the MDE OSE will not enter into an arrangement with an entity holding a special wage certificate under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act for the purpose of operating a program under which a youth with a disability is engaged in work at a subminimum wage.

Additional considerations include grievance procedure to resolve disputes between OVR/OVRB and the MDE OSE, as appropriate, as well as procedures to resolve disputes between an individual with a disability and the entities specified above, and information about the Client Assistance Program.

**B. TRANSITION PLANNING BY PERSONNEL OF THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND EDUCATIONAL AGENCY THAT FACILITATES THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THEIR INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS;**

Please see the section above.

**C. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES, INCLUDING FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES, OF EACH AGENCY, INCLUDING PROVISIONS FOR DETERMINING STATE LEAD AGENCIES AND QUALIFIED PERSONNEL RESPONSIBLE FOR TRANSITION SERVICES;**

Please see the section above.

**D. PROCEDURES FOR OUTREACH TO AND IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WHO NEED TRANSITION SERVICES.**

Please see the section above.

**E. COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH PRIVATE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS**

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.8(b)(3)). Describe the manner in which the designated State agency establishes cooperative agreements with private non-profit VR service providers.

MDRS develops a formal fee for service contract with private non-profit vocational rehabilitation service providers. The contract contains all necessary clauses and each contract is approved by the state's Assistant Attorney General assigned to MDRS. The contracts are executed by the MDRS Executive Director and the principal of the private non-profit vocational rehabilitation service provider.

MDRS has the following contracts (agreements) with private nonprofit vocational rehabilitation service providers:

1. Goodwill Industries of South Mississippi - an agreement to provide work evaluation and job readiness training.
2. Goodwill Industries of Jackson - an agreement to provide work evaluation and job readiness training.
3. Mississippi Industries for the Blind (MIB) - a summer program to provide clients with job seeking skills, assistance in preparation of job applications, provision of work experience/work adjustment training, and evaluation (with assistance of

MDRS Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind staff) of client skill levels to identify marketable skills and potential outplacement.

MDRS has the authority to enter into contracts with for-profit organizations for the purpose of providing, as vocational rehabilitation services, on-the-job training and related programs for individuals with disabilities upon determination that such for-profit organization is better qualified to provide such rehabilitation services than non-profit agencies and organizations. However, MDRS does not currently have any such contracts in place with for-profit organizations.

#### F. ARRANGEMENTS AND COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

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(Formerly known as Attachment 4.8(b)(4)). Describe the designated State agency's efforts to identify and make arrangements, including entering into cooperative agreements, with other State agencies and other appropriate entities in order to provide supported employment services and extended employment services, as applicable, to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities.

MDRS administers the Supported Employment (SE) Program as specified in Title VI of the Rehabilitation Act and amended in WIOA. VR works extensively with other state agencies, private non-profit entities, employers, family members, and consumer groups to ensure quality SE services are provided to all eligible individuals throughout all phases of the SE service delivery system.

MDRS- VR has entered into formal cooperative agreements with the Mississippi Division of Medicaid (Medicaid) and Department of Mental Health, Bureau for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, with respect to delivery of VR services, including extended services, for individuals with the most significant disabilities eligible for home and community-based services.

In addition to these formal agreements, MDRS collaborates on a more informal basis with public and private entities to ensure a comprehensive program of services is provided to SE eligible individuals.

Collaborative partners include local mental health facilities, Medicaid's Bridge to Independence Program to help people move from qualified institutions to homes in the community, local school districts, businesses and industries, local projects funded by the DD Council, workforce development one-stop career centers, advocacy groups, and other relevant third parties as well as parents of SE eligible individuals.

The collaboration with DMH has resulted in a formalized referral process between the two agencies to ensure an array of services is provided to individuals with the most significant disabilities, opening up many new options for them. The MDRS SE Program Coordinator receives the referral from the DMH Mental Health Support Coordinator/Target Case Manager. After review, the SE Program Coordinator then forwards the referral to the SE Counselor in the appropriate MDRS district office for determination of VR services.

A large portion of the SE Counselor's job duties involves liaison activities among SE clients, family members, employers, and other service providers. SE staff members regularly attend joint staffing's and Person Centered Planning meetings with third party service providers to

ensure that SE services are provided to clients in a consistent, appropriate, continual, and ongoing nature from the time of the initial referral to supported employment into the extended support phase. These staffing's often include family members and employers as well as service providers. Person Centered Planning and the development of natural supports for individual clients are an integral part of the SE staff members' activities.

Upon completion of the time-limited supported employment services, the ongoing job skills training assistance and other necessary long-term support is transitioned to a third party, group, or individual through a Cooperative Agreement or Extended Services Support Plan Agreement. The primary provider of extended services is the DMH-Bureau of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities through its network of local community service programs.

However, an increasing number of individuals and other community organizations are accepting this role. Employers are often willing to take on this responsibility and are encouraged to do so since it is the most natural arrangement for the client.

MDRS entered into 114 new Extended Service Support Plan Agreements from July 1, 2015 through December 31, 2017. These 114 new agreements are in addition to the agreements previously established and still ongoing.

WIOA increased the maximum amount of time for SE staff to provide time-limited supported employment services to 24 months. However, the rate of transitioning a client to extended services is dependent upon the needs of the individual, his/her family, the employer, the third party agency, and other involved individuals. Since SE staff members and the extended service provider will have been collaborating in the provision of SE services throughout an individual's vocational rehabilitation program, such transitions are normally smooth and do not cause job disruptions.

The Coordinator for the SE Program and the Coordinator for Transition and Youth Career Services will work together to ensure new policy is in place and the appropriate amount of funding is utilized for youth with the most significant disabilities.

## G. COORDINATION WITH EMPLOYERS

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(Formerly known as Attachment 4.8(b)(5)). Describe how the designated State unit will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of:

### 1. VR SERVICES; AND

WIOA specifically directs the VR program to work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment opportunities and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of VR services, and transition services for youth with disabilities such as pre-employment transition services. MDRS will handle this coordination with employers through its Office of Business Development Services.

The Office of Business Development (OBD) was established to recruit employers interested in hiring people with disabilities, promote job ready clients of both the VR Program and the VRB Program to employers, and provide a variety of services to employers. OBD staff, referred to as Business Representative, build employer relationships and develops career opportunities for individuals seeking competitive integrated employment. Business Reps.

The point of contact to businesses for any assistance and support needed to hire and maintain employment.

Business Development Representatives are able to work with businesses to determine if any of the job seekers on VR caseloads that will be deemed Job Ready match the skills that are needed by businesses, allowing VR counselors to spend more time with clients who require intensive IPE development and career counseling.

The main services provided by the Business Rep. include the following:

- Train employers regarding employment of individuals with disabilities, disability awareness, requirements of the Americans With Disabilities Act, work incentives, and laws related to employment opportunities;
- Provide consultation, technical assistance, and support to employers on workplace accommodations and assistive technology;
- Provide resources and support through collaboration with community partners and employers; and,
- Provide employer recruitment services, job matching, hiring, and retention of qualified individuals with disabilities.

MDRS also works with employers to help youth with disabilities and students with disabilities have more opportunities, explore career interests, acquire workplace skills, and enter into competitive integrated employment.

(2) Transition services, including pre-employment transition services, for students and youth with disabilities.

OBD staff work with students with disabilities and employers to place students in work experiences to assist them in learning about careers, opportunities and obtain work experience. MDRS has sponsored a summer internship program in which students participate in during the summer of 2016 and 2017. MDRS is on target to sponsor students in the 2018 Summer Internship program. This program also consists of students with physical disabilities, cognitive disabilities, blindness, deafness and other hearing impairments.

### **MDRS Community Rehabilitation Program Services to Business**

- **The Addie McBryde Center for the Blind**

The Addie McBryde Center is the state comprehensive center for the Blind and Visually Impaired. This center is a place where people who are blind can reside temporarily while they learn to lead productive, self-sufficient lives. The program incorporates instruction in a variety of independence skills as well as case management including home management, cooking, orientation and mobility, Braille, access to computer technology, college preparation, job readiness, adaptation to blindness and many other skills that contribute to independence and the confidence to seek the highest level of employment possible. The center provides Pre-ETS in conjunction with the independent skills classes on a daily basis. The Summer Internship Program is hosted by the Addie McBryde Center that connects clients with their first real world work experience.

- **AbilityWorks (AW)**

AbilityWorks enables VR program staff and employers to work together to identify career exploration opportunities and competitive integrated employment opportunities for clients. Both activities are conducted mainly through Community Based Services that connects client abilities with employer opportunities.

AW considers career exploration as a comprehensive process that systematically utilizes work, either real or simulated, as the focal point for evaluation and vocational exploration, the purpose of which is to assist an individual with vocational development.

When a client has an interest in a career but AW cannot provide the client with similar tasks or experiences related to that career, then the AW staff establishes a Work based learning opportunity in the community for the client.

The client gains exposure to and experience in the type of career in which he/she is interested, thereby either helping the client realize the career is not the right choice or reaffirming the client's interest in the career.

The Work Based Learning Experience may additionally help the client and the VR Counselor understand what additional training is required as well as the skills and/or abilities that must be acquired to be successful in the selected career.

There are 15 AbilityWorks located throughout the state.

Through its AbilityWorks program, MDRS-VR partnered with the Sephora to provide training for individuals with disabilities in a warehouse distribution setting. This program began at Sephora's Olive Branch Sephora location August 2017.

## 2. TRANSITION SERVICES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, FOR STUDENTS AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES.

Please see the section above.

### H. INTERAGENCY COOPERATION

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Describe how the designated State unit will collaborate with the State agency responsible for administering each of the following programs to develop opportunities for competitive integrated employment, to the greatest extent practicable:

#### 1. THE STATE MEDICAID PLAN UNDER TITLE XIX OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT;

MDRS has entered into formal cooperative agreements with the Mississippi Division of Medicaid (Medicaid) and DMH-Bureau of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, with respect to delivery of VR services, including extended services, for individuals with the most significant disabilities eligible for home and community-based services. The collaboration with DMH has resulted in a formalized referral process between the two agencies to ensure an array of services is provided to individuals with the most significant disabilities, opening up many new options for them.

In addition to the formal agreements with Medicaid and DMH, MDRS collaborates on a more informal basis with public and private entities to ensure a comprehensive program of services is provided to individuals eligible for supported employment services.

Collaborative partners include local mental health facilities, Medicaid's Bridge to Independence Program to help people move from qualified institutions to homes in the community, local school districts, businesses and industries, local projects funded by the Mississippi Council on Development Disabilities (DD Council), workforce development one-stop career centers, advocacy groups, and other relevant third parties as well as parents of individuals with the most significant disabilities.

MDRS also has in place with the Mississippi Partnership for Employment a Memorandum of Understanding that includes the following partners:

- 1) DD Council;
- 2) The University of Southern Mississippi Institute for Disability Studies;
- 3) Disability Rights of Mississippi;
- 4) Mississippi Department of Education;
- 5) DMH;
- 6) Mississippi Department of Employment Security (the administering authority for the state's workforce development system); and
- 7) Two self-advocates

The partnership's intent is to build capacity across existing state systems to improve outcomes for youth and young adults with developmental disabilities including intellectual disabilities seeking competitive employment in integrated settings.

## 2. THE STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING SERVICES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES; AND

Please see the section above.

## 3. THE STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES.

Please see the section above.

### I. COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT; DATA SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

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(Formerly known as Attachment 4.10)). Describe the designated State agency's procedures and activities to establish and maintain a comprehensive system of personnel development designed to ensure an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professional and paraprofessional personnel for the designated State unit, including the following:

#### 1. DATA SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

##### A. QUALIFIED PERSONNEL NEEDS.

Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on qualified personnel needs with respect to:

i. the number of personnel who are employed by the State agency in the provision of VR services in relation to the number of individuals served, broken down by personnel category;

Assurance of an adequate supply of qualified Rehabilitation professionals and paraprofessionals and personnel is the major driving force for the Mississippi Vocational Rehabilitation Human Resource Development Section. Data from numerous sources is used to determine current and projected needs, as well as, VR progress toward meeting them.

The table below includes VR personnel and turnover data for state fiscal year 2016-2017, a projected staffing requirements for the next five (5) years. It should be noted that positions are vacated for many reasons including termination, promotions, lateral position transfers and retirements. VR employs strategies to address turnover, as well as, develop and prepare staff for advancement opportunities.

The projected ratio is 129 counselors, 82 counselor assistants, 8 interpreters, 6 psychometrists, 26 evaluators, 47 work adjustment instructors, and 9 instructors at the center for the blind to 13,671 applicants and eligible individuals served.

Job Title	Total Positions	Current Vacancies	Projected Vacancies over the next 5 years
Counselor	129	15	88
Counselor Assistant	82	19	45
Interpreters	8	4	6
Psychometrists	6	1	3
Evaluators	26	7	12
Work Adjustment Instructors	47	7	28
Instructors at the Center for the Blind	9	1	6

The projected requirements to meet the staffing needs of MDRS customers for the next five years are 180 counselors and a 15% increase in counselor assistants. An added increase of one staff interpreter will be needed to insure quality services are provided in a timely manner.

Staffing needs Counselors that provide Transition and Youth Career Services remains consistent with overall Counselor staffing projections. When factoring in population growth, the projected five year staffing needs are slightly higher than noted above, and would require that VR be provided with additional FTEs.

Described in the following table is information from institutions of higher education in Mississippi that prepare vocational rehabilitation professionals, categorized by institution and type of program.

An annual survey of the state's two university graduate programs in rehabilitation counseling determine the number of students enrolled, projected graduation dates, and the total number expected to complete the requirements for national certification in rehabilitation counseling. These two graduate programs accredited by the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE), one at Mississippi State University and the other at

Jackson State University (a Historically Black College or University), are the only graduate programs in rehabilitation counseling in Mississippi. Jackson State currently has 57 students enrolled in its program and 15 students earned a Master’s Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling during the calendar year 2016. Mississippi State currently has 9 students enrolled in its Master’s Program in Rehabilitation Counseling and 9 students earned a Master’s Degree in this program in 2016.

**Program Data for Institutions of Higher Education**

Institutions	Students Enrolled	Employees sponsored by agency and/or RSA	Graduates sponsored by agency and/or RSA	Graduates from the previous year
<b>Jackson State University</b>	57	3	6	15
<b>Mississippi State University</b>	9	0	9	4

**Plan for Recruitment, Preparation and Retention of Qualified Personnel.**

Describe the development and implementation of a plan to address the current and projected needs for qualified personnel including, the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the designated State unit 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.

VR maintains close relationships with universities including minority institutions such as historically black colleges and universities and disability specific organizations. VR employees collaborate with universities in securing grant funding, invite university employees to help with providing training and education activities and provide practicum and internship slots for students. VR acknowledges that it will not be able to recruit an adequate number of qualified rehabilitation counselors to replace those retiring and departing for other reasons. VR is currently engaged in the activities indicated below to address recruitment preparation and retention of counselors.

The VR Services Portion of the Combined State Plan continues to address the need to recruit and retain qualified staff, including those staff with minority backgrounds and individuals with disabilities. MDRS encourages managers seeking to hire new counselors to hire only those individuals who meet the requirements of Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD). If a manager determines that there is not a *qualified* rehabilitation professional available to fill a vacancy, the vacancy may be filled by an individual with lesser qualifications as long as the individual meets the national standards for a vocational rehabilitation counselor.

MDRS works closely with the graduate program in rehabilitation counseling at both Mississippi State University and Jackson State University by establishing placement opportunities for intern and practicum students and actively participating in university career development activities, including participation in Career Days and Job Fairs.

Representatives from MDRS meet with the graduate students from each program annually to explain career opportunities and the state employment application process. A VR Coordinator also serves on each program's Advisory Council. Working with Jackson State University provides significant opportunities for recruitment of minorities, and MDRS works closely with university support services on both campuses to recruit graduates with disabilities.

ii. the number of personnel currently needed by the State agency to provide VR services, broken down by personnel category; and

Please see the section above.

iii. projections of the number of personnel, broken down by personnel category, who will be needed by the State 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.

Please see the section above.

## B. PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on personnel development with respect to:

i. a list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program;

Please see the section above.

ii. the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and

Please see the section above.

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.

Please see the section above.

## 2. PLAN FOR RECRUITMENT, PREPARATION AND RETENTION OF QUALIFIED PERSONNEL

Describe the development and implementation of a plan to address the current and projected needs for qualified personnel including, the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the designated State unit 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.

Please see section above.

## 3. PERSONNEL STANDARDS

Describe the State agency's policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) and 34 CFR 361.18(c) to ensure that designated State unit 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 order to ensure that staff maintain a 21st century knowledge for working with individuals with disabilities, The Core Curriculum series will be provided annually for all vocational rehabilitation counselors and vocational evaluators.

This training program which provides a structured introduction to the Mississippi Vocational Rehabilitation Program, presented at the State Office and/or via webinar in two to three day training sessions conducted over the course of a year. It includes modules on the history and law affecting rehabilitation; program policies; medical and psychological aspects of disability; Accessible Automated Case Environment (the Agency's computerized case management system); counseling theories; job development and job placement; assistive technology; vocational assessment and various commercial evaluation systems utilized by the Agency's CRPs (for vocational evaluators); and training on disability-specific issues such as autism, blindness, deafness, etc.

There is not a state approved or recognized certification, licensure or registration of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. VR in conjunction with the State Rehabilitation Council establish the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) educational eligibility requirement as its highest standard. Efforts are made to recruit those who meet the CRC educational eligibility status.

However, if MDRS is unsuccessful in finding enough applicants who meet the highest standards, MDRS will accept and considers qualified those who meet the minimum initial standard for providing Counseling and Guidance services, with an understanding of the needs of individuals with disabilities and a 21<sup>st</sup> century understanding of the evolving labor market.

The individual(s) must have Bachelor's degree from and accredited university and one year of experience counseling individuals with disabilities, with an understanding of the needs of individuals with disabilities and a 21<sup>st</sup> century understanding of the evolving labor market. Alternative majors may be considered such as vocational rehabilitation counseling, social work, psychology, disability studies, business administration, human resources, special education, supported employment, customized employment, economics, or another field that reasonably prepares individuals to work with consumers and employers. Or

A Master's degree or doctoral degree in a field of student such as Vocational Rehabilitation counseling, law, social work, psychology, disability studies, business administration, human resources, special education, management, public administration, or another field that reasonably provides competence in the employment sector, in a disability field, or in both business-related and rehabilitation-related fields and from an accredited university in a Social, Behavioral or Rehabilitative Science and substitute for the year of required experience.

In recent years, long-term strategies for the retraining vocational rehabilitation counselor or vocational evaluator who is not a qualified rehabilitation professional and not currently in a program are to utilize accessible Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) CSPD funded stipend programs to the extent possible, since it represents a significant savings to VR. VR has implemented this more aggressive approach in meeting the CSPD standards.

The previous in-service grant was allocated solely to VR CSPD activities. These training grant funds were used to pay tuition and fees to individuals who could not get the coursework through the RSA stipend program, such as those who did not live near the public university or who otherwise could not use the RSA Stipend program. The elimination of the in-service training grant to states has severely reduced VR's ability to continue support for these activities. It is not currently clear how much of the Basic VR grant will be available for this support. The HR department has implemented a system to track academic classes taken and progress toward certification eligibility.

Those not funded under a stipend program as funded by RSA CSPD will be sponsored by MDRS at available distance education or web-based Masters Programs in Rehabilitation Counseling such as those available through Auburn University, the University of Kentucky, the University of Wisconsin, Southern University, and the Georgia State University Consortium. Employees who live within commuting distance of Jackson State University and Mississippi State University can access these universities' campus-based programs.

Employees sponsored by the agency in graduate training are eligible for reimbursement of tuition, book costs, and approved educational leave. State statute requires that the employee enter a contractual agreement with MDRS for service repayment. MDRS requires three years of continued employment in return for expense reimbursement and educational leave. Additionally, MDRS has created a job classification for rehabilitation counselors which require certification as a professional rehabilitation counselor plus two years of rehabilitation counseling experience. Promotion to this highest of four counselor salary levels provides an additional incentive for personnel to obtain a Master's Degree and to attain certification. Upon attainment of the Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or certification in rehabilitation counseling, the employee may also be eligible for an educational salary benchmark of five percent.

The current salary for vocational rehabilitation counselors in Mississippi remains below that of other southeastern states. In State Fiscal Year 1999, MDRS was successful in its efforts to gain approval by the Mississippi State Legislature and the Mississippi State Personnel Board to raise the entry-level salary for counselors and evaluators in order to successfully attract *qualified* personnel. In January 2003, July 2006, and again in July 2007 the salaries of vocational rehabilitation counselors and vocational evaluators were also realigned. Following a survey of the southeastern average, the salaries remain lower than that of neighboring states. In December 2015, MDRS was successful in its efforts to gain approval by the Mississippi State Personnel Board to include a new classification for counselors and Evaluators possessing a CRC or CVE. This new classification increased the salary for qualified employees.

MDRS has established educational requirements of a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling with a continuing education component to address these issues.

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.

Please see section above.

4. STAFF DEVELOPMENT.

Describe the State agency's policies, procedures, and activities to ensure that, consistent with section 101(a)(7)(C) of the Rehabilitation Act, all personnel employed by the designated State unit receive appropriate and adequate training in terms of:

A. SYSTEM OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT

a system of staff development for professionals and paraprofessionals within the designated State unit, particularly with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology, including training implemented in coordination with entities carrying out State programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; and

MDRS has developed an ongoing training plan which provides training opportunities for all VR staff and appropriate VR support staff. The training is designed to meet the personal and career development needs of VR personnel, thus increasing retention among qualified personnel. The ongoing training plan for the VR Program includes four categories as provided below.

***Annual Core Curriculum Training Series:***

New employee training begins with a program of orientation and basic training (Core Curriculum) for professional staff that includes the following:

1. History of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Foundations of Rehabilitation and the Law
2. Assistive Technology
3. Medical and Psychological Aspects of Disabilities
4. Job Placement
5. Job-Specific Automated Accessible Case Environment (AACE) Computer Training

This program is designed to return the agency to its mission of counseling, guiding and assisting individuals with disabilities find and maintain employment by refocusing on impediments to employment job readiness.

***New VR Counselor Training***

New VR counselors also complete a structured and timely training at the local level. This training provides new staff task-specific training to promote quality service delivery to all VR consumers and promotes the timely performance of the counselor job duties. The training is completed in modules and includes instruction and hands-on training in overall case management. This training, with an accompanying training manual, is designed for

counselors to use as a guide in making decisions and delivering quality VR services to consumers.

### ***Annual Ongoing Staff Development Training Sessions***

Although there has been an emphasis on assisting Counselors meet the CSPD standards and developing the technical, managerial and leadership skills of supervisors and managers, VR provides ongoing staff development training to employees at every level.

Ongoing staff development training can include a variety of topics but, generally, include the following:

- Disability-Specific Topics
- Case Management
- Eligibility
- Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) Development
- Various Types of Caseloads including Supported Employment and Transition
- Issues Regarding Work with Minority Populations, including Cultural Diversity
- WIOA Pre-Employment Transition Services - Customized Integrated Employment
- Other Areas Identified during Case Reviews conducted by MDRS Program Evaluation Staff

### **Additional Training Based on Need**

VR offers individual training allocations for staff members. This allocation can be used for job related professional development activities such as attending conferences, purchasing books, CDs, DVDs or other materials, taking on-line short courses or any other approved professional development activity. Supervisory approval is required for these professional development activities to ensure that employees participate in activities consistent with their individual needs and job responsibilities and requirements. Our HR department provide consultation and technical assistance to VR employees as needed. Training sessions are held at the district level and in formal statewide training as needed.

In order to address the increasing percentage of retirement age employees and the need for knowledgeable managers and supervisors, the MDRS Executive Team established a formal leadership development program. This program, known as Leadership, Education, and Development for Rehabilitation Services (*LEADRS*), addresses the future loss of institutional memory and the transfer of accumulated wisdom through its development of employee management skills and technical competencies. *LEADRS'* mission is, *"To educate, develop, and empower current and future leaders of MDRS to sustain and enhance the Department's holistic approach in meeting the needs of Mississippians with disabilities."*

MDRS also promotes capacity building and leadership development through supervisory staff's participation in a Basic Supervisory Course and the Certified Public Manager Program available through the Mississippi State Personnel Board, and In-service Supervisor Training

available through MDRS. In addition, staff members have participated in the National Executive Leadership Program at the University of Oklahoma; the National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute at San Diego State University; the Community Rehabilitation Program Leadership Development Program and the Institute for New Supervisors through Georgia State University; the John C. Stennis State Executive Development Institute at Mississippi State University; and, the South Central Public Health Leadership Institute at the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.

The staff development plan is based upon the assessed needs of the staff. The Performance Development System (PDS) was developed by the Mississippi State Personnel Board in November 2010 to replace the previous Performance Appraisal System and is applicable to all state service employees.

Also incorporated into the employee evaluation process is the employee's Individual Development Plan (IDP), which serves as an employee training needs assessment. IDPs are developed by the employee and evaluated by the supervisor to assure that the employee receives work-related training and training in other areas that the employee and supervisor agree will benefit the employee's performance.

The system of employee performance evaluation does not impede the accomplishment of specific mandates contained in Title I of the Rehabilitation Act. The system facilitates accomplishment by means of including in performance standards the responsibilities of MDRS and its employees under the Rehabilitation Act.

Information from case reviews conducted by the MDRS Program Evaluation Unit is analyzed to evaluate the knowledge and skill of employees as they relate to the policy of serving individuals with the most severe disabilities. Results of such evaluations are included in the development of objectives for the annual VR training plan. Information from annual client surveys is also used in determining training objectives and is incorporated into the VR training plan.

#### **B. ACQUISITION AND DISSEMINATION OF SIGNIFICANT KNOWLEDGE**

procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to designated State unit professionals and paraprofessionals.

MDRS continues to identify current information from research, rehabilitation trends and professional resources. This information is provided to agency staff through a variety of methods, including training at the state, regional, and district levels. Most recently this training has been focused on Autism and customized employment. Additionally, this information is posted and available to staff on MDRS Connect, the agency intranet.

#### **5. PERSONNEL TO ADDRESS INDIVIDUAL COMMUNICATION NEEDS**

Describe how the designated State unit has personnel or obtains the services of other individuals who are able to communicate in appropriate modes of communication with or in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability.

VR staff need to work with Mississippi diverse populations. One way VR does this is to actively recruit and support employees who have diverse backgrounds. When a counselor is

unable to communicate directly with a customer in his/her preferred language, the agency has qualified interpreters or translators on staff. Due to the increasing Hispanic population, employees who are fluent in Spanish have been identified and are available to serve as interpreters. Also, MDRS has established fees for foreign language interpreters which may be authorized and paid by counselors when the need for their services occurs to provide rehabilitation services to non-English speaking individuals. American Sign Language interpretation needs who are deaf or deaf-blind are met using a combination of employee positions and arrangement with qualified local interpreter service providers. MDRS employs eight qualified sign language interpreters for the 10 districts that comprise the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. The Office on Deaf and Hard of Hearing also employs one qualified sign language interpreter who is available to provide interpreter services. When either staff of local interpreters are not available, VR will rescheduled appointments of use available text communication devices with customers. VR has assisted listening devices in most offices for MDRS employees to communicate with individuals are hard of hearing or late-deafened and do not know sign language. VR complies with the Americans with Disability Act by providing materials in braille or large print, through having qualified sign language interpreters, and offering text-based communication access. VR arranges for Foreign Language Translators when needed.

VRB counselors participate in specialized in-service quarterly training and in-service training provided through the MDRS Assistive Technology Division which includes training on communication skills for individuals who are blind or deaf-blind. . MDRS requires that all VR Counselors for the Deaf achieve and maintain basic proficiency in American Sign Language. VR coordinates with post-secondary educational consortiums to provide proficiency testing of manual communication skills. Specialized training in deafness-related areas is provided for new counselors in the Deaf Program as well as quarterly training for all VR Counselors for the Deaf and Sign Language Interpreters.

#### 6. COORDINATION OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT UNDER THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT

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.

MDRS pursues efforts to coordinate cross training with MDE that will address education and rehabilitation under the provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Training conferences on transition services have been held and co-sponsored by MDRS and MDE. Specifically, regional training conferences bring together all VR counselors with transition caseloads, other agency personnel involved with transition services, and transition specialists, teachers, and special education coordinators from MDE. VR strives to help MDE to meet the mandate the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004.

#### **VR support includes:**

- Offering an early VR referral and application at age 14
- VR Transition Liaison contact list

- VR Transition Brochures and coordination of the Individual Education Plan with the Individualized Plan for Employment when served by both agencies
- VR counselors continue to attend regular in-service training that specifically targets transition youth issues and helps meet the requirements of the CSPD.
- VR and community partners continue to make presentations and participate in annual transition conferences at the national, state and local level to better serve students with disabilities.

*These events allow for agency updates, contributing information on promising initiatives and sharing evidence based practices. When VR employees and local educators are assigned to teams at events, they use this time to discuss issues and learn from one another about effective transition practices. This information is often incorporated into VR staff trainings*

- VR offers a statewide transition training that is provided on a yearly basis. New counselors receive this training which includes resources from the VR Transition Coordinator. The VR Transition Manual and Best Practices is a training tool for VR Transition teams to assure statewide consistency in coordinating services to students with disabilities. VR employees have access to this manual on MDRS Connect (internal website).

*At the local level, VR employees participate in interagency groups with a transition focus to improve local coordination and services to students, families, schools, employers and agency partners.*

## J. STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.11(a)).

1. PROVIDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE REHABILITATION NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES RESIDING WITHIN THE STATE, PARTICULARLY THE VR SERVICES NEEDS OF THOSE:
  - A. WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THEIR NEED FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;

In review of the population in Mississippi relative to race/ethnicity and disability, the following statistics were identified (*reference 2016 U.S. Census*):

Based on US Census 2016 ACS			
Race/Ethnicity	TOTAL	WITH DISABILITY	% TO POPULATION TOTAL OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES
<b>White</b>	1,716,181	295,963	17.2%
<b>Black or African American</b>	1,106,549	166,959	15.1%

Based on US Census 2016 ACS

<b>American Indian and Alaska Native</b>	12,975	2,355	18.2%
<b>Asian</b>	26,056	1,270	4.9%
<b>Native Hawaiian and other pacific Islander</b>	*	*	*
<b>Hispanic or Latino (of any race)</b>	81,265	8,249	10.2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,943,026</b>	<b>474,796</b>	<b>16.1%</b>

**2018 Comprehensive Needs Assessment**

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (OVRB) utilize several mechanisms for identifying the needs of individuals with disabilities. OVR and OVRB have completed the 2018 Comprehensive Needs Assessment.

The results are as follows:

**Survey Results:**

**Individuals with Significant Disabilities**

83.33% of the respondents identified themselves as an individual with a disability with the remaining percentage identifying as a family member of a person with a disability or as “other”.

**Race and Ethnicity:**

50.54% African-American

44.09% White

5.38% American Indian or Alaskan Native or “*did not wish to self-identify*”.

The least amount (3.23%) indicated ‘Hispanic’.

**Disability Information**

<u>Answer Choices</u>	<u>Response %</u>	<u>Responses</u>
<b>Blindness</b>	3.76%	7
<b>Visual Impairments</b>	3.99%	13
<b>Legal Blindness</b>	2.69%	5
<b>Deafness</b>	7.53%	14

<u>Answer Choices</u>	<u>Response %</u>	<u>Responses</u>
<b>Hearing Loss</b>	29.57%	55
<b>Deaf/Blind</b>	1.08%	2
<b>Communication Impairments</b>	5.91%	11
<b>Mobility Impairments</b>	17.20%	32
<b>Orthopedic Impairments</b>	6.45%	12
<b>Neurological Impairments</b>	10.22%	19
<b>Respiratory Impairments</b>	1.61%	3
<b>Other Physical Impairments</b>	22.04%	41
<b>Intellectual Impairments</b>	9.14%	17
<b>Mental Health Impairments</b>	14.52%	27

**Level of Education**

<b>No formal schooling</b>	0.54%	1
<b>Disenrollment</b>	1.61%	3
<b>Special Educational Certificate</b>	4.84%	9
<b>Elementary Education (Grades 1-8)</b>	5.38%	10
<b>High School Graduate or Equivalent Certificate</b>	41.40%	77
<b>Vocational/Technical License</b>	3.76%	7
<b>Associate's Degree</b>	10.75%	20
<b>Bachelor's Degree</b>	21.51%	40
<b>Master's Degree</b>	9.14%	17
<b>Doctorate Degree</b>	1.08%	2
Answered 186/ Skipped 0		

Furthermore, realizing it's crucial for counselors to understand what clients believe to be most helpful and what they perceive to be the greatest obstacles in regards to gaining and retaining employment, the agency developed survey questions and implemented a statewide survey to capture this data.

**A. with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment (SE) services;**

**Most Significant Disabilities including Supported Employment**

- Of those who responded to the survey, 25% indicated they received SE services.
- 94.87% of those identified as SE participants stated they were receiving all the services they required.
- 97.44% of the respondents professed the SE staff showed respect, kindness, patience, professionalism and proficient knowledge of the SE program during service delivery.

**Service Needs Identified:**

- Keep more work
- Offer more classes on completing applications
- Teach money management skills
- Communication skills training
- Computer skills training
- Transportation
- Additional specialized job development and job retention services
- Counseling on identifying natural support resources within the community and building the support network necessary to maintain long-term employment.
- Increased Supported Employment training provided to staff and providers on job retention strategies for clients.

Individualized advocacy focused on increasing success in competitive integrated employment settings.

**B. WHO ARE MINORITIES;**

MDRS continues to monitor access and services provided to minorities with disabilities who are unserved and underserved by VR.

MDRS has increased the outreach activities to assist in creating awareness of available services to meet their needs.

Based on the FFY 2018 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment Survey, in regards to race and ethnicity, the results are as follows:

- African - American 50.54%
- American Indian 5.38%
- Hispanic 3.23%

Based on AACE - VR Case Management System

Based on AACE - VR Case Management System

Race/Ethnicity	TOTAL	% With Disability
<b>White</b>	7561	56.3%
<b>Black or African American</b>	5799	43.17%
<b>American Indian and Alaska Native</b>	247	1.83%
<b>Asian</b>	50	.37%
<b>Native Hawaiian and other pacific Islander</b>	30	.22%
<b>Hispanic or Latino (of any race)</b>	130	.97%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13820</b>	<b>16.1%</b>

Service Needs:

- In order to understand the purpose of vocational rehabilitation in terms of health related issues/disabilities, information that is verbally communicated through social media and information written in their native language would provide a better understanding of available VR services.
- Increase collaboration with the Choctaw Indian Vocational Rehabilitation entity to target services that are not provided by Choctaw VR to assist in increasing employment in the community.
- Provide better access to information to develop training and training opportunities for individuals who are Hispanic and Latino
- Increase outreach to potentially eligible individuals in the Asian, Hispanic and Latino communities.
- Need 'VR Counseling and Guidance' training to assist in obtaining access to services that will provide support in employment with competitive wages.

MDRS will conduct a separate needs assessment for the Hispanic/Latino population in Mississippi with disabilities to help gather more information regarding their vocational rehabilitation service needs.

MDRS will continue to monitor the ACS survey for the most recent data regarding the race and ethnicity per county so our agency is informed of target areas in which information should be disseminated.

MDRS will also continue to provide outreach to other minority populations to ensure they have information regarding the VR program.

**C. WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR PROGRAM;**

According to the 2016 American Community Survey, the following races and ethnicities were reported in the state for the state of Mississippi:

**Based on US Census 2016 ACS**

Race/Ethnicity	Total	Number with Disability	% TO POPULATION TOTAL OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES
<b>White</b>	1,716,181	295,963	17.20%
<b>Black or African American</b>	1,106,549	166,959	15.10%
<b>American Indian and Alaska Native</b>	12,975	2,355	18.20%
<b>Asian</b>	26,056	1,270	4.90%
<b>Native Hawaiian and other pacific Islander</b>	*	*	*
<b>Hispanic or Latino (of any race)</b>	81,265	8,249	10.20%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,943,026</b>	<b>474,796</b>	<b>16.10%</b>

Based on a review of the individuals served reported in AACE - VR Case Management System 10/01/16 - 09/30/17 the following individuals were served:

**Based on AACE - VR Case Management System**

Race/Ethnicity	TOTAL	% With Disability
<b>White</b>	7561	54.70%
<b>Black or African American</b>	5799	41.90%
<b>American Indian and Alaska Native</b>	247	1.79%
<b>Asian</b>	50	< 1%
<b>Native Hawaiian and other pacific Islander</b>	30	< 1
<b>Hispanic or Latino (of any race)</b>	130	< 1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13817</b>	<b>100%</b>

In 2017, the agency served 6256 in the VR and VRB program. The federal requirement for service rate of all individuals with disabilities is 0.80. Based Standard and Indicator 2.1, Ratio of Minority Service Rate to Non-Minority Service Rate is 0.804. VR and VRB will

continue to monitor the ratio of minority service rate to non-minority service rate to ensure that we are meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities in the state that are underserved and unserved.

VR and VRB collaborate with minority businesses and services providers that are located in the community in order to develop relationships that lead to employment.

The interagency agreement between MDRS and the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians is maintained. Both agencies work together to help ensure that eligible Choctaw Indians services are coordinated in order to provide comprehensive VR services that will lead to employment outcomes.

Based on information from the 2016 American Community Survey, the following types of disabilities in the state are:

**BASED ON US CENSUS 2016 ACS**

Disability Types	Number of Individuals	Percent with a Disability
<b>Ambulatory</b>	267,388	9.80%
<b>Cognitive</b>	189,526	6.90%
<b>Hearing</b>	117,227	4.00%
<b>Vision</b>	97,345	3.30%
<b>TOTAL OF INDIVIDUALS with Disability</b>	<b>671,486</b>	

Based on AACE - VR Case Management System for 2017, the following type of disabilities were served:

Primary Disability Impairment	Number	Percentage
<b>Blindness</b>	85	0.65
<b>Cognitive impairments</b>	1927	14.76
<b>Combination of Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments</b>	233	1.78
<b>Communicative impairments (expressive/receptive)</b>	45	0.34
<b>Deaf-Blindness</b>	2	0.01
<b>Deafness, communication auditory</b>	130	0.99

Primary Disability Impairment	Number	Percentage
<b>Deafness, communication visual</b>	175	1.34
<b>Dexterity Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments</b>	5	0.03
<b>General physical debilitation</b>	105	0.8
<b>Hearing loss, communication auditory</b>	2535	19.42
<b>Hearing loss, communication visual</b>	43	0.32
<b>Legally Blind (excluding totally blind)</b>	106	0.81
<b>Manipulation Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments</b>	102	0.78
<b>Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments</b>	516	3.95
<b>Other Hearing Impairments</b>	153	1.17
<b>Other mental impairments</b>	2089	16.01
<b>Other orthopedic impairments</b>	541	4.14
<b>Other physical impairments not listed elsewhere</b>	2482	19
<b>Other visual impairments</b>	1167	19.02
<b>Psychosocial impairments</b>	543	4.16
<b>Respiratory impairments</b>	63	0.48

Based on the Comprehensive Needs Assessment and other data received from VR Case Management System, individuals with Mental Illness, Cognitive Disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorders are the primary emerging population that are reported as underserved and who staff has requested the most assistance in understanding the disability in terms of employment. VR will seek to provide more training and resources to assist staff in serving this population.

**VR Service Needs Identified and Percentage:**

- Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling and Guidance - 22.04%
- On-the-Job Training - 20.43%
- Job Search/Placement Services - 18.28%
- Vocational Assessment/Evaluation and Transportation - 14.54%
- Training: College/Vocational - 10.00%
- Attendant Care - 66.67%
- Transportation - 20.69%
- Job or vocational training - 18.52%
- Information and Referral Services - 9%

- Work Adjustment Services- 9%
- Customized Employment 9%
- Job Coaching Services 8%
- Mental Health Treatment/Counseling 8%
- Social Security Benefits Counseling 7%
- Independent Living Skills 6%
- Other Services Needed 6%
- Durable Medical Equipment 6%
- Medical Services 6%
- Child Care Services 4%
- Rehabilitation Technology (DME/home/Vehicle or Job site modification) 4%
- Maintenance 4%
- Family and Caregiver Support 3%
- Personal Care Attendant (PCA) 3%
- Interpreter Services 2%
- Note Taker 1%
- Reader Services 1%

#### **D. WHO HAVE BEEN SERVED THROUGH OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM; AND**

As part of the comprehensive needs assessment, a survey question asked participants if they have ever used the state’s workforce investment network for help in finding a job or for receiving job training services. Of those respondents who identified themselves as an individual with a disability, 41% responded “yes” to the question. Of that 41%, approximately 71% reported receiving job search assistance.

VR will increase partnerships with the statewide workforce investment system to develop innovative programs to serve common customers. With our collaboration and integration efforts thus far we have been successful in implementing a common intake process, anticipating in having a HUB where are workforce partners can access information for common clients and all VR clients have the Workforce ID which is consistent throughout all programs.

VR will continue to participate and assist in providing ongoing training of job center staff on disability sensitivity issues.

Continued efforts to coordinate the efforts of different government agencies with very different rules and expectations for participation. An individual facing parenting responsibilities, poverty, and disability issues needs to work with agencies that can coordinate their efforts.

**E. WHO ARE YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES,  
INCLUDING, AS APPROPRIATE, THEIR NEED FOR PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION  
SERVICES OR OTHER TRANSITION SERVICES.**

**Youth and Students with Disabilities**

OVR/OVRB conducted a comprehensive needs assessment of students and youth with disabilities, ages 14-24, to determine the rehabilitation needs, including the need for pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS), of this population. A total of 132 individuals in this age group responded with the greatest number residing in Hinds, Madison, Jackson, Lauderdale and Bolivar counties.

**Transition Responses - Disability Selected - 132 Respondents**

Intellectual Impairments 39%  
Mental Health Impairments 15%  
Deafness 12%  
Neurological Impairments 11%  
Other Physical Impairments 9%  
Hearing Loss 8%  
Communication Impairments 6%  
Mobility Impairments 6%  
Visual Impairments 5%  
Deaf/Blind 4%  
Respiratory Impairments 2%  
Blindness 2%  
Legal Blindness 2%  
Orthopedic Impairments 2%

**Age Range**

- 13.64% - age 22-24
- 42.42% - age 19-21
- 43.94% - age 16-18
- There were no responses from individuals 14-15 years old.

**Gender**

- 56% - male
- 44% - female

**Race/Ethnicity**

- 2.27% - American Indian or Native Alaskan
- .76% - Asian
- 76.52% - Black or African American
- 18.94% - White
- 3.03% - Multiple races
- 1.52% - Other

**Education Level**

60.61% of respondents were in the 11<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> grade.

**Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)**

In July 2014, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was signed into law. WIOA requires a vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency to reserve at least fifteen percent (15%) of their federal funds to make available, in coordination with local education agencies, the provision of pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) to students with disabilities statewide who are eligible or potentially eligible in accordance with Section 361.48 of the federal regulations and 113 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended.

Pre-ETS are specific services that are only available to students with disabilities to ensure they have meaningful opportunities to receive training and other services necessary to achieve employment outcomes in competitive integrated employment. These services are designed to help students with disabilities begin to identify career interests that can be explored further through additional OVR/OVRB transition services.

Pre-ETS services are made available by the counselor to all eligible and potentially eligible students with disabilities.

This survey assessed the need for the provision of Pre-ETS for students with disabilities in the state of Mississippi. Results are as follows:

PRE-ETS Services	Received Pre-ETS	Never Received Pre-ETS	Interested in Receiving Pre-ETS	Not Interested in Receiving Pre-ETS
Job Exploration Counseling	53.79%	46.21%	70.45%	29.55%
Work-Based Learning Experiences	54.55%	46.97%	70.45%	29.55%
Workplace Readiness Training	48.48%	51.52%	62.88%	37.12%
Instruction in Self-Advocacy	60.61%	39.39%	65.15%	34.85%

PRE-ETS Services	Received Pre-ETS	Never Received Pre-ETS	Interested in Receiving Pre-ETS	Not Interested in Receiving Pre-ETS
Counseling on Post-Secondary Educational Opportunities	53.79%	46.97%	68.64%	31.36%

### Employment Plans for Students

In order to determine the services that students in the State of Mississippi will need upon graduation from secondary and/or post-secondary education programs, their post-graduation plans were assessed. 33.33% of students indicated they would be employed full time upon graduation. 34.09% did not know their future employment plans. Less than 8% reported that this question was not applicable to them.

Survey results show that 100 respondents were not enrolled in school or college at the time of the survey. They reported:

- 34% planned to search for a job immediately;
- 29% did not know their plans at the time of the survey;
- 18% planned to re-enroll in a high school diploma or a GED program;
- 17% planned to enroll in a vocational or technical training program;
- 9% planned to enroll in academic college training;
- 7% planned to travel or move out of state; and
- 3% planned to stay at home.

In order to determine why an individual was not working, we asked the respondents to identify the reasons they were not working. The top five reasons are listed below:

- 46.21% - Question not applicable them;
- 21.97% - Lack of work experience;
- 18.94% - Lack of transportation;
- 17.42% - Lack of jobs in the community (tied with)
- 17.42% - Other reasons.

It is important that individuals receive services to meet their individualized needs to ensure they have the greatest opportunity to achieve competitive integrated employment. Respondents indicated the following are the most needed services in helping them achieve employment:

- 45.45% - Job Search/Placement Services
- 40.91% - Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling and Guidance

- 33.33% - Transportation
- 26.52% - Job Coaching
- 22.73% - No Other Services Required

## 2. IDENTIFY THE NEED TO ESTABLISH, DEVELOP, OR IMPROVE COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE; AND

In 2017, VR recognized the need establish and develop more relationships with providers/community rehabilitation programs to assist in providing pre-employment transition services. In 2017 and early 2018, Request for Proposals were advertised. In 2018, the agency is hoping to have developed more community rehabilitation programs to provide such services.

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services through the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, operate 15 transitional rehabilitation community facilities referred to as AbilityWorks. In 2017, AbilityWorks restructured its services to be able to provide pre-employment transition services such as work based learning opportunities and career/vocational exploration services.

MDRS also contracts with one-nonprofit entity - Goodwill Industries.

These facilities provide a variety of services including vocational evaluation, work adjustment training, and community based work experiences, counseling and transportation. All services are individualized to meet the needs of the individual served to prepare him/her for competitive integrated employment

## 3. 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 THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT .

The 340 respondents consisted of potentially eligible students with a disability, VR eligible transition secondary and post-secondary students, transition out of school youth, and parents of transition students from all four regions of the state.

To effectively meet the needs of students, MDRS collaborates with education and workforce programs to assist students with disabilities in making the transition from school to post-secondary education and/or to competitive integrated employment. MDRS, through its Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (OVRB), maintains a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE).

In addition to the MOU with MDE, the Agency maintains individualized agreements between the local school districts and vocational rehabilitation offices. These agreements define referral procedures and the roles of the school and OVR/OVRB staff in the provision of transition services that are specific and tailored to the unique situation of each school and OVR/OVRB district. Each counselor is responsible for developing and maintaining an agreement between the Agency and local school district. A copy of the form to be used for

this agreement may be obtained from the State Coordinator for Transition Services. The form includes instructions and has been designed to assist in the development of the agreements locally.

A counselor is assigned to work with a specific school district to provide transition services in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act, as amended and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as amended.

VR assures that the individualized plan for employment (IPE) is also coordinated with the employment goal in the school's individualized educational plan (IEP) and, where appropriate, the (ISP) individualized service plans of the long term care providers.

The VR Counselor servicing local school districts as well as the VR Supported Employment Counselors work together with schools district to ensure that students with disabilities that previously entered subminimum wage employment are provided information and services to assist in diverting these individuals into competitive integrated employment.

VR facilitates the opening of cases for beginning at age 14 if required. Pre-ETS services are provided to students with disabilities as early as age 14. If these individuals require VR Transition services as early as age 14, VR facilitates this need by opening a VR case. This service provision will help strengthen VRs efforts to reach more students and strengthens the opportunity for successful employment outcomes.

In accordance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, the inclusion of transition services is not intended to shift the responsibility from school districts to vocational rehabilitation (VR), but enforces the need for coordinated efforts between education and workforce programs such as VR.

MDRS, through its OVR/OVRB, is the state agency that delivers transition services to secondary school students with disabilities. These counselors work with students, families, and educators during the transition process to inform them of available VR services, including pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS), and identify students who might benefit from or need VR services and career services designed to assist in obtaining a post school employment outcome.

While local school districts are responsible for providing education and transition services to students with disabilities who are still in the secondary school system, under WIOA, VR is the state unit that is mandated to make available Pre-ETS begin at age fourteen (14) for all eligible and potentially eligible students with disabilities with parental consent.

District Managers and counselors are responsible for developing cooperative working relationships with the local education agency staff in the districts, and other agencies working with youth. Letters were sent by the State Transition Program Coordinator to all the Special Education Directors and 504 Coordinators for each school district to discuss VR services for students with IEPs and 504 plans. The counselor is to follow-up with their Special Education Directors and 504 Coordinators at least annually to discuss the provision of outreach services for students with disabilities and to determine the need for potential referrals.

Counselors are assigned to all public secondary schools. The counselor and the District Manager establish linkages within each school with the following individuals:

1. Special Education Coordinator;
2. 504 Coordinator;
3. Transition Coordinator
4. Principal
5. Guidance Counselors for grades 8<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup>;
6. School health personnel; and
7. Other school-based staff determined appropriate by the counselor and the District Manager.

The counselor works with the school district's Transition Coordinator, Transition Assistants when applicable, and Special Education Teachers to implement Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) for eligible and potentially eligible students with disabilities. The required activities of Pre-ETS will mostly take place at the local school during a prearranged time that the counselor and school personnel have agreed to.

The counselor will be prepared to teach the Pre-ETS curriculum and will do so as agreed upon with school personnel. In addition to being prepared to teach the curriculum, the counselor will provide the classroom teacher with technical assistance and/or curriculum materials as needed. The counselor should be working in his/her assigned schools two to three days per week while rotating schools to ensure services are made available to both eligible and potentially eligible students in each school serviced.

The counselor documents the student's progress in Pre-ETS activity for eligible students in the participant's ACE Case note page and for potentially eligible (PE) students in the ACE PE Case Type page, and provide an update to the classroom teacher with a report of the student's participation and progress in Pre-ETS on a regular basis.

MDRS and the local school district may enter into a Cooperative Agreement to jointly fund a Transition Assistant position to ensure a smoother transition of services between the school and OVR/OVRB. The Transition Assistant will provide services to selected secondary students with disabilities who are: (a) between the ages of fourteen (14) and twenty-one (21), (b) in transition from school to work and community, and (c) eligible for vocational rehabilitation services. The addition of school-based transition services are intended to add a component to the overall school and rehabilitation service continuum, not supplant existing employment-related or other services which are potentially appropriate for a particular student (any service the school is already responsible for providing). The Transition Assistant will not serve students who, with or without modifications, can benefit from existing school programs (career/technical and educational training programs etc.).

Once the student leaves the school system, it becomes the full responsibility of the agency counselor to continue to provide services necessary to further prepare the individual for a successful post-school outcome by enrolling in a post-secondary education program or obtaining competitive integrated employment.

**K. ANNUAL ESTIMATES**

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Describe:

**1. THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS IN THE STATE WHO ARE ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES;**

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services has provided below estimates and projections for FFY 2018 (October 1, 2017 through September 30, 2018).

The Mississippi Disability Data Table from the 2016 American Community Survey (ACS) indicates that 258,824 Mississippians of working age (18-64) have a disability. Of this total, 76,078 or 29.39% are employed. Based on this data and number served from previous years it is estimated that 6% of 182,746 Mississippians of working age who are not working and have a disability could potentially be eligible for VR services if they applied.

Based on the trend analysis using actual numbers from FY 2012 to FY 2016, the number of individuals determined eligible to receive VR services decreased.

Prior to implementation of WIOA, caseloads were restructured in order to have more counselors that worked with students and youth. During this period of restructuring, current caseload sizes were reviewed to determine the need to assist counselors with existing cases that were not progressing through the rehabilitation process and to determine cases that were not longer interested in pursuing competitive integrated employment. As a result, cases were closed without obtaining an employment outcome. In the overall numbers served, the closing of these existing cases created a substantial decrease in the overall numbers served.

However, looking at numbers served from FY 2017 and the current number of referrals plus the increased number of referrals for students and youth with disabilities we estimate a 3% increase in the number determined eligible for FY 2017, FY 2018 and FY 2019.

Despite this decrease, MDRS estimates that 12,395 individuals will be served under the Title I part B and Title VI for the period beginning October 1, 2017 to September 30, 2018.

Based on the current number served, the current number of referrals and the anticipated number of individuals with disabilities who are adults, students and youth that will pursue VR services, we anticipate at least a 3% increase in the overall numbers served for 2018 and 2019.

TABLE 2.A.2

Fiscal Year (FY)	Number VR Served	% of Change from Previous Year
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Fiscal Year (FY)	Number VR Served	% of Change from Previous Year
<b>FY 2017</b>	12,034	3% Increase
<b>FY 2018</b>	12,395	3% Increase
<b>FY 2019</b>	12,767	3% Increase

**Annual Estimates for the VR Supported Employment Program**

MDRS estimates that 431 individuals will be served with Title VI - Supported Employment funds for the period from July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018. This estimate is based on a trend analysis using previous year numbers, FY 2012 to FY 2016 of Supported Employment consumers served. As with VR Title 1 B above, we anticipate the current numbers served for Title VI Supported Employment FY 2017, the current number of referrals and anticipated number of referrals to be served by Supported Employment Counselors will increase for FY 2018 and 2019.

Fiscal Year (FY)	Number Served SE Served	% of Change from Previous Year
<b>FY 2017</b>	431	10% Increase
<b>FY 2018</b>	521	10% Increase
<b>FY 2019</b>	573	10% Increase

**2. THE NUMBER OF ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS WHO WILL RECEIVE SERVICES UNDER:**

**A. THE VR PROGRAM;**

Please see the section above.

**B. THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM; AND**

See section above.

**C. EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY, IF UNDER AN ORDER OF SELECTION;**

MDRS estimates that 12,395 (10,870 in Title I Part B and 1,525 in Title VI) individuals with disabilities will be eligible to receive services in the following categories

The estimated number for service and outcome goals by OOS priority categories for July 1, 2017 ending June 30, 2018, is listed below:

Priority Category	Number of Individuals Served	Time within Goals are to be achieved	Cost of Services
1	3966	10/01/2017 to 09/30/2018	\$13,818,019.90
2	4958	10/01/2017 to 09/30/2018	\$16,599,830.22
3	3471	10/01/2017 to 09/30/2018	\$10,347,814.62
.	Total 12,395	.	\$40,765,664.76

**3. THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE ELIGIBLE FOR VR SERVICES, BUT ARE NOT RECEIVING SUCH SERVICES DUE TO AN ORDER OF SELECTION; AND**

See table above

The total projected available resources including the federal allotment, non-federal contributions, carryover, and program income for 2017 is \$70,735,555. Based on this projection and the estimates provided above, MDRS will be able to provide the full range of VR services to all eligible individuals in the state. Therefore, if MDRS determines that resources and funds are not available MDRS may implement an Order of Selection (OOS) in 2017 with Priority Category 3 being the first category to close if necessary.

**4. 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.**

See table above

**L. STATE GOALS AND PRIORITIES**

The designated State unit must:

**1. IDENTIFY IF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES WERE JOINTLY DEVELOPED**

Identify if the goals and priorities were jointly developed and agreed to by the State VR agency and the State Rehabilitation Council, if the State has a Council, and jointly agreed to any revisions.

Through outreach, education and marketing efforts targeted to individuals with disabilities, VR/VRB will continue to broaden the population of individuals with disabilities being served. VR/VRB will continue to target individuals with disabilities who are already working to retain or progress in employment, previous VR/VRB consumers who may have lost employment to become reemployed, college students nearing completion of their academic programs, and:

- o High school transition age youth with disabilities
- o Individual with blindness and visual impairments

- Individuals with deafness and hearing impairments
- Youth and Adults with Most Significant Disabilities

**GOALS**

Goal 1: Improve the employment, economic stability, and self-sufficiency of eligible individuals with disabilities

Goal 2: Improve the VR Service Delivery System to individuals with disabilities

Goal 3: Implement a statewide model for more effectively serving high school youth and students with disabilities including individuals with visual and/or hearing impairments

Goal 4: Implement identified improvements to increase statewide consistency and quality of consumer services

**2. IDENTIFY THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES IN CARRYING OUT THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS.**

The goals and priorities are listed separately for the Supported Employment Program. See Section (n) Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI funds.

**3. ENSURE THAT THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES ARE BASED ON AN ANALYSIS OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS:**

Please see the section above.

**A. THE MOST RECENT COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT, INCLUDING ANY UPDATES;**

The goals and priorities listed above were developed after an analysis of the comprehensive statewide needs assessment that the agency conducted in FFY 2015 and 2018.

The six primary performance indicators for the core programs were analyzed and incorporated into developing the goals and priorities.

The listed goals and priorities have been discussed with and are a result of conversations with the SRC, and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under Section 107, as applicable.

**B. THE STATE'S PERFORMANCE UNDER THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES OF SECTION 116 OF WIOA; AND**

MDRS is still collecting baseline data for the performance measures under section 116 of WIOA. We have submitted RSA 911 for two quarters of the program year.

**C. OTHER AVAILABLE INFORMATION ON THE OPERATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE VR PROGRAM, INCLUDING ANY REPORTS RECEIVED FROM THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL AND FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM MONITORING ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED UNDER SECTION 107.**

No additional recommendations or reports were received from the SRC.

**M. ORDER OF SELECTION**

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Describe:

1. WHETHER THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WILL IMPLEMENT AND ORDER OF SELECTION. IF SO, DESCRIBE:

A. THE ORDER TO BE FOLLOWED IN SELECTING ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS TO BE PROVIDED VR SERVICES.

While it is the intent of the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) to provide comprehensive vocational rehabilitation (VR) services to all eligible individuals who apply for services, often VR services cannot be provided to all eligible applications due to financial limitations. Federal Regulations require the establishment of an Order of Selection (OOS), if VR services cannot be provided to all eligible individuals who apply for VR services.

MDRS/OVR and OVRB has adopted an OOS which establishes a system of criteria for prioritizing individuals with disabilities to receive services. The OOS allows for individual with most significant disabilities to receive services before all other individuals with disabilities. Second priority shall be given to consumers with significant disabilities. Third priority will be given to other eligible consumers. The Order of Selection was implemented in May 2001. Since July 13, 2009, all priority categories have been open.

In 2015, VR updated its Order of Selection which was approved by the State Rehabilitation Council.

Priority Category 1: An individual has a Most Significant Disability if a mental or physical impairment exists that seriously limits three or more functional capacity areas in terms of an employment outcome and whose vocational rehabilitation will require multiple VR services over an extended period of time.

Priority Category 2: An individual has a Significant Disability if a mental or physical impairment exists that seriously limits two functional capacity areas in terms of an employment outcome and whose vocational rehabilitation will require multiple VR services over an extended period of time.

Priority Category 3: An individual has a Non-Significant Disability if a mental or physical impairment exists that seriously limits one functional capacity area in terms of an employment outcome and whose vocational rehabilitation will not require multiple VR services over an extended period of time.

The OOS does not discriminate against any eligible individual on the basis of gender, age, race, creed, color, religion, national origin, citizenship, type of disability, duration of residence in Mississippi, public assistance status, source of referral, expected employment outcome, need for specific services, anticipate cost of services required, or income level of an individual or his/her family.

MDRS in consultation with the SRC will close the Priority Categories designated to be closed. Any individual currently under an approved IPE at the time his/her priority category is closed will continue to receive with his/her IPE, including the provision of Pre-employment transition services and Post-Employment Services.

Individuals placed in delayed status will be notified of their priority category, process for reclassification, their right to appeal, and the availability of CAP.

If an OOS is implemented, MDRS will provide the following information:

- Show the order to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services
- Provide justification for the order
- Identify the services and outcome goals
- Identify the time within which these goals may be achieved for individuals in each priority category within the order

When an OOS is in effect, individuals meeting eligibility requirements but are in a closed priority category have access to information and referral services. VR will provide all eligible individuals with disabilities who do not meet the OOS criteria with information about, and referral to, other Federal or State programs (including to Workforce Investment Network Job Centers for training and placement) that can assist them with obtaining or retaining employment.

MDRS will elect to provide services, regardless of any established order of selection, to eligible individuals who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment.

### **Detailed Priority Category Descriptions**

#### **Priority 1. Most Significant**

Individual With a Most Significant Disability: An individual —

- who has a severe physical or mental impairment that seriously limits three (3) or more functional capacities in the areas of mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills in terms of an employment outcome;
- whose vocational rehabilitation can be expected to require multiple vocational rehabilitation services over an extended period of time; and
- who has one or more physical or mental disabilities (as listed under an Individual with a Significant Disability) or combination of disabilities determined on the basis of an assessment for determining eligibility and vocational rehabilitation needs to cause comparable substantial functional limitation.

#### **Priority 2. Significant Disability**

Individual With A Significant Disability: An individual

- who has a severe physical or mental impairment that seriously limits one or two functional capacities in the areas of mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills in terms of an employment outcome;
- whose vocational rehabilitation can be expected to require multiple vocational rehabilitation services over an extended period of time; and

- who has one or more physical or mental disabilities resulting from amputation, arthritis, autism, blindness, burn injury, cancer, cerebral palsy, cystic fibrosis, deafness, head injury, heart disease, hemiplegia, hemophilia, respiratory or pulmonary dysfunction, intellectual disability, mental illness, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, musculo-skeletal disorders, neurological disorders (including stroke and epilepsy), spinal cord conditions (including paraplegia and quadriplegia), sickle cell anemia, specific learning disability, end-stage disease or other disability or combination of disabilities determined on the basis of an assessment for determining eligibility and vocational rehabilitation needs to cause comparable substantial functional limitation.

### **Priority 3. Non-Significant Disability**

Individual with a Disability: An individual

- who has a physical or mental impairment that seriously limits one (1) functional capacity in the area of mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills in terms of an employment outcome;
- whose vocational rehabilitation is *not* expected to require multiple vocational rehabilitation services over an extended period of time; and
- who has one or more physical disabilities or combination of disabilities determined on the basis of an assessment for determining eligibility and vocational rehabilitation needs to cause comparable substantial functional limitation.
- Individuals having an active plan prior to the implementation of the Order of Selection will continue to receive services uninterrupted.

## **B. THE JUSTIFICATION FOR THE ORDER.**

### **Staff and Resources:**

MDRS has determined that sufficient resources are currently available to provide VR services to all individuals with disabilities that apply, those determined eligible in all priority categories and those under and IPE. Due to the increase in service needs and the staff resources in 2017 and 2018 to provide the services, if the projected resources for funds and personnel change before the next state plan modification, MDRS will make a determination whether it may need to close one or more of its priority categories.

During FF2018, MDRS will be able to serve all eligible individuals in all three priority categories. The total projected available resources including the federal allotment, non-federal contributions, carryover, and program income for FY 2018 is \$67,705,332. MDRS will conduct reviews periodically during the year to help validate the order and assess the impact of unforeseen circumstances.

When it is determined that MDRS does not have the resources to serve all eligible individuals in all priority categories, MDRS administration will make the decision to begin closing priority categories, first beginning with Priority Category 3, Non-Significant disability.

The estimated number for service and outcome goals by OOS priority categories for July 1, 2017 ending June 30, 2018, is listed below:

Priority Category	Number of Individuals Served	Time within Goals are to be achieved	Cost of Services
1	3966	10/01/2017 to 09/30/2018	\$13,818,019.90
2	4958	10/01/2017 to 09/30/2018	\$16,599,830.22
3	3471	10/01/2017 to 09/30/2018	\$10,347,814.62
.	Total 12,395	.	\$40,765,664.76

The total projected available resources including the federal allotment, non-federal contributions, carryover, and program income for FY 2018 is \$67,705,332. Based on the projection above and the estimated funds for FY 2017 served above, MDRS will be able to provide the full range of VR services to all eligible individuals in the state. Therefore, MDRS is anticipating we will NOT have to implement an Order of Selection (OOS) in FY 2018.

#### C. THE SERVICE AND OUTCOME GOALS.

See above

#### D. THE TIME WITHIN WHICH THESE GOALS MAY BE ACHIEVED FOR INDIVIDUALS IN EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY WITHIN THE ORDER.

All priority categories are currently open and there is no wait time for receipt of services for any category. The average length of time to receive services for each priority category is as follows: Priority Category 1: Most Significant Disability: 18 months; Priority Category 2: Significant Disability: 14 months and Priority Category 3: 8 months.

#### E. HOW INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES ARE SELECTED FOR SERVICES BEFORE ALL OTHER INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES; AND

When an OOS is in effect, MDRS continues to accept applications and make determinations of eligibility while notifying all eligible individuals of the priority category they are assigned.

When an individual is assigned to a category that is closed, the individual will be placed in delayed status to be served in the chronological order in which he or she applied.

Individuals having an active individualized plan for employment prior to the implementation of the OOS will continue to receive services uninterrupted.

#### 2. IF THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT HAS ELECTED TO SERVE ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS, REGARDLESS OF ANY ESTABLISHED ORDER OF SELECTION, WHO REQUIRE SPECIFIC SERVICES OR EQUIPMENT TO MAINTAIN EMPLOYMENT.

MDRS will elect to provide services, regardless of any established order of selection, to eligible individuals who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment.

## N. GOALS AND PLANS FOR DISTRIBUTION OF TITLE VI FUNDS.

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### 1. SPECIFY THE STATE'S GOALS AND PRIORITIES FOR FUNDS RECEIVED UNDER SECTION 603 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES.

In order to meet the expectations and intent of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended by WIOA and to achieve maximum utilization of available funds, certain priority areas are being emphasized by MDRS in the Supported Employment Program.

SE staff members continue to make every effort to identify and facilitate natural supports that occur in the workplace in order to maximize utilization of funds. These natural supports do not replace the one-on-one intensive support provided to clients by the SE Counselors. However, when properly identified and utilized, these natural supports do result in decreased direct service costs and increased quality of support.

**(2)**The SE Program will continue to emphasize individual employment placements. Other models will remain an option for clients and may be utilized when feasible. However, when given a choice, clients prefer individual placements by an overwhelming majority. Individual placement is the preferred option of MDRS as well as the clients because it achieves integration in the work environment, it is competitive integrated employment, and it provides more opportunities for career pathways and better quality jobs with more benefits.

Person Centered Planning and Customized Employment as integral parts of service provision continue to be high priorities. These service approaches have been embraced by mental health providers, the DD Council, and other service providers in the state as accepted best practices for model service delivery.

#### **Goals and priorities:**

**Goal I:** Continue the referral process between MDRS and DMH to identify "youth with the most significant disabilities" who will require SE services. Increase the number of youth with most significant disabilities served by 10%.

**Goal II:** Continue the referral process between the VR Transition/Youth Counselor and the VR Supported Employment (SE) Counselor for students with disabilities ages 14-21 who have determined to need long term ongoing support services.

This process will assist in an overall increase in the number of students and youth that are provided SE Services.

**Goal III:** Provide training to all SE staff by a highly experienced professional in the area of customized employment.

**Goal IV:** Continued development of the Job Trainer Handbook by the SE Coordinator and focus group to train all Job Coaches. This handbook will be utilized across the state.

**Goal V:** Train all OVR Counselors including those who work with General VR consumers in Supported Employment.

2. DESCRIBE THE ACTIVITIES TO BE CONDUCTED, WITH FUNDS RESERVED PURSUANT TO SECTION 603(D), FOR YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING:

A. THE PROVISION OF EXTENDED SERVICES FOR A PERIOD NOT TO EXCEED 4 YEARS; AND

VR also works with extended services providers, when feasible, as a means to provide additional resources and services to individuals needing and choosing these specialized services as an interim step to the rehabilitation process of achieving a successful employment outcome. SE Counselors will continue to primarily focus on successful employment outcomes in competitive integrated work settings.

B. HOW THE STATE WILL LEVERAGE OTHER PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FUNDS TO INCREASE RESOURCES FOR EXTENDED SERVICES AND EXPANDED SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES.

Cooperative arrangements will continue to be developed with other provider agencies and organizations, both public and private, to expand the SE Program to unserved and underserved populations. The focus of these arrangements is on promoting and enabling SE Counselors and service provider personnel from other agencies to work as teams to share expertise, provide technical support in specific disability areas, and conduct joint training.

With the interagency agreement and referral process that has been developed with the Department of Mental Health and the Division of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, we will continue to work with this agency in serving individuals who are eligible for the waiver as extended service providers.

SE staff also participate in both practices in coordinating services for SE clients in the education system throughout the state. These practices have proven to be successful for clients because of the enhanced teamwork with other agencies. Under WIOA customized employment is included in the definition of supported employment and VR is including it as a VR service that the SE client can choose to include in his/her IPE. Therefore, VR is expanding customized employment training to the majority of its direct service staff. These service approaches will continue to be made available to clients during the intake process and will be utilized when deemed appropriate and when chosen by the client.

MDRS expects to continue supplementing Title VI funds as supplemental funds are available and, if possible, continue the level of Title I monies committed to the SE Program. MDRS occasionally supplements Title VI funds with Social Security Reimbursement funds as there is a need for additional funds for program expenditures. MDRS plans to continue this process when Title I funds are not available. Additionally, MDRS will continue its efforts to increase the funds available for use by the SE program by development and submission of proposals for grants that may become available. MDRS will also explore ways to utilize available funds more efficiently by entering into cooperative agreements with other entities who may participate in the cost of providing services to SE clients. It is anticipated that SE Counselors will utilize all of the Title VI allotment. In obtaining extended service providers, Supported Employment counselors will continue to work with individuals that may be eligible for the IDD Waiver program to be the extended service provider. This will assist in providing the services necessary to assist in maintaining an individual with a significant

disability in employment. MDRS currently has a referred process in place with the Department of Mental Health for individuals who are eligible for the IDD Waiver, but seek competitive integrated employment.

Under WIOA the new law requires that 50% of the allotment received under Title VI be used for provision of SE services, including extended services, to youth with the most significant disabilities (up to age 24), with administrative costs limited to 2.5% of the allotment.

These youth may receive extended services (i.e., ongoing supports to maintain an individual in supported employment) for up to four (4) years.

MDRS will invest all Title VI allocations to fund the purchase of job training services. The Coordinator for the SE Program and the Coordinator for Transition and Youth Career Services will work together to ensure new policy is in place and the appropriate amount of funding is utilized for youth with the most significant disabilities.

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## O. STATE'S STRATEGIES

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Describe the required strategies and how the agency will use these strategies to achieve its goals and priorities, support innovation and expansion activities, and overcome any barriers to accessing the VR and the Supported Employment programs (See sections 101(a)(15)(D) and (18)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act and section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA)):

### 1. THE METHODS TO BE USED TO EXPAND AND IMPROVE SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind in consultation with the State Rehabilitation Council, consumers and other stakeholders, continually assesses the vocational rehabilitation needs of Mississippians with disabilities and the success of VR in meeting these needs.

The strategic plan is a major component in the on-going program evaluation and planning in the implementation of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by Title IVR of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

The VR/VRB partnership within Mississippi's one-stop system is clarified through Memoranda of Understanding with the State and each of the four local workforce development areas. The partnership is further enhanced through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES), the lead state workforce agency designated to disburse federal workforce funds and the main operator of the WIN Job Centers, to continually improve the lifestyle, acceptance and accessibility of persons with disabilities within Mississippi's WIN. These MOUs include language to provide for intercomponent staff training and technical assistance on availability of benefits and information on eligibility standards for VR services, and promotion of equal, effective and meaningful participation by individuals with disabilities in workforce development activities in the state through the promotion of program accessibility (including programmatic accessibility and physical accessibility), the use of nondiscriminatory policies and procedures, provision of reasonable accommodations, auxiliary aids and services, and rehabilitation technology.

MDRS has considered the results of the comprehensive statewide needs assessment (as stated in (j) Statewide Assessment) in developing strategies to achieve the goals and priorities stated in this plan.

Through the MDRS Assistive Technology (AT) Program, nine Rehabilitation Technologists and two Rehabilitation Engineers are strategically located throughout the state to provide consultation on all AT referrals as well as perform initial evaluations and assessments; procure and set up AT equipment; provide follow-up evaluations; design and fabricate original items; and, provide specifications and final inspections for AT services. VR Counselors evaluate the need for AT services throughout the rehabilitation process.

MDRS has a Cultural Diversity Taskforce that develops strategies to reach minority populations, especially the African American and Hispanic population, including those with the most significant disabilities. In each District, under the direction of the District Manager, monthly outreach activities are coordinated throughout the district to help ensure that information regarding Vocational Rehabilitation is disseminated. The taskforce members make recommendations for service delivery and outreach to minority groups. The taskforce creates plans for facilitated activities in the area of cultural diversity specific to each geographical area. The outreach activities that staff participate in assist in obtaining referrals and providing services to minority populations and those that are underserved and unserved. MDRS also has increased its communication and marketing to provide outreach to various areas in this state. This communication and public awareness will serve to assist in increasing referrals and providing VR services.

MDRS will continue to work with Workforce Partners to improve the services that are provided to individuals with disabilities. A common intake system has been created to assist in serving individuals with disabilities as well as on-going training with workforce staff and partners.

Each VR Regional Manager is represented on the local workforce boards and participate in quarterly meetings.

Based on information obtained from staff at Mississippi Department of Employment Security and data obtained from the National Strategic Planning & Analysis Research Center(NSPARC), in 2016 approximately 4,527 individuals who received services. These are individuals who have answered “yes” to the disability question on their profile in MSWorks.

MDRS is still collecting baseline data for the performance measures under section 116 of WIOA. We have submitted RSA 911 for two quarters of the fiscal year.

Methods to expand and improve services:

1. Designate staff in each MDRS district to be responsible for conducting outreach and orientation sessions on a regular basis
2. Utilize our relationships with workforce partners at the state and local levels in order to have more options and resources available for job placement and training.
3. Share specific agency expertise to facilitate interagency knowledge to improve services to all participants with disabilities served by any agency within the workforce system.

4. Annually evaluate physical location of VR staff to assure that all geographic areas of the state are covered with appropriate service delivery staff.
5. Administer a consumer satisfaction survey while the consumer's case is open with VR
6. Administer a consumer satisfaction survey with the consumer regarding services received from vendors/providers of VR services
7. Use case review results to identify and implement improvements and quality consistency of service
8. Increase collaboration within the state's workforce system to improve services to unemployed workers with disabilities who are eligible for VR services by better leveraging services with other workforce development programs

REFERENCE; VI-VR 0.8.A FOR GOALS AND PRIORITIES.

## 2. HOW A BROAD RANGE OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SERVICES AND DEVICES WILL BE PROVIDED TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES AT EACH STAGE OF THE REHABILITATION PROCESS AND ON A STATEWIDE BASIS.

Through the MDRS Assistive Technology (AT) Program, nine Rehabilitation Technologists and two Rehabilitation Engineers are strategically located throughout the state to provide consultation on all AT referrals as well as perform initial evaluations and assessments; procure and set up AT equipment; provide follow-up evaluations; design and fabricate original items; and, provide specifications and final inspections for AT services. VR Counselors evaluate the need for AT services throughout the rehabilitation process.

## 3. THE OUTREACH PROCEDURES THAT WILL BE USED TO IDENTIFY AND SERVE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO ARE MINORITIES, INCLUDING THOSE WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, AS WELL AS THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR PROGRAM.

Based on this data in Section J1c, the following minority groups are underserved: American Indian and Alaska Native; Asian; Hispanic or Latino.

Based on the Comprehensive Needs Assessment and other data received from VR Case Management System, individuals with Mental Illness, Cognitive Disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorders are the primary emerging population that are reported as underserved and who staff has requested the most assistance in understanding the disability in terms of employment. VR will seek to provide more training and resources to assist staff in serving this population.

To assist in reaching the underserved populations identified;

- Brochures will be updated and developed in order to utilize for outreach activities that will assist in a better understanding of VR services.
- District Outreach teams to provide outreach activities in their local communities in efforts to obtain referrals for individuals from diverse populations.
- Printed media such as brochures and other information in Spanish.

MDRS will continue to monitor the ACS survey for the most recent regarding the race and ethnicity per county so we will know where the information should be disseminated.

MDRS will also continue to provide outreach to other minority populations to ensure they have information regarding the VR program.

#### 4. THE METHODS TO BE USED TO 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).

- Engage with key partners such as MDE, the SRC, local school districts, community colleges, and other training and education programs in designing an improved service delivery model that will develop stronger partnerships to place increased emphasis on serving transition high school students with disabilities
- Community outreach and orientation will establish relationships with parent training and information groups, advocacy groups, and other service providers to encourage referral and parental participation in the development and provision of transition services
- Increase collaboration with Community Colleges to improve coordination of VR services with community college programs and Adult Basic Education programs to facilitate transition from secondary to post-secondary activities
- Develop and implement on-campus work experience training in order to provide work experience to students who cannot get into a vocational training program or opportunities for vocational training are not readily available in a community based setting
- Summer Internship Program for high school students with blindness and visual impairments, and deafness and hard of hearing
- Engage with key partners such as MDE, SRC, high schools, community colleges, and other training and education programs in designing an improved service delivery model that will develop stronger partnerships to place increased emphasis on serving transition high school students who are in special education
- Engage with key partners such as MDE, SRC, high schools, community colleges, and other training and education programs in designing an improved service delivery model that will develop stronger partnerships to place increased emphasis on serving transition high school students who are not in special education
- Plan and coordinate with the MDE Special Education Director to conduct at least annual training and semi-annual work groups for the purpose of cross-training in understanding the services offered by VR
- When developing the Youth Transition Handbook the design should be complementary to the MDE Special Education Transition Handbook

#### 5. IF APPLICABLE, PLANS FOR ESTABLISHING, DEVELOPING, OR IMPROVING COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE.

Plans for improving community rehabilitation programs (private and agency-supported) include training staff to provide Pre-ETS, customized employment services, and on-the-job tryout services which facilitate the agency's ability to achieve the changes in WIOA.

#### 6. STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF THE STATE WITH RESPECT TO THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA.

MDRS is collaborating with workforce partners through the State Workforce Development Board to integrate our agency's computer system with the workforce computer system, MS Works, to facilitate common intake, data sharing, transmission of performance measures and other appropriate data.

#### 7. STRATEGIES FOR ASSISTING OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM IN ASSISTING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

The VR/VRB partnership within Mississippi's one-stop system is clarified through Memoranda of Understanding with the State and each of the four local workforce development areas. The partnership is further enhanced through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES), the lead state workforce agency designated to disburse federal workforce funds and the main operator of the WIN Job Centers, to continually improve the lifestyle, acceptance and accessibility of persons with disabilities within Mississippi's WIN. These MOUs include language to provide for intercomponent staff training and technical assistance on availability of benefits and information on eligibility standards for VR services, and promotion of equal, effective and meaningful participation by individuals with disabilities in workforce development activities in the state through the promotion of program accessibility (including programmatic accessibility and physical accessibility), the use of nondiscriminatory policies and procedures, provision of reasonable accommodations, auxiliary aids and services, and rehabilitation technology.

MDRS has considered the results of the comprehensive statewide needs assessment (as stated in (j) Statewide Assessment) in developing strategies to achieve the goals and priorities stated in this plan.

Our relationships with our workforce partners will enhance our ability to achieve the following innovation and expansion activities through closer working relationships and introductions to employers:

- VR/VRB Summer Internship Program with specific focus on students who are blind and students who are deaf
- MDRS EmployAbility Job Fair in partnership with the Governor's Job Fair network that highlights the On-the-Job training initiatives for employers that hire a person with a disability
- Outreach and Orientation sessions to target unserved and underserved individuals with disabilities in rural communities Continue to work with WIOA partners to identify barriers relating to equitable access and to ensure participation of individual with disabilities

- Provide ongoing training to job center staff on disability sensitivity issues
- Co-locate staff in WIN Job Centers where appropriate
- Continue to expand partnerships and encourage coordination of services
- Increase partnerships with the statewide workforce investment system to develop innovative programs to serve common customers.
- Ongoing training of job center staff on disability sensitivity issues.
- Cooperation with job center network is valuable to consumers who can work on certain aspects of their job search independently. •
- Job readiness classes that focus on how to communicate skills and address their disability to the employer.
- Improve comprehensive assessment before referring to general programs for employment search.
- Development of new ways to provide for job creation or to incentivize employers
- Work cooperatively to remove stigmas in the workplace.
- Use of Customized Employment when appropriate.

## 8. HOW THE AGENCY'S STRATEGIES WILL BE USED TO:

### A. ACHIEVE GOALS AND PRIORITIES BY THE STATE, CONSISTENT WITH THE COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT;

Strategies to Achieve Goals — Title 1 The following strategies will be required to achieve the goals and priorities as listed in (l) State Goals and Priorities and (n) Goals and Plans for Distribution of title I Funds:

#### **Strategies**

**Goal I: Improve the employment, economic stability, and self-sufficiency of eligible individuals with disabilities.**

#### **Strategies (Plan of Action)**

- Develop a job placement culture by providing on-going training in the job development and placement process.
- Business Relations Specialist into the job placement culture in each district.
- Re-design and improve Business Relations Services that will target services to businesses.
- Designate a VR Program Coordinator who is responsible for the development of Business Relations Services program.
- BRS Program Coordinator will provide assistance in supervising, coordinating and/or provide training for Business Relations Specialist.

- Business Relations Specialist will providing information to VR staff the areas as follows:
  - a. the services BRS provide to employers,
  - b. training and information regarding work incentives,
  - c. job analysis and job matching,
  - d. career opportunities in the local area; and
- Develop and implement on campus work experience training in order to provide students who cannot get into or opportunities for vocational training are not readily available in a community based setting.
- Refer those consumers receiving SSI/SSDI cash benefits who are interested in earnings that will eliminate their reliance on SSA cash benefits for work incentives benefits analysis and counseling.
- Coordinate and conduct the Annual Governor’s Job Fair for individuals with disabilities.
- Summer Internship Program for high school students with blindness and visual impairments; and deafness and hard of hearing.

**GOAL II: Improve the VR Service Delivery System to Individuals with disabilities**

**Strategies (Plan of Action):**

1. Designate staff in each MDRS districts to be responsible for conducting outreach and orientation sessions on a regular basis.
2. Provide input to assure appropriate inclusion of vocational rehabilitation activities in, public service announcements, and agency website and publications.
3. Update and distribute vocational rehabilitation brochures to appropriate referral sources.
4. Designate and train specific staff members in each district to handle referrals and provide information to the public.
5. Assure that all geographic areas of the state are covered with appropriate service delivery staff.
6. Develop and implement a consumer satisfaction survey to be completed while the consumer’s case is open with VR.
7. Develop and consumer satisfaction survey to be completed by the consumer regarding services received from vendors/providers of VR services.

**Goal III: Implement a statewide model for more effectively serving high school youth and students with disabilities including individuals with visual and/or hearing impairments.**

**Strategic Objective(s):**

1. Improve economic and career success of youth and students with disabilities

**Strategies (Plan of Action):**

2. Engage with key partners such as the Department of Education, State Rehabilitation Council, high school, community colleges and other training and education program in designing an improved service delivery model that will develop stronger partnerships to place increased emphasis on serving transition high school students who **are** in special education.
3. Engage with key partners such as the Department of Education, State Rehabilitation Council, high school, community colleges and other training and education program in designing an improved service delivery model that will develop stronger partnerships to place increased emphasis on serving transition high school students who **are not** in special education.
4. Co-develop a formal interagency cooperative agreement with officials from the Department of Educations, local school districts and local high schools.
5. Plan and coordinate with the Mississippi Department of Education Special Education Director and Director of to plan and conduct at least annually training and semi-annual work groups for the purpose of cross-training in understanding the services offered by Vocational Rehabilitation.
6. Develop and implement the use of an OVR Transition Manual designed to assist staff in the delivery of transition services. This manual will be used as a technical assistance tool for transition planning purposes.
7. Develop a Youth Transition Handbook designed to assist OVR staff, teachers, students and their families in the delivery of transition services. This handbook will be used as a technical assistance tool for transition planning purposes. This handbook will be designed to complement the Mississippi Department of Education Special Education Transition Handbook.
8. Annually identify 504 coordinators and special education staff for each school.
9. Develop public relations materials that describe transition services.
10. Co-develop and implement self-identification tool identifying youth with disabilities who could possibly benefit from transition services.
11. Establish relationships with parent training and information groups, advocacy groups and other service providers to encourage referral and parental participation in the development and provision of transition services.
12. Establish comprehensive guidelines and indicators for assessing the individual transition needs of students.
13. Work with other core partners in the Workforce System to provide employment related services so that services will not be duplicated.

**Goal IV: Implement identified improvements to increase statewide consistency and quality of consumer services.**

**Strategies (Plan of Action):**

14. Use results of the annual case review to determine where additional guidance and training are required.

15. Utilize the new counselor training process for mentoring, training, and leadership development for all VR counselors.
16. Utilize and continue to develop consistent training process for key VR staff that deliver direct client services.
17. Conduct annual statewide case record reviews of case service practices to determine consistency and adherence with federal/state requirements. Use case review results to identify and implement improvements in quality and consistency of services. Survey DVR staff on practices and provide refresher training to assure consistent and quality service delivery.
18. Deliver high quality training and support to provide staff with the knowledge and skills needed to perform effectively.
19. Recognize and appreciate staff throughout the Division for their contributions to the VR's success.
20. Continue to update and deliver advanced best practices training to field staff statewide to provide ongoing skill development in key service delivery operations and practices, including a strong focus on customer service, cultural sensitivity, and better addressing each consumer's impediments to employment.
21. Increase collaboration within the Workforce System to improve services to unemployed workers with disabilities who are eligible for VR services by better leveraging services with other workforce development programs.
22. Play stronger roles on state and local Workforce Boards to assure that VR consumers and other individuals with disabilities are better served by the One-Stop System.
23. Increase collaboration with Community Colleges to improve coordination of VR services with community college programs and Adult Basic Education programs.
24. Implement written agreements providers of services for individuals with intellectual and development disability programs to affirm their roles and responsibilities for jointly serving VR consumers, including their capacity for providing long term employment supports to individuals after the VR case rehabilitated.

**B. SUPPORT INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES; AND**

Please see the section above.

**C. OVERCOME IDENTIFIED BARRIERS RELATING TO EQUITABLE ACCESS TO AND PARTICIPATION OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE STATE VR SERVICES PROGRAM AND THE STATE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM.**

Please see the section above.

**P. EVALUATION AND REPORTS OF PROGRESS: VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT GOALS**

Describe:

1. AN EVALUATION OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE VR PROGRAM GOALS DESCRIBED IN THE APPROVED VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN FOR THE MOST RECENTLY COMPLETED PROGRAM YEAR WERE ACHIEVED. THE EVALUATION MUST:

**A. IDENTIFY THE STRATEGIES THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS.**

**Report of Progress for VR Program**

**Goal I: Improve the employment, economic stability, and self-sufficiency of eligible individuals with disabilities.**

**Report of Progress:**

- Training on Job Placement was held in October 2016 by Dr. Charles Palmer from Mississippi State University
- Beginning October 2016 - 2017, VR advertised and selected ten (10) VR Counselors to serve as VR Career Counselors. The role of the VR Career Counselors is to work with General VR Counselor and Business Development Specialist to provide and assist in deeming the as "Job Ready". At the appropriate time, VR Counselor refer the clients to the VR Career Counselor to begin Job Search/Job Prep services that include but are not limited to: Resume building, appropriate interviewing skills, assistance with job development, etc. The VR Career Counselors also communicate, work with and provide information to the Business Relation Specialist regarding clients they are working with to be Job Ready. Therefore, include of going to multiple counselors in each district, the OBD staff and one point of contact.
- The Office of Business Development added new Business Relations Specialist to assist in providing services to employers and assist with placing VR and VRB clients on internships, on-the-job training opportunities, and job placement.
- A designed VR Program Coordinator was assigned to work with the Career Counselors and to ensure bridge the connection and communication with Office of Business Development.
- In 2016, OVR implemented the On-Campus Work Experience (OCWE). The OCW is a short-term training program that will assist a student with gaining hands-on work experience for a pre-determined amount of time during the school year. The training will consist of three to four individual work experiences (IWEs) and will last from four to six weeks. Although there is some on-the-job learning, it differs from on-the-job-training because of its short-term nature and partnership with the school district. OCWE can be used as a tool to help identify the student's interests, strengths, and areas of needed improvement. In 2017, 36 students participated in the program.
- Employability Job Fair - Jackson Medical Mall, Jackson, MS that focused on the hiring of individuals with disabilities was held March 29, 2017. 56 Employers were registered; 750+ job applicants attended; 4910 visits were made to employer's booths; 130 on-site interviews were conducted; 83 job offers were made at job fair; 221 projected job offers are expected to be made as a result of the job fair.

- Employability Job Fair held at The Arena in Southaven Ms. 29 Employers were registered; 275+ job applicants attended; 959 number of visits to employer's booths; 231 on-site job interviews conducted; 33 job offers made the day of job fair; and a projected number of 177 hires will be made during the next year.
- Employability Job Fair held at Lyman Community Center, Mississippi Gulf coast on June 28, 2017. 43 employers were registered; 500+ job applicants attended; 3470 visits were made to employer's booths; 175 onsite interviews conducted; and 39 job offers made the day of job fair.
- Summer Internship data for blind and deaf: In 2017, eight (8) consumers who were deaf participated in the summer internship program; 53 general VR clients and 11 Project Search interns participated for a total of 72.
- In 2017, a total of 326 clients received Benefits Counseling from our Community Work Incentive Partners

**January 2017 - Total 16**

**February 2017 - Total 53**

**July 2017 - Total 23**

**August 2017 - Total 42**

**September 2017 - Total 46**

**October 2017 - Total 43**

**November 2017 - Total 32**

**December 2017 - Total 29**

- At least one Business Development representative is strategically located in all 10 districts across the state of Mississippi. We also have more than one representative in certain geographic locations due to population density. Our team is made up of 13 field representatives and 3 leadership staff.

In 2017, 11,283 individual contacts to businesses in the state of Mississippi were made by Business Development staff. 145 businesses were engaged and attended our 3 job fairs held in Southaven, Jackson, and Gulfport, Mississippi. 65 Interns were placed in our annual Summer Internship Program that focuses on creating job skills, career exploration, and building resumes from high school and college youth looking to enter the workforce. Also, in 2017, 3,376 individual "job hunting" calls were made to businesses for the purpose of finding our individual clients specific employment opportunities around the state of Mississippi. Out of the 11,283 contacts to business, 5,373 calls were made to new accounts (businesses never contacted before), or a percentage of 48% of total outreach. 5,042 calls were made where the services of BD/VR/VRB were described to the business. Finally, throughout 2017,

2,901 individual job openings were identified across the state or 26% of calls made identified a potential job opening.

Goal II: Improve the VR Service Delivery System to Individuals with Disabilities

- Beginning in 2016, VR developed the Outreach and Orientation program that is to be utilized by all district staff to conduct outreach when meeting with other organizations and service providers. It is also our plan that Orientation sessions will be held at a minimum of once per month in each district. All information and material to be used has been developed. This program is assigned to a VR Program Coordinator who work with the staff. The Program Coordinator also when throughout the state demonstrating how the sessions shall be conducted. VR will continue to ensure that this program is on-going. Progress on this has been slow due to other major responsibilities.
- Agency website and brochures have been developed and updated. MDRS has created videos that demonstrate services that can be viewed by referral sources. VR has new brochures that cover Transition services, Pre-Employment Transition Services, Supported Employment, etc.
- In 2017, a new Consumer Satisfaction Survey was developed for open VR cases. The first survey will be conducted in 2018.

Goal III: Implement a statewide model for more effectively serving high school youth and students with disabilities including individuals with visual and/or hearing impairments.

- A statewide training was conducted in 2016 that included all VR/VRB counselors and staff, and Special Education coordinators from schools throughout the state. This training assist VR in explaining the role of VR in serving students that have an IEP and 504 plan as well as serving students that are not receiving special education services. We are in hopes that we will continually see an increase in referrals for these students.
- In 2017, the updated formal Interagency Cooperative Agreement was developed with the Mississippi Department of Education. MDRS also updated our local school agreements.
- In 2016, the OVR Transition Manual designed to assist staff in the delivery of transition services. This manual is used as technical assistance for transition planning purposes. Training was held in each district statewide with counselors that are assigned to local schools/school districts.
- Annually, the OVR Transition Coordinator updates and maintains a list of all 504 coordinators and special education staff for each school district. The list is a document that can be accessed by all staff on the MDRS intranet - MDRS Connect.
- In 2015 and in 2018, OVR completed its Comprehensive Transition Assessment. The results of this assessment is included in this state plan.

- In 2017, Community Work Incentive Partners participated with VR Counselors in providing pre-employment self-advocacy training by providing information on Benefits Planning at 24 high schools and presented to 456 students.

Goal IV: Implement identified improvements to increase statewide consistency and quality of consumer services.

The Program Evaluation Unit has completed a review of cases for all OVRB caseloads. Five cases were reviewed for each counselor's caseload(s). Three active and two closed cases were reviewed for a total of 85 cases. Counselors were notified of the cases to be reviewed less than 24 hours prior to arrival of the program evaluation unit. The overall accuracy percentage was 90% for all OVRB cases reviewed by the program evaluation unit.

In the eligibility section the overall accuracy percentage was 97% by the program evaluation staff.

In the IPE section the review indicated the overall accuracy rate of 78% by the program evaluation staff.

The authorization section revealed an overall accuracy of 99.5%.

The Program Evaluation Unit has completed a review of cases for all OVR caseloads. Five cases were reviewed for each counselor's caseload(s) with the exception of one caseload. Three active and two closed cases were reviewed for a total of 553 cases. Counselors were notified of the cases to be reviewed less than 24 hours prior to arrival of the program evaluation unit.

The overall accuracy percentage was 80% for all 10 OVR Districts reviewed by the program evaluation unit.

In the eligibility section the overall accuracy percentage for all districts was 89% by the program evaluation staff.

In the IPE section the review indicated the overall accuracy rate of 65% by the program evaluation staff.

The authorization section revealed an overall accuracy of 97%.

After reviewing the closed rehabilitated cases, the overall accuracy rate was by the program evaluation staff rate was at 96%.

The closed other section revealed an overall accuracy rate of 89% by the program evaluation reviewers.

#### **B. DESCRIBE THE FACTORS THAT IMPEDED THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES.**

Although WIOA was signed into law on July 22, 2014, federal regulations were not received until June 28, 2016. New regulations required a review of policy and procedures to identify areas there updates were needed to reflect changes in the law. Because of implementation of a new law and policy changes, VR is still currently working to achieve the goal and implement the strategies outlined in this state plan.

2. AN EVALUATION OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM GOALS DESCRIBED IN THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SUPPLEMENT FOR THE MOST RECENT PROGRAM YEAR WERE ACHIEVED. THE EVALUATION MUST:

A. IDENTIFY THE STRATEGIES THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS.

### **Report of Progress for the SE program for 2017.**

#### **Goal I.**

Continue the referral process between MDRS and DMH to identify “youth with the most significant disabilities” who will require SE services. The MDRS SE Program Coordinator receives the referral from the DMH Support Coordinator/Target Case Manager. The SE Program Coordinator then forwards the referral to the SE Counselor for determination of VR service.

Report of Progress:

- One hundred and three (103) referrals were received and processed from DMH
- The following Career Counseling and Information Services was provided at the following Sheltered Workshops:

#### **Goal II.**

Continue the referral process between the VR Transition Counselor and the VR (SE) Supported Employment Counselor for students with disabilities ages 14-21 who have been determined to need long term ongoing support services. The VR Transition Counselor will take the referral from the MDE, determine eligibility, complete the assessment and discovery process and work with the SE Counselor to develop the IPE with the student, parents/guardians, and school. Once the IPE has been signed by all the required parties, then the student’s case will be transferred to the SE Counselor’s caseload.

Report of Progress:

One hundred and seventy-three (173) students were identified that had been determined to need long term ongoing support services.

#### **Goal III.**

Provide training to all SE staff by a highly experienced professional in the area of customized employment.

Report of Progress: Discovery” training, a part of customized training was conducted at all ten (10) districts by Supported Employment/Transition Program Coordinators.

#### **Goal IV.**

Train all Transition staff and SE staff on the new policies and guidelines for SE services.

Report of Progress: As policy changes, all Transition/Supported Employment staff are trained accordingly.

## B. DESCRIBE THE FACTORS THAT IMPEDED THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES.

Although WIOA was signed into law on July 22, 2014, federal regulations were not received until June 28, 2016. New regulations required a review of policy and procedures to identify areas where updates were needed to reflect changes in the law. Because of implementation of a new law and policy changes, VR is still currently working to achieve the goal and implement the strategies outlined in this state plan.

## 3. THE VR PROGRAM'S PERFORMANCE ON THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY INDICATORS UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA.

The Workforce Partners in Mississippi are working together to create a Shared Data Warehouse that will link our separate case management and data systems. We refer to this as "The Hub", and are working with a vendor, *nSPARC*, to create this data warehouse and bridge. National Strategic Planning & Analysis Research Center (*nSPARC*) designed and wrote the HUB. Founded in 1998, *nSPARC* is a university research center with more than 100 diverse employees, ranging from data scientists to software architects and security experts. *nSPARC* supports Mississippi State University's overarching goals of research, learning, and service by collaborating within the university, through local, state, and federal agencies, and across the private sector to help society grow by discovering solutions to societal problems by using data science. They pursue entrepreneurial and collaborative initiatives to develop and maintain a pipeline of intellectual property and innovative technologies that positively impact real-world problems. *nSPARC* is headquartered in Starkville, Mississippi, adjacent to Mississippi State University's campus.

MDRS entered into an agreement with *nSPARC*, to develop a proof of concept in regards to how MDRS would capture the required data into the HUB. The proof of concept was tested and completed in March of 2016. *nSPARC* was able to use MDRS' proof of concept in order to move forward with developing the HUB for all partners.

MDRS entered into another agreement with *nSPARC* and our software vendor Alliance in July of 2016. This agreement was for MDRS to provide the necessary data needed for the HUB from our current case management system and to update our Referral Module with the new process of our getting and receiving referrals from our partners. From July of 2016 until June of 2017, Alliance, MDRS, *nSPARC* met to work through the process of how the data would be exchanged between the HUB and our Case management system.

All partner agencies will complete their separate intake forms with new customers. In each of these separate forms, however, there are **six diagnostic questions** that will be the same on all **forms and multiple demographic fields that are shared between partners (Intake)**. These data elements will automatically be uploaded into the Hub - or autofill - if the unique identifier matches a profile that already exists in "the Hub". If data in these areas is different than the information that was previously in the profile, this information will be updated with that from the most recent entry. The initial version of the HUB was completed in June 2017. MDRS has been sending data to the HUB since that time.

The WIOA hub software development was released and launched into the production environment on May 23, 2017. The other partners have been phasing in sending their data

between January 2018 and June 2018. In the future, the PIRL for the State of Mississippi will be created thru the HUB.

Alliance is the vendor that provides the case management system (Aware) for Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) and for the VR/VRB programs in at least 35 other states. MDRS has been working with Alliance to ensure that the performance measures are included in Aware. Alliance will have these reports available by June 2018. Alliance has multiple user groups that meet about Aware between 35+ states that use Aware. The WIOA/RSA-911 and the Aware VR User Groups are two that are involved in ensuring that all federal reports and WIOA requirements are met.

WIOA/RSA-911 User Group met January 19, 2016, May 25, 2016, June 2, 2016, October 24, 2016, November 1, 2016, November 29 2016, December 20, 2016, February 14, 2017, February 21, 2017, February 28, 2017, March 14, 2017, June 13, 2017, and August 8, 2017.

Aware VR User Group met June 15, 2017, August 17, 2017, September 21, 2017, October 19, 2017, October 20, 2017, October 24, 2017, December 5, 2017, December 21, 2017, January 18, 2018, February 15, 2018, and March 15, 2018.

There were two major releases of Aware in March 2017 (included new RSA 911 report and the HUB related interface) and October 2017. There have been other minor releases that addressed things related the WIOA/RSA-911. The next release will have the performance measures reports in it.

MDRS has submitted two quarters of RSA 911 information in order to be able to report on the performance measures.

#### 4. HOW THE FUNDS RESERVED FOR INNOVATION AND EXPANSION (I&E) ACTIVITIES WERE UTILIZED.

See section on Evaluation and Report of Progress for innovation and expansion activities and the utilization of funds.

#### Q. QUALITY, SCOPE, AND EXTENT OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES.

Include the following:

##### 1. 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.

The SE Program provides services to individuals with the most significant disabilities who require intensive support to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment. The services are designed to meet the current and future needs of these individuals whose disabilities are of such a nature that they need continuous, on-going support and extended services in order to engage in and maintain gainful employment. SE services include evaluation, assessment, job matching, job development, job placement, job coaching, brokering and training for natural supports to include extended services and other comprehensive follow along supports.

Under WIOA the new law requires that half of the allotment received under Title VI be used for provision of SE services, including extended services, to youth with the most significant

disabilities (up to age 24), with administrative costs limited to 2.5% of the allotment. These youth may receive extended services (i.e., ongoing supports to maintain an individual in supported employment) for up to four (4) years. MDRS will invest all Title VI allocations to fund the purchase of job training services and other allowable vocational rehabilitation services as needed by clients served in the SE Program. Additionally, the Coordinator for the SE Program and the Coordinator for Transition and Youth Career Services will work together to ensure new policy is in place and the appropriate amount of funding is utilized for youth with the most significant disabilities.

Eligible individuals are those who are determined to be "most significantly" disabled, which means they meet the following criteria:

- individual has a "significant disability" \*individual's physical or mental impairments seriously limit three (3) or more functional capacities in terms of an employment outcome □individual will require vocational rehabilitation services in order to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment

MDRS employs a unique strategy for delivery of SE services. The SE Program's structure and service delivery mechanism are integrated into that of the general agency service delivery system. The services are authorized, coordinated and, in most instances, delivered by staff of the state unit. Counselors who specialize in SE perform the functions of case management, job development, and supervision of overall SE service delivery in their respective districts. They are assisted by Vocational Training Instructors (VTIs) who perform a variety of functions including assessment, job development and placement, job training, job coach supervision, and facilitation of natural supports. Job coaches are employed on an "as needed" basis. Counselors are assigned to serve SE eligible individuals in each of the 10 districts in order to ensure statewide coverage. The SE staff includes 11 Counselors, 12 VTIs, and a pool of available Job Coaches who are assigned to work with an SE client as needed. Additionally, this staff works with the statewide community rehabilitation program, AbilityWorks, Inc., a division of MDRS.

MDRS contends that its responsibility regarding SE is the same as its responsibility for the general program. The SE programs for both VR and VRB have been combined into one program serving all eligible individuals. SE counselors have the same duties and responsibilities as those in the VR and VRB programs. However, the caseloads of the SE counselors consist of only those clients who meet Title VI eligibility criteria. Therefore, in addition to general agency policy and procedures, SE staff members must be knowledgeable about Title VI regulations and the unique requirements for SE eligibility. Additionally, SE staff members are provided clerical support in the same proportion as the VR program staff.

Administration and implementation of the SE Program is assigned to the Bureau of Client Services within VR. SE personnel are trained in general VR case management techniques and Title I regulations, and are held to the same procedures and standards of performance as are the general counselors.

MDRS designates a SE statewide program coordinator whose duties include the following:

- monitor issues developing in the field of SE
- serve as a resource person to staff

- serve as advisor to administrative staff in implementing programmatic policies in accordance with federal dictates
- develop effective programmatic procedures
- recommend training of SE staff
- other typical functions of a coordinating and liaison nature

MDRS maintains formal agreements with the MDE and DMH as well as other public and private entities, which identify areas of collaboration to ensure a comprehensive program of services to SE eligible individuals. Staff members collaborate intensively with local mental health centers, school districts, SE businesses and industries, the DD Council, parents, advocacy groups and other relevant third parties.

The service approach for SE eligible clients emulates the nationally accepted "best practices" models of SE service delivery which include individual job placement, mobile crews, and temporary employment placement (TEP) for individuals with chronic mental illness. Central to each of these approaches is an emphasis on person centered planning and facilitation of natural supports. Individualized job development is conducted by SE staff based on job matching assessment information and client's informed choice. SE clients are assisted with employment planning and placement by VTIs and job skills training is provided at the job site either by job coaches or through natural supports.

To fulfill the requirements of the Rehabilitation Act, as amended by WIOA, regarding transitional employment for individuals with chronic mental illness, MDRS utilizes the TEP model. This model involves placement in a series of temporary jobs that lead to permanent employment as an outcome. This service approach is implemented through coordination with local mental health centers.

## 2. THE TIMING OF TRANSITION TO EXTENDED SERVICES.

Upon completion of time-limited SE services, the ongoing job skills training assistance and other necessary long-term support is transitioned to a third party, group or individual through a Cooperative Agreement or Extended Services Support Plan Agreement. MDRS entered into 114 new Extended Services Support Plan Agreements from July 1, 2015 through December 31, 2017. These 114 new agreements are in addition to the agreements previously established and still ongoing. WIOA increased the maximum amount of time for SE staff to provide time-limited supported employment services to 24 months. However, the rate of transitioning a client to extended services is dependent upon the needs of the individual, his/her family, the employer, the third party agency, and other involved individuals. Since SE staff members and the extended service provider will have been collaborating in the provision of SE services throughout an individual's VR program, such transitions are normally smooth and do not cause job disruptions.

MDRS will continue to cooperate in the networking of services with entities that have supported employment facets or other applicable and/or similar resources, such as the state's workforce development one-stop system. Such collaborative efforts are essential for effective planning, development, implementation and continuation of SE arrangements. Service networking will involve developing and identifying appropriate job sites, tapping

existing or future job training resources, utilizing concurrent staffing opportunities, and other occasions for programmatic and budgetary interfacing.

Expansion of the SE Program is expected as a result of extensive outreach, staff development, interagency training, dissemination of information, identification and dissemination of information about best practices, technical assistance, and an emphasis on interagency collaboration for identification of potentially eligible individuals and service delivery to clients. MDRS continues to emphasize person centered planning by partnering with the Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities, MDE, and other entities in promotion of this service provision.

#### CERTIFICATIONS

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Name of designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate **Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services**

Name of designated State agency **Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services**

Full Name of Authorized Representative: **Chris Howard**

Title of Authorized Representative: **Executive Director**

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

1. The **designated State agency or designated State unit (as appropriate) listed above** 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 WIOA\*, and its supplement under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act.\*\* Yes
2. As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of VR services, the **designated State agency listed above** agrees to operate and administer the State VR Services Program in accordance with the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan , the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations , policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available under section 111 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; Yes
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 agrees to operate and administer the State Supported Employment Services Program in accordance with the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan\* , the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations , policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available under title VI are used solely for the provision of supported employment services and the administration of the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan;\*\* Yes
4. The designated State agency and/or the designated State unit 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; Yes

5. The State legally may carry out each provision of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement. Yes

6. All provisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement are consistent with State law. Yes

7. The **Authorized Representative listed above** 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; Yes

8. The **Authorized Representative listed above** has the authority to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and the supplement for Supported Employment services; Yes

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. Yes

## FOOTNOTES

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### 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

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON THE CERTIFICATIONS FROM THE STATE  
CERTIFICATION REGARDING LOBBYING — VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

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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 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 into 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 into 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.

Applicant's Organization

Full Name of Authorized Representative:

Title of Authorized Representative:

SF LLL Form – Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (only if applicable)  
(<http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html>). If applicable, please print, sign, and email to MAT\_OCTAE@ed.gov

#### CERTIFICATION REGARDING LOBBYING — SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

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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 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 into 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 into 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.

Applicant's Organization

Full Name of Authorized Representative:

Title of Authorized Representative:

SF LLL Form – Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (only if applicable)  
(<http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/apply/appforms/appforms.html>).

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### ASSURANCES

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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 of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), that it will comply with all of 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. PUBLIC COMMENT ON POLICIES AND PROCEDURES:

The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.

#### 2. SUBMISSION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT:

The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a unified plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140.

#### 3. ADMINISTRATION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN:

The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to:

**A. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS REQUIRED BY SECTION 101(A)(2) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT.**

**B. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF EITHER A STATE INDEPENDENT COMMISSION OR STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL, AS REQUIRED BY SECTION 101(A)(21) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT.**

The designated State agency or designated State unit, as applicable **(B) has established a State Rehabilitation Council**

**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.**

D. THE FINANCIAL PARTICIPATION BY THE STATE, OR IF THE STATE SO ELECTS, BY THE STATE AND LOCAL AGENCIES, TO PROVIDE THE AMOUNT OF THE NON-FEDERAL SHARE OF THE COST OF CARRYING OUT THE VR PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 101(A)(3).

E. 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.

The designated State agency allows for the local administration of VR funds **No**

F. THE SHARED FUNDING AND ADMINISTRATION OF JOINT PROGRAMS, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 101(A)(2)(A)(II) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT.

The designated State agency allows for the shared funding and administration of joint programs: **No**

G. STATEWIDENESS AND WAIVERS OF STATEWIDENESS REQUIREMENTS, AS SET FORTH IN SECTION 101(A)(4) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT.

Is the designated State agency requesting or maintaining a waiver of statewideness for one or more services provided under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan? See Section 2 of this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan. **No**

H. THE DESCRIPTIONS 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.

M. THE SUBMISSION OF REPORTS AS REQUIRED BY SECTION 101(A)(10) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT.

#### 4. ADMINISTRATION OF THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES:

The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will:

A. COMPLY WITH ALL REQUIREMENTS REGARDING INFORMATION AND REFERRAL SERVICES IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTIONS 101(A)(5)(D) AND (20) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT.

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 .

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 IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 101(A)(5) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT?

Agency will provide the full range of services described above **Yes**

D. DETERMINE WHETHER COMPARABLE SERVICES AND BENEFITS ARE AVAILABLE TO THE INDIVIDUAL IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 101(A)(8) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT.

E. COMPLY WITH THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INDIVIDUALIZED PLAN FOR EMPLOYMENT IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 102(B) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT.

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.

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 SECTION 101(A)(14) 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 SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, FACILITIES FOR COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS

J. WITH RESPECT TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, THE STATE,

LIV. HAS DEVELOPED AND WILL IMPLEMENT,  
. STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS IDENTIFIED IN THE ASSESSMENTS; AND

A. 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

LV. HAS DEVELOPED AND WILL IMPLEMENT STRATEGIES TO PROVIDE PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES (SECTIONS 101(A)(15) AND 101(A)(25)).

5. PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION FOR THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT TITLE VI SUPPLEMENT:

- 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.
- 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.
- C. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WILL COORDINATE ACTIVITIES WITH ANY OTHER STATE AGENCY THAT IS FUNCTIONING AS AN EMPLOYMENT NETWORK UNDER THE TICKET TO WORK AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY PROGRAM UNDER SECTION 1148 OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT.

6. FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION OF THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM:

- 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)(G) AND (H) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT.
- B. THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY ASSURES THAT IT WILL USE FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT ONLY TO PROVIDE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING EXTENDED SERVICES TO YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, WHO ARE ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE SUCH SERVICES; AND, THAT SUCH FUNDS ARE USED ONLY TO SUPPLEMENT AND NOT SUPPLANT THE FUNDS PROVIDED UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, WHEN PROVIDING SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES SPECIFIED IN THE INDIVIDUALIZED PLAN FOR EMPLOYMENT, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 606(B)(7)(A) AND (D), OF THE REHABILITATION ACT.

7. PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES:

A. THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY ASSURES THAT IT WILL PROVIDE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AS DEFINED IN SECTION 7(39) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT.

B. THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY ASSURES THAT:

- i. 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
- ii. 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)(6)(C) AND (E) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON THE ASSURANCES FROM THE STATE

## VII. PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR COMBINED STATE PLAN PARTNER PROGRAMS

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States choosing to submit a Combined State Plan must provide information concerning the six core programs—the Adult Program, Dislocated Worker Program, Youth Program, Wagner-Peyser Act Program, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program, and the Vocational Rehabilitation Program— and also submit relevant information for any of the eleven partner programs it includes in its Combined State Plan. When a State includes a Combined State Plan partner program in its Combined State Plan, it need not submit a separate plan or application for that particular program.\* If included, Combined State Plan partner programs are subject to the “common planning elements” in Sections II and III of that document, where specified, as well as the program-specific requirements for that program (available on [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov) for public comment). The requirements that a State must address for any of the partner programs it includes in its Combined State Plan are provided in this separate supplemental document. The Departments are not seeking comments on these program-specific requirements, which exist under separate OMB control numbers and do not represent requirements under WIOA. For further details on this overall collection, access the Federal eRulemaking Portal at <http://www.regulations.gov> by selecting Docket ID number ETA-2015-0006.

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\* States that elect to include employment and training activities carried out under the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Act (42 U.S.C. 9901 et seq.) under a Combined State Plan would submit all other required elements of a complete CSBG State Plan directly to the Federal agency that administers the program. Similarly, States that elect to include employment and training activities carried by the Department of Housing and Urban Development and programs authorized under section 6(d)(4) and 6(o) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 that are included would submit all other required elements of a complete State Plan for those programs directly to the Federal agency that administers the program.

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### TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES (TANF)

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States that include TANF in the Combined State Plan must outline how the State will meet the requirements of section 402 of the Social Security Act including how it will:

A. CONDUCT A PROGRAM DESIGNED TO SERVE ALL POLITICAL SUBDIVISIONS IN THE STATE (NOT NECESSARILY IN A UNIFORM MANNER) THAT PROVIDES ASSISTANCE TO NEEDY FAMILIES WITH (OR EXPECTING) CHILDREN AND PROVIDES PARENTS WITH JOB PREPARATION, WORK, AND SUPPORT SERVICES TO ENABLE THEM TO LEAVE THE PROGRAM, SPECIFICALLY CASH ASSISTANCE, AND BECOME SELF-SUFFICIENT (SECTION 402(A)(1)(A)(I) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT).

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Mississippi will conduct a program designed to provide allowable work activities that will serve all political subdivisions (counties) in the State with emphasis on providing assistance

to needy families with children and providing parents with job preparation, work, and support services to enable them to leave the program and become self-sufficient to the degree that State and local resources allow.

Mississippi will continue to provide financial assistance to needy families determined eligible under the currently established policies and the Standard of Need and maximum payment level for that size family. "Needy Families" are identified according to ongoing income, resources, and deprivation criteria. The money payment level set by State law at 43-17-5(1), is \$110 for the first person, \$36 for the second person and \$24 for additional persons, except as restricted by the Family Benefit Cap. A "Needy Family" is defined as a family with a dependent child(ren) and an average annual income at or below 350 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

As indicated in Mississippi's TANF Policy Manual (Volume III, Chapter 5), the State provides TANF-funded services through Families First Resource Centers, thus conferring Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE) to certain applicant/recipient households. Only households failing the BBCE criteria are subject to a \$2000 resource limit. The following households are not considered BBCE and are subject to the resource test:

- households containing a member currently disqualified from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for Intentional Program Violation (IPV);
- households containing a member convicted of a drug-related felony; and
- households who received certain lump sum payments within 12 months prior to the date of application (Exception: EITC, tax refunds, tax rebates, or tax credits).

A child or children under 18 years of age and their parent(s) or other caretaker relative must meet all technical and financial eligibility requirements in order to qualify for a TANF benefit.

The child or children must be deprived of one or other parents due to:

- Incapacity.
- Death.
- Continued absence. Continued absence includes, but is not limited to, absences by reason of:
  - Divorce
  - Desertion or non-support of legal parent.
  - Illegitimacy.
  - Hospitalization for more than a temporary period.
  - Imprisonment.
  - Court sentence to perform unpaid public work or service while living at home.
  - Removal of the child from the home by court order. Legal adoption by a single parent.
- Unemployment of the principal wage earner (PWE)

Mississippi operates a separate state program to serve needy two-parent families. State funds are used for cash assistance payments (TANF grant and transportation stipends). This program will not count toward the state's MOE requirements. Although two able-bodied

parents are in the home, a dependent child is considered deprived of parental care or support when the natural or adoptive parent is unemployed. Two-parent families are only eligible if the parent is designated as the “principal wage earner.”

- o Meets the state’s definition of “unemployed,” which means that he or she is not currently working or has not worked full-time for at least thirty (30) days prior to receipt of TANF benefits,
- o Works less than 100 hours per month,
- o Has not refused a bona fide offer of employment or training, without good cause, within the 30-day period prior to receipt of TANF benefits, and
- o Is not on strike.

All other eligibility requirements for the two-parent family are the same as the TANF (Basic) case.

To encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families:

o When the TANF recipient marries, the new spouse’s income will be disregarded for six months. This will allow the single parent who marries an employed person the opportunity to continue TANF cash assistance and work preparation activities without immediately losing benefits because of the spouse’s income. (One time disregard for the first marriage of the PI on or after October 1, 1999.)

o Recent work history requirements will be waived for two-parent families when the parents are under 21 years of age to allow these young families to qualify for the TANF Unemployed Parent program.

The TANF Program is administered by the Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS), the single State agency designated by State law for eligibility determination and spending authority. The organization is State administered with at least one full service office for intake and client service delivery located in each county with structured supervisory and regional administrative levels.

Mississippi will operate a statewide work program mandated by State law and TANF to provide work activities and supportive services (child care, work stipend, and work related expense payments) focused on enabling families to achieve and maintain self-sufficiency. In Mississippi, TANF monthly benefits and supportive service payments provided to individuals participating in allowable work activities or transitional programs are provided to the family by means of a Mississippi Debit MasterCard® card account. TANF supportive service payments issued to providers are paid by check or by vouchers redeemable for services.

*Deny TANF Assistance*

- i. According to the TANF prohibitions/requirements in Title I, Section 408, Mississippi will, except for individuals and families specifically exempt or excluded for good cause, deny TANF assistance to:
  - Families without a minor child residing with the parent or adult caretaker relative;

- Families including an adult head-of-household or spouse of the head-of-household, pregnant minor head-of-household or spouse of such head-of-household, a minor parent head-of-household or spouse of such minor parent head-of-household who has received assistance under TANF for 60 months (cumulative but not necessarily consecutive);
  - Families not assigning certain support rights to the State;
  - Families who fail to cooperate in establishing paternity or obtaining child support;
  - Teenage parents without a high school diploma or a high school equivalency (HSE) diploma, who are not employed and do not attend school or an equivalent training program;
  - Minor parents not living in an adult-supervised setting;
  - Minor children who are absent from the home for a significant period (30 days or more). NOTE: A relative who fails to report the absence of a child within five days will be disqualified;
  - Families who fail to complete up-front job search or vocational rehabilitation requirements, whichever is required;
  - Families who fail to comply with the Employability Development Plan signed by the individual, to cooperate with the TANF Work Program, or to participate satisfactorily in the assigned work activity;
  - Families who fail to submit to a written substance abuse screening questionnaire;
  - Fleeing felons and parole violators; and
  - Ineligible aliens
- ii. In accordance with 21 USC 862a, Mississippi shall deny TANF assistance to a convicted felon.
- iii. Recipients of SSI are excluded from the TANF assistance Unit.

Mississippi will coordinate services, where available, with public and private entities (i.e., Mississippi Departments of Rehabilitation Services, Employment Security and Mental Health, and the Mississippi Community College Board, etc.) to allow TANF families with barriers (i.e., little or no work experience, domestic violence, limited English proficiency, learning disabilities, mental, physical disabilities and/or substance abuse) an opportunity to gain access to services and resources needed to obtain the highest level of self-sufficiency within the constraints of the TANF time-limits. Special screening and referral procedures will be used to identify and refer the individual for the appropriate service. Mississippi will deny benefits to individuals who fail to comply with the activities provided by these entities.

Hardships will be assessed starting at forty (40) months and continued eligibility determined at the end of the individual's five (5) year time limit. The following individuals, as approved, may continue to receive benefits beyond the five-year time limit so long as the State does not exceed the 20% exemption criteria:

- Adults who are determined to be temporarily or permanently incapacitated and the household income does not exceed the TANF Basic 100% Requirement.
- Parents who are required to provide full-time care for an ill or incapacitated child or adult in the home and the household income does not exceed the TANF Basic 100% Requirement.

Mississippi will not deny assistance to a minor parent with a child under the age of 12 weeks for failure to attend school, but will permit the minor parent to voluntarily participate in educational activities as medically appropriate.

Mississippi requires regular school attendance and regular immunizations for all dependent children served under TANF. This is in accordance with State Law at 43-17-5. A 25% monthly benefit reduction is imposed for failure to comply without good cause. Mississippi will impose a family benefit cap to prevent increases in assistance for new children coming into the family after the initial ten months of benefits, with certain exceptions (State Law 43-17-5). Mississippi will also deny assistance for ten years to an individual convicted in Federal or State court of having made a fraudulent statement or representation, with respect to the individual's place of residence in order to receive TANF assistance simultaneously from two or more states.

Mississippi will deny benefits to all adult TANF applicants who do not meet an exemption from work requirements and fail to comply with job search or vocational rehabilitation activities during the 30-day TANF application processing period.

Mississippi will deny benefits to all adult TANF applicants age 18 and older who fail to submit to a written drug screening questionnaire. State law provides for an individual sanction of TANF until compliance for an adult recipient age 18 or older who fails, without good cause, to submit to a required drug test or declines to enter into required treatment for a substance abuse disorder or fails to meet the requirements of his/her treatment plan, including refusal to take or testing positive to a required drug test.

Mississippi will provide a one-time total earned income disregard opportunity for six months to TANF adults who find a job working at least 35 hours per week, at or above the federal minimum wage either: within 30 days after authorization for new TANF approvals on or after July 1, 1997; or within 30 days after the initial start date of the job readiness/job search work activity. The six-month total disregard of earnings will be available only once for new TANF approvals and ongoing cases beginning July 1, 1997, and thereafter.

A three-month total earned income disregard will be available when the TANF case is subject to closure because of increased earnings and the individual is employed at least 25 hours per week at or above the federal minimum wage. The three-month disregard cannot be claimed in combination with the six-month disregard. The three-month disregard can be claimed again after a 12-month consecutive break in assistance. If available, funds shall be used by the Mississippi Community College Board (MCCB) for the assessment, enrollment, certification, follow-up and performance standards as they relate to career-related training of TANF Work Program (TWP) participants. Training may be established based on employer needs in a particular area of the State. Training may also be established on an individual basis based on the individual's career goal(s)/objective(s) and training needs in conjunction with employer needs.

The goal of the program is to end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work and marriage.

The work program emphasizes unsubsidized jobs with supportive services following employment and/or transitional services following termination of the TANF grant because of increased earnings or loss of earned income disregards. The family also receives

supportive services during the training and transitional services when benefits are terminated after employment.

The MDHS does not discriminate against any individual or group because of race, sex, religion, national origin, color, marital status, handicap, or political beliefs. Mississippi will follow the nondiscrimination provisions in Title 1, Section 408, for any program or activity receiving funds under Public Law 104-193, provision in State Law and Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

**B. REQUIRE A PARENT OR CARETAKER RECEIVING ASSISTANCE TO ENGAGE IN WORK (DEFINED BY THE STATE) ONCE THE STATE DETERMINES THE PARENT OR CARETAKER IS READY TO ENGAGE IN WORK, OR ONCE HE OR SHE HAS RECEIVED 24 MONTHS OF ASSISTANCE, WHICHEVER IS EARLIER, CONSISTENT WITH THE CHILD CARE EXCEPTION AT 407(E)(2) (SECTION 402(A)(1)(A)(II) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT)**

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Mississippi will require a work eligible individual (an adult or minor head of household or a non-recipient parent) receiving assistance under the Program to engage in an allowable work activity once the State determines the parent or caretaker is work eligible, or once the work eligible individual has received assistance under the program for 24 months (whether or not consecutive), whichever is earlier.

Mississippi will not issue assistance payments to a family that includes an adult head-of-household, minor head-of-household, minor parent head-of-household, spouse of such head-of-household or a non-recipient parent who has received TANF funding for 60 months (whether consecutive or not), except as allowed by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 in regard to the 20% exemption.

The adults in the TANF case will participate in one or more of the following work activities as defined below:

- Job Search and Job Readiness - Job search and job readiness assistance is defined as the act of seeking or obtaining employment, preparation to seek or obtain employment, including life skills training, and substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, or rehabilitation activities for those who are otherwise employable. Such treatment or therapy must be determined to be necessary and certified by a qualified medical, substance abuse or mental health professional. A qualified professional is defined as any individual who is licensed or certified. Job search and job readiness assistance activities are supervised daily by the case manager and/or job readiness trainer.

Job readiness and job search activities are considered one activity by Federal law. The maximum number of hours that can be included in the State's participation rate calculation for any 12-month period is limited to:

- a maximum of 120 hours for a single custodial parent whose youngest child is under age six; and

- 180 hours for a single custodial parent whose youngest child is age six or older.

A maximum of four consecutive weeks may be counted and reported as participation. After four consecutive weeks are reported, there must be at least a one week break (seven consecutive days) before additional participation can be included in the participation rate calculation process.

- Unsubsidized Employment - Unsubsidized employment is full or part-time employment in the public or private sector for which the state does not furnish aid or support to the employer for wages paid to the TANF recipient. Types may include:
  - Regular employment in the public or private sector for which a person receives unsubsidized wages on an hourly, weekly, or monthly basis.
  - Self-employment is work for which a person earns income directly from one's own business, trade or profession rather than a specified salary or wages from an employer. Income may be verified by a W2 form, check stubs or written statements from customers.
- Subsidized Employment - Subsidized employment is defined as employment in the private or public sector for which the employer receives a subsidy from TANF or other public funds to offset some or all of the wages and costs of employing a recipient. Subsidized employment includes the following employment models:
  - Work supplementation where TANF funds that would otherwise be paid as assistance are paid to the employer;
  - A third-party contractor, like a temporary staffing agency, serves as employer of record and is paid a fee to cover salary, expenses and success in placing employees;
  - Work study programs which involve paid employment provided by an educational institution if the student's earnings are subsidized by the educational institution; and
  - Supported work for individuals with disabilities in an integrated setting, e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation AbilityWorks. Workers with disabilities may receive individualized services such as, but not limited to, transportation, family support or additional supervision.

Employers participating in a subsidy program must submit monthly documentation to verify participant attendance data. Agency staff will monitor and review employer reports to determine whether sufficient documentation exists to substantiate reported time and to warrant a subsidy payment. This auditing process will ensure the agency only pays for and reports actual and allowable hours of participation.

*Work Study* - Work study is also defined as subsidized employment. Work study is an approved employment plan at an accredited college, frequently granted in addition to other student financial aid. Various public funding sources may be utilized to pay earnings for hours worked. Earnings may be paid directly to the student or applied toward the student's tuition fees.

*Temporary Employment with the U.S. Census* - Certain temporary employment with the U.S. Census is defined as subsidized employment. This specifically refers to temporary census workers who are hired part-time during a census campaign. The employment is not expected to last longer than three months and the income received is totally disregarded in establishing TANF eligibility and the TANF benefit amount. Employment will be verified, by the case manager, via employer wage verification forms or check stubs. Countable work hours must be based on employer reports (wage forms) or check stubs and will be projected forward up to three months.

- Work Experience - Alternative Work Experience Program (AWEP) placements are only made with private non-profit or for-profit entities for no cash payment in order to improve work skills by offering training and experience for a better understanding of the work world so the individual may move more quickly into full-time employment. Individuals participating in these programs are subject to the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) requirements and cannot be required to participate for more hours than the total welfare benefits divided by the federal minimum wage (FMW). The maximum number of hours in any month that a participant may be required to participate in AWEP is based upon the family's combined value of TANF assistance (monthly grant and work stipend) and SNAP benefits divided by the federal minimum wage. The TANF benefit amount, net out child support, will be determined during the TANF application process and at each TANF redetermination appointment for all TANF cases that are subject to TANF Work Program requirements. TANF recipients assigned to this activity cannot displace regular workers. Based on certain criteria private, for-profit entities may be used for AWEP placements. For example, a certain type of placement may be necessary for the participant to gain needed skills to successfully accomplish his/her career goals. Such entities must be approved in writing by the Work Programs Unit.
- Community Service Programs - Community Service placements are only made with public entities and are limited to projects that serve a useful public purpose in fields such as health, social service, environmental protection, education, urban and rural development and redevelopment, welfare, recreation, public facilities, public safety, and child care. The main objective of assigning the TANF Work Program (TWP) participant to a community service activity is to improve work skills by offering training and experience for a better understanding of the work world so the individual may move more quickly into full-time employment. Individuals participating in these programs are subject to the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) requirements and cannot be required to participate for more hours than the total welfare benefits divided by the federal minimum wage (FMW). The maximum number of hours in any month that a participant may be required to participate in AWEP is based upon the family's combined value of TANF assistance (monthly grant and work stipend) and SNAP benefits divided by the federal minimum wage. The TANF benefit amount, net out child support, will be determined during the TANF application process and at each TANF redetermination appointment for all TANF cases that are subject to TANF Work Program requirements. TANF recipients assigned to this activity cannot displace regular workers. AmeriCorps (NCCC) Volunteers - AmeriCorps work activities are defined as community service.

AmeriCorps NCCC is a 10-month, full-time, team-based residential program for individuals between the ages of 18-24 who are current TANF recipients or who have been included in a TANF case within the last six (6) years. AmeriCorps NCCC recruits and trains individuals who are willing to devote at least a year to serving in their community to meet specific needs. In addition to gaining valuable skills, members are provided a living allowance during the ten (10) month program, housing, meals, limited medical benefits, uniforms, and up to \$400/monthly for childcare, if eligible.

- Vocational Educational - Training Vocational education is defined as an organized educational program which offers a sequence of courses directly related to the preparation of individuals for employment in current or emerging occupations that do not require an advanced degree. Such programs shall include competency-based applied learning which contributes in an individual's academic knowledge, higher-order reasoning, and problem-solving skills, work attitudes, general employability skills, and the occupational-specific knowledge and skills that prepare participants for a specific trade, occupation, or vocation. Vocational education programs must be provided by education or training organizations, such as vocational-technical schools, community colleges, post-secondary institutions, proprietary schools, nonprofit organizations, and secondary schools that offer vocational education. Limitation on Vocational Educational Training and Teens in School Vocational educational training cannot exceed 12 months for any individual. No more than 30% of the individuals counting toward the participation rate in a month may meet the work requirement by participating in vocational educational training. A teen parent head-of household attending secondary school or in an educational activity directly related to employment will be included in the 30%.
- Education Directly Related to Employment - Education directly related to employment is defined as educational activities related to a specific occupation, job or job offer for individuals who have not received a high school diploma or an HSE diploma. This includes educational courses designed to provide the knowledge and skills for specific occupations or work settings, but may also include adult basic education, English as a second language (ESL), literacy skills, HSE prep classes, and supervised study sessions.
- Secondary School Attendance - Satisfactory attendance at secondary school or in a course of study leading to an HSE diploma is an allowable "non-core" activity for individuals age twenty and older who do not have a high school diploma or HSE diploma. Participation in this activity is not restricted to individuals for whom obtaining an HSE diploma is a prerequisite for employment. Minor parents, under age twenty, who have not completed secondary school or received an HSE diploma will be encouraged to pursue a high school diploma or HSE diploma. Educational activities for individuals under the age of twenty are considered "core" activities and are countable in the participation rate calculation. Educational activities for individuals age twenty and older are considered "non-core" activities and only count after the individual participates for an average of twenty (20) hours per week in a "core" activity.
- On-the-Job Training - On-the-Job Training is defined as paid employment provided by a public or private employer through a contractual arrangement in which the employer provides training and skills essential to perform the job and the employer

is reimbursed for the added costs associated with training. While engaged in productive work, the participant is provided additional daily supervision and training which will provide the knowledge or skills essential to fully and adequately perform the job. The participant is compensated at a rate (including benefits) comparable to that of other employees performing the same or similar jobs. The state reimburses the employer up to 50 percent of the wages paid to the participant utilizing federal funds to offset the cost of training and supervision given to the participant. The employer is expected to retain the participant as a permanent, unsubsidized employee at the end of the training period.

- Job Skills Training Directly Related to Employment - Job skills training directly related to employment is training or education for job skills required by an employer to provide an individual with the ability to obtain employment or to advance or adapt to the changing demands of the workplace. Job skills training can include customized training to meet the needs of a specific employer or training that prepares an individual for employment, including literacy and language instruction, if necessary, to enable the participant to perform a specific job or engage in a specific job training program.

State Law, Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated at 43-17-5(f), prohibits the displacement of regular workers by TANF recipients. No adult in a work activity shall be employed or assigned when another individual is on layoff from the same or any substantially equivalent job within six months, before the date of the TANF recipients employment or assignment; or if the employer has terminated the employment of any regular employee or otherwise caused an involuntary reduction of its workforce in order to fill the vacancy created with an adult receiving TANF assistance. The Mississippi Department of Employment Security as established under Section 71-5-101 will appoint one or more impartial hearing officers to hear and decide claims by employees of violations.

#### C. ENSURE THAT PARENTS AND CARETAKERS RECEIVING ASSISTANCE ENGAGE IN WORK IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 407 (SECTION 402(A)(1)(A)(III) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT)

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Mississippi will ensure that a work eligible individual (an adult head of household or a needy caretaker relative) receiving assistance under the Program will engage in work activities in accordance with Section 407 of Title I of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (reauthorized by DRA of 2005). Work requirements and activities are defined in the Combined State Plan, TANF section (b) above. This document will be open for public review and comment according to the Administrative Procedures Act. The work requirements and activities are tracked through the system (MAVERICS and JAWS) interface throughout the period of assistance to ensure compliance is met, appropriate penalties imposed, and time limits not exceeded.

*Exemptions:* TANF mandates participation in approved work activities for all adult recipients who do not meet specific exemption criteria. All adults who are not specifically exempt will be referred for work activities. When appropriate, reasonable accommodations and language assistance will be provided to recipients to ensure meaningful access and effective communication. An adult included in the TANF grant assistance unit may be exempt from the mandatory work requirements for one of the following reasons:

- Incapacitated and not eligible for vocational rehabilitation services
- Temporary illness or injury
- Pregnancy in third trimester if there are verified complications with the pregnancy
- Caretaker of a child under 12 months old (up to 12 months)
- Caretaker of an ill or incapacitated person
- Age (over 60 and under 18)
- Domestic violence victim (up to 12 months)
- Caretaker in two-parent family of a child who is mentally retarded or physically handicapped

The State may exempt a TANF recipient from work requirements while receiving treatment for substance abuse, as long as the recipient is in compliance with the treatment plan. If certain criteria are met, the recipient's treatment plan may be defined and countable under the TWP job readiness activity. State law and Public Law 104-193 provide for a full benefit sanction of TANF and comparable SNAP sanctions until compliance for families in which the non-exempt individual refuses, without good cause, to participate.

*Sanctions:* If any adult in a household refuses without good cause to participate in work as required under TANF, the following full benefit sanction will apply. When appropriate, reasonable accommodations and language assistance will be provided to recipients to ensure meaningful access and effective communication to assist them in the conciliation process. If necessary and appropriate, the need for disability and language related accommodations are bases for good cause.

VIOLATION-----PENALTY (WHICHEVER IS LONGER) 1st Violation-----2 Months Minimum or Until Compliance 2nd Violation-----6 Months Minimum or Until Compliance 3rd Violation-----12 Months Minimum or Until Compliance 4th Violation-----Permanent Disqualification

NOTE: For a two-parent family, the parent who was meeting work requirements, but lost TANF benefits due to the other parent's non-cooperation, may open his/her own case with the dependent children after six months. Mississippi will comply with the mandatory work requirements and strive to meet the 50% participation rates required under current TANF regulations. Participation rate requirements may be adjusted based on reduction in the caseload. Beginning October 1, 2001, State funds were used for cash assistance payments (TANF grant and transportation stipends) for two-parent families. The State does not claim these expenditures against the Maintenance of Effort requirement. Therefore, federal mandatory work requirements and participation rates do not apply to the State's two-parent families. The State will not reduce or terminate assistance to a single custodial parent caring for a child under age six (6) for refusing to engage in work, if the parent demonstrates an inability to obtain appropriate, quality childcare. The parent's demonstrated inability must be for one of the following reasons:

- a. Appropriate childcare is unavailable and/or unaffordable. Appropriate childcare is defined as a licensed childcare center or a family day care (home or an individual) chosen by the parent/caretaker relative to care for the child. The childcare provider must be 18 years old or older.

- Appropriate childcare must be within a reasonable distance (within a 20-mile radius) of the parent/caretaker relative's home or worksite.
- Appropriate childcare must be affordable. Affordable formal childcare is childcare that is equal to or less than the established rates for the type of care according to the Division of Early Childhood Care and Development.

b. Informal childcare by a relative or under other arrangements is unavailable or unsuitable. Unavailable or unsuitable childcare shall be defined as a situation involving child abuse, neglect or an unsafe environment. If the parent/caretaker relative refuses to take the child to a particular day care center, he/she must inform the case manager of the reason for the refusal. The case manager must investigate to verify and substantiate the parent's claim of unsuitable childcare. Complaints involving child abuse, neglect or an unsafe environment will be reported to the MS State Health Department, Division of Child Care Facilities Licensure. The case manager must contact the Division of Early Childhood Care and Development (DECCD) representative to discuss the problem and determine what other childcare services are available in the area. The case manager will determine good cause for non-participation based on the investigation and information gathered. Parental complaints regarding a breakdown in receiving childcare services or against a DECCD representative must be submitted in writing to the Director, Division of Early Childhood Care and Development, Mississippi Department of Human Services, Post Office Box 352, Jackson, MS 39205. The parent/caretaker relative may also contact the DECCD Resource and Referral telephone line (1-800-877-7882).

D. TAKE SUCH REASONABLE STEPS AS THE STATE DEEMS NECESSARY TO RESTRICT THE USE AND DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION ABOUT INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES RECEIVING ASSISTANCE UNDER THE PROGRAM ATTRIBUTABLE TO FUNDS PROVIDED BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (SECTION 402(A)(1)(A)(IV) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT)

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Mississippi will take reasonable and necessary steps to restrict the use and disclosure of information about individuals and families receiving assistance under the program attributable to funds provided by the federal government. Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated, at 43-1-19, restricts disclosure of recipient information pursuant to federal regulations and to laws regarding use of electronically exchanged data. MDHS also provides staff training upon entry and annually thereafter with a Confidential Information Agreement setting forth policy and penalties for safeguarding information in accordance with requirements for the exchange of information received from the Social Security Administration and Internal Revenue Service.

E. ESTABLISH GOALS AND TAKE ACTION TO PREVENT AND REDUCE OUT-OF-WEDLOCK PREGNANCIES, WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON TEENAGE PREGNANCIES (SECTION 402(A)(1)(A)(V) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT)

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Mississippi established a task force consisting of public and private organizations and individuals to review the incidence and circumstance of out-of-wedlock pregnancies. Based on these findings, goals were established and recommendations made to prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies with special emphasis on teenage pregnancies. The State established numerical goals for reducing the illegitimacy ratio of the State (as defined in Section 403(a)(2)(B)) for federal fiscal year 1997 through calendar year

2005. The goals for the reduction of incidences of out-of-wedlock pregnancies in Mississippi by one-third between 2006 and 2017 have been met. The teen pregnancies rate in Mississippi has declined continuously over the past decade and is at the lowest level ever. The latest data available shows the rate has decreased almost 50% from 2005 (rate 35.5) through 2016 (rate 19.2).

MDHS has partnered with Families First for Mississippi and community based organizations that serve to impact the whole family throughout the state. Families First for Mississippi provides information and coordinates activities to promote sexual risk avoidance education, to aid in the continued reduction in teen pregnancies and out-of-wedlock births. Families First for Mississippi through the Healthy Teens for a Better Mississippi initiative (formerly the task force that was created to review the incidence and circumstances of out-of-wedlock pregnancies) provides educational and innovative programs on healthy choices, youth development and sexual risk avoidance. Families First for Mississippi through its Healthy Teens for a Better Mississippi initiative have created C.H.A.T. (Choosing Healthy Alternatives for Teens) to engage teens in conversation surrounding teen pregnancy, making healthy choices, sexual risk avoidance and participating in peer leadership. This program allows teens and parents alike to engage in a variety of activities/programs designed to address the challenges many teens face each day.

MDHS established an Abstinence/Youth Development Program within the Foundation for Families Unit. The FFRC will provide information and coordinate activities to promote sexual risk avoidance education, reduce the teen and out-of-wedlock births, and develop teen leadership throughout the State by working with public and private organizations, schools, churches, and interested groups. The FFRC will continue an aggressive public service campaign targeting at risk teens.

MDHS will continue to work with the FFRC community service partners, related organizations, and individuals to develop a program designed to reach State and local law enforcement officials, the education system and relevant counseling services that provide education and training on the problem of statutory rape so that teenage pregnancy prevention programs may be expanded in scope to include men.

**F. CONDUCT A PROGRAM DESIGNED TO REACH STATE AND LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS, THE EDUCATION SYSTEM, AND RELEVANT COUNSELING SERVICES, THAT PROVIDES EDUCATION AND TRAINING ON THE PROBLEM OF STATUTORY RAPE SO THAT TEENAGE PREGNANCY PREVENTION PROGRAMS MAY BE EXPANDED TO INCLUDE MEN (SECTION 402(A)(1)(A)(VI) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT)**

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MDHS established the FFRCs across the State as described above in section (e). MDHS will continue to work with the FFRCs, community service partners, and individuals to develop a program designed to reach State and local law enforcement officials, the education system and relevant counseling services that provide education and training on the problem of statutory rape so that teenage pregnancy prevention programs may be expanded in scope to include men.

In deciding how to best use Federal TANF funds for low-income families, MDHS developed strong collaborative relationships with businesses, local agencies, faith-based groups, and community organizations for the delivery of services. Continuation and/or expansion of

these initiatives are subject to availability of funding and the justification of need. MDHS may contract with public and private entities to provide services under TANF initiatives to assist families end welfare dependency and become self-sufficient. The initiatives are:

a. Child Care Enhancements - To end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work and marriage, MDHS may provide quality, comprehensive childcare services for children in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program and income-eligible, working families at risk of going onto TANF who meet Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) eligibility.

b. Responsible Fatherhood Initiative - To encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families and prevent and reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies, MDHS may provide comprehensive services that support and educate fathers on the importance of responsible parenthood. The program goals are to:

- increase public awareness concerning the impact of a father's absence;
- assist fathers in becoming "Team Parents" and to share the legal, financial and emotional responsibilities of parenthood with the mother(s) of their child(ren),
- improve the self-image of fathers and their families;
- increase fathers' parental involvement in their child(ren)'s education;
- improve academic performance and graduation rate and reduce the dropout rate of their children;
- decrease the teenage pregnancy rate;
- decrease juvenile crime;
- promote two-parent families and the father's role in the family; and
- recruit fathers and expectant fathers to volunteer as mentors to other fathers.

Financial eligibility determination is not required for the program.

c. Post-Employment Assistance Programs - To end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation and work, MDHS may provide post-employment assistance services to current and former TANF recipients who are employed. Where appropriate, case managers will work with employers to ensure reasonable accommodations are provided to employees with disabilities. Individuals with language barriers shall be referred to an English as a Second Language (ESL) activity prior to job placement. Case management will also work with potential employers to ensure reasonable accommodations and language assistance are available at the work site to ensure meaningful access and effective communication. The goals of the initiative are to increase job retention, job advancement, and self-sufficiency for former and current TANF recipients. Families eligible for this program are not required to be TANF eligible, but must be at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

d. TANF Prevention/Intervention Program - To develop projects in community-based settings to prevent and reduce at-risk behaviors among youth and their families to prevent, or break the cycle of welfare dependence, MDHS may provide the following services/activities to:

- reduce and prevent out-of-wedlock pregnancies,
- prevent/reduce substance abuse (use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco products), and

- prevent/reduce other behaviors that prevent the attainment of a high school diploma or HSE diploma.

Financial eligibility determination is not required for the program.

e. “Healthy Choices, Brighter Future” Initiative - To involve community, faith-based organizations, schools and families within the State’s four congressional districts (counties) in the establishment of educational and training programs on youth leadership development and teenage pregnancy prevention MDHS may provide the following activities:

- develop and implement a community-wide abstinence-till-marriage curriculum that teaches the social, psychological and physical effects of engaging in sexual activities,
- teach that abstinence from sexual activity before marriage, and fidelity within marriage is the only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and related health problems,
- conduct multimedia marketing campaign to reach a wide audience with the abstinence-till-marriage message,
- develop workshops in community settings that address at-risk behaviors (i.e., dropping out of school; alcohol and substance abuse/use; teen pregnancy), £ develop and maintain resources that will promote the abstinence-till-marriage message and allow the program to be replicated statewide, and
- reinforce abstinence and second-time abstinence.

The goal is to reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and prevent other at-risk teen behavior. Financial eligibility determination is not required for the program. If funds are available, MDHS may enter into a contract(s)/agreement(s), using Federal TANF funds, with public, private or private nonprofit entities to serve as a fiscal administrator(s) for the TANF Summer Enrichment Program in the county or counties within the State. The fiscal administrator will be responsible for managing and administering the operation of the Summer Enrichment Program in the counties within its designated service area(s). The Summer Enrichment Program is designed to fund projects in community-based settings to prevent and reduce at-risk behaviors (i.e., dropping out of school; substance abuse-use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco products; teen pregnancy; dependency on welfare, etc.) among youth between the ages of 10 and 17. MDHS may contract, using Federal TANF funds, with public, private or private nonprofit entities to provide TANF Work Program services as needed statewide. All contractual services used will be procured in accordance with State Laws. The subgrant will contain performance measures that will assure TANF Work Program goals are achieved. The strategy for accomplishing the goals and objectives outlined for the work program must include utilizing the case management approach. To provide assistance, using Federal TANF funds, to low-income families in resolving barriers to self-sufficiency the State may establish a Crisis Intervention Program. The program will use TANF funds to:

- Meet a TANF family’s ongoing basic needs (i.e., food, clothing, shelter, utilities, household goods, personal care items, and general incidental expenses.)
- Provide assistance to families experiencing an emergent need (i.e., utility payments) that cannot be met with their own income and resources. This program is designed

to deal with a specific situation or an episode of need and is not intended to meet recurrent or ongoing needs. These services will not extend beyond four months. Families are not required to be TANF eligible but must be below 150 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

The goals of the program are to provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives; and end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, and work. Based on availability of TANF funds, the following programs may be implemented through legislative appropriation:

a. Funds may be made available to the Attorney General to implement programs that serve unmet needs of "at risk" youth in the state. The programs shall be designed to:

- Provide assistance to needy families so that the children may be cared for in their homes or in the homes of relatives;
- End the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation and work. These programs provide safe and stable environments which help children succeed and allow their parents to work;
- Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and
- Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

b. TANF funds may be used for temporary care (not to exceed 45 days) of children in foster care. The placements are through emergency shelter facilities and normally do not exceed 45 days. TANF funds will not be used to duplicate Federal foster care payments. Families eligible for this program are not required to be TANF eligible, but must be below 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. The goal of the program is to provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives.

c. TANF funds may be used for the expansion of the Families First Resource Centers. To establish resource centers that would not be possible through the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Grant, MDHS will advance the development, expansion and enhancement of a statewide network of community-based, prevention focused, parent resource centers that offer assistance to families. To encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families and reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies the centers will:

- provide early comprehensive support for parents,
- promote the development of parenting skills, & promote the independence of families,
- increase family stability,
- improve family access to resources and opportunities for assistance,
- focus on prevention of teenage pregnancy while supporting teen parents,
- support the needs of families with children with disabilities, and
- provide a safe place for supervised visitation.

The Families First Resource Centers have strategically braided all available resources therefore eligibility requirements are waived for families and services are free of charge.

d. TANF funds may be used to provide family preservation services to families, with dependent children, earning at or below 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. Social workers and homemakers provide supportive services to promote the safety and well-being of children and their families, promote stability and permanency, and preserve family unity. The goal of the program is to provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives.

e. TANF funds may be used for the purpose of developing and implementing statewide programs that serve the unmet needs of youth. These programs are designed to ensure children remain in the home, prevent out-of-wedlock pregnancies, encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families, improve school attendance, and facilitate goal development that will lead to gainful employment. Individuals eligible for these programs are not required to be TANF eligible, but must be below 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

The MDHS will create a referral process to the Department of Child Protection Services (DCPS) to contact state and local law enforcement, the education system, and counseling services for recipients requiring assistance with statutory rape, domestic violence issues, mental health concerns, and drug/alcohol treatment. The counselors and educators can focus on problems that may be an underlying problem other than statutory rape. Individuals referred will complete an assessment, discuss educational barriers, and receive life skill strategies. MDHS established the Healthy Marriage Initiative, using Federal TANF funds, to promote the well-being of children in Mississippi by encouraging the involvement of mothers and fathers in their lives. The initiative will:

- Encourage stable family formation and healthy marriages,
- Promote responsible fathering,
- Increase paternity and child support objectives,
- Encourage community support for marriage, and
- Prevent out-of-wedlock pregnancies.

The MDHS collaborates with the Families First Resource Centers and other non-profit community service organizations, educational institutions, and faith-based groups to provide the appropriate skills-based relationship education and services to youth and unmarried couples and to:

- Support healthy marriage and family development/formation,
- Prevent family disruption, and
- Secure permanent families for children

The MDHS may implement a TANF Up-Front Diversion Program to provide assistance, using Federal TANF funds, to families with emergency circumstances, if funding is available. As an alternative to TANF cash assistance, a family with an emergency circumstance may be eligible for a one-time short-term cash assistance payment. To receive the diversion program assistance:

- Family units must include an adult and a dependent child(ren) less than 18 years of age.

- Family members must have lived in the designated disaster areas at the time the disaster occurred.
- Family members must currently live together in Mississippi.
- Family members must not be current recipients of regular TANF, including Transitional Transportation or Transitional Child Care.
- Family's primary individual must sign an agreement restricting any member of their household from receiving TANF for a period of three (3) months.

Households will be required to pass the gross income limits standard (200% of the Federal Poverty Level). The maximum amount of resources the family may retain to be eligible is \$3000. In addition to the above, the adult(s) in the family must:

- be employed an average of 25 or more hours per week at or above the federal minimum wage;
- have documentation of the promise of a job starting within 14 days from the application date, working an average of 25 or more hours per week at or above the federal minimum wage; or
- be currently participating in a short-term work-related training program.

A payment of up to \$1000 will be issued directly to the family (parent/caretaker relative and child) to assist in resolving any short-term financial issues related to basic needs (i.e., childcare, transportation, rent and relocation expenses).

**G. IMPLEMENT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES AS NECESSARY TO PREVENT ACCESS TO ASSISTANCE PROVIDED UNDER THE STATE PROGRAM FUNDED UNDER THIS PART THROUGH ANY ELECTRONIC FUND TRANSACTION IN AN AUTOMATED TELLER MACHINE OR POINT-OF-SALE DEVICE LOCATED IN A PLACE DESCRIBED IN SECTION 408(A)(12), INCLUDING A PLAN TO ENSURE THAT RECIPIENTS OF THE ASSISTANCE HAVE ADEQUATE ACCESS TO THEIR CASH ASSISTANCE (SECTION 402(A)(1)(A)(VII) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT)**

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Mississippi delivers TANF benefits via the Mississippi Debit MasterCard Program ePayment/EPPICard. Mississippi also delivers other benefits via the EPPICard including child support, adoption subsidy, and foster board payments.

TANF assistance may be accessed worldwide at any commercial point-of-sale (POS) machine that displays the Maestro or Master Card logo. Cash may be accessed at any automated teller (ATM) that displays the MasterCard or Cirrus or a teller in a bank location that displays the MasterCard logo. Recipients may also receive cash back with a purchase at a vendor that accepts Maestro or MasterCard.

TANF recipients experiencing a problem accessing their TANF benefits can contact their local county office or call customer services toll free. The State will work one-on-one with TANF recipients reporting inadequate access to their cash benefit. The State will ensure such individuals are connected to a Families First for Mississippi (FFFM) navigator, FFFM operates the Families First Resource Centers (FFRC) across the state. The FFRC act as a liaison between MDHS and local community partners and offer a variety of services. Navigators connect individuals with local partner agencies able to meet individual needs and provide barrier mitigation.

Pursuant to Section 4004 of Public Law 112-96, this section describes Mississippi's policies and procedures to prevent access to TANF assistance through electronic fund transactions at casinos, liquor stores, and establishments providing adult-oriented entertainment. This section also explains how the state ensures that recipients have adequate access to their TANF assistance, and can withdraw the TANF assistance with minimal fees or charges, including the opportunity to access the TANF assistance with no fee or charge and how information on fees are communicated to recipients.

Mississippi law follows the Federal Statutes to prohibit the use or acceptance of an electronic benefit transfer card at the following locations:

- Liquor or package stores that sell intoxicating liquor, either exclusively or primarily;
- Gambling establishments that offer, as its primary services, casino, gambling or gaming activities; and
- All retail establishments that provide adult-oriented entertainment in which performers disrobe or perform in an unclothed state for entertainment.

In order for Mississippi to prevent EBT transactions at the above-defined locations, agency staff will discuss with TANF applicants/recipients the proper use of their TANF benefits at initial application and redetermination. All county offices are required to display a poster with the TANF restrictions and penalties in a prominent location.

When it is determined that such unauthorized transactions have occurred, TANF households will face a 50% reduction in the monthly assistance unit payment. Benefits will be reduced for each month such a transaction occurred, with the penalty being imposed as soon as possible after advance notice of the reduction. Penalties for misuse of TANF funds shall not be imposed in conjunction with another disqualification/sanction. It will be imposed the month after the disqualification concludes.

H. ENSURE THAT RECIPIENTS OF ASSISTANCE PROVIDED UNDER THE STATE PROGRAM FUNDED UNDER THIS PART HAVE THE ABILITY TO USE OR WITHDRAW ASSISTANCE WITH MINIMAL FEES OR CHARGES, INCLUDING AN OPPORTUNITY TO ACCESS ASSISTANCE WITH NO FEE OR CHARGES, AND ARE PROVIDED INFORMATION ON APPLICABLE FEES AND SURCHARGES THAT APPLY TO ELECTRONIC FUND TRANSACTIONS INVOLVING THE ASSISTANCE, AND THAT SUCH INFORMATION IS MADE PUBLICLY AVAILABLE (SECTION 402(A)(1)(A)(VIII) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT)

The cardholder can use their EPPICard at vendor and bank locations worldwide that displays the Maestro or MasterCard logo.

Transactions performed at ATMs and some POS machine vendors are subject to surcharges by the financial institution or owner.

Form MDHS-EA-303A, Mississippi Debit MasterCard Program ePayment/EPPICard Customer Information Sheet, is provided to and discussed with the TANF recipient during the interview at application and redetermination. The MDHS-EA-303A also informs the recipient of merchant and bank locations where cash benefits may be redeemed. The card carrier mailed with the EPPICard also provides this information, as well as, EPPICard

account access, card use and customer service information. Recipients may also access this information via the internet at <https://www.eppicard.com/>.

Fees: Purchase No fee Cash-back or Bank Teller Window No fee ATM Cash Withdrawal \$1.75 each time ATM Balance Inquiry \$.75 each time Card Replacement \$5.00 Expedited Card Delivery \$15.00 ATM Denial for Insufficient Funds \$.50 after 3 requests (each call, each calendar month) Monthly Account Access by Calling Customer Service \$.50 after 5 calls (each call, each calendar month)

Surcharges: A surcharge is an additional fee that may be charged for using a card at an ATM, or for withdrawing cash only at some point-of-sale machines in retail stores. The surcharge is charged by the owner of the equipment or financial institution supporting the ATM.

Banks and other retailers may have varying surcharges. Recipients may avoid the surcharge by accessing benefits at any Hancock, Trustmark or Regions Bank ATM.

TANF recipients are informed of benefit prohibitions by use of posters displayed in all MDHS county offices. In addition to the MDHS-EA-303A noted above, benefit use prohibitions are provided to all TANF households via the MDHS-EA-300, TANF Rights and Responsibilities, and the MDHS-EA-312, Personal Responsibility Contact. Benefit use prohibitions are also included in the TANF Approval Notice, the MDHS website, the EPPICard website, and through the recipient's online account "My MDHS Account". In addition, County and Regional Directors randomly observe TANF client interviews to ensure that eligibility workers are complying with requirements to explain benefit use and restrictions with TANF households.

I. INDICATE WHETHER IT INTENDS TO TREAT FAMILIES MOVING FROM ANOTHER STATE DIFFERENTLY FROM OTHER FAMILIES UNDER THE PROGRAM, AND IF SO HOW (SECTION 402(A)(1)(B)(I) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT)

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Mississippi will not treat families moving into the State differently than other families under the TANF program. To treat families differently would create an unfair advantage to person moving into the State with higher benefits.

J. INDICATE WHETHER IT INTENDS TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE TO NON-CITIZENS, AND IF SO INCLUDE AN OVERVIEW OF THE ASSISTANCE (SECTION 402(A)(1)(B)(II) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT)

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Mississippi will provide assistance to individuals who are not citizens of the United States only in accordance with the provisions outlined in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, State Law and subsequent amendments to the Social Security Act.

The following qualified aliens are eligible:

- For five years after obtaining the designated alien status:
  - An alien admitted under Section 207 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA): - An alien who is granted asylum under Section 208 of the INA;
  - An alien whose deportation is being withheld under Section 243(h) of the INA, or whose removal is being withheld under Section 241(b)(3) of the INA;

- An alien who is a Cuban or Haitian entrant as defined in Section 501(e) of the Refugee Education Assistance Act of 1980; or
- An alien admitted as an Amerasian immigrant pursuant to Section 584 of the Foreign Operations Act, as amended.
- For an unlimited period, the following qualified aliens lawfully admitted for permanent residence:
  - Veterans (honorably discharged for reasons other than alienage); active duty personnel (other than active duty for training), and their spouses and unmarried dependent children; and
  - Aliens who are lawfully admitted for permanent residence and have worked for 40 qualifying quarters of coverage under Title II of the SSA or can be credited with such quarters as provided for by section 435 of PRWORA (SUSC 1645), not including quarters beginning January 1, 1997 in which the alien received any Federal means-tested public benefit.

Mississippi will provide assistance to victims of severe forms of trafficking to the same extent as aliens.

K. SET FORTH OBJECTIVE CRITERIA FOR THE DELIVERY OF BENEFITS AND THE DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY AND FOR FAIR AND EQUITABLE TREATMENT, INCLUDING AN EXPLANATION OF HOW IT WILL PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR RECIPIENTS WHO HAVE BEEN ADVERSELY AFFECTED TO BE HEARD IN A STATE ADMINISTRATIVE OR APPEAL PROCESS (SECTION 402(A)(1)(B)(III) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT)

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Mississippi has established objective criteria for the delivery of benefits and the determination of eligibility and for fair and equitable treatment, including the opportunity for recipients who have been adversely affected to be heard in a State administrative or appeal process. The State will administer the due process notification of adverse action with an opportunity for a fair hearing handled independently of the county office eligibility and/or benefit level decision to resolve any recipient benefit decreases, terminations, or related issues. Basic assistance program eligibility criteria and benefit levels are the same statewide.

CRITERIA or BASIS FOR A HEARING

An applicant or recipient has a right to appeal decisions regarding eligibility for assistance including the following issues:

1. Decisions regarding eligibility for or amount of TANF benefits
  2. Conditions of payment or repayment
  3. Denial of opportunity to make application or reapplication of benefits
  4. Undue delay in determining eligibility for TANF and in making TANF benefits available
  5. Suspension or discontinuance of TANF benefits in whole or in part
  6. Assignment or participation issues in the TANF Work Program, including work exemptions, supportive services, good cause, etc.
  7. Decisions regarding cooperation with the Division of Child Support Enforcement and good cause claims
  8. Application of penalties which results in rejection of application, case closure, or reduction of benefits
- NOTE: Some issues that are established by law are not subject to the fair hearing process, such as the maximum TANF benefit level.

## REQUESTING A HEARING

The applicant or recipient has the choice of either an agency conference or a state hearing to appeal any decision made on his case. The individual may bypass the agency conference and request a state hearing, or if he chooses to request an agency conference and is dissatisfied with the result, a state hearing may then be requested. The individual must make the request for a hearing in writing and sign the request. The claimant may be represented by any one he designates; however, he must give the designation in writing.

The request for a hearing may be made by:

1. Checking in the space provided on any of the notification forms
2. Writing a letter indicating his request for a hearing
3. Completing form MDHS-EA-305, Request for a Hearing

The individual may make the request orally, but this must be followed by a formal written request. The worker will assist the individual by explaining how to request a hearing, sending the form MDHS-EA-305 to the individual who does not wish to write a letter and lacks a notification form, or helping to fill out a request form when the individual comes to the office of the Department of Human Services and requests a hearing. The request for a hearing may be sent to the county office or to the Administrative Hearings Unit. The worker may give the individual an addressed envelope when the individual prefers to mail the request himself.

### State Hearing Request after Local Hearing

When the individual has had a local hearing and is not satisfied with the outcome, he must request a state hearing within 90 days, following the expiration of the advance notice of case change or closure. NOTE: If the 10th day falls on a weekend or holiday, the individual must always be given until the first working day following the weekend or holiday to prevent the action or to request continued benefits.

#### L. INDICATE WHETHER THE STATE INTENDS TO ASSIST INDIVIDUALS TO TRAIN FOR, SEEK, AND MAINTAIN EMPLOYMENT (SECTION 402(A)(1)(B)(V) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT)—

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1. PROVIDING DIRECT CARE IN A LONG-TERM CARE FACILITY (AS SUCH TERMS ARE DEFINED UNDER SECTION 1397J OF THIS TITLE); OR

2. IN OTHER OCCUPATIONS RELATED TO ELDER CARE, HIGH-DEMAND OCCUPATIONS, OR OCCUPATIONS EXPECTED TO EXPERIENCE LABOR SHORTAGES AS, DETERMINED APPROPRIATE BY THE STATE FOR WHICH THE STATE IDENTIFIES AN UNMET NEED FOR SERVICE PERSONNEL, AND, IF SO, SHALL INCLUDE AN OVERVIEW OF SUCH ASSISTANCE.

If TANF funding is available, Mississippi will assist TANF Work Program participants to train for, seek, and maintain employment

- o providing direct care in a long-term care facility (as such terms are defined under section 1397j of this title); or

- in other occupations related to elder care determined appropriate by the State for which the State identifies an unmet need for service personnel.

The Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS), Division of Workforce Development (DWD) shall partner with the Mississippi Community College Board (MCCB), Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES) and/or other entities to provide short-term training (e.g., Certified Nurses Assistance (CNA) training for placement in a nursing home, etc.) for TANF Work Program (TWP) participants who seek employment in the eldercare workforce. Training shall be established on an individual basis based on the individual's career goal(s)/objective(s) and training needs in conjunction with employer needs.

M. PROVIDE FOR ALL MOE-FUNDED SERVICES THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION: THE NAME OF THE PROGRAM BENEFIT OR SERVICE, AND THE FINANCIAL ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA THAT FAMILIES MUST MEET IN ORDER TO RECEIVE THAT BENEFIT OR SERVICE. IN ADDITION, FOR TANF MOE-FUNDED SERVICES (CO-MINGLED OR SEGREGATED MOE) DESCRIBE THE PROGRAM BENEFIT PROVIDED TO ELIGIBLE FAMILIES (SSP SERVICES DO NOT HAVE TO INCLUDE A DESCRIPTION BUT THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES ENCOURAGES IT) (§263.2(B)(3) & §263.2(C) PREAMBLE PAGES 17826-7)

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The State shall maintain a Segregated State program for the following state-funded programs. These programs shall count towards the State's MOE:

- State funded scholarship programs for needy families with dependent children that began after 1995. [Mississippi Code of 1972 Sections 37-106-29, 37-106-31, and 37-157-1 amended by Senate Bill 2231(1997) and House Bill 1273(1998)]

Eligible population: A needy family is defined as a family with a dependent child(ren) and an average annual income at or below 350 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. The eligible child is defined as anyone who has not yet attained their 24th birthday, continuously enrolled in a program of post-secondary education [Attorney General's Opinion (September 6, 2002)]. The eligible child is not a veteran, not a graduate or professional student, not married, not an orphan or ward of the court, and does not have legal dependents. The eligible child is living in the home; however, he/she may be absent from the home for periods while attending the post-secondary program.

The cost of a scholarship provided to the head of household and/or his/her spouse in an income eligible family shall also count toward the State's MOE requirement.

- State funded programs to increase the likelihood of school success of preschool and school age children in needy families. Eligible population: Preschool and school age children from families with an income at or below 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. Mississippi established new programs to assist needy families with educational opportunities. The Mississippi Department of Education developed state funded programs for 3 and 4 year olds whose families are at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. However, the Reading and Intervention Program was established for school age child who has scored low on state tests and

this program does not have a financial eligibility criteria. Pamphlets, brochures, and posters are provided to local MDHS offices ensuring the public is aware of all available services funded by the Mississippi Department of Education. The TANF goals of these programs/activities are to:

- Provide assistance to needy families so that the children may be cared for in their homes or in the homes of relatives;
- End the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation and work. These programs provide safe and stable environments which help children succeed and allow their parents to work;
- Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and
- Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

State funds may be used for the following programs/expenditures. The eligibility criteria, if applicable, is 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Level:

- State funded programs to assist TANF Work Program participants with out-of-pocket expenditures for work-related items and/or services required by the employer in order to accept or maintain employment;
- Mandatory State funded expenditures for early care and education for children whose parent(s) are employed or required to participate in TANF Work Program activities;
- State funded administrative expenditures for frontline caseworkers and state level staff which includes salaries, office supplies, and goods; and
- State funded expenditures to maintain and enhance the eligibility and case management systems required to support the TANF Work Program.

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### TANF CERTIFICATIONS

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States that include TANF in the Combined State Plan must provide a certification by the chief executive officer of that State, that during the fiscal year, the State will:

Operate a child support enforcement program under the State Plan approved under part D. (section 402(a)(2) of the Social Security Act)    Yes

Operate a foster care and adoption assistance program under the State Plan approved under part E, and that the State will take such actions as are necessary to ensure that children receiving assistance under such part are eligible for medical assistance under The Unified or Combined State Plan under title XIX. (section 402(a)(3) of the Social Security Act)    Yes

Specify which State agency or agencies will administer and supervise the program referred to in paragraph (1) for the fiscal year, which shall include assurances that local governments and private sector organizations (section 402(a)(4) of the Social Security Act)—have been consulted regarding the plan and design of welfare services in the State so that services are provided in a manner appropriate to local populations;    Yes

Specify which State agency or agencies will administer and supervise the program referred to in paragraph (1) for the fiscal year, which shall include assurances that local governments and private sector organizations (section 402(a)(4) of the Social Security

Act)—have had at least 45 days to submit comments on the plan and the design of such services Yes

Provide each member of an Indian tribe, who is domiciled in the State and is not eligible for assistance under a tribal family assistance plan approved under section 412, with equitable access to assistance under the State program funded under this part attributable to funds provided by the Federal Government. (section 402(a)(5) of the Social Security Act) Yes

Establish and enforce standards and procedures to ensure against program fraud and abuse, including standards and procedures concerning nepotism, conflicts of interest among individuals responsible for the administration and supervision of the State program, kickbacks, and the use of political patronage. (section 402(a)(6) of the Social Security Act) Yes

(optional) Establish and Enforcing standards and procedures to (section 402(a)(7) of the Social Security Act).— screen and identify individuals receiving assistance under this part with a history of domestic violence while maintaining the confidentiality of such individuals; Yes

(optional) Establish and Enforcing standards and procedures to (section 402(a)(7) of the Social Security Act).— refer such individuals to counseling and supportive services; Yes

(optional) Establish and Enforcing standards and procedures to (section 402(a)(7) of the Social Security Act).—waive, pursuant to a determination of good cause, other program requirements such as time limits (for so long as necessary) for individuals receiving assistance, residency requirements, child support cooperation requirements, and family cap provisions, in cases where compliance with such requirements would make it more difficult for individuals receiving assistance under this part to escape domestic violence or unfairly penalize such individuals who are or have been victimized by such violence, or individuals who are at risk of further domestic violence Yes

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### TRADE ADJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE (TAA)

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There are no program-specific state planning requirements for TAA. If the state includes TAA in a Combined State Plan, the state must incorporate TAA in its responses to the common planning elements in sections II, III, IV, and V of the WIOA State Plan requirements instrument.

Has the state incorporated TAA into the sections indicated above? No

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### JOBS FOR VETERANS' STATE GRANTS

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The Jobs for Veterans' State Grants (JVSG) are mandatory, formula-based staffing grants to (including DC, PR, VI and Guam). The JVSG is funded annually in accordance with a funding formula defined in the statute (38 U.S.C. 4102A (c) (2) (B) and regulation and operates on a fiscal year (not program year) basis, however, performance metrics are collected and reported (VETS-200 Series Reports) quarterly (using four "rolling quarters") on a Program Year basis (as with the ETA-9002 Series). Currently, VETS JVSG operates on a five-year (FY 2015-2019), multi-year grant approval cycle modified and funded annually.

In accordance with 38 U.S.C. § 4102A(b)(5) and § 4102A(c), the Assistant Secretary for Veterans' Employment and Training (ASVET) makes grant funds available for use in each State to support Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists and Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVER) staff. As a condition to receive funding, 38 U.S.C. § 4102A(c)(2) requires States to submit an application for a grant that contains a State Plan narrative, which includes:

**A. HOW THE STATE INTENDS TO PROVIDE EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING AND JOB PLACEMENT SERVICES TO VETERANS AND ELIGIBLE PERSONS UNDER THE JVSG**

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MDES plans to assign and utilize DVOP Specialists and other agency employees trained in case management to metropolitan WIN Job Centers throughout the state where the need of intensive services is greatest. DVOP Specialists will provide intensive services, through the case management framework, and facilitate 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 Secretary of Labor. The DVOP Specialist, Intensive Services Coordinator (ISC), will continue to work with the Veterans Affairs' Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment (VR & E) program. DVOP specialists will provide intensive services through the case management approach, including completion of an assessment and a written employability development plan. LVER staff trained in networking will be assigned and utilized within workforce areas. LVER staff will conduct outreach to employers within the workforce area to assist veterans in gaining employment, including conducting seminars for employers and, in conjunction with employers, conducting job search workshops and establishing job search groups; and facilitate employment, training, and placement services furnished to veterans served by the WIN Job Centers. MDES plans to fill grant-funded vacancies expeditiously despite State budget problems, hiring freezes and furloughs. MDES plans to identify projected losses and retirements early when possible. Applicants will be given the following order of priority: qualified service-connected disabled veterans; qualified eligible veterans; and qualified eligible persons. Also, veteran (non-JVSG) staff in the agency may be considered for assignment to the program.

**B. THE DUTIES ASSIGNED TO DVOP SPECIALISTS AND LVER STAFF BY THE STATE; SPECIFICALLY IMPLEMENTING DVOP AND LVER DUTIES OR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES AS OUTLINED IN 38 U.S.C. § 4103A AND 4104. THESE DUTIES MUST BE CONSISTENT WITH CURRENT GUIDANCE;**

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*DVOP Specialists* In accordance with Veterans' Program Letter (VPL) 03-14, VPL 04-14 or most recent guidance, MDES Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program Specialists (DVOP) will provide intensive services, following the case management framework, and facilitate placements to meet the employment needs of veterans, prioritizing service to special disabled veterans, other disabled veterans, and other categories of veterans in accordance with priorities determined by the Secretary of Labor.

In the event that a DVOP specialist does not have a full case-load of eligible veterans and eligible spouses, the DVOP specialist may perform additional activities, in the order specified below:

- Review all open case files of current participants with a SBE or in a priority category and perform case management duties.

- Conduct relationship building, outreach and recruitment activities with other service providers in the local area, to enroll SBE and priority category veterans in the WIN Job Center employment system.

DVOP specialists will target their services to special disabled veterans, other disabled veterans, and veterans age 18 to 24. DVOP Specialists are integrated into the WIN Job Center service delivery system at the local office level. Eligible veterans and eligible spouses with significant barriers to employment are referred to or assigned to DVOP Specialists after other WIN Job Center staff complete initial core services. To better serve this target group, DVOP Specialists will continue to be oriented in all WIN Job Center programs, i.e., WIOA qualifications. WIN Job Center staff, WIOA and Wagner-Peyser, will identify eligible veterans or eligible spouses at the point of entry through the use of the intake form and complete initial assessments. Those identified (self-attest) as having a SBE will be referred or assigned to the DVOP specialists or, in instances where a DVOP specialist is not available or has reached the predetermined caseload, another WIN Job Center staff will provide services, including intensive services, to veterans and eligible spouses as appropriate under the programs the staff administer.

*LVER Staff* In accordance with Veterans' Program Letter 07-10, 03-14 or most recent guidance, MDES Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVER) will conduct outreach to employers in the area to assist veterans in gaining employment, including conducting seminars for employers and, in conjunction with employers, conducting job search workshops and establishing job search groups, and facilitating employment, training, and placement services furnished to veterans within WIN Job Centers.

The LVERs will work with the local area management team to coordinate and conduct employer outreach activities.

LVERs will advocate for all veterans served by the WIN Job Centers with business, industry, and other community-based organizations by participating in appropriate activities such as:

- Planning and participating in job and career fairs;
- Conducting employer outreach;
- Educating all WIN Job Center staff and partners with current employment initiatives and programs for veterans;
- Conducting job searches and workshops, and establishing job search groups, in conjunction with employers;
- Coordinating with unions, apprenticeship programs and businesses or business organizations to promote and secure employment and training programs for veterans;
- Informing Federal contractors of the process to recruit qualified veterans;
- Promoting credentialing and licensing opportunities for veterans; and
- Coordinating and participating with other business outreach efforts.

MDES will use LVER staff to facilitate job-driven employment, training, and placement services on behalf of veterans. On behalf of all veterans, MDES LVER staff will conduct outreach to businesses and industries by email, text, phone, mail, employer forums, and face to face office visits.

The expected outcomes are enhanced employability and placement of veterans who seek employment; increased employers awareness of the benefits to hire veterans and increased knowledge of services offered by WIN Job Centers.

C. THE MANNER IN WHICH DVOP SPECIALISTS AND LVER STAFF ARE INTEGRATED INTO THE STATE'S EMPLOYMENT SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEM OR ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM PARTNER NETWORK;

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*Program Integration and Leveraging Resources*

DVOP specialists and LVERs are an essential part of and fully integrated into the WIN Job Center network. They are included among the WIN Job Center partner staff, which consists of all staff employed by programs or activities operated by job center partners that provide job-driven online and/or in-person workforce development or related support services as part of the workforce development system. Other WIN Job Center partner staff members include staff of WIOA, WP, and other network partner programs.

LVER staff will continue to be viable and effective in the WIN Job Center delivery system, e.g., facilitating and participating in employer marketing services, employer job fairs, etc. LVER staff will continue to be considered key players and team participants in business development activities and employer marketing efforts, developing jobs for WIN Job Centers, marketing veteran services to employers, assisting employers at job fairs and facilitating employer recruitments. Veterans with significant barriers to employment are referred to or assigned to the DVOP after initial core services. All of these activities translate into a fully integrated system with positive benefits and productivity for the WIN Job Centers and also subsequently result in the development of seamless employment opportunities for veterans.

MDES DVOP and WIN Job Center staff will continue to identify service providers in the state and establish linkages to leverage and enhance employability and placement of veterans. MDES LVER and WIN Job Center staff will continue to seek out and partner with other economic stakeholders regarding the employment of veterans, i.e. Chambers of Commerce, economic development units, human resource associations, professional organizations, educational institutions, training providers and others, by attending meetings and through outreach.

MDES LVER will conduct outreach to other organizations that provide employment services to veterans. MDES will negotiate future Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with service providers as appropriate to bring additional services as part of the overall service delivery strategy. Mississippi Department of Corrections (MDOC) and the Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES) have created an electronic means through which offenders nearing release from the custody of MDOC have an opportunity to place an employment application with MDES.

The MDES website provides information about available employment and training-related services. MDES plans to use service brochures to convey information on employment and training opportunities to veterans during the initial core services. Information may also be provided by phone, mail, or electronically through the agency workforce technology system.

To better meet the needs of employers wishing to hire veterans, a coordinated approach to marketing and service delivery will include the LVER and other WIN Job Center staff.

Chambers of Commerce, economic development units, veterans' organizations and colleges/community colleges will be invited to play a key role in marketing a job-driven campaign to help veterans make decisions based on their individual employment needs coupled with the projected labor market. MDES plans to continue using marketing brochures and tools to target veterans and employers (on behalf of veterans) resulting in increased job opportunities for veterans.

**D. THE INCENTIVE AWARD PROGRAM IMPLEMENTED USING THE 1% GRANT ALLOCATION SET ASIDE FOR THIS PURPOSE, AS APPLICABLE;**

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*Performance Incentive Awards*

MDES intends to use up to one percent (\$16,000) of the annual JVSG allocation for Performance Incentive Awards. In accordance with Veterans Program Letter Number 02-07, MDES has established a performance incentive awards program to recognize individuals for quality employment outreach and placement services to veterans. Individuals must provide a recognizable service that exceeds their ordinary job duties and that clearly demonstrates extraordinary and commendable efforts on behalf of veterans and eligible spouses. It includes outstanding outreach and placement efforts on behalf of veterans, or extraordinary community relations efforts to increase the awareness of veterans' issues.

MDES expects an increase in services to veterans by our partners, innovative approaches to servicing veterans, expanded program integration, increases in performance outcomes and increased advocacy within the employer community. MDES also expects that staff will:

- Improve the employment status of veterans with Significant Barriers to Employment (SBE);
- Improve policies and procedures related to veterans' services;
- Improve the promotion of services to veterans by rewarding innovative outreach strategies, supportive services, case management and job development; and
- Improve procedures that will increase collaboration and improve performance outcomes.

The incentive program will bring attention to veterans as a group with special employment needs and will reinforce the special federal regulations that support priority of services to veterans.

Selection criteria for award recipients will be based on performance standards and activities accomplished during the fiscal year for which the award is given. Attitude, motivation, program improvement and positive feedback will also be considered.

The Director of the Office of Job Connections and the Department Chief of Workforce Services, with input from local management, will administer awards among:

- Local Veterans' Employment Representative (LVER) staff;
- Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists; and
- WIN Job Center WIOA, WP, and partner programs employees.

Selection of recipients and presentation of incentives will be made by the end of the fourth quarter of each year. Incentive award funds will be obligated by September 30th of each

year and liquidated by December 31st of the same year. An Incentive Award Report will be submitted with the quarterly report due mid-November.

E. THE POPULATIONS OF VETERANS TO BE SERVED, INCLUDING ANY ADDITIONAL POPULATIONS DESIGNATED BY THE SECRETARY AS ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES, AND ANY ADDITIONAL POPULATIONS SPECIFICALLY TARGETED BY THE STATE WORKFORCE AGENCY FOR SERVICES FROM ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM PARTNERS (E.G., NATIVE AMERICAN VETERANS; VETERANS IN REMOTE RURAL COUNTIES OR PARISHES);

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*Targeting Services to Veterans with Significant Barriers to Employments (SBE)*

In accordance with 38 U.S.C. 4103A, Veterans' Program Letters 03-14 , 04-14, or most recent policies, the DVOP Specialists will provide intensive services to eligible veterans and eligible persons with Significant Barriers to Employment (SBE) through the case management approach. An eligible veteran or eligible person is determined to have an SBE if he or she attests to belonging to at least one of the six criteria below:

- A special disabled or disabled veteran, who is entitled to VA compensation or released from active duty because of a service-connected disability;
- Homeless;
- A recently-separated service member who at any point in the previous 12 months has been unemployed for 27 or more consecutive weeks;
- An offender who has been released from incarceration within the last 12 months;
- Lacking a high school diploma or equivalent certificate; or
- Low-income, as defined by WIOA.

In accordance with Veterans' Program Letters 03-14 and 04-14, or most recent policies, MDES DVOP Specialists will target services to other special populations of veterans with SBE:

- Veterans age 18-24;
- Former Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Participants;
- U.S. Military members receiving treatment at a military treatment facility and spouse or family caregiver of a member of the U.S. Military who is receiving treatment at a military treatment facility. Services to these populations is contingent upon an authorized extension past FY 2014; or
- Most recent populations as designated by the Secretary of Labor.

DVOP Specialists will conduct the following outreach activities to locate and assist veterans and eligible persons, with the primary purpose of delivering intensive services:

- Veterans Rehabilitation & Employment Centers;
- Vet Centers, VA Medical Centers and Outpatient Clinics;
- Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) Projects and Homeless Shelters;
- Community-based and Civic Organizations;
- Veterans' Service Organizations;
- Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Offices;
- Workforce Partners and Service Providers;

- Veterans' Affairs Coordinators at Colleges/Community Colleges to promote services to veterans and solicit VA Work-Study Assistants;
- Faith-Based Organizations;
- Reserve and National Guard units;
- Military Base Family Service/Support Centers; and
- Military Treatment Facilities (MTF). Services to these populations is contingent upon an authorized extension past FY 2014; and
- Other venues and locations where veterans congregate.

MDES Local Veterans Employment Representative (LVER) will continue to coordinate with all WIN Job Center partners to optimize employment outcomes for special populations. MDES Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialists (DVOP) and WIN Job Center staff have on-going relationships with Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services and community colleges for direct services to veteran participants.

MDES Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialists (DVOP) and WIN Job Center staff will work closely with the reserves, the National Guard, and active duty family readiness coordinators, to help identify those military spouses who need assistance. DVOP Specialists will continue to work with the Veterans Affairs' Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment (VR & E) program.

MDES Local Veterans Employment Representative (LVER) and WIN Job Center staff will work with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) to provide information to veterans on opportunities in federal contracting. This will assist service-disabled business owners to receive information on sole-source and set-aside procurement opportunities and benefits. LVER staff will continue outreach efforts to federal contractors.

At the local level, WIN Job Centers' management will utilize the Manager's Report on Services to Veterans, the DVOP's Outreach and Recruitment Activity Report, the DVOP Case Management Log and the Personnel Development Assessments (PDA) to monitor and assess the productivity and quality of services provided to veterans. At the state level, the State Veterans Coordinator (lead LVER) will continue to conduct WIN Job Center assistance visits to ensure guidelines set forth in the DVOP Specialists/LVER Roles and Responsibilities VPLs, State Plan, Special Grant Provisions for Jobs for Veterans Grants, Title 38, USC, Chapters 41 and 42, and other applicable compliance requirements are followed. Performance reports will be analyzed quarterly.

MDES Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialists (DVOP) and WIN Job Center staff plan to conduct outreach and provide services to Native American veterans with significant barriers living on tribal lands to include the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. MDES will maintain contact with local tribal representatives as well as contact with national representatives. MDES will ensure that continued approval from the tribal leadership is received for services and outreach activities.

#### F. HOW THE STATE IMPLEMENTS AND MONITORS THE ADMINISTRATION OF PRIORITY OF SERVICE TO COVERED PERSONS;

To ensure veterans receive consideration for all opportunities for which they qualify, MDES ensures covered persons are aware of (1) their entitlement to priority of service, (2) the full array of employment, training, and placement services available through the WIN Job

Centers and all service points, and (3) that all applicable eligibility requirements for these programs are understood and applied.

MDES will also utilize the following as means of providing priority of service:

- Referral of qualified veterans to new job openings, especially Federal Contractor job orders, prior to all non-veteran job referral activity; and
- Veterans placed at the top of WIOA waiting lists (ITAs and OJT) for limited training funds.

MDES management will monitor priority of service by reviewing quarterly performance reports, Managers' Report and MS Works special reports. MDES management will monitor priority of service in covered programs at two levels. WIN Job Centers will continue to use established protocol of identifying targeted groups. At the state level, management will continue to analyze performance reports, Managers' Report and MS Works special reports.

WIN Job Center services are made available and provided to eligible veterans, transitioning service members, VA VR & E Chapter 31 veterans, Native American Veterans and other groups targeted for special consideration, veterans with significant barriers to employment through outreach activities performed by DVOP Specialists. MDES does have an agreement with the Mississippi Department of Corrections (MDOC) for direct services and/or to coordinate services provided to target groups. MDES will continue to encourage non-DOL program partners to focus on providing priority of service to targeted groups for special consideration.

G. HOW THE STATE PROVIDES OR INTENDS TO PROVIDE AND MEASURE,  
THROUGH BOTH THE DVOP AND ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM PARTNER STAFF:

**1. JOB AND JOB TRAINING INDIVIDUALIZED CAREER SERVICES,**

To identify the appropriate career services needed by individual veterans, DVOPs use the Case Management process. They assess the job or job training needs of the veterans referred to them that have been identified by WIN Job Center staff as having a significant barriers to employment. If training is needed, DVOPs refer veterans to the appropriate WIN Job Center staff.

**2. EMPLOYMENT PLACEMENT SERVICES, AND**

DVOPs refer veterans to jobs based on job orders within the MDES MS Works system. If no job orders are available for the skill-set desired by the veterans, the DVOP works with the LVER and WIN Job Center staff to locate employers in the community.

**3. JOB-DRIVEN TRAINING AND SUBSEQUENT PLACEMENT SERVICE PROGRAM FOR  
ELIGIBLE VETERANS AND ELIGIBLE PERSONS;**

DVOPs refer those veterans with significant barriers to the appropriate program within the WIN Job Center for job-driven training and placement services. DVOP job services, career services, and placement services are measured through the MDES MS Works system and manual tools, i.e., managers' reports and logs.

**H. THE HIRE DATE ALONG WITH MANDATORY TRAINING COMPLETION DATES  
FOR ALL DVOP SPECIALISTS AND LVER STAFF; AND**

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Hire date and training information is provided in the “Addendum for Mandatory Training Requirements” form provided in Appendix 17A.

**I. SUCH ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AS THE SECRETARY MAY REQUIRE.**

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At the time of plan submission, no addition information was requested by the Secretary.

**UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (UI)**

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The Unemployment Insurance (UI) program requires a State Quality Service Plan (SQSP) on a 2-year planning cycle that is a condition of receipt of administrative funding to administer the program. The SQSP is the State’s UI performance management and planning process that allows for an exchange of information between Federal and State partners to enhance the UI program’s ability to reflect their joint commitment to performance excellence and client-centered services. A formal two-year SQSP is submitted biennially. On the off years, States may be required to modify the SQSP with additional corrective action plans and narrative if they are failing any new performance measures, and they are required to provide updated budget documents, certifications, and assurances. ETA Handbook No. 336, 18th Edition provides detailed guidance for the preparation and submittal of the SQSP and supplemental guidance is provided in an annual UIPL, issued as UIPL 21-14 for the FY 2015 SQSP. The Social Security Act (SSA) sections 302 and 303 authorize the Secretary of Labor to provide funds to administer the UI program and govern the expenditure of those funds. States that choose the option to include UI in a WIOA Combined State Plan will be required to submit their SQSP through the Combined State Plan process. The SQSP must be prepared in accordance to the instructions in ET Handbook 336, 18th Edition and there are no changes to the established SQSP cycle if a State chose to submit their SQSP through the Combined State Plan process.

**A. CONTENTS OF A COMPLETE UI SQSP PACKAGE**

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A complete UI SQSP package includes the following documents, as described in Chapter 1, ETA Handbook 336, 18th Edition:

**1. TRANSMITTAL LETTER**

A cover letter to the appropriate Regional Office (RO) transmitting all the required SQSP documents.

August 16, 2019

Winston Tompoe

Acting Regional Administrator

U. S. Department of Labor/ETA

Atlanta Federal Center

61 Forsyth Street, S. W., Room 6M12

Atlanta, Georgia 30303-3104

Dear Mr. Tompoe:

Please find attached the Fiscal Year 2020 Unemployment Insurance State Quality Service Plan (SQSP) for the State of Mississippi.

If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact Tarvose Johnson at 601-321-6005.

Sincerely,

Timothy Rush

Director, Office of Reemployment Assistance

Note: The signed copy of the Transmittal Letter is maintained with the Agency and the Regional Office.

## 2. BUDGET WORKSHEETS/FORMS

Budget worksheets/forms and plan for program administration based on projected allocations received from the Federal partner. These forms include Worksheet UI-1 and SF 424, SF 424A and SF 424B. The SF 424A is only required if the State vary the quarterly distribution of base claims activity staff years.

Title: Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 State Workforce Agency Unemployment Insurance (UI) Resource Planning Targets and Guidelines

Description: Unemployment Insurance

Funding total: 16,374,331.00

Project start and end date: October 1, 2019 through September 30, 2022

Authorizing Representative: Mrs. Jacqueline A. Turner

Note: The signed copy of the SF 424 and other appropriate budget-related forms are maintained with the State Agency and the Regional Office.

## 3. THE STATE PLAN NARRATIVE

The State Plan Narrative is a vital element of the SQSP that provides a vehicle for sharing with the Federal partner State-specific efforts that affect the administration of the UI Program. The State Plan Narrative allows the State to describe in a single narrative: a) State performance in comparison to the Government Performance Review Act goals; b) actions planned to correct deficiencies regarding UI programs, UI program reviews and reporting requirements; and c) results of customer satisfaction surveys (optional).

## **STATE PLAN NARRATIVE MISSISSIPPI FY 2020 Biennial SQSP**

The Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES) is dedicated to improving the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program to provide superior service to our customers. Mississippi has included a Corrective Action Plan, CAP, in its FY 2020 SQSP for Effective Audit Measure and Detection of Overpayments. Mississippi addresses First Payment Promptness, Detection of Overpayment, Establish Tax Accounts Promptly and UI Reporting Requirements in the narrative. The Mississippi Department of Employment Security, the state's workforce agency, has a straightforward mission, "Helping Mississippians Get jobs." Our goal is to expand employment, improve workforce skills and enhance productivity in our state. MDES has contributed to the economic growth and stability of our state by providing vital employment services to Mississippi residents and employers. We are meeting the needs of our workforce through partner services, analyzing and disseminating actionable Labor Market Information and administering Unemployment Insurance programs geared to help participants return to work sooner. MDES will continue to partner with Mississippi employers to procure and fulfill job listings. Our staff will identify and refer the most qualified candidate for each job opening in our system. If no trained candidates are available, we will act as a conduit between business and training providers to identify candidates with training potential for those jobs. During the past year, Mississippi recorded historically high numbers of jobs available and historically low unemployment levels in the state. Over this past year, 26,316 employers submitted 143,457 job orders to MDES. We served 127,195 people through our WIN Job Centers and 57,414 through our online systems. The agency will continue to be good stewards of the Unemployment Insurance (UI) trust fund, keeping it one of the most solvent UI trust funds in the nation. We will do this by collecting UI taxes in a timely fashion, ensuring people who are eligible for benefits receive them and improving processes to prevent and recover improper payments. MDES will continue to use technology and innovation to provide accurate, efficient, timely customer service as we operate within the regulation set forth by the United States Department of Labor.

### **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, WIOA Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Partners**

MDES has continued to achieve success implementing Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) strategies this year through partnerships to meet Mississippi's workforce needs. WIOA partner services are harmonized to help Mississippians seeking employment find the training necessary to qualify for occupational opportunities that bring self-sufficiency.

Mississippi's WIOA Combined Plan vision is to create a workforce system that acts and functions as an ecosystem. The local areas created plans for their areas that will further develop that vision. The Reemployment and System Integration and the Workforce Data Quality Initiative grants have made it possible for the state to create a data hub aligning partner services for participants. This hub allows WIOA partner systems to communicate to make electronic referrals and share records necessary for case management, federal reporting and continual performance improvement dashboards. MDES's workforce system has been modified to interact with the centralized 'WIOA Hub' system.

A key concern of the original plan was closing the gap between the demand and supply of workers with specialized skills beyond high school. It had become clear that filling these openings is the key to shifting Mississippi's workforce landscape and keeping the state on a path of long-term, sustainable economic growth. The state's strategy to prepare Mississippians for occupational opportunities has been further developed to include a well-organized apprenticeship program. MDES works diligently with the Mississippi Community College Board on the Mississippi Apprenticeship Program. Since receiving the grants from USDOL, Mississippi has achieved: 529 new registered apprentices, 125 new businesses engaged expressing interest in the registered apprenticeships program, 5 new registered apprenticeships and 2 existing registered apprenticeship programs expanded.

### **Make Timely Benefits Payments**

The GPRA goal for intrastate first payments made timely within 14/21 days is 87.0%. For the performance year ending March 31, 2019, Mississippi achieved a level of 91.0%. First payment timeliness has continued to improve as evidenced by our increased score for the performance year ending March 31, 2019. This was primarily due to ongoing staff training and development, system enhancements and a concerted focus on timely nonmonetary decisions. MDES constantly seeks ways to optimize processes to ensure timely first payments.

### **Establish Tax Accounts Promptly**

The goal for the new employer status determinations made within 90 days of the last day of the quarter in which the business became liable is 70%. For the performance year ending March 31, 2019, Mississippi was at 86.4%. For the quarter ending June 30, 2019, Mississippi was at 91.1% which exceeded the established goal by 21.1%. While we are pleased with this improved score, our ultimate goal is to achieve 100.0%. We will continue our efforts to provide information regarding reporting liability to the employer community using methods such as employer seminars, presentations, and social media. Staffing continues to be a concern. An additional tax field representative was hired on June 1, 2019. Staffing vacancies are expected to be filled by the end of October 2019. The focus is to process the federal employer identification number (FEIN) extract provided by the Internal Revenue Service. This will aid efforts to locate and register liable employers in a timely manner.

### **Detection of Benefits Overpayments**

The GPRA goal for overpayments detected is 54.5% of the estimated detectable, recoverable overpayments. For the performance period ending of March 31, 2019 the estimated amount of BAM overpayments and amounts established by BPC was 152.73%. MDES continues to analyze the Benefits Accuracy Measurement monthly report and meet with staff to define ways to prevent overpayments.

## UI Reporting Requirements

The ETA 9051p was not submitted timely for the reporting period of March 2019 because of a transmittal error. This reporting issue has been resolved and the report has been submitted. Mississippi has implemented electronic reminders to double check report submissions prior to the required deadlines to prevent this oversight in the future.

### 4. CORRECTIVE ACTION PLANS (CAPs)

Corrective Action Plans (CAPs): CAPs are expected as a part of the SQSP when State's annual performance does not meet the established criteria for core measures, Secretary's Standards, UI program, assurances, and other program deficiencies identified in the annual SQSP guidance provided by the Department. The CAP must list both specific milestones for key corrective actions or improvement activities, and the completion date for each milestone.

#### Corrective Action Plan

##### **Detection of Overpayment: Core Measure =50% and=95% (152.73%)**

##### **A. Reason for the deficiency.**

Detection of overpayments has increased due to increased work search audits and continued tightening of the quarterly crossmatch parameters.

##### **B. Please include a description of these actions/ activities in each stage of your "Plan-Do-Check-Act" corrective action plan.**

MDES is looking at incorporating Work Search Audit with Eligibility Review processes so the work search details are audited prior to payment. MDES will conduct focused outreach to Mississippi employers with the highest linkage to improper payments as a prevention measure. MDES will enhance claimant and employer education regarding new hires, re-hires, reporting earnings and potential issues.

##### **C. If a plan was in place the previous year, an explanation of why the actions contained in that plan were not successful in improving performance; and, an explanation of why the actions now specified will be more successful.**

MDES's plan was successful in detecting overpayments by modifying the parameters used in crossmatching. We increased employer education however we did not target specific employers. By creating focused outreach to employers linked to the highest percentage of improper payments, MDES will be able to provide a more personalized level of awareness resulting in a greater impact.

##### **D. A brief description of plans for monitoring and assessing accomplishment of planned actions and for controlling quality after achieving performance goals.**

MDES will continue ongoing analysis of existing procedures, employer and claimant education along with BAM findings to monitor progress on improper payments.

**Milestones:**

1. Incorporate Work Search Audit with Eligibility Review
2. Employer Education
3. Claimant Education

**Effective Audit Measures: Failed Factor 3-Total Wages Audited (0.7%)****A. Reason for the deficiency.**

The audit unit continued to experience audit staff vacancies over the last year compounded by delays in the hiring of new staff. MDES has filled all of the auditor positions as of 5/1/2019. The training is ongoing. The new auditors will gain the experience needed to work independently to reach expected and maximized performance levels.

**B. Please include a description of these actions/ activities in each stage of your “Plan-Do-Check-Act” corrective action plan.**

With all staff positions are filled, the expectation is that these auditors will slowly progress in productivity over the next year and will be at full productivity by 5/1/2020. Ongoing training through exposure to large and or complex audits will be provided through shadowing of experienced auditors on audits of that nature. Ongoing feedback and review will be detailed and provided by the audit supervisor in order to assist the auditors in gaining the necessary skills to perform at expected levels. Audit unit policies and procedures are being examined to assist in the productivity of the unit as a whole.

**C. If a plan was in place the previous year, an explanation of why the actions contained in that plan were not successful in improving performance; and, an explanation of why the actions now specified will be more successful.**

While continued vacancies in auditor positions over the past year as well as delays in the hiring process lead to underperformance of the audit unit as a whole, MDES has made strides to utilize its auditors to meet the necessary standards through changes in audit policy and procedures. MDES has managed to meet one of the CAP items from the previous year through these steps in spite of continued vacancies in the unit. Ongoing examination of policies and procedures along with having a fully staffed audit unit should allow the unit to meet and exceed productivity expectations.

**D. A brief description of plans for monitoring and assessing accomplishment of planned actions and for controlling quality after achieving performance goals.**

The audit supervisor maintains a spreadsheet that documents the performance of each individual auditor as well as the performance of the unit as a whole in regards to each of the EAM factors as well as the size of each audit performed. Monthly monitoring of this information allows for detection of underperforming individuals, areas of deficiency across the entire unit and identifies individuals who are exceeding standard performance levels. Auditors who are exceeding the performance measures will be assisting the less experienced audit staff to ensure that the audit measures are met.

**Milestones:**

1. Provide continuing training to audit staff.
2. Provide shadowing opportunities to staff that have been with the unit less than one year.
3. Examine internal audit policies and procedures for opportunities for increased productivity and automation.

**5. UI PROGRAM INTEGRITY ACTION PLAN (UI IAP)**

The UI IAP outlines the strategies the State will undertake during the planning period regarding the prevention reduction and recovery of UI improper payments.

State: Mississippi

Federal Fiscal Year: 2020

**UI Integrity Action Plan**

**Mississippi Top Three Root Causes**

**Root Cause1 Benefit Year Earnings 53.40%**

**Root Cause2 Separation Issues 23.81%**

**Root Cause3 Able & Available 6.39%**

**Summary:**

The UI Integrity Taskforce is being reorganized with changes in personnel. The taskforce will meet regularly to identify and implement strategies to prevent improper payments for the three root causes. The taskforce will continue educating employers and claimants as well as UI and Workforce staff on the importance of properly reporting issues and earnings information.

## **Benefit Year Earnings:**

### **Strategies**

#### 1. Employer Education

Focus outreach on MS employers linked to the highest percentage of improper payments due to benefits year earnings. Educate all employers on the importance of timely reporting new hire and rehire information.

#### 2. Claimant Education

Generate messages advising the importance of properly reporting earnings and return to work date at the time of filing weekly certifications.

#### 3. Staff Training

Training UI and Workforce staff on MDES's integrity plan and the importance of claimants reporting earnings and employers reporting new hire/rehires timely.

## **Separations:**

### **Strategies:**

#### 1. Educate employers on timely and adequately requirements

Generate emails and mail correspondence educating the employer on the consequences of timely and adequately providing separation information.

#### 2. Analyze self-service separation questionnaires

Analyze self-service separation questionnaires for claimant and employer to obtain all pertinent information during initial statement

#### 3. Educate Claimants

Generate messages advising the importance of adequately reporting reason for separation.

## **Able & Available**

### **Strategies:**

#### 1. Individualized review of eligibility requirements

Assessing ways to incorporate Work Search Audit and Eligibility Review into one appointment to provide more one on one service with the claimants regarding continue eligibility requirements.

#### 2. Claimant Educations

Generate texts, emails and mail correspondences through the duration of the claim advising/reminding claimants of the eligibility requirements.

## **6. ORGANIZATIONAL CHART**

The organization chart must conform to the requirement for delivery of service through public employment offices, or such other designated providers as the Secretary may authorize; show the State's configuration from the Governor of the State down to the point of Employment Service and UI customer service delivery; and provide sufficient detail to show each organizational unit involved and the title of the unit manager.

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT SECURITY- OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

### **Executive Director - Jacqueline A. Turner**

#### **Office of Reemployment Assistance**

Tax  
Technical Services  
Quality & Integrity  
Benefits  
Contact Centers (Jackson & Hattiesburg)  
Audit Compliance & Tax Support

#### **Office of Legal Affairs**

Appeals  
Board of Review  
Collections

#### **Strategic Affairs**

#### **Office of Job Connections**

Area Directors  
Veterans Employment Services  
WIN Job Centers  
Workforce Services

## **Human Capital**

### **Special Staff Chief Gov. Job Fairs**

### **Equal Opportunity Officer**

### **Office of Comptroller**

Administrative Services  
Business Management  
Distribution Services  
Procurement  
Department of Internal Audit

### **Office of Workforce Information**

Labor Market Information  
Communication Department

### **Office of Grant Management**

Program Oversight  
Grants and Contracts  
Office of Legal Affairs  
Reporting and Performance

### **Office of Technology Support and Innovation**

Applications Maintenance  
Infrastructure

## **7. SQSP SIGNATURE PAGE**

The State administrator must sign and date the SQSP Signature Page. By signing the Signature Page, the State administrator certifies that the State will comply with all the assurances and activities contained in the SQSP guidelines.

Unemployment Insurance State Quality Service Plan Signature Page

State: Mississippi

State Administrator: Jacqueline A. Turner, Executive Director

Note: The signed copy of the 'SQSP Signature Page' is maintained with the Agency and the Regional Office.

B. REQUIREMENTS FOR STATES ELECTING TO INCLUDE UI IN THE COMBINED STATE PLAN

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States that elect to include UI in the Combined State Plan must:

1. SUBMIT AN SQSP IN THE FOLLOWING MANNER DEPENDING ON THEIR TIMING IN THE SQSP CYCLE:

MS has completed SQSP FY 2020 package narratives, CAPs, IAP, and Organizational Chart.

A. IF A STATE IS IN THE FIRST YEAR OF THEIR 2-YEAR CYCLE, A COMPLETE SQSP PACKAGE MUST BE SUBMITTED. A COMPLETE SQSP PACKAGE WILL INCLUDE THE TRANSMITTAL LETTER, BUDGET WORKSHEETS/FORMS, STATE PLAN NARRATIVE, CAPS (INCLUDING THE MILESTONES AND THE COMPLETION DATE FOR EACH MILESTONE), THE UI IAP, ORGANIZATIONAL CHART, AND THE SQSP SIGNATURE PAGE. ONE OF THE KEY GOALS FOR THE UI PROGRAM IS TO ENSURE THAT CLAIMANTS ARE ABLE TO SUCCESSFULLY RETURN TO WORK. AS SUCH, THE SQSP STATE PLAN NARRATIVE MUST PROVIDE A DISCUSSION OF THE PLAN COORDINATION WITH OTHER WIOA COMBINED PLAN PROGRAMS TO ENSURE A COORDINATED EFFORT AND INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY.

B. IF A STATE IS IN THE SECOND YEAR OF THE 2-YEAR CYCLE, THE STATE IS REQUIRED TO SUBMIT THE MOST RECENTLY APPROVED COMPLETE SQSP PACKAGE WITH A MODIFICATION THAT MUST INCLUDE THE TRANSMITTAL LETTER, BUDGET WORKSHEETS/FORMS, ORGANIZATIONAL CHART, AND THE SQSP SIGNATURE PAGE. THE MODIFICATION MAY ALSO INCLUDE CAPS FOR NEW IDENTIFIED PERFORMANCE DEFICIENCIES, AND ANY REQUIRED MODIFICATIONS TO EXISTING CAPS. THE CAP MUST LIST BOTH SPECIFIC MILESTONES FOR KEY CORRECTIVE ACTIONS OR IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITIES, AND THE COMPLETION DATE FOR EACH MILESTONE.

2. SUBMIT THE REQUIRED OFF-YEAR SQSP COMPONENTS AS A MODIFICATION TO THE COMBINED STATE PLAN ON THE SAME CYCLE AS THE REGULAR SQSP PROCESS WHICH MUST BE APPROVED BY SEPTEMBER 30TH EACH YEAR.

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SENIOR COMMUNITY SERVICE EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM (SCSEP)

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At minimum, in the SCSEP stand-alone submission and the SCSEP portion of the Combined State Plan, States should comprehensively cover the following elements.

A. ECONOMIC PROJECTIONS AND IMPACT

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States must:

1. DISCUSS LONG-TERM PROJECTIONS FOR JOBS IN INDUSTRIES AND OCCUPATIONS IN THE STATE THAT MAY PROVIDE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

FOR OLDER WORKERS. (20 CFR 641.302(D))(MAY ALTERNATIVELY BE DISCUSSED  
IN THE ECONOMIC ANALYSIS SECTION OF STRATEGIC PLAN.)

Mississippi is a predominantly rural state with only three metropolitan areas and a population of 2,967,297. From 2000 to 2010, Mississippi's overall population grew by 122,639. The following population groups experienced the greatest percentage growth in the previous decade: American Indian and Alaska Native, 41.42 percent, Asian, 39.02 percent; Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 124.87 percent; and two or more races, 88.23 percent. This demographic change has led to a more diverse Mississippi. The state also has a larger potential workforce in 2010 than it did in 2000, as Mississippi's population over 18 years old grew by 142,000 to a total potential workforce of 2,219,538.

The population over 55 grew by 138,386 to a potential older workforce of 727,732. Mississippi's unemployment rate rose to 11.6 percent in July 2011 at the peak of the Great Recession and has lowered to 7.7 percent as of September 2014. This is still higher than the pre-recession rate 5.9 percent in January 2000. Unemployment rates by county currently range from 4.8 to 15.1 percent. Mississippi private-sector employers have added 46,200 jobs (an increase of 5.5 percent) since February 2010. The largest job gains have been in professional and business services (14,000 jobs), leisure and hospitality (9,100 jobs) and education and health services (8,600 jobs). These three sectors provide many employment options for seniors.

The projected growth trends for Mississippi's economy are in the Healthcare and Energy sectors. Healthcare is an industry of necessity. As Mississippi population ages, the need for quality, accessible medical care will increase. Nationally, healthcare jobs growth rose 18.3 percent between 2009 and 2013. This growth requires more Direct Service Workers in both patient care and ancillary healthcare jobs from housekeeping to medical records. This is an employment area that the Mississippi SCSEP will target for unsubsidized employment.

Mississippi NonFarm Employment -  
<https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/MSNonFarmEmployment.jpg>

As the chart above indicates, Mississippi's economy is dominated by six sectors. The largest sector as of September 2014 was Government; followed by Trade, Transportation, and Utilities; Manufacturing; and Education and Health Services.

The data below compare Mississippi's employment by industry sector at September 14, 2014, to employment at March 31, 2012. Leisure and Hospitality and Professional and Business Services show robust growth and are areas that have significant employment potential for senior workers.

Industry Sector - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/MSIndustrySector.jpg>

The charts below indicate that Mississippi is losing certain population groups while the population of those over 55 years of age is growing. The total population over 55 from the 2000 census was 589,346 and will nearly double to 1,011,768 by 2030.

Mississippi Population Groups - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/MSPopulationGroups.jpg>

Individuals with Disabilities make up the following percentages in Mississippi:

Mississippi Disability Status - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/MSDisabilityStatuses.jpg>

More importantly, the prevalence of disability and the need for assistance increases dramatically with age:

Disability Prevalence and the Need for Assistance -  
<https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/DisabilityPrevalence.jpg>

Data from the US Census Bureau also indicate that:

- Among men age 55 and older, 37.25 percent are veterans, and 1.33 percent of women age 55 and older are veterans;
- 50.72 percent of the overall population of Mississippi live in rural counties;
- 1.6 percent of Mississippians speak English less than “very well”;
- Of the total population in Mississippi of 2,967,297:
  - Whites number 1,789,391 or 60.3 percent
  - Black or African American number 1,103,101 or 37.18 percent
  - American Indian and Alaska Native number 16,837 or 0.57 percent
  - Asian number 26,477 or 0.89 percent
  - Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander number 1,700 or 0.06 percent, and
  - Two or more races number 29,791 or 1.0 percent.

Educational attainment statistics from the 2010 census are only available for the total population over 25, not specifically for those over 55, but show the following:

Educational Attainment Statistics -  
<https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/EducationalAttainmentStatistics.jpg>

2. DISCUSS HOW THE LONG-TERM JOB PROJECTIONS DISCUSSED IN THE ECONOMIC ANALYSIS SECTION OF STRATEGIC PLAN RELATE TO THE TYPES OF UNSUBSIDIZED JOBS FOR WHICH SCSEP PARTICIPANTS WILL BE TRAINED AND THE TYPES OF SKILL TRAINING TO BE PROVIDED. (20 CFR 641.302(D))

Please see the section above.

3. DISCUSS CURRENT AND PROJECTED EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN THE STATE (SUCH AS BY PROVIDING INFORMATION AVAILABLE UNDER §15 OF THE WAGNER-PEYSER ACT (29 U.S.C. 491-2) BY OCCUPATION), AND THE TYPES OF SKILLS POSSESSED BY ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS. (20 CFR 641.325(C))

Please see the section above.

## B. SERVICE DELIVERY AND COORDINATION

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States must:

1. PROVIDE A DESCRIPTION OF ACTIONS TO COORDINATE SCSEP WITH OTHER PROGRAMS

This may alternatively be discussed in the State strategies section of the strategic plan, but regardless of placement in document, must include:

**A. ACTIONS TO COORDINATE ACTIVITIES OF SCSEP GRANTEEES WITH WIOA TITLE I PROGRAMS, INCLUDING PLANS FOR USING THE WIOA ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM AND ITS PARTNERS TO SERVE INDIVIDUALS AGED 55 AND OLDER. (20 CFR 641.302(G), 641.325(E))**

In July 1, 2012, the Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES) was designated as the SCSEP State Grantee. Since MDES is the state agency that operates the state workforce system, coordination of SCSEP with other workforce programs in the state should increase greatly.

*Coordination with State's Title I WIOA Activities*

MDES is the agency that oversees WIOA in Mississippi. MDES staff members are liaisons to the Local Workforce Development Areas and track the use of WIOA funding. The WIOA in Mississippi and the LWAs are important partners to SCSEP. The SCSEP Managers rely on MDES and the LWAs for labor market information, training, and job search assistance.

SCSEP participants register with the WIN Job Centers (One-Stop Centers) to research the available jobs in their area and jobs of interest to them. Participant training plans are based on the employment opportunities for which they are interested. Employment specific training is usually coordinated through the WIOA course offerings.

Coordination with Title I WIOA is further enhanced through The WIN Job Centers' participation as host agencies. All grantees in the state place participants in local WIN Job Centers as a host agency. Placing participants in the WIN Job Centers serves many purposes such as:

- having a senior on site provides a more comfortable setting, thereby attracting other seniors;
- provides an opportunity for the older worker to network with potential businesses and locate unsubsidized employment;
- provides an opportunity for the older work to recruit eligible individuals into the SCSEP program; and,
- provides an opportunity to research jobs regularly.

**B. ACTIONS TO COORDINATE ACTIVITIES OF SCSEP GRANTEEES WITH THE ACTIVITIES TO BE CARRIED OUT IN THE STATE UNDER THE OTHER TITLES OF THE OAA. (20 CFR 641.302(H))**

The Department of Labor provides funds to operate SCSEP to States and other national sponsor organizations. Governor Bryant has designated the Mississippi Department of Employment Security as the State SCSEP Grantee. Currently, the MDES subgrants funds to the ten (10) planning and service areas designated as Area Agencies on Aging for the administration of the SCSEP. The Area Agencies on Aging are experienced providers of services for the senior population. In Mississippi, the Area Agencies on Aging are subordinate agencies within the nonprofit economic development organizations known as Planning and Development Districts.

*Activities Carried out Under Other Titles of the Older Americans Act*

i. Transportation.

Transportation is offered to older adults as an option to assist in continuing their independence. SCSEP participants that cannot drive may take advantage of local Area Agency on Aging transportation services. The state and National Grantees target transportation providers with a goal of benefiting SCSEP participants interested in training — with the transportation providers acting in a host agency capacity.

ii. Nutrition.

The Nutrition Program serves a dual purpose; it provides a well-balanced meal for SCSEP participants and it provides host agencies that train participants at their congregate meal sites. Training at the Nutrition Program congregate meal sites offers skills training in food handling and preparation, management skills, and recreation development. SCSEP Managers' goals are to continue partnering with the Nutrition Program congregate meal sites as host agency sites.

iii. Aging and Disability Resource Center.

The state and National Grantees plan to partner with the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC), an online database of resources. The Aging and Disability Resource Center Program (ADRC), a collaborative effort of AoA and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), is designed to streamline access to long-term care. The ADRC program provides states with an opportunity to effectively integrate the full range of long-term supports and services into a single, coordinated system. The ADRC provides a single entry point for resources that can assist SCSEP participants to meet their personal and family needs. Additionally, the ADRC will identify eligible participants for SCSEP.

iv. Adult Day Care.

The Adult Day Care program is beneficial for the SCSEP participants that are also caregivers. The Adult Day Care program allows participants to continue training at host agencies with the reassurance their family member is taken care of. The state and National Grantees also benefit from the Adult Day Care Program in a host agency capacity. Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA) are needed in Adult Day Care centers; CNA Training is an opportunity for participants interested in furthering their careers or entering the medical field.

v. Family Caregiver Support Program.

The Family Caregiver Support Program provides information about services, assistance in gaining access to services, counseling, respite care, and supplemental services to complement the care provided by the caregivers. The program can support the needs of SCSEP participants that are caregivers needing to be training for unsubsidized employment.

**C. ACTIONS TO COORDINATE SCSEP WITH OTHER PRIVATE AND PUBLIC ENTITIES AND PROGRAMS THAT PROVIDE SERVICES TO OLDER AMERICANS, SUCH AS COMMUNITY AND FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS, TRANSPORTATION PROGRAMS, AND PROGRAMS FOR THOSE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS OR DISABILITIES. (20 CFR 641.302(I))**

*National Sponsors*

Mississippi has three (3) national sponsor organizations operating SCSEP. The following is a list of the national sponsors and the contact person for each of those agencies:

- National Caucus and Center on Black Aged, Inc. Chester A. Johnson, Program Manager Post Office Box 545 Cleveland, MS 38732 (662) 846-6992 Email: cjohnson@myncba.com
- Senior Service America, Inc. Chris Garland, National SCSEP Director 8403 Colesville Road, Suite 1200 Silver Spring, MD 20910 301-578-8932 cgarland@ssa-i.org www.seniorserviceamerica.org
- Institute for Indian Development, Inc. John Silver, Program Director 991 Grand Caillou Road, Houma, Louisiana 70363-5705 985-851-5408 985-346-3682 jsilver@itcla.com

*Service Organizations and Community Based Organizations*

The state’s sub-grantees, the Area Agencies on Aging (AAA), utilize the services of or directly contract with the service organizations that serve the aging population, such as elder abuse prevention services, legal services, and transportation services. Many of these services are provided by community based organizations. Due to the direct contractual relationship, AAA staff members remain in constant contact with the service provider staff from which participant and host agency referrals are made. The SCSEP Managers, through the AAAs, work with homemakers, transportation, nutrition providers, and community action organizations. Service providers and community action agencies are invited to the public hearings held annually to discuss aging programs, including the SCSEP.

*Collaboration with Other Public and Private Entities and Programs that Provide Services to Older Americans*

Community Based Organizations.

The state subgrants SCSEP to the 10 AAAs in the state; the AAAs have a direct contractual relationship with community based organizations as service providers. Local community action agencies work closely with the state grantee to collaborate on the SCSEP.

Transportation Programs.

Transportation providers are generally non-profit organizations that partner with Area Agencies on Aging. The rural nature of the state is compounded by the lack of an entity with mandated responsibility for providing transportation assistance to citizens in need. To combat transportation problems:

- the Mississippi Department of Transportation is actively involved in leading the United We Ride campaign in the state;
- the AAAs Planning and Development Districts either sponsor or closely partner with the Regional Transportation Councils.

**D. ACTIONS TO COORDINATE SCSEP WITH OTHER LABOR MARKET AND JOB TRAINING INITIATIVES. (20 CFR 641.302(J))**

*Labor Market Effects on Employment Opportunities and Host Agencies*

Employment opportunities for SCSEP participants vary greatly based on the jobs available in the local labor market. Data on the local jobs, such as type, availability, and potential growth should determine the types of host agencies and the how many are needed to

support SCSEP participant training. Also, each SCSEP participant's Individual Employment Plan is developed based on the skills needed for the available jobs in the region and should guide the training he or she receives. The labor market data needed to drive these decisions comes from the MDES Labor Market Information unit and is provided in partnership with the WDBs through board meetings, conferences, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) State Plan, and local Workforce Investment Network Job Centers.

#### *Collaboration with Other Labor Market and Job Training Initiatives*

MDES is the State Grantee for SCSEP and developed the 5-Year SCSEP State Plan. MDES is also the designated state workforce agency, and as such, provided Governor Phil Bryant's five-year Integrated Workforce Plan to the Department of Labor for WIOA, Wagner-Peyser, and other DOL funded workforce programs. The integrated plan is centered on an effective and efficient state workforce development system that meets the demands of Mississippi's businesses and job seekers by creating a **Work-Ready Mississippi**. This system will integrate state and local resources to create a seamless system to serve the business community and the individuals who use the system. The SCSEP plan will coordinate with, support, and benefit from the Integrated Workforce Plan and the Governor's workforce initiatives.

As a demonstration of his commitment to transform the system, Governor Bryant directed a commission of workforce and education partner agencies to develop a statewide plan that establishes a more coordinated and accountable workforce development system with greater emphasis on training, increasing job skills, and certifications. The Governor has also created a statewide economic development plan, "Mississippi Works," that will be aligned with the redesigned workforce development system. This will be an industry-focused, demand-driven workforce development system.

Governor Phil Bryant's economic priorities for Mississippi over the next four years will guide the strategic and operational workforce planning for state agencies. The priorities include providing an attractive economic climate for current and emerging industries that foster economic opportunity, job creation, capital investment and infrastructure development by developing a well-trained, educated, and productive workforce. The initial emphasis will be placed on two growth sectors, Health Care and Energy, which were the focus of important pieces of legislation passed in the 2012 legislative session. Of equal importance is the retention and expansion of existing industries such as advanced manufacturing, including automotive, shipbuilding, and aerospace; tourism; and defense and homeland security.

Mississippi passed the Mississippi Health Care Industry Zone Act which expands the health care industry. This Bill advocates centralizing health care and encouraging health care-related businesses to create high-paying jobs and to locate within qualified Health Care Zones. Businesses that create jobs in the research, development, manufacturing or processing of pharmaceuticals, biologics, biotechnology, medical supplies and medical equipment, diagnostic imaging and other shared services would be eligible for incentives.

As Mississippi's population ages, the need for quality, accessible medical care will increase. This increase in need for medical care will require an increase in the number of healthcare jobs, as evidenced by the national growth in this sector of twenty-one percent between 2001 and 2010. Mississippi jobs in healthcare pay 40 percent more than the statewide

average. This is an area in which older Mississippians can also be placed in unsubsidized employment after SCSEP job training.

At the heart of Mississippi's economy are our existing businesses and industries. Developing a workforce for the growth and sustainability of Mississippi businesses large and small - from tourism on the Mississippi Blues Trail to the high tech and advanced manufacturing of military drones - must remain a priority. The vision is simple: to help our state attract, keep, and grow businesses that create good jobs.

The Governor understands that Mississippi's economic growth is dependent on a comprehensive statewide workforce system that integrates education, industry, employment and economic development into a unified enterprise with a shared vision and common goal. This system will be employer-focused and demand-driven. The growth of high wage employment is dependent upon Mississippi having a trained workforce, a continued supply of skilled Mississippians who are ready, willing and able to fill jobs, regardless of their age. Mississippi has identified five keys to meet the shortage a high-quality workforce:

- A high quality education for all citizens is a key tenet of competitiveness that makes Mississippi an attractive place to create, locate and grow a business;
- High wage jobs must be filled by highly skilled workers possessing the appropriate skills to do the job and further business growth. Unfilled job positions are wasted opportunities in the short and long term causing employers to look outside Mississippi for talent;
- An information system that supports data-driven planning and decision making for state and local workforce stakeholders;
- An increase in post-secondary credentials and certifications that help jobseekers access the high-skill, high-growth jobs of the future; and
- A pipeline for workforce development must be advanced through strategic partnerships with a common vision among K-12, community colleges, universities, state agencies and other stakeholders devoted to workforce training and retraining.

Each of these five keys is as critical in helping seniors fill a part of the shortage in skilled workforce as they are for other workers.

#### *Leveraging Resources from Key Partners to Support SCSEP*

Area Agencies on Aging work with community colleges to provide training to SCSEP participants at a reduced cost; many provide tuition waivers for SCSEP participants. Community colleges are an integral component of the WIOA programs offered through the WIN Job Centers. SCSEP participants are encouraged to dual enroll in WIOA with the WIN Job Centers for job search assistance and training classes.

**E. ACTIONS THE STATE WILL TAKE TO ENSURE THAT SCSEP IS AN ACTIVE PARTNER IN THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM AND THE STEPS THE STATE WILL TAKE TO ENCOURAGE AND IMPROVE COORDINATION WITH THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM. (20 CFR 641.335)**

#### *Collaboration with State Vocational Rehabilitation*

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, like SCSEP, is a required partner in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act programs. SCSEP and Vocational Rehabilitation will collaborate with the WIN Job Centers for employment assistance for aging and disabled individuals through training modules.

*Collaboration with Adult Education and Literacy Providers*

SCSEP participants complete an initial assessment upon entrance into the program to determine their employment plan. For participants that are interested in completing their High School Equivalency Diploma (HSE), SCSEP partners with the Adult Education program administered by the Mississippi Community College Board. The Adult Education program is designed to offer opportunities to enhance the skills and abilities of individuals preparing for the workforce. SCSEP participants are encouraged to prepare themselves in the areas of math, reading, writing, communication, and computer skills to become employment ready. The Adult Education program provides assistance in developing these skills based on the individual's skill level and learning capacity.

The Adult Education program is available statewide through community colleges, public schools, and other resources. SCSEP participants can test at any of the 28 GED testing sites across the state.

*Collaboration with Education and Training Providers*

The SCSEP program collaborates with the WIN System to offer SCSEP participants access to training using Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) through the state's Eligible Training Provider System. Available courses include, but are not limited to:

- Accounting;
- Administrative Services;
- Animal Husbandry;
- Auto Mechanics;
- Banking and Finance;
- Building Maintenance;
- Clerical;
- Computer;
- Data Word Processing;
- Forestry;
- Health Services;
- Industrial;
- Landscaping;
- Manicuring;
- Medical Coding;
- Pharmacy Tech;
- Retail Sales;
- Teacher Assistant; and,
- Welding.

**F. EFFORTS THE STATE WILL MAKE TO WORK WITH LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OFFICES IN RURAL LOCATIONS.**

### *Local Governments*

Area Agencies on Aging are also directly linked to the economic development of the region and receive funds from local cities, counties and local governments. Area Agencies on Aging have direct relationships with cities, counties and local governments; many are host agencies for SCSEP participants. The following are government agencies that SCSEP works with on an ongoing basis:

- Board of Supervisors;
- Cities;
- Towns;
- Libraries;
- Local Chambers of Commerce; and,
- State Chamber of Commerce.

SCSEP staff from all grantees and subgrantees will continue to foster these relationships to increase their participation as host agencies. These entities may potentially hire participants into unsubsidized employment.

### *Business Organizations*

State sub-grantees and their SCSEP managers work with business organizations such as the Mississippi Manufacturers Association and local chambers of commerce to develop job opportunities. They collaborate with Medicaid and regional transportation and economic assistance providers to access services to SCSEP participants in need. They also solicit advice and recommendations from support service organizations through public hearings and joint conferences.

### *Mississippi Chambers of Commerce*

The mission of a Chamber of Commerce is to provide leadership in economic development activities, support existing businesses, attract new businesses, and promote civic, cultural, and recreational activities that improve the quality of life for businesses and residents. There are about one hundred (100) Chambers of Commerce in Mississippi.

### *Strategy for Collaborating with Chambers of Commerce*

SCSEP Managers will contact the chambers to educate them on the benefits of hiring older workers. The mission of the chambers supports the goals of SCSEP; working together will strengthen the case for targeting older workers when meeting new and existing businesses. Additionally, the chambers will be avenues that SCSEP Managers can use to identify industry appropriate training opportunities for SCSEP participants interested in the local labor market opportunities.

### *Strategy for Seeking Advice and Recommendations*

The state and National grantees will meet with the Chambers of Commerce at Workforce Development Board meetings, conferences and individually to seek their advice and recommendation on improving SCSEP. The chambers can provide important information on the local economy and ensure that SCSEP Managers meet with and partner with existing and new businesses interested in hiring and/or training older workers.

Partnering with chambers as host agencies and providing a SCSEP participant to train onsite brings recognition to SCSEP while providing valuable training to participants. Chambers of Commerce that are host agency sites provide skills training in clerical, phone skills, record keeping, etc.

#### *Economic Development Agencies*

Economic development is a focus on the state level as well as at the local community level. SCSEP grantees and subgrantees in the state will target economic development agencies for partnership opportunities.

#### *Strategy for Collaborating with Economic Development Agencies*

The state and National Grantees will work with economic development agencies at the state and local level to network and educate on employment training opportunities for older workers that new and existing businesses can utilize to hire skilled older workers. Collaboration with the economic development agencies through the Mississippi Economic Development Council allows SCSEP a single point of entry to providing education on older workers to the more than 3,100 manufacturing entities that drive the state's economy. The Mississippi Economic Development Council organizes two conferences a year. SCSEP Managers will attend the conferences to network with businesses.

#### *Strategy for Seeking Advice and Recommendations*

The state and National grantees will network with the economic development agencies and attend their meetings and conferences. SCSEP Managers will present the benefits of hiring older workers at local Workforce Development Board meetings and conferences, such as the Governor's Conference on Workforce Development, to increase the entered employment rate for SCSEP participants. The state and National grantees will glean information from the economic development agencies on ways to improve participant's individual employment plans to ensure that participants are receiving the training needed to be job ready in the industries that support our economy.

#### *Labor Organizations*

Labor unions for business organizations in Mississippi can assist SCSEP Managers by providing information for the design of individual employment plans for participants, as they best know the skills needed for worker safety and career advancement.

2. DESCRIBE THE LONG-TERM STRATEGY FOR ENGAGING EMPLOYERS TO DEVELOP AND PROMOTE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE PLACEMENT OF SCSEP PARTICIPANTS IN UNSUBSIDIZED EMPLOYMENT. (20 CFR 641.302(E)) (ALTERNATELY, THE STATE MAY DISCUSS THIS IN THE STATE STRATEGIES SECTION OF STRATEGIC PLAN IF SUBMITTING A COMBINED PLAN.)

#### *Major Employers*

The state and National grantees will target the major employers with an educational campaign to raise awareness of the benefits of hiring older workers. The goals are to increase the rate of entered employment of exited SCSEP participants and increase the number of higher paying jobs (with benefits) for SCSEP participants.

- Strategy for Collaborating with Major Employers

The top 100 businesses in Mississippi will provide SCSEP Managers businesses to target and education on hiring older workers, thereby increasing the rate of entered employment for exited SCSEP participants. SCSEP Managers have a sample letter, provided by the USDOL, which will be customized and sent to businesses to introduce SCSEP and request a face-to-face meeting. Additionally, the USDOL provided SCSEP Mangers with sample presentations they can customize and present to businesses.

- Strategy for Seeking Advice and Recommendations

Seeking advice and recommendations from local businesses is beneficial to SCSEP. Businesses can provide information on the skills needed for employment to assist in the development of the SSEP participant's individual employment plan. Another possibility is to increase the number of On-the-Job Training contracts that SCSEP Managers can enter into with businesses to ensure that SCSEP participants received the training needed for hiring by the business. SCSEP Managers will attend job fairs and will require all participants to attend as part of their training.

- Engaging and Developing Partnerships with Businesses

The state and National Grantee SCSEP managers will coordinate with the Local WDBs to show businesses the benefits of hiring older workers. Older workers in general have low turnover rates, are flexible and open to change, are interested in learning new skills, have low absentee rates, have experience and knowledge, and are willing to work. Therefore, hiring older workers is a solution to the shortage of workers in the state.

SCSEP Managers will work with the LWAs to develop partnerships with businesses by utilizing recruitment efforts such as sending brochures and fact sheets on the older workers, sending letters to businesses outlining the benefits of older workers and following up with a presentation to the Human Resources Director and/or President, and where applicable recruit them to become a host agency. Developing partnerships with businesses creates the opportunity to share success stories from other businesses that hire older workers.

To increase partnerships with businesses, SCSEP Managers are encouraged to:

- increase contacts with local businesses;
- promote On-the-Job Training contracts with businesses;
- make presentations to businesses; and,
- assist local businesses with training needs.

#### *Retention Activities for Participants in Unsubsidized Employment*

Once an SCSEP participant is trained and placed in unsubsidized employment, the SCSEP Manager continues to follow the participant for one year to ensure he/she has the support needed to remain employed. SCSEP participants in unsubsidized employment may need

additional training and support to keep up with the demands of the changing workforce. Support will be provided in the form of tracking, counseling, and job development.

SCSEP Managers will work with the LWAs to educate businesses on how to retain older workers. Once businesses see the value older workers bring to their businesses, they will be looking for ideas to retain their older workers. SCSEP assists in restructuring jobs that help employees to maintain or advance their careers. Managers can educate businesses on the following strategies for creating a positive environment for older workers:

- Flextime: employees can begin and end their workday at varying times;
- Job Sharing: Use two employees for one job position;
- Part-time Position: Older workers may be looking for 20-30 hours a week;
- Consulting: older workers may prefer to work in a consultant role;
- Compressed Work Week: work longer hours, but fewer days; and,
- Telecommuting: working from home.

### 3. DESCRIBE THE LONG-TERM STRATEGY FOR SERVING MINORITIES UNDER SCSEP. (20 CFR 641.302 (C))

The State subgrants to the Area Agencies on Aging at the Planning and Development Districts since the AAAs are the primary provider of other services to the aging community and have established contacts and rapport in the community. The AAAs should collaborate with the One-Stop Centers and other workforce system partners to provide outreach services to minority populations.

MDES provides the required Equitable Distribution (ED) report and Minority Report to DOL annually. MDES will continue to use both the ED and the Minority Report to guide the AAAs as they provide SCSEP services and to advise the National Grantees that operate the program in the state.

### 4. LIST NEEDED COMMUNITY SERVICES AND THE EXACT PLACES WHERE THESE SERVICES ARE MOST NEEDED. SPECIFICALLY, THE PLAN MUST ADDRESS THE NEEDS AND LOCATION(S) OF THOSE INDIVIDUALS MOST IN NEED OF COMMUNITY SERVICES AND THE GROUPS WORKING TO MEET THEIR NEEDS. (20 CFR 641.330)

#### *Process Implemented to Identify Community Service Needs*

MDES will work with the National Grantees and the 10 AAAs to collect information on the participants, services, and skills needs of the businesses in the area that each serves. Identifying gaps between the participants, the skill requirements, and the services provided will guide decisions on targeted recruitment, training, host agency assignments, and recruitment of businesses willing to hire seniors into unsubsidized training.

The industry makeup of the state varies by region. The Delta region of the state is predominately agricultural with a secondary gaming and tourism emphasis; the northeastern region is industrial; the west-central region is mixed with agriculture, manufacturing, and professional, with a recent growth in oil production; and the southern region is agricultural, gaming and tourism, and industrial. Due to the variety of industries in the state, SCSEP Managers will continue to work with the local WIN Job Centers and other stakeholders to identify local community service needs and obtain recommendations on

how SCSEP participants can bridge those gaps. Individual Employment Plans will be tailored to meet the needs of the participants and the community service assignments.  
*Timeline for Identifying and Recruiting Host Agencies to Meet Community Service Needs*

State and National Grantees, with the assistance of the LWAs, will identify non-profits and government organizations as potential host agencies for a resource list. The resource list will guide the SCSEP Managers in their attempts to recruit host agencies to train SCSEP participants. The USDOL data collection system will assist SCSEP Managers to track the types of host agencies using the Host agency management reports. The State and National Grantees will increase the number of host agencies every program year to meet the needs of participants.

5. DESCRIBE THE LONG-TERM STRATEGY TO IMPROVE SCSEP SERVICES, INCLUDING PLANNED LONG-TERM CHANGES TO THE DESIGN OF THE PROGRAM WITHIN THE STATE, AND PLANNED CHANGES IN THE USE OF SCSEP GRANTEEES AND PROGRAM OPERATORS TO BETTER ACHIEVE THE GOALS OF THE PROGRAM. THIS MAY INCLUDE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE DEPARTMENT AS APPROPRIATE.  
(20 CFR 641.302(K))

Since the Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES) was designated as the State Grantee as of July 1, 2012, coordination with other workforce programs in the state has greatly increased. The division of MDES that has direct oversight of the SCSEP also provides direct fiscal and programmatic support to the state's four Local Workforce Development Areas.

*Long-Term Strategy to Improve SCSEP Services*

The State is implementing a WIOA Common Intake and Reporting System that will capture common participant information for the four core programs. The system will align resources and generate automatic referrals among the core programs and partner programs such as SCSEP.

Using a no wrong door policy, all participants will develop an individualized success plan that coordinates the optimum blend of services and funding to achieve their goals for success. This success plan also indicates which of the pathways in the Smart Start Pathways Model to which the participant will be assigned. A connection to a career pathway must be included as part of an older worker's individual service strategy or MS Smart Start Success plan. This model is an integrated compilation of programs and services intended to develop basic, technical and employability skills; provide continuous education and training; and work supports that lead to high-demand jobs in targeted sectors.

*Planned Changes in the Utilization of SCSEP Grantees and Program Operators*

In PY2015, the State Grantee's largest subgrantee, Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District, moved its SCSEP staff from the Area Agency on Aging division to the Workforce division. This puts SCSEP in this district under the direction of the Twin Districts Workforce Development Area. SMPDD is the SCSEP subgrantee of both the State subgrant and Senior Service America, Inc., operating a total of 125 slots. SMPDD will use the Smart Start Pathways Model throughout its service area. SSAI intends for all of its subgrantees to follow the lead of SMPDD and use Smart Start as the service model.

To implement WIOA and the Smart Start Pathways Model, the agencies that oversee the four core programs will engage in intensive an ongoing training of staff to ensure a consistent workforce message and seamless operation of the programs. Staff of all the State's SCSEP subgrantees will be included in this training, thereby ensuring that all SCSEP participants in the state grant will be connected with coordinated services of the partner programs under WIOA.

- Increased Frequency of Formal Collaboration Activities Among SCSEP Grantees.

The state grantee will conduct trainings multiple times a year, as previously discussed. The state is dedicated to increasing the number of collaborative activities and efforts in the state regarding the benefit of older workers.

- Development of Criteria for Selection of Sub-Recipients.

The state grantee, in collaboration with the USDOL, will develop more stringent criteria for the selection of sub-recipients. Subgrantees will be selected based on their ability to run SCSEP effectively, measured by performance measure results. The program is designed to develop economic self-sufficiency and promote useful opportunities in community service activities to increase the number of persons who may enjoy the benefits of unsubsidized employment in both the public and private sectors. A performance driven selection process for subgranting SCSEP will ensure the program meets its performance measures.

- Opportunities to Share Best Practices Statewide.

The state grantee will work with National Grantees to share best practices through regular contact including the annual Equitable Distribution Meeting. Working together statewide will ensure that SCSEP is serving the eligible and the target population effectively.

MDES will also coordinate with NCBA to assist and provide the following:

- Continue to work together in collecting and sharing labor market information in any specific area to identify the skills that area businesses require so that we can develop targeted recruitment of both the participants and host agencies.
- Remain in compliance with DOL equitable distributions in the state. NCBA will work closely with the state to ensure that the distribution remains equitable at all times.
- As a national administrator of the SCSEP in Mississippi, NCBA has recognized and experienced the many challenges presented by the rural nature of the state. NCBA will continue to work with the state to develop and implement plans to meet these challenges and help the participants gain unsubsidized employment.

6. DESCRIBE A STRATEGY FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT IN THE LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE FOR SCSEP PARTICIPANTS' ENTRY INTO UNSUBSIDIZED EMPLOYMENT, AND TO ACHIEVE, AT A MINIMUM, THE LEVELS SPECIFIED IN OAA SECTION 513(A)(2)(E)(II). (20 CFR 641.302(F))

### *State's Plan for Ensuring Goals are Achieved*

SCSEP Managers receive performance measures from the USDOL prior to the start of the Program Year. The 2006 amendments to the Older Americans Act section 513(a) mandates that SCSEP Managers are given the opportunity to negotiate their performance measures based on state-specific data. Acceptable sources of data include, but are not limited to: TANF; state unemployment rate; labor market information, and past performance.

The USDOL provides the SCSEP Managers with management reports via the web-based data collection system known as SPARQ (SCSEP Performance And Results QPR). Management reports are produced quarterly to gauge progress towards performance measures. The following management reports will be used by the state, National Grantees, and SCSEP Managers:

#### Applicant

- Pending
- Ineligible
- Eligible, Not Assigned or on Waiting List
- Waiting List

#### Participants

- Current/Exited
- Started Employment but Not Yet Achieved Entered Employment
- Achieved Entered Employment but Not Yet Achieved Retention
- Waiver of Durational Limit
- Participants Who Have Reached Durational Limit
- Participants With Approved Break(s)

#### Follow-Ups

- Pending
- Pending, Displayed by Month

#### Actions

- Most In Need/Waiver Factor Actions

#### Host Agencies

- Host Agencies
- Assignments by Host agency

#### Employers

- Unsubsidized Employers
- Placements by Employer

Meeting, trainings, and conference calls. Meetings among the state, National Grantees, and subgrantees will be held on a regular basis, either in person or using electronic means such as conference calls and webinars. As issues warrant, MDES will meet with subgrantees on an individual basis by phone or during site visits, monitoring visits, or data validation visits. Topics may include:

- Data entry review prior to close date for reports
- Quarterly reports
- Reports reviewed
- Reports discussed by SCSEP Managers.

### C. LOCATION AND POPULATION SERVED, INCLUDING EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION

States must:

#### 1. DESCRIBE THE LOCALITIES AND POPULATIONS FOR WHICH PROJECTS OF THE TYPE AUTHORIZED BY TITLE V ARE MOST NEEDED. (20 CFR 641.325 (D))

##### *Current and Projected Employment Opportunities in the State*

There has been a shift in the last two decades in the nation as a whole from an industrial to a service and knowledge based economy. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Mississippi has followed the national industrial trend with 36 percent of the workforce employed in service oriented jobs. In the service industry, the largest sub-sectors include healthcare and social assistance followed by administrative and support services.

Governor Phil Bryant's economic priorities for Mississippi over the next four years will guide the strategic and operational workforce planning for state agencies. The priorities include providing an attractive economic climate for current and emerging industries that foster economic opportunity, job creation, capital investment and infrastructure development by developing a well-trained, educated, and productive workforce.

The initial emphasis will be placed on two growth sectors, Health Care and Energy, which were the focus of important pieces of legislation passed in the 2012 legislative session. Of equal importance is the retention and expansion of existing industries such as advanced manufacturing, including automotive, shipbuilding, and aerospace; tourism; and defense and homeland security.

##### *Employment Projections for High Growth Industries and Occupations*

Employment in the service sector is projected to grow by 16 percent by 2018 with the largest growth in administrative support; professional, scientific and technical services; health care and social assistance; and arts, entertainment, and recreation. Meanwhile, employment in the manufacturing sector is expected to grow by only 3.2 percent by 2018. The state relies on labor market information disseminated by the MDES Labor Market Information division to ensure that SCSEP meets the local labor market demands. Labor market information shows that all industry sectors are in need of skilled workers, especially those that require the application of technology and knowledge such as automotive and health care professionals.

The SCSEP Managers must emphasize the need to obtain skills through training at host agencies in order to generate quality job placements in high growth industries. Mississippi projects that over 1.5 million jobs are expected to be available in the next ten years. Increasing SCSEP job placements in the high growth areas will move Mississippi ahead.

*Industries and Occupations with Employment Opportunities for SCSEP Participants*

Participants are encouraged to design their employment plan around the following industries most in need of skilled workers:

- service sector;
- administrative support;
- health care;
- retail;
- food service;
- gaming;
- social assistance; and,
- education.

*Employment Histories and Skills Possessed by Eligible Individuals in the State*

Generally, SCSEP participants in Mississippi have very limited skills and work history; many are displaced homemakers or widows with limited work experience. Therefore, the state and National Grantees must ensure that the SCSEP participant's Individual Employment Plan includes the skills training needed to locate unsubsidized employment upon exiting the program. Training may be attained at the host agency, the Workforce Investment Network Job Centers, community colleges, and at participant educational meetings.

Mississippi ranks last in educational attainment in the adult population, particularly older females. In the state, 21 percent of SCSEP participants have no high school degree, 35 percent have a high school degree or equivalent, and only 13 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher. A snapshot of the Mississippi SCSEP participant education, age, and wages from the SPARQ database follows:

Participant Education, Age, and Wages by Mississippi Grantee (PY2013 Final) - <https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/ParticipantInfoByGrantee.jpg>

**2. LIST THE CITIES AND COUNTIES WHERE THE SCSEP PROJECT WILL TAKE PLACE. INCLUDE THE NUMBER OF SCSEP AUTHORIZED POSITIONS AND INDICATE IF AND WHERE THE POSITIONS CHANGED FROM THE PRIOR YEAR.**

This data is listed in the Program Year 2017 Equitable Distribution List by National and State Grantee with Counties (Provided in Appendix I9A).

**3. DESCRIBE ANY CURRENT SLOT IMBALANCES AND PROPOSED STEPS TO CORRECT INEQUITIES TO ACHIEVE EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION.**

*Location of Positions*

As of July 1, 2017, Experience Works, Inc. is no longer a grantee in Mississippi. The state also has a new set-aside grantee, the Institute for Indian Development. The US Department

of Labor has redistributed positions among Senior Service America, Inc., National Caucus on Black Aged, The Institute for Indian Development, and the Department of Employment Security in order to more equitably serve the eligible population as indicated by the 2010 Census through the USDOL distribution process. In Mississippi, the state and national grantees agree that the distribution is currently equitable.

4. EXPLAIN THE STATE'S LONG-TERM STRATEGY FOR ACHIEVING AN EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF SCSEP POSITIONS WITHIN THE STATE THAT:
- A. MOVES POSITIONS FROM OVER-SERVED TO UNDERSERVED LOCATIONS WITHIN THE STATE IN COMPLIANCE WITH 20 CFR 641.365.

*Strategy for Maintaining Equity of Slots*

The Department of Labor implemented revisions to the required Equitable Distribution Report. The four grantees provided their Grantee Reports to the DOL and MDES compiled the information from the four into a Statewide Grant Report, which was also submitted to DOL on September 28, 2017. The state grantee will monitor distribution and service of the slots to ensure that all grantees are working to implement the action plans stated in the reports. We will also continue to monitor distribution of slots relative to demographic changes and will address any potential issues as they arise through communication with DOL.

- B. EQUITABLY SERVES BOTH RURAL AND URBAN AREAS.

Please see the section above.

- C. SERVES INDIVIDUALS AFFORDED PRIORITY FOR SERVICE UNDER 20 CFR 641.520. (20 CFR 641.302(A), 641.365, 641.520)

Please see the section above.

5. PROVIDE THE RATIO OF ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS IN EACH SERVICE AREA TO THE TOTAL ELIGIBLE POPULATION IN THE STATE. (20 CFR 641.325(A))

N/A

6. PROVIDE THE RELATIVE DISTRIBUTION OF ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS WHO:

Provide the relative distribution of eligible individuals who:

- A. RESIDE IN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS WITHIN THE STATE

The State of Mississippi is a predominately rural state, with 50.72 percent of Mississippians living in rural counties, according to the 2010 census. Access to transportation and limited numbers of host agencies in the most rural counties will continue to be a challenge that all SCSEP grantees must work together to overcome.

*Inadequate Resources*

The state and National Grantees strive to serve both rural and urban areas of Mississippi equitably. In order to accomplish this, state and National Grantees must work together to

overcome inadequate resources (limited employment prospects, few host agencies, lack of transportation, etc.).

### *Employment*

The rural nature of the state combined with an agrarian-based economy makes it difficult to provide adequate unsubsidized placement opportunities. The number of jobs available is few and because public and mass transportation are not available, access to many of the existing jobs or employment opportunities can be problematic. In some instances, the cost of transportation and other job maintenance factors exceed the benefits of employment.

### *Host Agencies*

The rural nature of the state also creates a shortage of host agencies. The state and National Grantees operating in the state know the challenge of developing enough host agencies to rotate participants appropriately according to their individual employment plan. SCSEP managers will continue to partner with the WDBs to assist in developing new business opportunities and to partner with new and existing non-profit organizations located in the state.

### *Transportation*

Access to transportation continues to be a problem in areas outside of the metropolitan area of Jackson. In an attempt to alleviate transportation concerns, the state grantees may reimburse participants for transportation costs only when travel is necessary for training, physical exams or enrollee meetings. If there is no public transportation available, and there are no other options, and if the participant could not otherwise participate in the program, transportation to and from host agency assignment may be reimbursed until another option is identified.

The state grantee will attempt to collaborate with other local agencies and resources to provide participant transportation at no cost or reduced cost whenever possible. Additionally, flexible scheduling is encouraged to help participants reduce travel costs by training more hours on fewer days, providing the same community service assignment hours.

### *Timeline*

To address inadequate resources in rural areas, the grantees will target individual geographic areas and systematically contact community representatives in an attempt to develop host agencies or employers and in partnership with these organizations determine if a plan to accomplish program requirements can be developed. The Area Agencies on Aging and the National Grantees will be challenged to identify and develop two targeted areas each program year. This strategy will result in approximately one-fourth of the 76 rural counties achieving successful targeted development each program year.

### *Specific Populations Groups*

The state and National Grantees offer various recruitment and selection techniques in order to address Older Americans Act Section 518(b) as detailed below:

OAA Section 518(b) defines priority individuals as those who qualify based on one or more of the following criteria:

- Are aged 65 years or older;
- Have a disability;
- Have limited English proficiency or low literacy skills;
- Reside in a rural area;
- Are veterans or their spouses who meet the requirements of the Jobs for Veterans Act, 38 U.S.C. sec. 4215(a)(1);
- Have low employment prospects;
- Have failed to find employment after utilizing services provided under Title 1 of WIOA; or,
- Are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Other populations identified in the statute are defined in OAA Section 503(a)(4)(C)(i)-(iv) as:

- Eligible individuals with the “greatest economic need” (as defined in 20 CFR 641.140);
- Eligible individuals who are minority individuals; and,
- Eligible individuals who are individuals with “greatest social need” (as defined in 20 CFR 641.140).

The WDBs that oversee the Workforce Investment Networks in the state are key partners for both the state and National Grantees in the state as they provide labor market information and economic data to assist grantees in developing new host agencies, educating employers on the benefits of hiring older workers, and providing job search assistance for SCSEP participants. Workforce Investment Networks provide an additional avenue to recruit eligible individuals to participate in the SCSEP.

Additional recruitment activities include, but are not limited to, the following:

- attending job fairs;
- advertising in local newspapers and newsletters;
- referrals from exited participants, host agencies, faith based organizations and local officials;
- running public service announcements;
- visiting local senior centers;
- partnering with organizations that serve aging and/or disabled adults;
- distributing brochures, flyers, posters and fact sheets throughout the state; and,
- partnering with the local Workforce Investment Networks.

[For the subrequirements for section (c), see Appendix I9A, 2017 Grantee ED Report ETA-8705B, which provides the State's Equitable Distribution Report to DOL.]

#### B. HAVE THE GREATEST ECONOMIC NEED

Please see the section above.

#### C. ARE MINORITIES

Please see the section above.

D. ARE LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT.

Please see the section above.

E. HAVE THE GREATEST SOCIAL NEED. (20 CFR 641.325(B))

Please see the section above.

7. DESCRIBE THE STEPS TAKEN TO AVOID DISRUPTIONS TO SERVICE FOR PARTICIPANTS TO THE GREATEST EXTENT POSSIBLE, WHEN POSITIONS ARE REDISTRIBUTED, AS PROVIDED IN 20 CFR 641.365; WHEN NEW CENSUS OR OTHER RELIABLE DATA BECOMES AVAILABLE; OR WHEN THERE IS OVER-ENROLLMENT FOR ANY OTHER REASON. (20 CFR 641.325(I), 641.302(B))

*Avoiding Service Disruptions*

The state and National Grantees are dedicated to the avoidance of disruptions in the service to SCSEP participants. Mississippi's state and National SCSEP Grantees will follow the recommendation of the USDOL that when there is over-enrollment, for any reason, there will be a gradual shift that encourages current participants to move into unsubsidized employment to make positions available for eligible individuals in the areas that are underserved. Grantees understand that participants are not entitled to remain in a subsidized community service assignment indefinitely, and will adhere to the time limits on a SCSEP community service assignment as detailed in the Older Americans Act.

SCSEP standards define the program requirements that AAA state grantees must adhere to. Issued in March 2006, the standards address Designation of Service, slot movement, and time in training assignment.

To view more information about the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) portion of the WOIA State Plan for Mississippi, please view the following PDF: [https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/SCSEP\(Continued\).pdf](https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/SCSEP(Continued).pdf)

SCSEP ASSURANCES

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The State Plan must include assurances that where SCSEP is included in the Combined Workforce Plan, the State has established a written policy and procedure to obtain advice and recommendations on the State Plan from:

Representatives of the State and area agencies on aging; Yes

State and local boards under WIOA; Yes

Public and private nonprofit agencies and organizations providing employment services, including each grantee operating a SCSEP project within the State, except as provided under section 506(a)(3) of OAA and 20 CFR 641.320(b); Yes

Social service organizations providing services to older individuals; Yes

Grantees under Title III of OAA; Yes

Affected Communities; Yes

Unemployed older individuals; Yes

Community-based organizations serving older individuals; Yes

Business organizations; and Yes

Labor organizations. Yes

#### STATE COMMENTS ON SCSEP ASSURANCES

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## APPENDIX 1. PERFORMANCE GOALS FOR THE CORE PROGRAMS

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Each State submitting a Unified or Combined Plan is required to identify expected levels of performance for each of the primary indicators of performance for the two years covered by the plan. The State is required to reach agreement with the Secretary of Labor, in conjunction with the Secretary of Education on state adjusted levels of performance for the indicators for each of the two years of the plan. States will only have one year of data available under the performance accountability system in Section 116 of the WIOA; therefore, the Departments will continue to use the transition authority under WIOA sec. 503(a) to designate certain primary indicators of performance as “baseline” indicators in the first plan submission. A “baseline” indicator is one for which States will not propose an expected level of performance in the plan submission and will not come to agreement with the Departments on negotiated levels of performance. “Baseline” indicators will not be used in the end of the year performance calculations and will not be used to determine failure to achieve adjusted levels of performance for purposes of sanctions. The selection of primary indicators for the designation as a baseline indicator is made based on the likelihood of a state having adequate data on which to make a reasonable determination of an expected level of performance and such a designation will vary across core programs.

States are expected to collect and report on all indicators, including those that have been designated as “baseline”. The actual performance data reported by States for indicators designated as “baseline” in the first two years of the Unified or Combined Plan will serve as baseline data in future years.

Each core program must submit an expected level of performance for each indicator, except for those indicators that are listed as “baseline” indicators below.

For this Plan, the Departments will work with States during the negotiation process to establish the negotiated levels of performance for each of the primary indicators for the core programs.

### **Baseline Indicators for the First Two Years of the Plan**

Title I programs (Adult, Dislocated Workers, and Youth):

- Measurable Skill Gains
- Effectiveness in Serving Employers

Title II programs (Adult Education):

- Employment in the 2nd quarter
- Employment in the 4th quarter
- Median Earnings
- Credential Attainment
- Effectiveness in Serving Employers

Title III programs (Wagner-Peyser):

- Effectiveness in Serving Employers

Title IV programs (Vocational Rehabilitation):

- Employment in the 2nd quarter
- Employment in the 4th quarter
- Median Earnings
- Credential Attainment
- Measurable Skill Gains
- Effectiveness in Serving Employers

States may identify additional indicators in the State plan, including additional approaches to measuring Effectiveness in Serving Employers, and may establish levels of performance for each of the State indicators. Please identify any such State indicators under Additional Indicators of Performance.

TABLE 1. EMPLOYMENT (SECOND QUARTER AFTER EXIT)

Program	PY 2018 Expected Level	PY 2018 Negotiated Level	PY 2019 Expected Level	PY 2019 Negotiated Level
<b>Adults</b>	80.20	74.00	80.20	75.00
<b>Dislocated Workers</b>	66.30	69.00	66.30	70.00
<b>Youth</b>	84.40	70.00	84.40	72.00
<b>Adult Education</b>	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
<b>Wagner-Peyser</b>	64.40	64.40	64.40	65.00
<b>Vocational Rehabilitation</b>	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline

User remarks on Table 1

TABLE 2. EMPLOYMENT (FOURTH QUARTER AFTER EXIT)

Program	PY 2018 Expected Level	PY 2018 Negotiated Level	PY 2019 Expected Level	PY 2019 Negotiated Level
<b>Adults</b>	65.00	70.00	68.00	72.00
<b>Dislocated Workers</b>	63.90	66.50	66.90	68.00
<b>Youth</b>	69.00	69.40	70.00	69.70
<b>Adult Education</b>	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
<b>Wagner-Peyser</b>	62.30	65.00	65.30	65.30
<b>Vocational Rehabilitation</b>	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline

User remarks on Table 2

TABLE 3. MEDIAN EARNINGS (SECOND QUARTER AFTER EXIT)

Program	PY 2018 Expected Level	PY 2018 Negotiated Level	PY 2019 Expected Level	PY 2019 Negotiated Level
<b>Adults</b>	5,759.00	5,000.00	5,759.00	5,200.00
<b>Dislocated Workers</b>	5,007.00	5,007.00	5,007.00	5,007.00

Program	PY 2018 Expected Level	PY 2018 Negotiated Level	PY 2019 Expected Level	PY 2019 Negotiated Level
<b>Youth</b>	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
<b>Adult Education</b>	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
<b>Wagner-Peyser</b>	3,858.00	3,900.00	3,858.00	3,900.00
<b>Vocational Rehabilitation</b>	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline

User remarks on Table 3

TABLE 4. CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT RATE

Program	PY 2018 Expected Level	PY 2018 Negotiated Level	PY 2019 Expected Level	PY 2019 Negotiated Level
<b>Adults</b>	28.80	46.00	28.80	48.00
<b>Dislocated Workers</b>	29.30	46.00	29.30	48.00
<b>Youth</b>	67.70	70.00	67.70	70.50
<b>Adult Education</b>	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline

Program	PY 2018 Expected Level	PY 2018 Negotiated Level	PY 2019 Expected Level	PY 2019 Negotiated Level
<b>Wagner-Peyser</b>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
<b>Vocational Rehabilitation</b>	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline

User remarks on Table 4

TABLE 5. MEASUREABLE SKILL GAINS

Program	PY 2018 Expected Level	PY 2018 Negotiated Level	PY 2019 Expected Level	PY 2019 Negotiated Level
Adults	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Dislocated Workers	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Youth	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Adult Education	49.00	49.00	50.00	50.00
Wagner-Peyser	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Vocational Rehabilitation	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline

User remarks on Table 5

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**TABLE 6. EFFECTIVENESS IN SERVING EMPLOYERS**

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<b>Measure</b>	<b>PY 2018 Expected Level</b>	<b>PY 2018 Negotiated Level</b>	<b>PY 2019 Expected Level</b>	<b>PY 2019 Negotiated Level</b>
Line 1 (enter the measure information in the comments below)	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Line 2	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Line 3	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Line 4	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Line 5	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Line 6	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline

User remarks on Table 6

Effectiveness in Serving Employers Measurement 1: Repeat Business Customers

Effectiveness in Serving Employers Measurement 2: Employer Penetration Rate

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**TABLE 7. ADDITIONAL INDICATORS OF PERFORMANCE**

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<b>Measure</b>	<b>PY 2018 Expected Level</b>	<b>PY 2018 Negotiated Level</b>	<b>PY 2019 Expected Level</b>	<b>PY 2019 Negotiated Level</b>
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User remarks on Table 7

## APPENDIX 2. OTHER STATE ATTACHMENTS (OPTIONAL)

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Mississippi WIOA Plan - [https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/WIOA\\_Plan\\_2018.pdf](https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/WIOA_Plan_2018.pdf)

Mississippi WIOA Plan Appendix -  
[https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/WIOA\\_Plan\\_Appendix\\_2018.pdf](https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/WIOA_Plan_Appendix_2018.pdf)

Mississippi WIOA Plan + Appendix -  
[https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/WIOA\\_Plan\\_Combined\\_2018.pdf](https://swib.ms.gov/wioaplan/WIOA_Plan_Combined_2018.pdf)