

# Regional and Local Plan for Central Oklahoma

*Workforce Innovation Board (COWIB)*



**CENTRAL OKLAHOMA**  
**WORKFORCE INNOVATION BOARD**  
A proud partner of the americanjobcenter network

Serving 9 counties:

Canadian, Cleveland, Hughes, Lincoln, Logan, Okfuskee, Oklahoma, Pottawatomie  
and Seminole

**November 1, 2024**

Prepared by:

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## Executive Summary

The Central Oklahoma Workforce Innovation Board (COWIB) is proud to share its 4-year Regional and Local Plan. This plan was formed with key insights from board members, local elected officials, one-stop partners, and community-based organizations and embodies the spirit of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014, demonstrating a unified effort to improve the economic prosperity and employment outcomes of individuals and communities across COWIB's service area. By enhancing access to employment, supporting skill development, driving economic growth, and fostering collaboration, COWIB is dedicated to linking individuals with essential educational resources and eligible training partners, furnish them with comprehensive career services, offer enriching work experience opportunities, and provide access to invaluable community resources.

COWIB recognizes that, despite the existing low unemployment rate, many positions in the state remain unfilled. The 2023 Business Leaders Poll by the State Chamber Research Foundation, still relevant in 2024, highlights persistent challenges in meeting the demand for skilled positions and a continuing shortage of durable skills within the workforce. The poll's findings stress that students need to be empowered not just with technical expertise, but also with the adaptability that comes from transferable skills. This calls for a concerted effort from both the education system and capable training providers. To address these challenges and effectively reduce job vacancies, COWIB is laser-focused on expanding the number of credentialed workers equipped with enduring skills throughout our nine-county region. We also understand the importance of remaining agile and responsive to the evolving needs of employers and businesses.

Oklahoma is entering a transformative era with the creation of the new Workforce Commission. This central authority will oversee workforce and talent development across the state, with the goal of establishing a more integrated and efficient workforce system that promotes economic growth and expands the pool of skilled labor. The state's vision is to align resources, education, training, and job opportunities to strengthen the workforce, addressing the key success factors identified in Governor Stitt's Workforce Transformation Task Force Report: Authority,

Accountability, Coordination, Information, Agility, and Durability. COWIB is fully committed to supporting and realizing the vision and objectives set forth by this pivotal commission.

As with any strategic plan, its success depends on the collaborative efforts of policymakers, employers, educators, and key contributors to the workforce system. By implementing the proposed strategies, COWIB seeks to build a more dynamic and adaptable workforce that drives economic growth and vitality. This plan adheres to the WSD #85-2024 (Regional and Local Plans) policy format and invites feedback from all workforce system partners.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ashley Sellers".

Ashley Sellers, COWIB CEO  
3813 N. Santa Fe Ave., Suite 135  
Oklahoma City, OK 73118

## A. COWIB's Workforce Development System Vision

Provide a description of the local board's strategic vision and goals to support economic growth and economic self-sufficiency, including:

### **a. Goals for Preparing an Educated and Skilled Workforce, including individuals with barriers to employment:**

COWIB recognizes that a thriving economy depends on a skilled and adaptable workforce, and is committed to building a workforce development system that provides equitable opportunities for all individuals to gain the skills and knowledge needed for success. This includes a focus on individuals facing barriers to employment, as we believe that everyone deserves the chance to reach their full potential. To achieve these goals, we prioritize collaborative partnerships with employers, training providers, educational institutions, and community-based organizations. By working together, we can ensure that our programs and services are accessible, relevant, and responsive to the diverse needs of our community, equipping individuals with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive in the jobs of tomorrow. This collaborative approach is essential for creating a workforce development system that is responsive to the unique needs of our community and promotes equitable opportunities for all, ultimately investing in the future of our region.

Echoing the vision and goals set forth by the Workforce Transformation Taskforce Commission, which highlights the critical need for increased coordination and collaboration to overcome Oklahoma's workforce challenges, COWIB is proactively establishing a collaborative environment at the local level. We are strategically aligning education and training programs with the specific needs of industries, actively promoting opportunities for work-based learning, and diligently addressing barriers to employment. Through these concerted efforts, COWIB remains committed to preparing individuals with the essential and transformative skills they require to thrive in the dynamic landscape of today's job market.

While education credentials can open doors and secure interviews, the real-world work experience truly differentiates candidates and often serves as the deciding factor in landing a job. Hands-on experience not only complements the theoretical knowledge acquired through education, but also allows individuals to develop practical skills, build professional networks, and demonstrate their ability to apply their learning in a real-world setting. Importantly, it fosters the development of transferable skills, such as problem solving, communication, and adaptability, which are invaluable across various industries and roles. This combination of credentials, experience, and durable skills makes them highly desirable to employers seeking candidates ready to contribute effectively from day one. COWIB also offers an adult work experience program (Transitional Jobs) that lets participants learn and earn, regardless of their employment history. This has proven especially helpful for people facing barriers to employment, like single parents, women transitioning from incarceration, displaced homemakers, and those with past criminal records. To emphasize the importance of Work-Based Learning programs for all WIOA participants, COWIB has allocated 28% of client budgeting towards these efforts.

COWIB is proactively addressing the critical skills gap in today's rapidly evolving job market. By championing career advancement and providing targeted training opportunities, we are making a significant impact. One of our key focus areas is the healthcare sector. We offer expedited training approval and comprehensive support to Certified Nurse Assistants (CNAs) who are transitioning to become Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs). We also support LPNs aspiring to become Registered Nurses (RNs), contingent upon the individuals' commitment to achieving financial independence or enhancing their earning potential. This targeted approach helps address the ongoing demand for skilled healthcare professionals.

Beyond the healthcare industry, we have forged strategic partnerships to bolster the local workforce and create pathways to fulfilling careers. Our collaboration with Meridian Technology Center (Guthrie campus) strengthens the center's apprenticeship programs, particularly the high-demand Collision Repair and Heating, Ventilation, and Air Condition (HVAC) programs in central Oklahoma. Through Work-Based Learning initiatives and comprehensive support services, we

ensure that apprentices have the resources and guidance needed to succeed in their chosen fields.

We have also recently announced a partnership with BioTC, Oklahoma's pioneering short-term biomanufacturing training center, powered by the Oklahoma City Innovation District. This collaboration aims to inspire and equip high school students with a passion for STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) by providing them with exposure and access to this rapidly growing industry. Through a combination of cutting-edge training and essential supportive services funding, we are investing in the next generation of STEAM professionals.

These multi-faceted initiatives demonstrate our dedication to addressing workforce development challenges, fostering innovation, and creating sustainable career pathways for individuals within our community. By continuously adapting our programs to meet emerging needs, we are ensuring that community members have access to the necessary skills and opportunities to achieve sustainable career success.

COWIB is dedicated to fostering a collaborative environment among its partners and organizations under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). We have increased the frequency of our AJC Partners and Friends meetings to monthly, creating a platform for resource sharing, expertise exchange, and collective problem solving. This ensures individuals receive comprehensive workforce development services tailored to their needs, fostering success in the ever-evolving job market.

In addition, we actively connect job seekers with opportunities through our weekly "Hot Jobs" flyer, distributed digitally and amplified via social media by our partners. Our monthly Business Services Network meetings adopt a "no wrong door" approach for employers and businesses, providing a one-stop shop for accessing a range of services available through COWIB and other partners. This allows businesses to utilize and braid various services that are low- or no-cost to support and grow their business. This integrated model promotes resource sharing, problem-solving, and best practices, fostering collaboration and effective service delivery to support local business growth.

Both these meetings serve as a platform for exchanging information about partner programs, identifying workforce needs, and facilitating professional networking among stakeholders. We are also committed to expanding our Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), especially with organizations serving individuals facing employment barriers. This allows us to co-enroll clients and braid resources, delivering more effective and comprehensive workforce services to help individuals achieve their career goals.

COWIB's core strategy is to prepare an educated and skilled workforce, including individuals facing barriers to employment, ensuring they can thrive in today's dynamic professional landscape. To successfully execute this strategy, the Board is dedicated to enhancing our staff's proficiency with the O\*Net crosswalk, a vital tool for identifying and leveraging essential skills. We acknowledge a current training gap in this area but are confident that targeted training will swiftly prepare our service provider team to guide clients towards fulfilling careers. While our funding prioritizes opportunity youth, we remain committed to fulfilling the WIOA mandate by providing comprehensive career guidance to secondary school students. By incorporating resources like the OKCareerGuide assessment into our publications, we are ensuring students have the tools to explore their career options. Furthermore, we have proactively exceeded the WIOA requirement for paid work experience, offering participants valuable hands-on opportunities to develop skills and boost their employability.

COWIB is deeply committed to empowering individuals facing barriers to employment, nurturing a robust network of collaborations with agencies like the Department of Rehabilitation Services, Office of Juvenile Affairs, and more. For over half a decade, our enduring partnership with ReMerge has been instrumental in helping mothers rebuild their lives. By providing comprehensive employment and training opportunities, we've empowered these women to not only stay out of the penal system but also to thrive in fulfilling careers, particularly within the Information Technology (IT) industry, often securing full-time positions with esteemed COWIB Business Work-Based Partners such as the Oklahoma Blood Institute and TeamLogic IT.

Similarly, our longstanding collaboration with the Office of Juvenile Affairs, through the groundbreaking Juvenile Relapse Avoidance Project (JRAP), has proven to be transformative for delinquent youth in state custody. By offering work experience and job skills training, COWIB provides these young individuals with the tools they need to earn money for restitution and pave a path towards a brighter future, with OJA generously matching up to \$1,500 per case.

Our nationally recognized partnership with Guthrie Job Corps stands as a testament to the power of collaboration. This fully WIOA-compliant program has not only yielded effective programs and positive outcomes for youth participants but has also become a model for other states to emulate. We are also actively establishing strategic partnerships within the Community Hope Center, leveraging key workforce stakeholders and community-based organizations to offer comprehensive services to the multicultural residents and businesses in the historically underserved WesTen District in Oklahoma City, further enhancing their quality of life.

Our strong partnership with Work Ready Oklahoma, conveniently co-located at the Oklahoma City Oklahoma Works center and Community Hope Center, ensures a smooth transition for clients seeking assistance. This collaboration streamlines access to a comprehensive array of resources and services through co-enrollment, particularly benefiting those receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

Furthermore, we have strengthened our collaboration with Oklahoma Department Human Services (OKDHS) by actively exchanging referrals with the OK SNAP Works program. This initiative specifically targets able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWD), integrating WIOA and OK SNAP Works funding to provide work related activities that lead to gainful employment or training opportunities. By doing so, we empower participants to achieve greater self-sufficiency through meaningful careers.

Additionally, COWIB has collaborated with the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services and OU Pre-ETS on the BEST (Building Employment Skills for Today) STEP (Summer Transition Employment Program) summer transition employment internship program for the past three years, providing young people with disabilities aged 16 to 21 various job skills and career

opportunities to improve their employment readiness. Initially piloted by COWIB, this program has expanded to three additional workforce areas, with all parties aiming to make it a statewide initiative. COWIB will use this opportunity to recruit youth, aligning with the Department of Labor's vision of co-enrollment between WIOA core partners. Our dedication to this initiative was recognized with the Workforce Partner of the Year award at the DRS – People with Disabilities Awareness Day 2024 event in March.

COWIB is taking a leading role in youth workforce development as the only local workforce area in Oklahoma selected by the Department of Labor for the Performance Pilot Partnership (P3). This innovative program is designed to help specific groups of young people overcome employment barriers. It targets high school seniors dealing with challenges such as justice system involvement, disabilities, or foster care experience; young adults in their final semester of CareerTech facing similar obstacles; and recent high school graduates participating in the Summer Bridge program. The summer Bridge program, in partnership with the Oklahoma Department of Education, connects youth with opportunities to earn credentials, obtain certifications, or pursue a college degree. This unique agreement with the Department of Labor extends through September 30, 2026, and underscores COWIB's commitment to providing opportunities and support for young people facing challenges as they enter the workforce.

Oklahoma's high incarceration rate, with 905 people incarcerated per 100,000 residents with this statistic growing annually, creates significant barriers to employment for a large segment of the population, including those released from correctional facilities and justice involved youth (<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/OK.html#articles>). COWIB is tackling this issue head-on by working with state and local agencies to help these individuals, especially young adults, successfully rejoin the workforce. One key initiative is the Juvenile Relapse Avoidance Project (JRAP), a partnership with the Office of Juvenile Affairs (OJA) launched in 2020. JRAP provides work experience and job skills training to young people in state custody, even enabling them to earn money for restitution with a matching contribution from OJA. This program, initially started by COWIB, has been so effective that it is now operating across the entire state. COWIB is also collaborating with the Urban League of Greater Oklahoma City to help young people with past or

present justice system involvement get their lives on track. They're supporting the Urban League's Young Adult Reentry Program (UYRP), which helps 18- to 24-year-olds earn their high school equivalency, gain job skills, and access the support they need to find good jobs that offer competitive wages, comprehensive benefits, job security, safe working conditions, and opportunities for advancement. COWIB is committed to referring young adults to this program and providing support to the Urban League.

Moreover, our newfound partnership with Aetna on the "Better Health, Better Pay" initiative allows us to demonstrate that meaningful employment is a critical part of people's health and social well-being, especially for those receiving Medicaid. Through these diverse and impactful collaborations, COWIB is breaking down barriers and creating a more inclusive and equitable workforce landscape, where all individuals have the chance to achieve their full potential.

The role of COWIB's Business Services and Communication Program Manager is multifaceted, serving as a crucial link between businesses seeking skilled talent and individuals seeking fulfilling careers. This dedicated professional offers tailored workforce solutions, connecting businesses with qualified candidates through various services. These include creating a weekly "Hot Jobs" flyer highlighting in demand vacancies, coordinating and connecting businesses to hiring events and career fairs, promoting work-based learning, e.g., Work Experience, On-the-Job Training and apprenticeships. Nevertheless, their role goes beyond simple recruitment: they empower businesses with tools and knowledge to build a strong and stable workforce. This includes offering no-cost Workforce Stability Training to help employers analyze and reduce turnover. By providing regular updates on labor market trends, sharing inspiring success stories, and curating valuable resources like the Business Services Resource Guide (recently recognized by the Department of Labor as a promising practice!), COWIB ensures both businesses and job seekers have the information and support they need to thrive. COWIB aims to facilitate the ideal match between employers and job seekers. We also prioritize making our policies user-friendly, accessible, and transparent by making information readily available on our website ([www.cowib.org](http://www.cowib.org)). At COWIB, our underlying motivation is to bridge the gap between employers seeking skilled talent and individuals seeking meaningful employment opportunities. Through

our Business Services model and strategic partner initiatives, COWIB strengthens our local workforce to thrive in today's dynamic professional landscape.

**b. Goals relating to the performance accountability measures based on performance indicators.**

COWIB's goals relating to performance accountability are deeply rooted in a commitment to continuous improvement, collaborative partnerships, and impactful outcomes. We strive to exceed expectations by actively monitoring the progress of our service providers, engaging in open communication, and offering ongoing support to ensure they have the tools and resources needed to excel. This collaborative approach extends to our clients as well, with a focus on providing personalized support and connecting individuals with opportunities that align with their aspirations and abilities.

Recognizing the workforce challenges facing central Oklahoma, COWIB prioritizes the engagement of underrepresented individuals, including those facing barriers such as limited access to education, disabilities, or past involvement in the justice system. By providing accessible pathways to advanced education and training, we aim to equip these individuals with the skills needed for high-demand occupations and encourage greater workforce participation.

To ensure alignment with state-level goals, COWIB actively tracks local progress towards targets identified by the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission (OESC) and endorsed by the Governor's Council of Workforce and Economic Development (GCWED). This includes monitoring key performance indicators such as employment rates, wage outcomes, retention rates, workforce participation, and equitable access to training opportunities. Furthermore, we collaborate with workforce partners to regularly review funding sources, assess the effectiveness of federal and state funding, and track metrics related to career readiness and wealth generation.

COWIB's commitment to performance accountability is amplified by its active engagement with the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission (OESC) and other local workforce boards across the state. We maintain an open dialogue with the OESC, sharing best practices, identifying

emerging trends, and contributing to the development of statewide workforce development strategies. This collaborative exchange with other local boards ensures that our initiatives are aligned with state priorities and contribute to the overall performance and economic prosperity of Oklahoma. Furthermore, this dedication to collaboration, coupled with a focus on customer needs and continuous improvement, allows COWIB to effectively serve both individuals and the community, building a strong and inclusive workforce that benefits both individuals and communities throughout the central Oklahoma region.

Describe the strategy to work with entities that carry out the core programs and required partners to align resources available to the local area, to achieve the strategic vision and goals.

COWIB's strategy for achieving its vision and goals hinges on robust collaborative partnerships, the strategic alignment of resources, and the effective braiding of funding streams. We recognize that building a thriving and inclusive workforce requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders and a diversified funding approach. Therefore, we actively engage with a diverse network of partners, including training providers, employers, community organizations, educational institutions, and government agencies. This collaborative approach ensures that we leverage the unique expertise and resources of each partner to effectively address the evolving needs of our local workforce.

To optimize our impact, COWIB is committed to braiding funding from various sources. This includes core partner funding, such as federal and state grants allocated for workforce development programs; required partner funding, which may come from organizations like the Department of Human Services or the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services; and funding from community-based organizations that provide critical wraparound services to support individuals on their path to employment. By strategically combining these funding streams, we can maximize our resources and create a more comprehensive and sustainable system of support for job seekers and employers alike. To facilitate this ongoing collaboration and ensure effective resource allocation, COWIB has implemented a multi-faceted

communication and engagement framework. This includes monthly American Job Center (AJC) Partner meetings, where partners convene to discuss operational updates, share best practices, and address challenges related to service delivery. By meeting monthly rather than quarterly, we ensure that information is disseminated quickly and that partners have many opportunities to provide input and feedback. Furthermore, monthly Business Services Network meetings focus specifically on the needs of businesses in our region. These meetings bring together employers, training providers, and economic development organizations to identify workforce trends, address skill gaps, and develop strategies to support business growth and competitiveness.

Its local Board of Directors, comprised of representatives from business, education, labor, and community organizations, governs COWIB and its Board Chief Elected Officials, which includes county commissioners from across the nine counties. These governing bodies play a critical role in providing strategic direction and ensuring that COWIB's workforce development initiatives remain aligned with the broader economic development goals of central Oklahoma region.

The Board of Directors brings a wealth of knowledge and experience from various sectors, providing valuable insights into the needs of employers and the skills required for success in the local job market. The Board Chief Elected Officials offer a crucial understanding of the economic landscape and workforce challenges within their respective counties, ensuring that COWIB's programs and services are tailored to meet the unique needs of each community.

Through frequent meetings, held six times a year, these governing bodies engage in robust discussions regarding workforce trends, industry demands, and emerging challenges. They review performance data, ensure fiscal accountability, analyze program outcomes, and provide guidance on strategic priorities to ensure that COWIB remains responsive to the evolving needs of the region. This collaborative governance structure ensures that COWIB effectively serves the community by providing high-quality workforce development programs that contribute to the economic prosperity of central Oklahoma.

COWIB prioritizes continuous improvement and responsiveness to the community's evolving workforce needs. To achieve this, COWIB conducts an annual SWOT analysis, bringing together

core and required partners and governing boards to collaboratively evaluate the workforce development system. This process, completed in both 2023 (<https://cowib.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/SWOT-for-COWIB-4-year-plan.pdf>) and 2024 (<https://cowib.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/COWIB-SWOT-2024-1.pdf>), involves a thorough assessment of strengths and weaknesses, identification of opportunities for growth, and proactive planning to address potential challenges. Notably, the 2024 analysis demonstrated significant progress, with marked improvements in the system's strengths and an increase in identified opportunities, highlighting the positive impact of collaborative efforts and a growing awareness of potential avenues for expanding workforce development initiatives. This collaborative SWOT analysis enables COWIB and its partners to develop targeted strategies, enhancing the effectiveness and responsiveness of workforce development initiatives in Central Oklahoma.

Through these various channels of communication and collaborative processes, COWIB fosters a transparent and collaborative environment where partners can openly discuss challenges, share best practices, and identify opportunities for improvement. This ongoing dialogue ensures that our strategies remain responsive to the dynamic economic, demographic, and funding landscape of Central Oklahoma.

We prioritize initiatives that align with our strategic vision, such as expanding employment opportunities for all job seekers, with a particular focus on those facing barriers. This includes providing targeted support for individuals with disabilities, English language learners, and formerly incarcerated citizens. By working together and strategically braiding funding, we can leverage the expertise and resources of each partner to create a more inclusive and effective workforce system that benefits both individuals and employers, ultimately contributing to the economic vitality of our region.

## B. Local Workforce Development System Response to Regional Plan

According to Workforce System Directive (WSD #85-2024), Section B is only required for local areas that are part of a multi-area planning region. While local areas can use the regional plan as

a reference, they are expected to provide additional context specific to their local needs and identify unique areas of focus. As a single planning region, the Central Oklahoma Workforce Innovation Board (COWIB) is exempt from answering the questions outlined in this section of the policy.

### C. COWIB Development System Description

Describe the workforce development system in the local area by addressing each of the following.

**a. List and describe the programs that are include in the system.**

Program/Activity	One-Stop Partner
(a)	Programs authorized under Title I of WIOA:
i	Adults & Dislocated Worker Activities Board of Local Elected Officials (Central Oklahoma)
ii	Youth Workforce Investment Activities Board of Local Elected Officials (Central Oklahoma)
iii	Job Corps Guthrie Job Corps Center
iv	YouthBuild (No programs in Central Oklahoma)
v	Native American programs Absentee Shawnee Tribe; Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma; Citizen Potawatomi Nation; Muscogee Creek Nation; Seminole Nation of Oklahoma; United Urban Indian Council
vi	Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker ORO Development Corporation
(b)	Programs authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act Oklahoma Employment Security Commission

(c)	Adult education and literacy activities authorized under title II	Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education (Canadian Valley Technology Center; Metro Technology Center; OSU-IT Okmulgee; OIC of Oklahoma City; Oklahoma City Community College)
(d)	Programs authorized under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973	Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services
(e)	Activities authorized under title C of the Older Americans Act of 1965	AARP S Foundation; National Indian Council on Aging (NICOA)
(f)	Career and technical education programs under the Carl D. Perkins Act of 2006	Francis Tuttle Technology Center; Oklahoma City Community College; Oklahoma State University - OKC; Rose State College
(g)	Activities authorized under chapter 2 of title II of the Trade Act of 1974	Oklahoma Employment Security Commission
(h)	Activities authorized under chapter 41 of Title 38	Oklahoma Employment Security Commission
	Employment and training activities under the Community Services Block Grant Act	Central OK Community Action Agency; Deep Fork Community Action Foundation; CAA of Oklahoma City
	Employment and training activities under the Department of Housing and Urban Development	Shawnee Housing Authority; Oklahoma City Housing Authority
	Programs authorized under State unemployment compensation laws	Oklahoma Employment Security Commission
	Programs authorized under section 212 of the Second Chance Act of 2007	(No programs in Central Oklahoma)
	Programs authorized under part A of title IV of the Social Security Act	Oklahoma Department of Human Services

b. List the location(s) of the comprehensive One-Stop Center(s) (at least one) within your local area; and any affiliated or specialized centers (both physically and electronically linked, such as libraries) in the local workforce development area. Identify the workforce system partners who are physically co-located in those centers.

Central Oklahoma's workforce system provides comprehensive support to job seekers and employers through a network of service centers and offices. This network includes three Comprehensive Centers, one Specialized Center, and five offices conveniently located within partner agencies or community-based organizations. These centers are strategically positioned throughout the region to serve the following counties: Canadian, Cleveland, Hughes, Lincoln, Logan, Okfuskee, Oklahoma, Pottawatomie, and Seminole.

**Comprehensive Centers:**

Oklahoma County

5005 N Lincoln Blvd

Oklahoma City, OK 73105

- Partners physically located at this center: COWIB, OESC, and OESC -Disabled Veteran Outreach Program, Guthrie Job Corps, \*Metro Technology Center and \*\*Work Ready Oklahoma (Public Strategies, Inc).

Seminole County

229 N 2nd

Seminole, OK 74868

- Partners physically located at this center: COWIB, OESC, OESC -Disabled Veteran Outreach Program, OSU-IT Okmulgee (Adult Basic Education).

Pottawatomie County

2 John C. Bruton Blvd

Shawnee, OK 74804

(Gordon Cooper Technology Center)

- Partners physically located at this center: COWIB, OESC, and OESC -Disabled Veteran Outreach Program, Guthrie Job Corps and Department of Rehabilitation Services.

**Specialized Center:**

Canadian County

210 N Choctaw Ave

El Reno, OK 73036

- COWIB staff only

**Partner Agencies or Community-Based Organizations:**

Cleveland County

103 W Acres

Norman, OK 73069

(Pioneer Central Library)

Hughes County

209 E. 9th St

Holdenville, OK 74848

(Grace M. Pickens Public Library)

7892 OK-9

Wetumka, OK 74883

(Wes Watkins Technology Center)

Oklahoma County

7201 NW 10th St

Oklahoma City, OK 73127

(Hope Community Center -OKDHS)

823 N Villa Ave

*Oklahoma City, OK 73107 (ReMerge)*

This groundbreaking partnership between Work Ready Oklahoma, Metro Technology Center, and the OKC Central Oklahoma Works center represents a major leap forward in workforce development in central Oklahoma by creating a centralized "one-stop shop" where job seekers can easily access a comprehensive array of services. This streamlined approach eliminates barriers, allowing individuals to explore career paths with Work Ready Oklahoma, gain valuable skills training at Metro Technology Center, and connect with potential employers through OKC Central Oklahoma Works, all in one location. This co-location model fosters collaboration, enabling partners to share information and resources for more holistic service delivery. While WIOA funding provides a foundation, the partnership expands resources to include specialized skills training, career counseling, and support services that address barriers to employment. The center assists a diverse population, from those seeking entry-level positions to those looking to upskill or change careers, by providing help with resume writing, interview skills, and navigating the job market. Employers also benefit from access to a larger pool of qualified candidates, streamlined hiring processes, and potential training partnerships with Metro Technology Center. This strengthens the workforce pipeline and contributes to economic growth in the region, making this initiative a win-win for job seekers, employers, and the community.

\*Metro Technology Center, operating within the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education, continues its dedication to empowering individuals, bolstering communities, and fostering economic development. This commitment is realized through cutting-edge educational programs and workforce training initiatives. With four strategically located campuses across Oklahoma City, the institution offers a wide range of learning opportunities, including full-time programs, short-term courses, career-focused training, and customized business solutions. This comprehensive approach ensures Metro Technology Center's continued role as a crucial resource for skill development and professional growth in the Oklahoma City area.

**\*\*Public Strategies, Inc** operates the "Work Ready Oklahoma" (WRO) program, which has been awarded contracts by the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (also known as Oklahoma Human Services) to provide statewide services. This key initiative aims to boost self-sufficiency among low-income families, strategically expanding the agency's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) work program efforts. WRO provides tailored workshops, job preparation services, coaching, and support to help low-income individuals overcome employment barriers and secure quality jobs. The programs focus on families using government-funded safety-net services to help them achieve self-sufficiency.

c. Describe the roles and resource contributions of each of the One-Stop partners. Please include the completed Job Seeker and Business Services service matrices.

The Central Oklahoma Workforce Innovation Board (COWIB) collaborates with a network of One-Stop Partners who provide essential resources and services to support both job seekers and employers in the region. These partners offer a comprehensive range of services, including career guidance, job search assistance, training programs, access to job listings and labor market information, and connections to community resources. To maximize coordination and collaboration, these One-Stop Partners are co-located at a comprehensive center, ensuring seamless access to high-quality services for all who utilize the workforce system. This integrated approach strengthens COWIB's ability to effectively address the diverse workforce development needs of central Oklahoma. Core partners in this effort are those funded through WIOA Title I (Adult, Dislocated Workers, and Youth), WIOA Title II (Adult Education and Literacy), WIOA Title III (Wagner-Peyser), and WIOA Title IV (Vocational Rehabilitation).

The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) Division of the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education (ODCTE) plays a crucial role in central Oklahoma's workforce system by providing adult education and literacy services. As the pass-through agency for federal AEFLA grants, ODCTE supports programs that help adults acquire essential skills for employment and self-sufficiency. COWIB collaborates with a diverse network of adult education and literacy providers, including Canadian Valley Technology Center, Metro Technology Center, and Meridian Technology Center. Community colleges like Oklahoma City Community College also play a vital

role, along with organizations such as OIC of Oklahoma City and the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. These providers offer a range of programs and services at numerous locations throughout the region, ensuring accessible pathways to skill development and self-sufficiency for adult learners.

The Oklahoma Employment Security Commission (OESC) is a key One-Stop Partner in central Oklahoma's workforce system, providing comprehensive services to job seekers and employers at co-located centers in Oklahoma City, Shawnee, and Seminole. Funded through the Wagner-Peyser Act and overseen by the U.S. Department of Labor, the OESC offers a wide range of services, including job search assistance, training programs, and support services, with a particular focus on assisting individuals facing economic disadvantage or displacement. They also manage the Unemployment Insurance Program, providing financial assistance to eligible unemployed workers and actively working to facilitate their re-entry into the workforce. Following a transfer of authority in August 2023 by Governor Kevin Stitt, the OESC now oversees all Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds for the state, further solidifying its role in Oklahoma's workforce development efforts. Furthermore, the OESC administers several specialized programs, including the Jobs for Veterans State Grant, the Federal Bonding Program, Trade Adjustment Assistance, and the Work Opportunity Tax Credit. These programs provide targeted support and resources to specific populations, such as veterans, individuals with barriers to employment, and workers impacted by international trade.

The Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS), another key One-Stop Partner in central Oklahoma's workforce system, is authorized under Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to expand opportunities for employment and independent living for Oklahomans with disabilities. DRS offers a range of services through its Vocational Rehabilitation and Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired divisions, including career counseling, job search assistance, assistive technology, and training programs. These services are designed to help individuals with disabilities bridge barriers to success in the workplace, school, and at home. DRS staff work closely with clients to develop Individualized Plans for Employment (IPE) that outline the specific services and supports needed to achieve their employment goals. DRS operates

within co-located centers in Oklahoma City, Shawnee, and Seminole, ensuring individuals with disabilities have seamless access to the resources and support they need to thrive in the workforce.

COWIB Local and Regional Plan Job Seeker Business Services Matrix: <https://cowib.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/COWIB-Job-Seeker-and-Business-Services-Matrix.pdf>.

Identify your key strategies for aligning the core programs (WIOA Title I, II, III, and IV programs) as well as all required partner programs within the local One-Stop system of comprehensive and affiliate offices by addressing each of the following items. (Include a copy of any completed Process Maps and how they are used to align services and avoid duplication of services).

**Assess the types and availability of adult and dislocated worker employment and training activities in the local area.**

Career services for adults and dislocated workers are available throughout all nine counties of the Central Oklahoma workforce area, although these services are typically limited in resources.

Nonetheless, thousands of workers benefit from these services annually. In this Local and Regional Plan, we showcase the many One-Stop partner programs that offer career services to adults and dislocated workers. These programs include Wagner-Peyser offering basic career services to eligible adults; Unemployment Insurance, providing benefit payments to thousands of claimants each month, and RESEA (Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment) program, which aims to reduce unemployment duration, enhance UI program integrity, and align with WIOA objectives.

The One-Stop partner programs also provide support to the general population of adults and dislocated workers, including through the WIOA Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker grants. In

Program      Year      2022      (<https://cowib.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/PY22-COWIB-Performance-Metrics.pdf>)and      Program      Year      2023      (<https://cowib.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/PY23-COWIB-Performance-Metrics.pdf>)

<content/uploads/2024/10/PY23-COWIB-Performance-Metrics.pdf>), COWIB successfully meet all negotiated performance metrics that includes Employment – 2nd Quarter after Exit; Employment – 4th Quarter after Exit; Median Earnings, Credential Attainment and Measurable Skills Gain for Adult and Dislocated Worker grant programs. Moreover, certain subsets of adults and dislocated workers receive tailored services from our SCSEP program partners, AEFLA program partners, WIOA Native American programs, TANF, TAA, Jobs for Veterans State Grant, and National Farmworker Jobs Program, which offer various types of services as specified in WIOA Section 134(c)(2)(A).

In addition to the career services outlined in WIOA Section 134(c)(2)(A), the WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker formula grant programs offer an array of training activities and supportive services, although they may be limited by program resources. WIOA Section 134(c)(3)(E) gives priority to individuals who receive public assistance, have low income, or have basic skills deficiencies. Furthermore, we adhere to the priority guidelines established by the Jobs for Veterans Act.

**Provide an explanation of how the local board addresses local rapid response activities.**

The Central Oklahoma Workforce Innovation Board (COWIB) plays a vital role in supporting rapid response activities within the region, recognizing the urgent need for career services when layoffs or business closures occur. While the state bears primary responsibility for rapid response, COWIB actively supports the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission (OESC) by monitoring the engagement of its One-Stop partners in responding to these events. This includes ensuring timely and effective access to employment and training services for impacted workers.

COWIB also demonstrates its commitment to assisting employers through its Business Services and Communication Programs Manager, collaborating with the One-Stop Operator to provide support as needed. For example, COWIB offers a dedicated Rapid Response webpage where businesses can request assistance with layoff events, whether in-person or virtual (<https://cowib.org/services/business-services-2/>). These services are typically provided in response to WARN Act notices, permanent closures, mass layoffs, or natural disasters.

COWIB's rapid response efforts are further strengthened by its close collaboration with local employers, employees, and community organizations. This collaborative approach ensures a swift and coordinated response to minimize the negative impact of economic disruptions on the workforce. By leveraging its partnerships with educational institutions, industry associations, and economic development organizations, COWIB can access a broad network of resources and expertise to develop effective strategies for navigating workforce changes and promoting economic stability in central Oklahoma.

**Describe how the local board will coordinate relevant secondary and post-secondary education programs and activities with workforce investment activities to coordinate strategies, enhance services, and avoid duplication of services.**

COWIB, as the convener of One-Stop partners in Central Oklahoma, facilitates the coordination of secondary and post-secondary education programs and activities with workforce investment activities in our area. This coordination enhances services, prevents duplication of effort, and fosters a closer working relationship between education and workforce partners. To achieve this, we actively support, develop, and implement Career Pathways.

Career Pathways, as we understand them, adapt to meet the needs of a wide range of individuals, including youth, adults, and dislocated workers. Our vision for Career Pathways initiatives involves collaboration among multiple One-Stop partners, including eligible Adult Education providers, Registered Apprenticeship programs, WIOA Title I Formula grant programs, TANF activities, Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services programs, and Job Corps, along with relevant secondary and postsecondary education programs and activities.

Features of our career pathways initiatives include:

**Aligned with the Skill Needs of Industries.** To ensure that Career Pathways initiatives in our area are aligned with the needs of businesses, we actively seek input from employers. This involves establishing advisory committees composed of representatives from local businesses to guide the development of career pathways in Central Oklahoma. We also collaborate with existing

advisory groups convened by career technology schools, community colleges, and other relevant institutions. Additionally, we leverage the expertise of the industry advisory boards that have already been established by the COWIB to support our Sector Strategy efforts. We recognize the importance of aligning Career Pathways with our sector strategies and other business engagement efforts in the local workforce development system.

**Implemented in a Full Range of Secondary and Postsecondary Education Options.** We aim to ensure that each Career Pathway is comprehensively developed to incorporate a diverse array of educational opportunities, including training and education provided by secondary schools, community colleges, career tech schools, registered apprenticeship programs, and other relevant organizations.

**Includes Career Counseling appropriate to all participant groups.** To ensure the success of our Career Pathways initiatives, we acknowledge the importance of providing effective career counseling to various participant groups. This may require us to develop activities that enhance the ongoing training of career counselors, such as career exploration programs, among others.

**Provides for Workforce Preparation Activities and Training to be offered concurrently with Educational Activities / Programs.** We enhance educational activities and programs by actively involving students in workforce preparation activities and training programs focused on specific occupations or occupational clusters.

**Accelerates Educational and Career Advancement of Individuals, as much as possible.** We strive to facilitate the development of Career Pathway initiatives that enable individuals to achieve their educational and career objectives more efficiently than would otherwise be possible, to the extent feasible.

**Supports the Attainment of a Secondary School Diploma (or equivalent) as well as Postsecondary Credential (one or more).** We endorse programs that enable high school students to embark on either a Career Pathway that can be continued in postsecondary education, in the

same or a different pathway. We evaluate the success of each initiative based on the achievement of relevant credentials and the long-term success of participants in their careers.

**Helps Individuals to Advance within a Specific Occupation or Occupational Cluster.** We are committed to ensuring that our Career Pathways initiatives are adaptable and inclusive, allowing underemployed workers to benefit from additional training and skill-building activities. COWIB takes a collaborative approach with our partners, providing support rather than direct management or direction. Our role will be to facilitate the development of these initiatives, monitor their effectiveness, and promote their impact on meeting the workforce needs of our region.

**Describe how the local board, in coordination with the One-Stop operator, maximizes coordination, improves service delivery, and avoids duplication of Wagner-Peyser Act services and other services provided through the delivery system.**

COWIB has had a successful partnership with the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission (OESC) since our inception under the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act. OESC is the recipient of Wagner Peyser grant funds in Oklahoma, and we have maintained co-located operations in a One-Stop setting.

Our Career Services have been delivered in a coordinated manner to avoid duplication of effort.

In Central Oklahoma, our One-Stop Operator plays a crucial role in coordinating service providers across the One-Stop delivery system, including coordination with our Wagner-Peyser partner. The COWIB's contract with our One-Stop operator outlines this coordination function in detail.

“Contractor will provide integrated services and/or services being delivered in a functional delivery system. This may require Contractor to provide some services that are traditionally delivered by other entities that are none-the-less allowable services. In the integrated / functional delivery system, other entities may also be required to deliver some of the services that are included in the statement of work in this contract. Contractor’s staff may be functionally

supervised by staff from other partner agencies that are assisting in the provision of services in the workforce system or Contractor's staff may functionally supervise staff of other entities working in the Workforce Centers."

We will include additional measures to coordinate services and enhance service delivery in Central Oklahoma through the negotiation of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among the One- Stop partners in our area.

**Describe how the local board will coordinate WIOA Title I workforce investment activities with adult education and literacy activities under WIOA Title II, including how the local board will carry out the review of local applications submitted under Title II.**

Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act outlines the creation of a partnership among the Federal Government, States, and localities to voluntarily provide adult education and literacy activities in order to achieve certain goals, including:

"Assist adults to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and economic self-sufficiency...."

The administration of policy for adult education and literacy activities in Oklahoma is the responsibility of the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education (ODCTE), which distributes funds to local areas in the state in accordance with the methodology described in the State's Unified Plan, as required by Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Eligible providers may receive grants or contracts from ODCTE to develop, implement, and improve adult education and literacy activities in the state through a competitive application process. The review of applications and awarding of grants or contracts is conducted periodically.

Section 231(e) describes 13 evaluation criteria that must be reviewed by ODCTE before it makes any award of grants or contracts. Three out of the 13 "considerations" relate to coordination with the local workforce development system in one way or another. Here are excerpts:

(e) CONSIDERATIONS. — In awarding grants or contracts under this section, the eligible agency shall consider —

(1) the degree to which the eligible provider would be responsive to—

(A) regional needs as identified in the Local and Regional Plan under section 108; and

(B) serving individuals in the community who were identified in such plan as most in need of adult education and literacy activities, including individuals—

(i) who have low levels of literacy skills; or

(ii) who are English language learners....

(4) the extent to which the eligible provider demonstrates alignment between proposed activities and services and the strategy and goals of the Local and Regional Plan under section 108, as well as the activities and services of the One-Stop partners...

(10) whether the eligible provider's activities coordinate with other available education, training, and social service resources in the community, such as by establishing strong links with elementary schools and secondary schools, postsecondary educational institutions, institutions of higher education, local workforce investment boards, One-Stop centers, job training programs, and social service agencies, business, industry, labor organizations, community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, and intermediaries, for the development of career pathways;

This focus on appropriate linkages with the local workforce system is intentional. The emphasis on strong linkages is reiterated in the description of the application that must be submitted by

each local eligible provider. Pursuant to WIOA Section 232, each eligible provider desiring a grant or contract from ODCTE “shall submit an application” including, at a minimum, the following information:

- a) a description of how funds awarded under this title will be spent...;
- b) a description of any cooperative arrangements the eligible provider has with other agencies, institutions, or organizations for the delivery of adult education and literacy activities;
- c) a description of how the eligible provider will provide services in alignment with the Local and Regional Plan under section 108, including how such provider will promote concurrent enrollment in programs and activities under title I, as appropriate;
- d) a description of how the eligible provider will meet the State adjusted levels of performance described in section 116(b)(3), including how such provider will collect data to report on such performance indicators;
- e) a description of how the eligible provider will fulfill One-Stop partner responsibilities as described in section 121(b)(1)(A), as appropriate.

Obviously, the law envisions that there will be appropriate coordination between the local workforce system and local eligible providers of adult education and literacy activities.

To drive this coordination, Section 107(d)(11) of the WIOA law provides that COWIB will review the applications submitted to ODCTE in order to “determine whether such applications are consistent with the Local and Regional Plan.” Additionally, COWIB will make recommendations to ODCTE in order to “promote alignment” with the Local and Regional Plan.

With respect to COWIB’s review of grant applications, our priority will be to confirm that each applicant properly describes their willingness to:

- Provide access through the One-Stop delivery system to such program or activities carried out by the entity, including making their applicable career services available at the One-

Stop centers (in addition to any other appropriate locations), as described in WIOA Section 121(b)(1)(A)(i).

- Use a portion of the funds available for adult education and literacy activities to maintain the One-Stop delivery system, including funds to support the infrastructure costs of One-Stop centers in the Central Oklahoma area, as described in WIOA Section 121(b)(1)(A)(ii).
- Participate, as may be directed by the ODCTE, in the Memorandum of Understanding for the local workforce system in Central Oklahoma, as described in WIOA Section 121(b)(1)(A)(iii).
- Participate in the operation of the local One-Stop system consistent with WIOA Section 121(b)(1)(A)(iv). Eligible providers may do this, for example, by participating in periodic meetings of the COWIB's One-Stop Partners group.
- Promote concurrent enrollment in programs and activities under title I – including, as appropriate, WIOA Formula Grant programs, WIOA Native American programs, WIOA Farmworker program, etc.

COWIB aims to coordinate workforce investment activities under Title I with local adult education and literacy activities by implementing various service alignment strategies in collaboration with our One Stop partners. These strategies may include identifying suitable referral activities, exploring co- location strategies, and providing staff cross training.

To ensure effective co-enrollment of AEFL participants in the core programs of WIOA Title I, COWIB will establish annual goals and a reliable reporting system for co-enrollments, services rendered, and outcomes achieved. Our objective is to achieve a specific number of co-enrollments in the WIOA Adult and WIOA Youth programs.

**Describe and assess the type and availability of youth workforce investment activities in the local area, including activities for youth who are individuals with disabilities, and provide an identification of successful models.**

COWIB demonstrates its commitment to the future of central Oklahoma by investing in the next generation of its workforce through a comprehensive Youth Program and a dedicated Youth Council that is led by COWIB's dedicated Youth Programs Manager. This council, comprised of community representatives from across the nine-county region, provides valuable insights into youth policy and guides the implementation of youth programs funded by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). By collaborating with employers and young people, the council expands employment and training opportunities in alignment with state-level strategies.

COWIB's Youth Program offers a range of high-quality services, including career exploration, educational support, and skills training in high-demand industries. These services are designed to support young people in their transition to adulthood, whether through employment or continued education. COWIB emphasizes models that encourage school completion and provides comprehensive program elements such as work experience, career exploration, and tutoring.

Furthermore, COWIB recognizes that young people face diverse needs and challenges. For in-school youth facing barriers to employment, such as those with disabilities, foster youth, or justice-involved youth, COWIB utilizes the P3 waiver to provide individualized and flexible support. This waiver allows for innovative approaches to service delivery, ensuring access to the resources and opportunities needed for success.

Both in-school and out-of-school youth can access valuable programs like paid work experience that integrate academic and occupational learning, providing opportunities to gain practical skills and explore career pathways. COWIB offers additional support and resources to help out-of-school youth navigate the educational and workforce systems, ensuring they have the tools and guidance needed to achieve their goals. This comprehensive approach ensures that all young people in central Oklahoma have the opportunity to thrive in the workforce.

COWIB will make sure that all the elements listed in WIOA Section 129 are accessible to participants who need them. In particular, we will offer paid work experience activities that feature academic and occupational education components, including:

- Summer employment opportunities and other employment opportunities available throughout the school year;
- Pre-apprenticeship programs;
- Internships and job shadowing; and
- On-the-job training opportunities.

As suggested by Department of Labor guidance, we will coordinate our work experience activities with other youth serving organizations and agencies. We will strengthen our partnership-building efforts by reaching out to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Community Services Block Grant activities, and Community Development Block Grant programs.

Furthermore, we will endeavor to expand our linkages with our Adult Education partners, WIOA Native American programs, and Job Corps.

Describe how the local board will work with entities carrying out core programs to accomplish the following outcomes:

**Expand access to employment, training, education, and supportive services for eligible individuals, particularly eligible individuals with barriers to employment.**

The core programs in our local workforce development system are:

1. The Wagner-Peyser Employment Service (ES) Program;
2. The WIOA Title I Adult program;
3. The WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker program;
4. The WIOA Title I Youth program;
5. The Adult Education and Literacy Activities under WIOA Title II; and
6. The programs of Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (amended by WIOA Title IV).

Collectively, these programs serve thousands of individuals within the Central Oklahoma area. Even so, there is always the possibility to expand and improve access to these programs and services.

Our local board is committed to working with our core program partners to expand access to employment, training, education, and supportive services. We will do this by:

1. Improving our outreach efforts to the community – aiming to increase awareness of our services, particularly regarding community groups with employment barriers.
2. Locating our services in places that are conveniently accessible to the 1.4 million residents of our 9-county area.
3. Creating and maintaining electronic service delivery systems that are user-friendly, effective, and accessible to individuals who reside in remote parts of our area.
4. Maintaining our efforts to identify individuals with barriers to employment when they present themselves during intake.
5. Making sure that the participants of all core partners are made aware of the full scope of services that are available to them through the American Job Center network in Central Oklahoma.
6. Assuring that services are delivered equitably, in full compliance with Section 188 of WIOA – “Nondiscrimination” — including the language accessibility provisions of the law. (See “Complying with Section 188 of WIOA,” Page 83) and,
7. Assuring compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, including a focus on physical accessibility at all our locations. (See “Complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act,” page 83)

Our local board has initiated a monthly performance meeting with our service provider to ensure that our adult, dislocated worker, and youth programs are meeting their performance goals and delivering the intended benefits. The purpose of this engagement is to ensure that our clients are not missing out on any of the benefits of being a WIOA participant and that they are receiving the maximum amount of support possible. This proactive approach allows us to identify and address any gaps in service, ensuring that our clients receive the highest level of care and support.

COWIB intends to monitor and evaluate its progress in enhancing service accessibility by regularly generating a report on the quantity of participants served through the core programs. The report

will provide a detailed breakdown of the services offered, including employment, training, education, and supportive services, for various participant groups, especially those with recognized barriers to employment. The goal is to monitor progress in each core program from year-to-year and continually improve the delivery of services.

If deemed necessary, the local board will collaborate with the State Equal Opportunity Officer to suggest improvements for expanding access to services for eligible individuals.

Facilitate the development of career pathways\*. Provide a list of the career pathways, and for each include:

- The phase of development (conceptual, in initial implementation, being sustained or, expanding);
- Workforce Demand (need) – Describe the business workforce need being addressed by the strategy. Indicate the industry(s) and occupations being represented, how the need was determined, and the occupational skills to be addressed;
- Relevance – Indicate the connection between the demand and the priority(ies) for the region;
- Strategy – Identify the sector partners and the role of each;
- Funding – Describe available resources that will support the strategy;
- Critical Elements – Identify any critical elements for the identified strategy that must be done for the success of the strategy that cannot be met with available resources. This may include: the expansion of an existing strategy, in any phase, from one LWDA to others in the region; the need to procure new training vendors; planning sessions involving multiple partners; training of One-Stop staff; and development of regional data collection systems.

This item relates, in part, to how the local board will coordinate education and workforce investment activities carried out in the local area with relevant secondary and postsecondary education programs and activities.

In a broader sense, though, Career Pathways offer opportunities for all job seekers – not just students in secondary and postsecondary education programs and activities. For example, Career Pathways can be important for meeting the needs of dislocated workers, older workers, and workers who are underemployed.

As defined in Section 3 of WIOA:

(7) CAREER PATHWAY. — The term “career pathway” means a combination of rigorous and high-quality education, training, and other services that—

- A. aligns with the skill needs of industries in the economy of the State or regional economy involved;
- B. prepares an individual to be successful in any of a full range of secondary or postsecondary education options, including apprenticeships registered under the Act of August 16, 1937 (commonly known as the “National Apprenticeship Act”; 50 Stat. 664, chapter 663; 29 U.S.C. 50 et seq.) (referred to individually in this Act as an “apprenticeship”, except in section 171);
- C. includes counseling to support an individual in achieving the individual’s education and career goals;
- D. includes, as appropriate, education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster;
- E. organizes education, training, and other services to meet the particular needs of an individual in a manner that accelerates the educational and career advancement of the individual to the extent practicable;
- F. enables an individual to attain a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and at least one recognized postsecondary credential; and

- G. helps an individual enter or advance within a specific occupation or occupational cluster.

COWIB will seek to identify, review, expand, and create new career pathways to benefit workers in Central Oklahoma. We recognize that some of our partners have previously been engaged with the development of career pathways. As much as possible, we will avoid the duplication of their efforts.

In our work to facilitate the development of career pathways, we will be guided by the U.S. Department of Labor's Career Pathways Toolkit: An Enhanced Guide and Workbook for System Development.

Additionally, we will rely on guidance from the state's Career Pathways Committee. We note that the Governor's Council has a duty to assist the Governor in developing "strategies to support the use of career pathways." (WIOA Section 101(d)(3)(B)).

A copy of the Department of Labor's Toolkit can be found online, here:

<https://careerpathways.workforcegps.org/resources/2016/10/20/10/11/EnhancedCareerPathwaysToolkit>

The Toolkit recommends a step-by-step process for building career pathways, including:

- Element One: Build Cross-Agency Partnerships
- Element Two: Identify Industry Sector and Engage Employers
- Element Three: Design Education and Training Programs
- Element Four: Identify Funding Needs and Sources
- Element Five: Align Policies and Programs
- Element Six: Measure System Change and Performance

COWIB and its One-Stop partners are constantly seeking to establish cross-agency partnerships. In December 2018, COWIB introduced an electronic AJC Partners referral form that is entirely

accessible. However, only a few partners are presently utilizing this form. Since 2020, numerous partners and community-based organizations (CBOs) have joined the Unite Us Oklahoma (sponsored by Oklahoma Health Care Authority) and the Be A Neighbor platform (sponsored by the Oklahoma Human Services).

Conceptually, our career pathways efforts will begin with initiatives designed to meet the needs of employers in our most important industry sectors. We recognize that an effective career pathways system must be employer driven. COWIB is tackling a critical workforce challenge in the region. Tinker Air Force Base (TAFB), one of the region's largest employers and a key stakeholder on the COWIB board, is experiencing a shortage of skilled workers in the aerospace industry. This skills gap, driven by a lack of qualified workers and an aging workforce nearing retirement, poses a significant threat to the region's economic stability. COWIB, in partnership with TAFB and other aerospace employers, is actively working to address this challenge by leveraging the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) program participants to combat this workforce challenge. This includes connecting the individuals who have gained valuable skills through WIOA-funded programs to the open positions at TAFB and within the broader aerospace industry, effectively filling vacancies and strengthening the talent pipeline. WIOA provides a framework for developing and implementing workforce development programs that align with industry needs, offering solutions such as targeted skills training, apprenticeships, and career pathways to bridge the gap and ensure a sustainable pipeline of qualified workers for the aerospace sector. <https://cowib.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Updated-Booklet-Tinker-Hiring-Forecast-FY24-25.pdf>

As stated in the Toolkit: "As a full partner, employers have active and continual involvement from program inception through implementation. Engaging employers early on in the design of an initiative will help ensure that a career pathways system aligns with business needs."

Consequently, our career pathways initiatives in Oklahoma will parallel, to a large degree, the COWIB's work on sector strategies. Both career pathways and sector strategies will involve a strengthened relationship with employers.

As noted in the toolkit: “A sector strategy is a strategic approach to engage employers by bringing together industries critical to the economic success of a region and identifying the skills that are necessary to build the region’s talent pipeline.”

During the 4-year scope of our Local and Regional Plan, COWIB will develop a list of career pathways. During the first year of the Plan, our focus will be on building partnerships within our One-Stop delivery system, engaging employers, and identifying the industries and occupations on which to focus our attention.

Our career pathways development efforts will address the following list of careers:

- **Childcare**
- **Biomanufacturing**

#### **Comprehensive Plan Outline:**

**Childcare Objective:** To develop a comprehensive childcare career pathway by leveraging partnerships with community organizations, training providers, and employers. This initiative aims to address workforce gaps, strengthen the talent pipeline, and ensure access to quality childcare services in Central Oklahoma.

#### **Plan Details**

Development Phase - COWIB is supporting partners in Shawnee, OK, to pilot a childcare workforce development project. This effort involves leveraging resources from the Avedis Foundation, Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (OPSR), Scholars for Excellence in Child Care (SECC), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) to address workforce gaps. While the IPG funding and project will conclude on December 31, 2024, COWIB remains committed to participating in continued activities and supporting the community in achieving its childcare workforce goals. The pilot project is expected to launch within the next 12–18 months.

#### **Suggested Partner Activities and Milestones**

- Cross-Agency Collaboration and Community Engagement (Next 3–6 Months):
- Host a community forum with partners, including Avedis, OPSR, SECC, and TANF, to align goals and identify specific childcare workforce needs in Shawnee.
- Develop a localized needs assessment to identify gaps in childcare services, workforce skills, and employer demand.
- Engage local childcare employers to identify priority skills and certifications for workforce development.
- Education and Training Development (6–12 Months):
- Collaborate with SECC to promote scholarship opportunities for childcare workers pursuing CDA credentials or other certifications.
- Partner with OPSR to design training programs tailored to regional childcare needs, incorporating flexible hybrid learning options.
- Encourage TANF-eligible individuals to participate by offering targeted outreach and support services.
- Pilot Implementation in Shawnee (12–18 Months):
- Launch the pilot childcare workforce project, including training programs, scholarship applications, and mentorship opportunities.
- Establish systems for tracking participant outcomes, such as training completion rates and employment placements.
- Facilitate employer engagement to ensure alignment with industry needs and secure job placements for graduates.
- Evaluation and Expansion Planning (18–24 Months):
- Conduct an evaluation of the pilot project, incorporating feedback from participants and employers to measure impact.
- Refine the program based on findings and develop a plan for scaling the initiative to other regions in Oklahoma.
- Identify long-term funding sources and sustainability strategies for the childcare talent pipeline.

**Workforce Demand (Need)** - The childcare worker occupation has a Location Quotient of 1.20 and is projected to grow by 50% in Central Oklahoma between 2018 and 2028. Although childcare is a tertiary sector, it is essential to primary and secondary industries, as employees rely on it to maintain workforce participation. Critical occupational skills include monitoring, service orientation, active listening, coordination, and social perceptiveness. Related occupations include home health aides, kindergarten teachers, nannies, personal care aides, and preschool teachers.

**Relevance** - Childcare is highly relevant to economic security, supporting businesses, families, and communities. A well-supported childcare sector enables parents to remain in the labor force, work consistent hours, and contribute to shared economic prosperity. This initiative aligns with broader goals of enhancing community well-being and addressing workforce participation barriers.

**Strategy** - COWIB will serve as the intermediary organization for this sector partnership, convening employers, educators, economic development organizations, and other stakeholders. Partners include Crossroads Head Start, Community Action Agency of Oklahoma City, Mid-Del Public Schools, Shawnee Forward, Avedis Foundation, and more. Together, the group will identify workforce gaps, barriers to employment, and talent pipeline needs. Specific strategies include identifying needs for meeting space, supplies, travel expenses, facilitation, and staff time and effort.

**Funding** - The program will utilize OESC Impact Partnership Grant Funds for core activities, including planning and program implementation.

**Unfunded Critical Elements** - Planning sessions involving multiple partners currently lack a designated funding source. Additional unfunded critical elements will be identified as the planning process progresses, including resources for meeting facilitation, outreach, and long-term sustainability planning.

**Biomanufacturing Objective:** To establish a sustainable career pathway in biomanufacturing by leveraging partnerships with the Oklahoma City Innovation District, BioTC, and leading employers in the sector. This initiative aims to recruit participants, provide targeted training, and guide individuals into meaningful employment through work-based learning and full-time employment opportunities.

## Plan Details

**Development Phase** - The development phase includes initial planning and coordination with key partners. Efforts involve engaging with the Oklahoma City Innovation District and BioTC to finalize curriculum and training logistics, formalizing partnerships with employers such as Cytovance Biologics, WheelerBio, Immy, and Our Blood Institute, and establishing recruitment pathways with Oklahoma City Public Schools, Pivot, Rmerge, Center for Employment Opportunities, WorkReady, and TANF programs. The pilot program is expected to launch in March 2025.

### Suggested Partner Activities and Milestones

- Recruitment partners, including Pivot, Rmerge, and others, will host information sessions, distribute recruitment materials, and provide referrals for eligible participants between December 2024 and February 2025.
- BioTC will deliver 1–3 week training sessions starting in March 2025 and collaborate with additional organizations to offset tuition costs beyond COWIB’s \$5,000 per participant contribution.
- Employer partners will design work-based learning opportunities, such as WEX and OJT, and commit to hiring program graduates into full-time unsubsidized positions.
- COWIB will oversee program coordination, fund training, and monitor participant outcomes to ensure alignment with workforce demands and economic goals.

**Workforce Demand (Need)** - The biomanufacturing sector in Central Oklahoma faces significant workforce gaps, driven by a shortage of skilled workers and increasing industry

demand. Employers such as Cytovance Biologics and WheelerBio report challenges in filling critical roles. With biomanufacturing as a growing sector in Oklahoma, the program addresses the need for a skilled workforce to support industry expansion while offering competitive wages and career advancement opportunities.

**Relevance** - The program provides opportunities for high school seniors, underserved populations, and individuals referred by TANF and community-based organizations, addressing barriers to employment through targeted training and support. By aligning training with employer needs, the initiative ensures participants acquire in-demand skills, reducing time-to-placement and bolstering the region's workforce.

**Strategy** - The program's strategy focuses on three key components: training, work-based learning, and employment. BioTC will deliver short-term (1–3 week) intensive training programs focused on biomanufacturing fundamentals and industry standards. Upon completion, participants will transition to paid internships (WEX) and OJT opportunities with employer partners. Graduates will secure full-time unsubsidized employment in biomanufacturing roles, supported by employers such as Cytovance Biologics and WheelerBio.

**Funding** - COWIB will provide up to \$5,000 per participant to cover training costs. BioTC will partner with additional organizations to offset the remaining tuition costs, which total \$10,000 per person. However, critical elements such as transportation, childcare, and housing for participants, along with resources to expand recruitment outreach and enhance program scalability, remain unfunded and require additional support.

### **Timeline**

- Program design will be finalized between November and December 2024, with curriculum development, logistical planning, and partnership agreements completed during this time.

- Recruitment will occur from December 2024 through February 2025, utilizing outreach campaigns, application collection, and participant selection processes.
- Training will begin in March 2025 with 1–3 week sessions led by BioTC. From April to June 2025, participants will transition to paid work-based learning opportunities, including WEX and OJT.
- By July 2025 and beyond, graduates will be placed in full-time unsubsidized employment with biomanufacturing employers.

Facilitate co-enrollment, as appropriate, in core programs. This planning requirement is distilled from WIOA Section 108(b)(3):

(3) a description of how the local board, working with the entities carrying out core programs, will expand access to employment, training, education, and supportive services for eligible individuals, particularly eligible individuals with barriers to employment, including how the local board will facilitate the development of career pathways and co-enrollment, as appropriate, in core programs, and improve access to activities leading to a recognized postsecondary credential (including a credential that is an industry-recognized certificate or certification, portable, and stackable);

In context, the focus is on co-enrollment in core programs for the purpose of promoting career pathways and improving access to services leading to a recognized postsecondary credential. To achieve this, the plan emphasizes strengthening cross-agency partnerships, streamlining co-enrollment processes, and addressing barriers to participation. Efforts will include regular collaboration among WIOA core programs, unified intake processes, and targeted outreach to underserved populations. Key strategies involve leveraging technology to enhance access through online tools and virtual workshops, aligning training programs with local labor market needs, and providing wraparound support services such as childcare and transportation. By tracking outcomes and refining efforts based on participant feedback, this approach ensures a streamlined pathway to recognized credentials and meaningful employment opportunities.

With this in mind, our local board is wholeheartedly dedicated to promoting the establishment of career pathways. We are equally dedicated to collaborating with our "core" partners - OESC, DRS, ODCTE - to enhance access to services.

At present, there are no policy impediments to co-enrolling an eligible individual in two or more of our core partner programs. However, technical barriers exist that can complicate the sharing of participant data among programs. To address these barriers, efforts will focus on developing secure, integrated data systems that enable authorized access while complying with privacy regulations, such as FERPA and HIPAA. Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) among core partners will establish standardized data-sharing protocols, and staff will receive training and technical assistance to ensure consistent application. Progress will be tracked through key performance indicators, periodic audits, and stakeholder feedback to refine processes and resolve issues, ensuring data systems effectively support co-enrollment and program alignment.

To demonstrate the lack of policy barriers, it is worth noting that co-enrollments frequently take place between the WIOA Adult program and the Wagner-Peyser program. Other examples of co-enrollment involve TAA participants who are concurrently counted as participants in the WIOA Dislocated Worker program, as well as older youth who may be co-enrolled in the WIOA Adult program, among others. If an individual meets the eligibility criteria, they may be co-enrolled in as many programs as they choose to apply for.

However, tracking co-enrollments can be challenging due to the existence of multiple "core" programs that use different case management and reporting systems. This means that, for instance, an Adult Education service provider may not be aware that one of their students has co-enrolled in the WIOA Youth program. The automated case management system for the WIOA Youth program (the OSL system) does not directly communicate with the LACES system utilized by Adult Education and Family Literacy providers.

This represents a technical limitation in our current system. However, it is a challenge that can be surmounted. To that end, our local board is committed to prioritizing the identification and/or

creation of a supplementary data tracking system that can facilitate the management of co-enrollments in Career Pathways activities, and other related programs.

It is important to note that the scope of this supplementary data management system will have certain limitations. Our intention is not to create a large-scale database that shares enrollments across all "core" programs. Rather, the focus will be on establishing a secondary data system that can support Career Pathways activities and programs leading to a recognized postsecondary credential. With this specific purpose in mind, we believe it is possible to develop a feasible solution.

We plan to collaborate with our "core" program partners in pursuing this co-enrollment strategy.

Improve access to activities leading to a recognized post-secondary credential (including a credential that is an industry-recognized certificate or certification, portable, and stackable).

The phrase "recognized postsecondary credential" is defined in Section (3) of WIOA:

(52) RECOGNIZED POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIAL. — The term "recognized postsecondary credential" means a credential consisting of an industry-recognized certificate or certification, a certificate of completion of an apprenticeship, a license recognized by the State involved or Federal Government, or an associate or baccalaureate degree.

Our local board will direct our One-Stop Operator to work with our Adult Education and Family Literacy, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Wagner- Peyser partners to improve access to recognized post-secondary credentials.

We aim to strengthen career pathways by focusing on various strategies, such as increasing postsecondary opportunities in high school, expanding adult degree completion efforts,

improving basic skills remediation, and providing supportive services for participants who require financial assistance.

Our objective is to offer effective career counseling to unemployed, underemployed, and dislocated workers and to raise awareness of viable career paths, particularly in-demand occupations in the Central Oklahoma area.

As a state priority, we will work towards increasing postsecondary opportunities in high school to enable more students to graduate with specialized knowledge or credentials that lead to in-demand occupations or continue their education in a shorter time frame. Although our local workforce system may have limited influence on this objective, we will allocate a portion of resources to in-school youth while focusing primarily on out-of-school youth through our WIOA Youth program.

COWIB, in partnership with several local workforce boards, has joined hands with the Oklahoma State Department of Education's new initiative called the Summer Bridge program. This program aims to increase the number of Oklahoma high school graduates with access to postsecondary opportunities by providing career preparation, identifying student interests and skills, and connecting them with workforce leaders. The program targets high school seniors who do not have a job or a clear plan to pursue a postsecondary credential, certification, or college degree.

COWIB is collaborating with both metro and rural school districts to identify eligible candidates who may face various barriers, including being a low-income individual, basic skills deficient, an English language learner, an offender, homeless, a runaway, in foster care or has aged out of it, pregnant or parenting, or have a disability (IEP or 504 plan). Our service provider will work with these candidates to determine their eligibility to receive WIOA services. By doing so, we aim to provide support to candidates who need it the most, thereby enabling them to pursue their education and career goals.

We will also provide support for WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker participants through our Individual Training Account system, offering them a broad range of training and education

options. Our Policy on Informed Customer Choice prioritizes training services that lead to recognized postsecondary credentials aligned with in-demand industry sectors or occupations in the Central Oklahoma area.

Facilitate engagement of employers in workforce development programs, including small employers and employers in in-demand industry sectors and occupations to:

Our local workforce development system has established a Business Services Network – the purpose of which is to:

- i. facilitate engagement of employers, including small employers and employers in in-demand industry sectors and occupations, in workforce development programs; and
- ii. support a local workforce development system that meets the needs of businesses in the local area;

When we engage employers as providers of training or as partners in other types of workforce development activities, we will approach this task with professionalism and honesty. We recognize that the best partnerships are those that yield benefits to all stakeholders — including the employer, as well as, the local workforce development system. We will have a commitment to fairness. To the extent possible, we will engage with all employers, large and small, who are willing to work with us to support employment opportunities in in-demand occupations / industry sectors. Moreover, we will have a commitment to compliance with the regulatory requirements of each of our One-Stop partner programs, as appropriate. We will be especially focused on assuring that the labor standards of Section 181(b) are fully upheld.

COWIB, through its Business Services Network, takes a collaborative approach to workforce development in Central Oklahoma, recognizing that strong partnerships with employers are essential for a thriving regional economy. This network, made up of representatives from various One-Stop partner

agencies, offers valuable services to boost business productivity and profitability. However, it goes beyond that, working closely with employers to develop work experience programs, on-the-job training, and customized training contracts. By viewing employers as key partners and investing in these collaborative initiatives, COWIB maximizes the impact of workforce development efforts and ensures that both businesses and job seekers in Central Oklahoma have the resources they need to succeed.

In all of our engagement with employers, we prioritize professionalism, honesty, and fairness. We believe that the most successful partnerships are those that benefit all stakeholders, including the employer and the local workforce development system. As such, we are committed to engaging with all employers who are willing to collaborate with us to support employment opportunities in in-demand occupations and industry sectors, regardless of their size.

We also recognize the importance of compliance with regulatory requirements for each of our One-Stop Partner programs, with a particular focus on upholding the labor standards of Section 181(b).

Finally, we understand that delivering Business Services is a crucial part of Employer Engagement. Many of our One-Stop Partner agencies offer valuable services aimed at improving the productivity and profitability of businesses in the Central Oklahoma area. To prioritize these efforts, a coordinated approach is being proposed to align business services across One-Stop Partner agencies, ensuring consistency and maximizing impact. Steps include establishing a dedicated business services team to serve as a central point of contact for employers, conducting regular outreach to identify and respond to employer needs, and offering tailored solutions such as workforce training, recruitment assistance, and retention strategies. The goal is to create a seamless and employer-focused service delivery model that strengthens relationships with businesses, addresses workforce challenges, and supports economic growth in the Central Oklahoma area.

**Support a local workforce development system that meets the needs of businesses in the local area;**

Many of the One-Stop partners in our local workforce development system offer valuable services that are intended to improve the productivity and profitability of businesses in the Central Oklahoma area.

These services are designed to meet the needs of area employers. Examples of business services include:

- **Hot Jobs** – Hot Jobs is a collection of new job openings delivered weekly to 300+ of the Central Oklahoma Workforce Innovation Board’s partner organizations working directly with job seekers, as well as job seekers who have selected to subscribe to the weekly Hot Job emails. Through this listing, companies can reach an untapped talent pool of job seekers with various skills and backgrounds;
- **Incumbent Training** – The Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) Program is a competitive grant program provided through COWIB using local-area funds to address the skills gaps of existing incumbent workers employed by qualified businesses. The maximum training amount is \$10,000 per grant recipient (business), per COWIB program year. COWIB will pay the training provider or reimburse the company after training is completed. Applications may be submitted to the COWIB Business Services Team at any time during the program year by completing the application;
- **Job Descriptions** – Using the tools offered through [ONetOnline.org](https://www.onetonline.org), the DOL Job Writer, and Skillful, prepare a job description for an Employer Partner;
- **Job Fairs** – Job fairs can be provided either virtually or in-person either at our American Job Center or at one of our partners’ locations;
- **Job Postings** – OKJobMatch is a free tool that makes it easy to list and manager the positions employers have open. Search through current résumés to find the most qualified candidates that will take a business to the next level;
- **Job Referrals** – Giving an employer the list of matched and screened job candidates for the business’ current job openings;
- **Labor Market Info** – Business Services Consultants provide businesses with reporting of local labor market information such as wage surveys, high growth industries and

occupations, as well as talent demographics through the utilization of Lightcast and Bureau of Labor Statistics. This resource benefits businesses and educational institutions who need this data for recruiting, wage analysis and comparison, industry supply chain, and occupational training development;

- **Lay-Off Aversion/Incumbent Worker Training** – Activities that increase the skill level of existing employees and connect companies facing financial difficulties to resources that may prevent or reduce the need for layoffs;
- **On-The-Job Training** – Businesses provide: a vacant, full-time position (minimum 32 hours per week), Workers’ compensation coverage, and the ability to train on-the-job to WIOA. Oklahoma Works will reimburse up to 50% of the wages paid to new employees to offset the cost of training for a period of up to 6 months;
- **Provide Interviewing Space** – Providing space within your facility for an employer to conduct interviews. This may include, but is not limited to: providing a room, equipment, refreshments, staff to greet the job candidates, and logistics for the interviews;
- **Rapid Response** – Providing short-term, early intervention and immediate assistance with layoffs and/or plant closures (affected by corporate restructuring, plant closures, or loss of jobs due to natural disasters) affecting a significant number of workers.
  - Activities may include, but are not limited to the establishment of onsite contact with employers and employee representatives, the provision of information and access to available employment and training activities, assistance in establishing a labor-management committee with the ability to devise and implement a strategy for assessing the employment and training needs of dislocated workers, and obtaining services to meet those needs, the provision of emergency assistance adapted to the particular closure, layoff or disaster, and, the provision of assistance to the local community in developing a coordinated response and state economic development assistance;
- **Registered Apprenticeship** – Registered Apprenticeship combines on-the-job training with job-related, technical instruction. Apprentices are full-time, paid employees that receive instruction and mentoring from skilled-workers who have done the job they are

training to do. Upon successful completion of the program, apprentices receive a national recognized and portable credential. Apprenticeships are available for thousands of competitive occupations in nearly a dozen major industries;

- **Schedule interviews** – Contacting job candidates electronically, by phone or in person on behalf of a business to schedule a time for the business to interview the candidate for a job;
- **Skills-Based Hiring** – Skillful, a non-profit initiative of the Markle Foundation, is dedicated to enabling all Americans – particularly those without a four-year college degree – to secure good jobs in a changing economy. In partnership with Microsoft and others, Skillful is developing skills-based training and employment practices in collaboration with state governments, local employers, educators and workforce development organizations;
- **Work Experience/Transitional Jobs** – Work Experience/Transitional Jobs are opportunities to provide short-term employment, up to 240 hours, to Oklahoma Works participants to gain hands-on work experience and build a résumé. Participant wages are completely paid by Oklahoma Works.

Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 16-16 (“One-Stop Operations Guidance for the American Job Center Network”) provides guidance on how business services are to be provided through the local workforce development system.

TEGL 16-16 states:

To support area employers and industry sectors most effectively, American Job Center staff, including designated partner program staff, must:

- Have a clear understanding of industry skill needs;
  - Identify appropriate strategies for assisting employers, and coordinate business services activities across American Job Center partner programs, as appropriate;
- and

- Incorporate an integrated and aligned business services strategy among American Job Center partners to present a unified voice for the American Job Center in its communications with employers.

At COWIB, our Business Services and Communications Manager (BSCM) plays a central role in fostering dynamic partnerships with employers. They expertly coordinate job and career fairs, ensuring seamless communication with our WIOA core partners throughout the process. The BSCM's responsibilities include managing communication logs, conducting email campaigns, creating impactful promotional materials, and providing comprehensive support to employers during registration. By collaborating closely with our partner agencies, the BSCM ensures that businesses receive timely and accurate information, maximizing their participation and strengthening their connection to valuable workforce resources. This collaborative approach underscores COWIB's commitment to providing exceptional service and support to employers in Central Oklahoma.

**Provide better coordination between workforce development programs and economic development;**

In any local area, access to a skilled workforce is the number one need for economic growth and sustainability. To support the needs of businesses in Central Oklahoma, our local workforce system regularly engages with economic development organizations in our 9- county area. The Central Oklahoma workforce development area falls within the boundaries of two regional economic development areas (EDA's), as designated by the Economic Development Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce:

- The Association of Central Oklahoma Governments (ACOG) Economic Development District aligns perfectly with the four western-most counties of the Central Oklahoma area.
- The Central Oklahoma Economic Development District (COEDD) encompasses the five easternmost counties of our area.

Additionally, through the COWIB board, our local workforce development system will maintain close coordination with regional economic development organizations such as the Greater Oklahoma City Regional Partnership (which crosses the boundaries between the EDA's), Select Oklahoma, and other local economic development agencies. By design, the COWIB board includes representatives of governmental and economic and community development entities serving the Central Oklahoma area.

COWIB is widely recognized as the go-to partner in efforts to address skill shortages wherever they may exist.

In order to better coordinate workforce development programs and economic development, COWIB will support the following strategies:

1. COWIB's Chief Executive Officer (or designate) will attend all ACOG meetings on the subject of CEDS implementation. CEDS is the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. Elected officials from our 9-county area also attend these meetings.
2. Elected officials from our 9-county area will attend COEDD meetings.
3. COWIB's CEO (or designee) will attend meetings of the Greater Oklahoma City Regional Partnership.
4. As required by WIOA Sec. 107(b)(2)(D), the membership of the COWIB board of directors will include one or more representatives of economic and community development entities.

All opportunities for appropriate coordination between workforce development programs and economic development efforts will be explored.

**Support sector partnership strategies, including a list of active sector partnerships. For each, describe:**

- The phase of development (conceptual, in initial implementation, being sustained or, expanding)

- Workforce Demand (need) – Describe the business workforce need being addressed by the strategy. Indicate the industry(s) being represented, how the need was determined, the occupational skills to be developed, the number of jobs being addressed, and the timeframe(s) associated with the need.
- Relevance – Indicate the connection between the demand and the priority(ies) for the region.
- Strategy – Identify the sector partners and the role of each.
- Funding – Describe available resources that will support the strategy.
- Critical Elements – Identify any critical elements for the identified strategy that must be done for the success of the strategy that cannot be met with available resources. This may include: the expansion of an existing strategy, in any phase, from one LWDA to others in the region; the need to procure new training vendors; planning sessions involving multiple partners; training of One-Stop staff; and development of regional data collection systems.

Pursuant to WIOA Section 107(d)(4)(D), a local workforce development board like COWIB has a duty to “lead efforts to engage with a diverse range of employers” in order to achieve certain objectives, including:

“...To develop and implement proven or promising strategies for meeting the employment and skill needs of workers and employers (such as the establishment of industry and sector partnerships), that provide the skilled workforce needed by employers in the region, and that expand employment and career advancement opportunities for workforce development system participants in in-demand industry sectors or occupations.”

As defined in WIOA Section 3(26), an “industry or sector partnership” means a workforce collaborative, convened by or acting in partnership with a local board, that organizes key stakeholders in an industry cluster into a working group that focuses on the shared goals

and human resources needs of the industry cluster. A properly designed sector partnership includes, at the appropriate stage of development of the partnership—

- Representatives of businesses;
- One or more representatives of a labor organization or central labor council, or another labor representative, as appropriate;
- One or more representatives of a provider of education or training programs that support the industry cluster; and
- Optionally: Representatives of local government, business or trade associations, economic development organizations, nonprofit organizations, community-based organizations, or intermediaries, philanthropic organizations, industry associations; and others.

Throughout the four-year duration of this Local and Regional Plan, COWIB will continue to employ its successful sector strategy approach for engaging the employer community. This approach involves creating individual industry advisory boards for each critical sector in our regional economy, which has led to the formation of sector partnerships in the healthcare, childcare, and STEAM sectors. Our primary objective is to maintain a job-driven and employer-responsive local workforce development system.

As our sector partnerships continue to develop over the next four years, we will work to identify the strategies necessary to meet the unique needs of each sector. Additionally, we will determine the operational and budgetary requirements required to sustain these partnerships. Our aim is to remain current on issues that impact critical industries and promote economic growth in our region.

Our framework aims to promote alignment in the region and keep us up-to-date on the issues impacting the industries that are essential to the economic health of the region. Our sector partnerships include:

- Childcare

- Biomanufacturing

COWIB is committed to collaborating with the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments (ACOG) initiatives through their Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) program. ACOG administers the CDBG entitlement program, which provides annual grants to larger cities and urban counties in order to develop sustainable communities that offer decent housing, a suitable living environment, and opportunities for economic expansion, particularly for low- and moderate-income individuals.

ACOG has extensive experience in administering CDBG projects for local governments in the region. As such, our partnership with ACOG allows us to tap into their expertise and resources, ensuring that our efforts to support economic growth and development in the region are well informed and effective.

Over the course of the 4-year Local and Regional Plan, we plan to create additional sector partnerships and may re-purpose existing ones to meet emerging needs.

Strengthen linkages between the One-Stop delivery system and unemployment insurance programs; and, we fully endorse the contents of Unemployment Insurance Program Letter No. 14-18 that emphasizes:

“UI programs play a vital role in the comprehensive, integrated workforce system by providing temporary income support to eligible individuals, who are important customers of the workforce system. These benefits allow unemployed workers to survive economically while engaging in work search activities for suitable work; and the workforce system is a key source of services to support the reemployment of UI claimants.

As a required One-Stop partner program in the local One-Stop delivery system, not only does UI make a financial contribution towards infrastructure costs, but UI claimants benefit from services provided by other One-Stop partners in the American Job Center network. Depending on program requirements, such services may be provided in-person or virtually.

In addition, a key role of the workforce system is to connect skilled workers with employers who need them, and because UI claimants have recent attachment to the workforce, they are a significant part of the available labor pool for employers”

Furthermore, we agree with this statement in Training and Employment Guidance Letter 16- 16, (“Attachment II: Coordination with Partner Programs“):

“The American Job Center network must provide reemployment services to UI claimants for whom such services are required as a condition for receipt of UI benefits. Services must be appropriate to the needs of UI claimants who are referred to reemployment services under any Federal or State UI law.”

TEGL 16-16, goes on to identify some of the needs of UI claimants and how they are met by a properly designed workforce development system:

- Provision of information and assistance regarding filing claims under UI programs, including meaningful assistance to individuals seeking assistance in filing a claim.
- The American Job Center has current labor market information and provides a wide array of reemployment services free of charge.
- Employment Service staff can refer claimants to job openings in the local area, or in other parts of the State or country if the claimant is willing to relocate.
- Referral to various training programs.
- Assistance in establishing eligibility for programs of financial aid assistance for training and education programs not provided under WIOA. If job openings in current field are limited, can offer testing and counseling to determine other appropriate jobs for the claimant.
- Claimants who believe they have special needs or considerations, such as physical needs, which may prevent them from getting a job, can be referred to other agencies for help with those needs.

Through the staff and managers of the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission, our local system will offer services to UI claimants, including services delivered through the voluntary Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program.

Required RESEA services are described in Unemployment Insurance Program Letter 10-22:

Each RESEA must include the following minimum components to serve the needs of the claimant:

- UI eligibility assessment and referral to adjudication, as appropriate, if an issue or potential issue(s) is identified;
- Requirement for the claimant to report to an AJC;
- Orientation to AJC services;
- The provision of labor market and career information that addresses the claimant's specific needs;
- Registration with the state's job bank;
- Enrollment in Wagner-Peyser-funded Employment Services;
- Development or revision of an individual reemployment plan that includes work search activities, accessing services provided through an AJC or using self-service tools, and/or approved training to which the claimant acknowledges agreement; and
- Provision of at least one additional career service, such as:
  - Referrals and coordination with other workforce activities, including the WIOA Dislocated Worker Program;
  - Labor Exchange, including information about in-demand industries and occupations and/or job search assistance;
  - Information about the availability of supportive services;
  - Information and assistance with financial aid resources outside of those provided by WIOA;
  - Financial literacy services; and
  - Career readiness activities, including assistance with resume writing and/or interviewing.

The local workforce development system in Central Oklahoma will support these services by assuring that there is space available for these activities at our comprehensive One-Stop centers in Oklahoma City, Seminole, and Shawnee.

Additionally, we will explore the capacity of our system to facilitate some or all of these services at our specialized locations in Chandler, El Reno, and Guthrie.

The partners in our system firmly believe that UI claimants should receive “meaningful” staff-assisted services, as needed. As stated in UIPL 14-18, “‘Meaningful assistance’ means having staff well-trained in UI claims filing and claimant rights and responsibilities, available in the One-Stop centers to provide UI claim-filing assistance, if requested....”

We recognize that the ultimate goal of UI / RESEA services is the reemployment of our customers to meaningful employment as quickly as possible.

We are actively working on a plan with the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission (OESC) to strengthen and enhance the integration of services for individuals utilizing the unemployment insurance (UI) program. This collaborative effort is designed to ensure that we meet and exceed state law requirements by proactively engaging with individuals as they access our centers. Our team is committed to interceding at critical points in their journey, enrolling these individuals into Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs, and seamlessly coordinating with OESC staff to deliver the full array of services available to all customers. Key components of this initiative include the development of a shared referral system to connect UI claimants with reemployment services, co-enrollment in applicable WIOA programs, and providing access to career counseling, skills assessments, and training opportunities. By aligning resources and streamlining processes, we provide meaningful support that empowers individuals to reenter the workforce with the tools, training, and guidance they need to succeed.

The implementation of this collaborative effort is already underway, with significant progress being made to ensure seamless coordination of services for unemployment insurance (UI) claimants. WIOA Title I staff, OESC staff, and other One Stop Partners have received clear

instructions and guidance on how to align their efforts and effectively integrate their services. This includes joint training sessions to build a shared understanding of each partner's role, as well as the processes required to support UI claimants as they navigate the workforce system.

Staff have been equipped with detailed protocols for identifying UI claimants, making referrals, and ensuring co-enrollment in appropriate WIOA programs. Regular communication and cross-agency meetings are being held to address any challenges, share best practices, and refine service delivery strategies. Additionally, frontline staff are working closely together to provide individualized support, such as conducting skills assessments, offering career counseling, and identifying training opportunities tailored to each claimant's needs. By fostering a unified approach, we are creating a streamlined and effective service delivery model that prioritizes customer success and enhances the overall impact of our workforce system.

**Implement initiatives such as incumbent worker training programs, on-the- job training programs, customized training programs, work-based learning, industry and sector strategies, career pathways initiatives, utilization of effective business intermediaries, and other business services and strategies designed to meet the needs of regional employers.**

As noted in other sections of this Plan, our local workforce development board has a realistic plan to facilitate the engagement of employers in workforce development programs, provide business services, coordinate the workforce development programs in our area with local economic development efforts, and strengthen linkages between the One-Stop delivery system and unemployment insurance programs.

To further meet the needs of employers, we intend to support additional initiatives that will advance workforce development in the Central Oklahoma area. These initiatives include:

**Incumbent Worker Training Programs.** Under Title I of WIOA, up to 20 percent of Adult and Dislocated Worker formula grant funds may be used for incumbent worker training projects. This initiative involves collaborating with employers to provide training programs that equip their employees with the skills needed to maintain their jobs or avoid potential layoffs. As mandated

by WIOA Section 134(d)(4)(C), employers must contribute to this training's cost. The employer's financial responsibility varies from 10% to 50% of the total training expenses, depending on the size of the company. The employer may provide their share in cash or in kind, fairly evaluated. The employer's share may include the amount of the wages paid by the employer to a worker while the worker is attending the training program.

We have explored opportunities to align our WIOA Incumbent Worker Training programs with similar programs that may be provided with state or local funding and we have created an effective policy.

**On-the-Job Training Programs.** WIOA Section 134(d)(3)(D)(ii) permits the use of WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker funds to support on-the-job training (OJT) activities. In this context, "OJT" means training by an employer that is provided to a paid participant while engaged in productive work in a job that—

- A. provides knowledge or skills essential to the full and adequate performance of the job;
- B. is made available through a program that provides reimbursement to the employer of up to 50 percent of the wage rate of the participant; and
- C. is limited in duration, as appropriate to the occupation for which the participant is being trained.

COWIB routinely uses our WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker funds to support OJT training activities with qualifying employers. We will continue to do so during the 4-year scope of this Local and Regional Plan. The Board already requires of our Service Provider that 15% of all training funds must be spent for on- the-job training opportunities.

**Customized Training Programs.** This is another type of occupational skills training designed to meet the specific needs of employers. As defined in Section 3 of WIOA, "customized training" is training:

- A. that is designed to meet the specific requirements of an employer (including a group of employers);
- B. that is conducted with a commitment by the employer to employ an individual upon successful completion of the training; and
- C. for which the employer pays—
  - a. a significant portion of the cost of training....

COWIB will use a portion of our WIOA Title I funds to support customized training projects in our area. To the extent possible, we will implement these training projects in coordination with other One-Stop partners.

**Industry and Sector Strategies.** This portion of our plan is described in “Sector Strategies.”

**Career Pathways Initiatives.** Elsewhere in this Plan, we describe how we will coordinate education and workforce investment activities in our local area with relevant secondary and postsecondary education programs. In particular, we make a commitment to lead efforts in the local area to develop and implement career pathways.

The term “career pathway” refers to a combination of rigorous and high-quality education, training, and other services. By definition, career pathways must align with the skill needs of industries in the regional economy.

We will ask employers to voluntarily serve on advisory committees to help guide the development of career pathways in Central Oklahoma. We will also work with existing advisory groups that have been convened by area career technology schools and community colleges, etc. Not least of all, we intend to use the expertise of the industry advisory boards that have been convened by the COWIB to support our Sector Strategy efforts.

Our goal will be to make sure that our Career Pathways initiatives are properly aligned with the needs of business.

Utilization of Effective Business Intermediaries. In WIOA Section 134(d)(1)(A)(ix), the law allows local boards to use a portion of their Adult and Dislocated Worker program funds to provide activities to provide business services and strategies that meet the workforce investment needs of area employers.

The law goes on to say that these services may include:

- Developing and implementing industry sector strategies;
- Developing and delivering innovative workforce investment services and strategies for area employers, which may include career pathways, skills upgrading, skill standard, and more;
- Assistance to area employers in managing reductions in force and with strategies for the aversion of layoffs; and
- Marketing of business services to appropriate area employers, including small and mid-sized employers.

According to WIOA Section 134(d)(1)(A)(ix)(I), these services and strategies “...may be provided through effective business intermediaries working in conjunction with the local board, and may also be provided on a fee-for-service basis or through the leveraging of economic development, philanthropic, and other public and private resources in a manner determined appropriate by the local board.”

A further explanation of these services is given in the WIOA Final Joint Rule, which was published jointly by the U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Education. The Joint Rule states:

“These business services may be provided by the Local WDB or through effective business intermediaries working in conjunction with the Local WDB, or through other public and private entities in a manner determined appropriate by the Local WDB and in cooperation with the State....”

COWIB will use its Business Services and Communications Program Manager as a key liaison between businesses and workforce development resources. This manager will work closely with the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission (OESC) local staff and managers, and other core and required partners. Additionally, the manager will leverage the support from the COWIB Business Services Network and engage with workforce community stakeholders. Together, they will develop and implement business services, innovative workforce solutions, and strategies outlined in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to meet the evolving needs of the Central Oklahoma workforce.

### Describe how the local board will implement the goals and strategies of Oklahoma's Unified State Plan and the Regional Plan.

The State's strategic vision for its workforce development system is described beginning on Page 42 of the 2020-2023 Unified State Plan:

“The State's strategic vision: Align resources, education, training and job opportunities to build Oklahoma's workforce.”

In terms of the state's goals, these are defined beginning on Page 43 of the Unified State Plan. There are two goals:

**Goal 1:** Goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce, including preparing youth and individuals with barriers to employment and other populations.

**Goals 2:** Goals for meeting the skilled workforce needs of employers.

Under these goals, the State's Unified plan includes objectives and strategies, including:

- **Objective/Goal 1: EXPAND OKLAHOMA'S WORKFORCE TO SATISFY INDUSTRY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS:** An expanded workforce will provide a larger pool of potential workers, increase the financial and economic opportunities of workers, and encourage greater business investment, economic development, and job creation.

- **Objective/Goal 2: UPSKILL OKLAHOMA’S WORKFORCE:** A well-trained workforce will reduce the incidence and effects of unemployment, increase the financial and economic opportunities of workers, and encourage greater business investment and job creation.
- **Objective/Goal 3: OFFER WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS TO OKLAHOMA’S BUSINESSES:** Businesses that have access to a responsive, effective and solutions-focused public workforce system will be better positioned to expand the availability of quality jobs and capital investments.
- **Objective/Goal 4: BUILD OKLAHOMA’S WORKFORCE SYSTEM CAPACITY:** A public workforce system able to respond to changing business needs and deliver innovative solutions will support the expansion of business investments and job creation.

Listed below are the job seeker goals that include a focus on specific populations: Goals for Youth:

- A greater focus and clearer strategies for out-of-school youth with regard to credential attainment, work experience, and work-based learning;
- An increased awareness of jobs that are currently available and lead to economic success, as demonstrated by labor market information.
- An increased awareness of and access to other options/paths, in addition to college, such as Registered Apprenticeships; and
- A fully deployed Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP) integrated with all students within the secondary school system as a preventative measure.

Goals for Individuals with Barriers to Employment:

- Clearer strategies for ex-offenders, including the exploration of a pay for performance strategy, as ex-offenders represent a large population of Oklahoma’s workforce;
- Connecting more WIOA participants to Registered Apprenticeship opportunities;
- Increased on-the-job training opportunities (e.g., registered apprenticeships, internships, etc.) to ensure the integration of relevance with education and training, as well as enculturation into appropriate professional and soft skills;

- Greater assistance for those who experience a job loss and are supporting a family (e.g., retraining);
- An increased focus on lifelong learning through development of a state-level strategy to ensure individuals are both successful in the current job market, as well as the future economy as skills are increasingly changing as technology develops; and
- Supporting and guiding a shift from survival mode to a vision for the future (adult and youth; consider mentors) for those hard-to-serve and opportunity populations.

COWIB will cultivate and maintain productive relationships between regional employers, educators, and other workforce partners to ensure an appropriately skilled workforce that meets the needs of employers. For example, we are actively engaged in a sector strategy process that draws together a meeting of regional employers. This ensures that we understand and can make our partners aware of the skilled workforce needs of employers in our region.

We are a Board that strives to continually improve the conditions of our communities, both on the individual and business level. This includes optimizing our resources by creating models that blend the efforts of similar workforce programs. Programs that increase the effectiveness and efficiency of delivery by eliminating duplication and realizing that our efforts should be about the efforts needed to improve the economic condition of everyone in our region.

With regard to the state's second goal ("Goal 2: Meeting the Needs of Employers"), our board understands how important it is to engage the business community — to listen, learn and translate their needs to our individual clients and to our partner organizations. We set aside money specifically for Business Services, providing services to small businesses that often are searching for an organization to provide them with the support they need to continue to grow and be profitable.

We will support each of the state's goals and objectives by participating appropriately on statewide planning groups and offering our input, as may be asked, on the development of

models for partnership and resources. We will fully support the state's efforts to meet the needs of employers.

Describe how the local board will coordinate local workforce development activities with regional economic development activities that are carried out in the local area and how the local board will promote entrepreneurial skills training and microenterprise services.

The One-Stop partners in Central Oklahoma represent various programs and funding sources. Some of the partners have a service area that is statewide in scope. Some of them serve smaller areas.

The COWIB board will strive to coordinate the workforce investment activities in Central Oklahoma so that economic development activities are properly supported throughout all 9 counties of our region.

We will do this by:

- Convening regular meetings of the COWIB board of directors;
- Inviting the participation of all One-Stop partners in regular meetings;
- Sharing relevant information with economic development organizations in our area;
- Making regular reports to our Board of Chief Elected Officials.
- With regard to Entrepreneurial Skills Training and Microenterprise Services, COWIB will direct the use of its WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth funds in order to supplement the training and services available through other One-Stop partner programs. Our goal will be to supplement, support, and expand the availability of such training and services in our 9-county area.

**Entrepreneurial Skills Training.** It is notable that entrepreneurial skills training is listed as an allowable activity in several WIOA Title I programs.

In Section 129, entrepreneurial skills training is given as one of the elements of the WIOA Youth program;

In Section 134(a)(3)(A), the WIOA law provides that statewide funds may be used to carry out microenterprise and entrepreneurial training and support programs;

In Section 134(c)(3)(D), entrepreneurial training is listed as a type of training services that may be supported with the COWIB's local Adult / DLW funds.

In Section 166 of WIOA ("Native American Programs"), training on entrepreneurial skills is included as one of the comprehensive workforce development activities that are authorized by the law.

During the 4-year period of our Local and Regional Plan, COWIB's goals for supporting Entrepreneurial Skills Training include:

1. Determine the scope and scale of Entrepreneurial Skills Training available through our One- Stop partners and others, including:
  - a. The TANF program of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services;
  - b. Small Business Training offered through the Community Action Agency of Central Oklahoma;
  - c. Programs available through the Oklahoma Small Business Development Center;
  - d. The programs of the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Services;
  - e. OIC-OKC Business Academy (program intended to assist entrepreneurs in marginalized communities in starting businesses within their own neighborhoods)
2. COWIB's Service Provider will establish relevant connections to offer Entrepreneurial Skills Training to eligible participants in the Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs.
3. COWIB will establish suitable Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with providers of Entrepreneurial Skills Training and

4. Ensure that Entrepreneurial Skills Training is equitably represented in the delivery of entrepreneurship training programs in Central Oklahoma.

Describe how:

**The local board will ensure the continuous improvement of eligible providers of services through the system in order to meet the employment needs of local employers, workers, and jobseekers; and,**

Across the system, continuous improvement is supported through evaluation, accountability, identification of best practices, and data driven decision-making. (Source: [workforcegps.org](http://workforcegps.org))

**WIOA** Section 101(d)(6)(A) gives a leading role to the “State Board” (i.e., the Governor’s Council for Workforce and Economic Development) in the development of policies and guidelines promoting the continuous improvement of One-Stop centers and their services:

“(d) FUNCTIONS. — The State board shall assist the Governor in...

“(6) 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 described in such section.”

At the local level, the COWIB has complementary functions as described in WIOA Section 107(d).

For example:

“(d) FUNCTIONS OF LOCAL BOARD. —Consistent with section 108, the functions of the local board shall include the following...

“(6) PROVEN AND PROMISING PRACTICES. — The local board shall lead efforts in the local area to—

identify and promote proven and promising strategies and initiatives for meeting the needs of employers, and workers and jobseekers (including individuals with barriers to employment) in the local workforce development system...; and

identify and disseminate information on proven and promising practices carried out in other local areas for meeting such needs....

“(8) PROGRAM OVERSIGHT. — The local board, in partnership with the chief elected official for the local area, shall—

(i)conduct oversight for local youth workforce investment activities authorized under section 129(c), local employment and training activities authorized under subsections (c) and (d) of section 134, and the One-Stop delivery system in the local area; and

“(ii) ensure the appropriate use and management of the funds provided under subtitle B for the activities and system described in clause (i); and

for workforce development activities, ensure the appropriate use, management, and investment of funds to maximize performance outcomes under section 116.”

§ 682.220 of the WIOA Final Rule reinforces the role of the State Board. It asserts that, “States must use funds reserved by the Governor for statewide activities to conduct evaluations of activities under the WIOA title I core programs in order to promote continuous improvement, research and test innovative services and strategies, and achieve high levels of performance and outcomes.”

The WIOA Final Rule also suggests that Local Boards support the design and implementation of those evaluations.

Consistent with the WIOA law and regulations, our local workforce development board will give great attention to supporting and implementing the state policies and procedures.

In addition to supporting the improvement of our One-Stop centers, we will absolutely accept our responsibility to support the continuous improvement of service providers. In particular, we will give attention to monitoring the performance outcomes achieved by eligible providers of services in Central Oklahoma — including providers of career services (as described in Section 134(c) of WIOA), providers of youth services (WIOA Section 129), and providers of training services (as referenced in WIOA Section 122).

**Career Services and Youth Services.** WIOA Section 134(b) authorizes the use of WIOA Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker core funds to provide the career services described in Section 134(c). WIOA Section 129 authorizes the use of WIOA Title I Youth core funds to provide youth services.

Our local board and elected officials are fiscally responsible for these core funds, and we will monitor their use and effectiveness as a part of our regular oversight duties. Our board will create a local monitoring and oversight policy for this purpose. Board staff have been identified to carry out these functions.

**Training Services.** With regard to measuring the continuous improvement of eligible providers of training, the WIOA law and regulations describe duties for both the state and the local board. For example, Section 122(a) authorizes the Governor to “establish criteria, information requirements, and procedures regarding the eligibility of providers of training services to receive funds” under WIOA Title I, Subtitle B.

The eligibility criteria for training providers under Section 122 includes information on program completion rates, credentials earned by participants, and “appropriate measures of performance outcomes determined by the Governor.”

Additionally, Section 122 provides that local areas may have a role in receiving and reviewing applications from providers of training and in making determinations of eligibility based on the state's criteria and procedures.

COWIB will fully comply with the policy and procedures established by the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission. In this way, we will contribute to the continuous improvement of eligible providers of training.

**Entities within the One-Stop delivery system, including system/center operators and partners, will comply with section 188 of WIOA, if applicable, and applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 regarding the physical and programmatic accessibility of facilities, programs and services, technology, and materials for individuals with disabilities, including providing staff training and support for addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities.**

Section 188 is the "Nondiscrimination" section of the WIOA law. Here is an excerpt: SEC. 188. NONDISCRIMINATION.

a) IN GENERAL. —

- 1) FEDERAL FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE. — ...programs and activities funded or otherwise financially assisted in whole or in part under this Act are considered to be programs and activities receiving Federal financial assistance.
- 2) PROHIBITION OF DISCRIMINATION REGARDING PARTICIPATION, BENEFITS, AND EMPLOYMENT. — No individual shall be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, subjected to discrimination under, or denied employment in the administration of or in connection with, any such program or activity because of race, color, religion, sex (except as otherwise permitted under title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972), national origin, age, disability, or political affiliation or belief.

- 3) PROHIBITION ON ASSISTANCE FOR FACILITIES FOR SECTARIAN INSTRUCTION OR RELIGIOUS WORSHIP...
- 4) PROHIBITION ON DISCRIMINATION ON BASIS OF PARTICIPANT STATUS. — No person may discriminate against an individual who is a participant in a program or activity that receives funds under this title, with respect to the terms and conditions affecting, or rights provided to, the individual, solely because of the status of the individual as a participant.
- 5) PROHIBITION ON DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CERTAIN NONCITIZENS. ....

As described in the Federal Regulations at 29 CFR Part 38, Section 188 applies to any recipient of funding under Title I of WIOA. It is also applicable to:

1. Programs and activities that are part of the One-Stop delivery system and that are operated by One-Stop partners, to the extent that the programs and activities are being conducted as part of the One-Stop delivery system; and
2. The employment practices of a recipient and/or One-Stop partner, to the extent that the employment is in connection with programs and activities that are being conducted as a part of WIOA Title I or the One-Stop delivery system.

The Federal Regulations go on to describe how the implementation of certain requirements of Section 188 will be the responsibility of “The Governor or the LWDA grant recipient, as provided in the State’s Nondiscrimination Plan....”

As an example, § 38.73 states:

38.73 Responsibility for developing and publishing complaint processing procedures for service providers.

The Governor or the LWDA grant recipient, as provided in the State's Nondiscrimination Plan, must develop and publish, on behalf of its service providers, the complaint processing procedures required in § 38.72. The service providers must then follow those procedures.

In addition, the COWIB One-Stop Operator has established an Access for All Star Accessibility team comprising joint system partners. COWIB designated two Board Directors who are core WIOA Partners and a County Commissioner (BCEO) to oversee compliance with Section 188 and assess the need for staff training, among other responsibilities. The team is focused on facilitating access to services and has three main goals:

- To provide information and guidance to One-Stop partners who are interested in making their facilities and services more accessible to all customers.
- To explore and implement electronic linkages to services.
- To establish a process for sharing space within the American Job Centers in our area.

By achieving these goals, we aim to make our services more accessible to all customers and promote inclusivity within the workforce development system.

Our local workforce development system in Central Oklahoma is committed to ensuring accessibility for all job seekers and businesses, in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). We share the perspective of Unemployment Insurance Program Letter No. 20-15 that underscores the importance of accessibility for people with disabilities.

Collaborating with the Governor's Council for Workforce and Economic Development (GCWED) and other partners, we aim to further develop and employ more Oklahomans with disabilities. The Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS), as the lead agency in enhancing accessibility, is working with our workforce system partners to provide equitable services and ensure ADA compliance.

In Central Oklahoma, we are implementing the Access for All initiative developed by ORS and Oklahoma Able Tech. This initiative focuses on recruitment, hiring, and promotion of individuals

with disabilities within the state's workforce system, including American Job Center partners and employers. We have completed Phase I of the Star Accessibility Assessment and are awaiting guidance from the state for Phase 2.

Through the Access for All initiative, we aim to equip our One-Stop partners with the knowledge and resources to make our entire system more accessible to individuals with disabilities, in person, on the phone, and through the web. We are committed to cross-training staff, technical assistance, sharing information, and collaborating with employers to enhance the provision of services to individuals with disabilities and others.

To ensure compliance with the American Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), COWIB will enter into an agreement with the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services, committing to cooperation, collaboration, and coordination efforts for enhanced service provision to individuals with disabilities.

Describe how the local board will coordinate WIOA Title I workforce development activities with the provision of transportation, childcare, and other appropriate supportive services in the local area. Include a copy of a completed Job Seeker Wrap Around Services service matrix.

While each partner program has different requirements for providing transportation, childcare, and other supportive services, our local board and Title I partners acknowledge that there is potential to coordinate these services in a way that may result in cost savings. By identifying gaps and areas of duplication, we analyzed the availability of various services, including supportive services. This information, along with our comprehensive and robust resource guide (the Department of Labor has deemed a promising practice), is accessible to the public at:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1eQ1pg3I1HvdVss2QTPp490ywB4E7VdR5qBOIfsJ2eHE/e/dit#heading=h.o8jg7s1roq8t>

While there are no formal agreements in place on who provides support services, the Board mandates a policy that requires Title I service providers to coordinate with partners in the provision of support services, if available, before utilizing Title I funds for support services. We are exploring case management options that would be accessible to all partners, which would simplify and enhance coordination and referrals.

Finally, we recognize that transportation can be a significant barrier for many job seekers, particularly in rural parts of the Central Oklahoma region. As a result, the board is prioritizing efforts to address these needs with our partners and workforce stakeholders.

A copy of our region's Job Seeker Wrap Around Services Service Matrix is included in this Local and Regional Plan as Attachment II.

Provide the executed cooperative agreements, which define how service providers will carry out the requirements for integration of, and access to, the entire set of services available in the local One-Stop system. This includes cooperative agreements between the local WDB and other local entities with respect to efforts that will enhance the provision of services to individuals with disabilities and to other individuals, such as cross training of staff, technical assistance, use and sharing of information, cooperative efforts with employers, and other efforts at cooperation, collaboration, and coordination.

COWIB is committed to properly carrying out all our defined functions as a local workforce development board, including the duty to coordinate with education providers, as described in Section 107(d)(11) of the WIOA law.

Section 107(d)(11) provides that local boards will coordinate activities with education and training providers in the local area, including:

... Providers of workforce investment activities;

... Providers of adult education and literacy activities under Title II;

... Providers of career and technical education (as defined in Section 3 of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (20 U.S.C. 2302)); and

... Local agencies administering plans under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Paragraph (B) of Section 107(d)(11) describes how the local board coordinates these activities. Two specific requirements have been identified.

First, the local board is required to carry out certain functions related to Title II of WIOA. As described in WIOA Section 232, the board has an obligation to review the applications to provide adult education and literacy activities under Title II for the local area.

Second, the board is required to replicate certain cooperative agreements in accordance with subparagraph (B) of Section 101(a)(11) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act relates to the “vocational rehabilitation services portion” of the Unified State Plan. Section 101(a)(11) lays out a requirement for there to be a cooperative agreement between the designated State agency (ORS) and “other entities that are components of the statewide workforce development system.”

Paragraph (A) of Section 101(a)(11) of the Rehabilitation Act explains that the state’s cooperative agreement must describe efforts that will enhance the provision of services to individuals with disabilities and to other individuals, such as cross training of staff, technical assistance, use and sharing of information, cooperative efforts with employers, and other efforts at cooperation, collaboration, and coordination.

Then, in Paragraph (B) of Section 101(a)(11), this requirement is given:

(B) REPLICATION OF COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS. — The State plan shall provide for the replication of such cooperative agreements at the local level between

individual offices of the designated State unit and local entities carrying out activities through the statewide workforce development system.

As stated above, COWIB is committed to properly carrying out all of our defined functions as a local workforce development board. We will work diligently to maintain a positive working relationship with each of our One-Stop partners.

It is our understanding that, as a local workforce development board, we should work cooperatively with our state partners – including, as described in the Rehabilitation Act – to replicate the state’s cooperative agreement. As much as possible, our local agreement with ORS will copy the state model in form and content. If possible, we will execute this agreement before the end of June, 2017.

As we interpret this requirement, the cooperative agreements mentioned in § 679.560(b)(13) of the WIOA Final Rule are much different from other types of agreements that the COWIB might have with our One-Stop partners. In particular, there is a distinction between a “One-Stop partner” and a “service provider.”

A One-Stop partner is a grant recipient or organization that manages a One-Stop program as defined in WIOA Section 121(b)(1)(B). A service provider, on the other hand, is a provider of training services or a provider of career services, etc. For example, the WIOA law refers to “eligible providers of training services,” “eligible providers of youth workforce investment activities,” “providers of adult education,” “providers of career and technical education activities,” and so on. In some cases, a One-Stop partner may be a service provider. In other instances, the One-Stop partner may have more of a management role — awarding contracts to service providers, for example.

COWIB will enter into cooperative agreements with service providers for the purpose of promoting integration / access, etc. We will prioritize such agreements after we have completed the negotiation of our Memorandum of Understanding with our One-Stop partners.

## Identify the local:

### **Fiscal agent**

The Board of Chief Elected Officials for the Central Oklahoma workforce area has designated a Fiscal Agent for WIOA grant funds: It is the Central Oklahoma Workforce Innovation Board (COWIB).

### **One-Stop Operator(s)**

COWIB is currently in the process of selecting a new One Stop Operator. After becoming the fiscal agent and employer of record for the Northeast Workforce Development Board on July 1, 2024, COWIB issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) to find a suitable organization to manage the One Stop Operator functions. Despite no responses to the initial RFP, a second RFP with broader outreach yielded two proposals, with a final selection decision expected at the COWIB Board of Directors meeting on October 16, 2024. In the interim, COWIB staff are diligently fulfilling the One Stop Operator duties to ensure consistent and effective service delivery.

### **Service Provider(s) for Adult and Dislocated Worker WIOA Title I Basic and Individualized Career Services**

To provide essential career services for adults and dislocated workers participating in WIOA Title 1 programs, COWIB conducted a competitive bidding process. Following a thorough evaluation, the contract was awarded to Kaiser Group, Inc., operating as Dynamic Workforce Solutions.

### **Service Provider(s) for Youth WIOA Title I Services**

Following a competitive selection process, COWIB chose Kaiser Group, Inc., doing business as Dynamic Workforce Solutions, as the service provider for its core Youth program under WIOA Title I.

## Describe the competitive process used to award the subgrants and contracts for WIOA Title I activities.

In context, this requirement relates to the procurement of WIOA Title I services by the local workforce board.

As our local board identifies the need to award a sub-grant or contract for WIOA Title I services, we will follow the state mandated procurement process.

That is, if we believe the resulting contract might be for an amount in excess of \$24,999.00 we follow a competitive sealed bid process. If it is designed for a sub-grant, we use a Request for Proposals (RFP); and if we are looking to fulfill a very specific list of requirements, we use the Invitation to Bid (ITB) method.

Notice of the RFP or ITB is published and distributed to a list of suggested bidders. We intend to allow up to six weeks between the notice's publication and when sealed bids are due. A committee of the Board specifically for that duty evaluates the proposals and/or bids. Their recommendation to enter into a contract is forwarded to the entire Board for ratification and the Chief Executive Officer is the point for the negotiation of the contract.

#### Describe the local levels of performance negotiated with the State.

COWIB entered negotiations with the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission (OESC) with regard to the local levels of performance for these three (3) programs:

- WIOA Adults (PY24/PY25)
- WIOA Dislocated Workers (PY24/PY25)
- WIOA Youth (PY24/PY25)

The local levels of performance for Program Year (PY) 2024 and 2025 were determined after considering economic data for the local area, previous performance data, and predicted outcomes resulting from the use of a statistical adjustment model.

WDA	Program	Indicator	PY	PY
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<b>Central</b>	WIOA Title I Adult	Employment Rate 2nd Quarter after Exit	73.7%	73.7%
<b>Central</b>	WIOA Title I Adult	Employment Rate 4th Quarter after Exit	75.0%	75.0%
<b>Central</b>	WIOA Title I Adult	Median Earnings in the 2nd Quarter after Exit	\$8,000	\$8,000
<b>Central</b>	WIOA Title I Adult	Credential Attainment Rate	78.5%	78.5%
<b>Central</b>	WIOA Title I Adult	Measurable Skill Gains	69.5%	74.0%
<b>Central</b>	WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker	Employment Rate 2nd Quarter after Exit	78.0%	78.0%
<b>Central</b>	WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker	Employment Rate 4th Quarter after Exit	79.0%	79.0%
<b>Central</b>	WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker	Median Earnings in the 2nd Quarter after Exit	\$10,000	\$10,000
<b>Central</b>	WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker	Credential Attainment Rate	82.5%	82.5%
<b>Central</b>	WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker	Measurable Skill Gains	75.0%	75.0%
<b>Central</b>	WIOA Title I Youth	Employment Rate 2nd Quarter after Exit	78.0%	78.0%
<b>Central</b>	WIOA Title I Youth	Employment Rate 4th Quarter after Exit	78.1%	78.1%
<b>Central</b>	WIOA Title I Youth	Median Earnings in the 2nd Quarter after Exit	\$6,200	\$6,200
<b>Central</b>	WIOA Title I Youth	Credential Attainment Rate	65.0%	65.0%
<b>Central</b>	WIOA Title I Youth	Measurable Skill Gains	69.0%	71.0%

Describe the actions the local board will take toward becoming or remaining a high performing board.

The key to ensuring that a local board is highly effective can be found in the criteria defined for certifying the local board. As determined by the Governor's Council Workforce Economic Development (GCWED), the certification criteria include:

- Appropriate LWDB membership;
- Proper LWDB area organizational structure;
- Separation of LWDB, One-Stop Operator, and WIOA Title I provider staff; and
- Collaboration with Economic Development Partners.

COWIB successfully renewed its designation as the Central Oklahoma workforce development board (recertification) at the OESC Executive Committee meeting on September 30, 2024. The next recertification will be on or about May 2026.

Our local board understands that being a high-performing board requires innovation and a willingness to create opportunities for employment. We are committed to working closely with our business community to ensure that we are meeting their needs for a strong workforce.

To maximize our training dollars, we will continuously seek out cost-effective ways to provide industry-focused and short-term training programs to our clients. Our focus will be on providing credentials and skills that are in high demand by employers and that lead to immediate employment opportunities.

We also recognize the importance of partnering with other organizations to provide employment related activities for individuals who have barriers to employment. By working together, we can provide a comprehensive set of services that help move these individuals into the labor force and, ultimately, improve their economic well-being.

Our region has more potential growth in employment than in population, which means we need to explore all options to ensure we have the talent needed to sustain this growth. We will work to create career paths that provide individuals with meaningful growth opportunities and benefits, and we will engage our opportunity youth to ensure they are an energized part of our

growing economy. By demonstrating that today’s work environments value and support them, we can help to create a more inclusive and vibrant regional economy.

In the future, the members and staff of the Central Oklahoma Workforce Innovation Board will take additional steps toward remaining a high-performance board. Planned actions include:

1. Participation in regular board member development activities – such as those offered by the Oklahoma Association of Workforce Boards (OAWB);
2. Leadership attendance at the Annual Forum of the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB);
3. Enforcement of the COWIB’s conflict of interest standards as published in the board’s bylaws;
4. Enforcement of bylaws regarding attendance in board and committee meetings.

Describe how training services will be provided through the use of individual training accounts, including, if contracts for training services will be used, how the use of such contracts will be coordinated with the use of individual training accounts, and how the local WDB will ensure informed customer choice in the selection of training programs regardless of how the training services are to be provided.

This planning requirement is distilled from WIOA Section 108(b):

“(b) CONTENTS. —The Local and Regional Plan shall include—

“(19) a description of how training services under chapter 3 of subtitle B will be provided in accordance with section 134(c)(3)(G), including, if contracts for the training services will be used, how the use of such contracts will be coordinated with the use of individual training accounts under that chapter and how the local board will ensure informed customer choice in the selection of training programs regardless of how the training services are to be provided.”

In context, Chapter 3 of Subtitle B of the WIOA Law encompasses Sections 131, 132, 133, and 134 of the Act. This chapter deals with Adult and Dislocated Worker Employment and Training Activities and how they are funded through grants awarded to the states by the U.S. Department of Labor. A majority of the funds described in this chapter are distributed by the states to local workforce areas based on an allocation formula. The requirement for the allocation of funds to local areas is specified in Chapter 3.

Section 134(c) describes “Required Local Employment and Training Activities.”

Section 134(c)(3) provides that a portion of the allocated funds must be used “to provide training services to adults and dislocated workers” who meet certain eligibility criteria. Training services may be provided to individuals who are “in need of training services” and who “have the skills and qualifications” to participate successfully in a “selected program of training services.”

Additionally, pursuant to Section 134(c)(3)(A)(i)(II), the individual must select a program of training services that is “directly linked to the employment opportunities in the local area or the planning region, or in another area to which the adults or dislocated workers are willing to commute or relocate.”

Section 134(c)(3)(G) of the WIOA Law states:

“(G) USE OF INDIVIDUAL TRAINING ACCOUNTS. —

“(i) IN GENERAL. — Except as provided in clause (ii), training services provided under this paragraph shall be provided through the use of individual training accounts in accordance with this paragraph, and shall be provided to eligible individuals through the One-Stop delivery system.”

An individual training account — known as an “ITA” — is a payment mechanism that may be used to provide the training services described in Section 134(c)(3) of WIOA. The definition of the term “Individual Training Account” appears in the WIOA Final Regulations issued by the U.S. Department of Labor:

“§ 680.300 How are training services provided?”

“Training services for eligible individuals are typically provided by training providers who receive payment for their services through an ITA. The ITA is a payment agreement established on behalf of a participant with a training provider. WIOA title I adult and dislocated workers purchase training services from State eligible training providers they select in consultation with the career planner, which includes discussion of program quality and performance information on the available eligible training providers. Payments from ITAs may be made in a variety of ways, including the electronic transfer of funds through financial institutions, vouchers, or other appropriate methods....”

Although the WIOA Regulations say that training services are typically provided through an ITA, the law does allow for the use of an alternative under certain circumstances. The alternative is a training contract, as described in clause (ii) of Section 134(c)(3)(G):

“(ii) TRAINING CONTRACTS. — Training services authorized under this paragraph may be provided pursuant to a contract for services in lieu of an individual training account if—

- I. the requirements of subparagraph (F) are met;
- II. such services are on-the-job training, customized training, incumbent worker training, or transitional employment;
- III. the local board determines there are an insufficient number of eligible providers of training services in the local area involved (such as in a rural area) to accomplish the purposes of a system of individual training accounts;
- IV. the local board determines that there is a training services program of demonstrated effectiveness offered in the local area by a community-

based organization or another private organization to serve individuals with barriers to employment;

V. the local board determines that—

“(aa) it would be most appropriate to award a contract to an institution of higher education or other eligible provider of training services in order to facilitate the training of multiple individuals in in-demand industry sectors or occupations; and

“(bb) such contract does not limit customer choice; or “(VI) the contract is a pay for-performance contract.”

With respect to the training services described in Section 134(c)(3) of WIOA, Individual Training Accounts will be used extensively. As stated in the WIOA Regulations, “Training services for eligible individuals are typically provided... through an ITA.”

Pursuant to the law, ITA’s will be awarded to eligible individuals who are in need of training services, who have the skills to succeed in training, and who select a program of training services that is appropriately “linked to employment opportunities,” etc.

At times, the Central Oklahoma Workforce Innovation Board will allow for the limited use of training contracts as described in clause (ii) of Section 134(c)(3)(G). Each contract will be developed in response to a specific need, and the terms of each contract will be negotiated by the COWIB’s Chief Executive Officer with oversight by the COWIB’s Executive Committee.

Here is a general description of how training contracts will be used in lieu of ITA’s in appropriate circumstances:

- 1) The use of On-the-Job Training, Customized Training, Incumbent Worker Training, or Transitional Employment activities.

COWIB will support the use of these training options when a determination is made that a training contract is necessary to fill a void in services and/or to provide additional value to the COWIB and its stakeholders. Specific local policies will be developed to govern the use of these training activities.

- 2) The use of a training contract upon a determination that there are an insufficient number of eligible providers of training services in the local area.

There are a large number of eligible providers of training services in the Central Oklahoma workforce area, and COWIB has not made a determination that the number of training providers is insufficient. However, the members of the COWIB will continue to review and monitor the availability of training services throughout our local area — including rural parts of the Central Oklahoma region.

If the number of training providers shrinks to such a level that the purpose of an ITA system cannot be reasonably accomplished, the COWIB board will be asked to make a determination. Any such decision will be made pursuant to a motion and a vote in a public meeting of the board.

- 3) The use of a training contract upon a determination that there is a training program with demonstrated effectiveness offered in the local area by a community-based organization or another private organization to serve individuals with barriers to employment.

Presently — as of the time of the submission of this plan — COWIB has not been asked to make a determination that there is a “training services program of demonstrated effectiveness...” as described in WIOA Section 134(c)(3)(G)(ii)(IV). Any such determinations will be made on a case- by-case basis after a fair review by members of the COWIB board voting in open session. In these cases, COWIB will refer directly to the Act’s provisions to guide the evaluation process, ensuring compliance with federally defined criteria and maintaining transparency in decision-making.

We interpret the term “individuals with barriers to employment” in a manner that is consistent with Section 3 of WIOA. That is:

(24) INDIVIDUAL WITH A BARRIER TO EMPLOYMENT. — The term “individual with a barrier to employment” means a member of 1 or more of the following populations:

- A. Displaced homemakers.
  - B. Low-income individuals.
  - C. Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians, as such terms are defined in section 166.
  - D. Individuals with disabilities, including youth who are individuals with disabilities.
  - E. Older individuals.
  - F. Ex-offenders.
  - G. Homeless individuals (as defined in section defined in section 725(2) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11434a(2))).
  - H. Youth who are in or have aged out of the foster care system.
  - I. Individuals who are English language learners, individuals who have low levels of literacy, and individuals facing substantial cultural barriers.
  - J. Eligible migrant and seasonal farmworkers, as defined in section 167(i).
  - K. Individuals within 2 years of exhausting lifetime eligibility under part A of title IV of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.).
  - L. Single parents (including single pregnant women).
  - M. Long-term unemployed individuals.
  - N. Such other groups as the Governor involved determines to have barriers to employment.
- 4) The use of a training contract upon a determination that it would be most appropriate to award a contract to an institution of higher education or other eligible provider of

training services in order to facilitate the training of multiple individuals in in-demand industry sectors or occupations.

COWIB recognizes that some occupational training options are very highly sought-after. In our experience, there is a very high demand for training services for truck drivers, certified nurse aides, welders, and other high-demand occupations. At times, it may be most appropriate to award a training contract for a class-size training program rather than to rely on the usual system of Individual Training Accounts.

The COWIB board will rely on our CEO, working under the supervision of our Executive Committee, to develop and award appropriate training contracts that will serve to expand training opportunities in our local area while also providing a favorable value compared to the usual system of ITA's.

5) The use of pay-for-performance contracts.

The term "Pay For Performance Contract" is defined in Section 3 of the WIOA Law:

"(47) PAY-FOR-PERFORMANCE CONTRACT STRATEGY. —The term 'pay-for-performance contract strategy' means a procurement strategy that uses pay-for-performance contracts in the provision of training services described in section 134(c)(3) or activities described in section 129(c)(2), and includes—

- A. contracts, each of which shall specify a fixed amount that will be paid to an eligible service provider (which may include a local or national community-based organization or intermediary, community college, or other training provider, that is eligible under section 122 or 123, as appropriate) based on the achievement of specified levels of performance on the primary indicators of performance described in section 116(b)(2)(A) for target populations as identified by the local board (including

individuals with barriers to employment), within a defined timetable, and which may provide for bonus payments to such service provider to expand capacity to provide effective training;

- B. a strategy for independently validating the achievement of the performance described in subparagraph (A); and
- C. a description of how the State or local area will reallocate funds not paid to a provider because the achievement of the performance described in subparagraph (A) did not occur, for further activities related to such a procurement strategy, subject to section 189(g)(4).”

Presently — as of the time of the submission of this plan — COWIB has not yet developed a Pay-for-Performance contract strategy. When we do, it will include the proper features to assure that the Customer Choice requirement of Section 134(c)(3)(F) is fully honored. At this time, COWIB is not utilizing the Pay-for-Performance model and therefore cannot provide specific timelines, measurable outcomes, or actionable steps. However, if a decision is made to adopt this strategy in the future, COWIB will develop a comprehensive plan that includes a clear timeline, defined outcomes, and actionable steps to guide implementation and ensure the strategy aligns with WIOA requirements and regional workforce goals.

With regard to Customer Choice, Section 134(c)(3)(F) of the WIOA Law states:

“(F) CONSUMER CHOICE REQUIREMENTS. —

“(I) IN GENERAL. — Training services provided under this paragraph shall be provided in a manner that maximizes consumer choice in the selection of an eligible provider of such services.”

This part of the law is consistent with Section 134(c)(3)(G)(ii)(I) of the Act which allows a training contract to be used in lieu of an ITA only when the Consumer Choice Requirements of subparagraph (F) have been met.

In October, 2017, the COWIB board adopted a 22-page Policy on Informed Consumer Choice. In this policy, we state:

“Whether training is delivered through an ITA or through a Training Contract, COWIB is committed to honoring the value of informed customer choice. Therefore, when an eligible participant has been properly determined to have the skills and qualifications to successfully participate in more than one program of training services, we will always provide an opportunity for the consumer to make an informed choice of training programs / providers.”

Additionally:

“In all cases, the Career Planners in our One-Stop Centers will adhere to the Consumer Choice Requirements of the law. We believe that training success is best achieved when the client has made an informed choice of training program and training provider.”

For additional details on this subject, see the COWIB Policy on Informed Consumer Choice. Here is a link to the policy on the COWIB website: <http://cowib.org/knowledge-base/informed-consumer-choice/>

Describe how One-Stop centers are implementing and transitioning to an integrated, technology-enabled intake and case management information system for programs carried out under WIOA.

COWIB and its partners utilize a variety of systems for intake and case management, each tailored to the specific needs of the populations they serve. Oklahoma Employment Security Commission and WIOA Title I: These partners share a common system, streamlining the process for individuals seeking employment assistance and those participating in core WIOA programs. This shared system facilitates efficient communication and coordination between these key agencies.

**Adult Basic Education Providers (WIOA Title II):** The LACES NexGen System serves the needs of providers offering Adult Basic Education (ABE), volunteer literacy programs, and correctional education. This online student data management software enables these partners to track learner progress, manage educational resources, and report on program outcomes.

**Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services (WIOA Title IV):** This agency utilizes the AWARE Case Management System, an internet-based platform designed to track and manage services provided to individuals with disabilities. AWARE allows for detailed documentation of individual needs, progress, and outcomes, ensuring personalized support and effective service delivery.

**Oklahoma Service Link (OSL) within OKJobMatch:** Several partners rely on the Oklahoma Service Link (OSL) component within the OKJobMatch System. This client management application supports case managers in tracking their caseloads, reporting on program activities, and fulfilling requirements for various federal programs, including Labor Exchange, Re-Employment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA), and Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA).

COWIB acknowledges the need for a more integrated approach to intake and case management across its network of partners. While various systems are currently in use, each serving specific purposes and populations, COWIB is actively working towards greater unification and data sharing. This effort aims to enhance efficiency, eliminate duplicate processes, and create a more user-friendly experience for those navigating the workforce development system in Central Oklahoma. Proposed actions include exploring the development of a centralized intake system to streamline participant enrollment, assessing the feasibility of implementing shared data platforms for real-time information exchange, and planning cross-agency training to equip staff with the skills needed to utilize integrated tools effectively. Additionally, COWIB intends to collaborate with partners to draft common data-sharing agreements and establish protocols that ensure compliance with privacy regulations while improving service coordination and participant outcomes.

This commitment to integration is reflected in the upcoming launch of a new shared system for the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission (OESC) and WIOA Title I programs, projected to go live in November 2024. This new system represents a significant step towards streamlining services and improving communication between these key partners. In the meantime, COWIB continues to leverage existing resources and collaborate with partners to ensure effective service delivery and data management.

Describe the direction given to the One-Stop center operator to ensure priority for adult career and training services will be given to recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient.

In February 2023, our board approved and published COWIB's Priority of Service policy (<https://cowib.org/knowledge-base/priority-of-service/>) to ensure the priority of service, our policy reads as follows:

Due to the statutorily required priority for Adult funds, priority must be provided in the following order:

- First, to veterans and eligible spouses who are also included in the groups given statutory priority for WIOA Adult formula funding. This means that veterans and eligible spouses who are also recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, or individuals who are basic skills deficient receive first priority for services provided with WIOA Adult formula funds for individualized career services and training services.
- Second, to non-covered persons (i.e., individuals who are not veterans or eligible spouses) who are included in the groups given priority for WIOA Adult formula funds.
- Third, to veterans and eligible spouses who are not included in WIOA's priority groups.
- Fourth, to priority populations established by the LWDB (for example, for non-covered persons who are not included in groups given priority for WIOA Adult formula funds, such as persons living within a designated Promise Zone).
- Last, to non-covered persons outside the groups given priority under WIOA.

Describe the process used by the local board to provide a 30-day public comment period prior to submission of the plan, including an opportunity to have input into the development of the Local and Regional Plan, particularly for representatives of businesses, education, and labor organizations. The required public comment process is outlined in section 108(d) of WIOA.

The COWIB's proposed 4-Year Local and Regional Plan, developed in collaboration with Board Members, Elected Officials, and community partners, will be available for public comment starting October 16th, 2024. This plan outlines COWIB's strategy for aligning and integrating workforce development services in Central Oklahoma. Key partners, including the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technical Education, Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services, Oklahoma Employment Security Commission, Native American WIOA programs, Senior Community Service Employment programs, and community action agencies, will have the opportunity to provide valuable feedback during the 30-day comment period. This feedback will help ensure the plan effectively addresses the needs of the workforce and employers in the region.

The COWIB Board of Directors will convene for a regular meeting on October 16, 2024, to review and approve the workforce development plan. Following board approval, the plan will be published on the COWIB website (<https://cowib.org/about/>) for a 30-day public comment period. Additionally, all partners will receive a copy of the plan via email to ensure transparency and gather valuable feedback.

Once approved, as required by WIOA Section 108(d), there will be a 30-day period during which comments will be received from the public. After receiving public comments, the plan, along with any comments representing disagreement with the plan, will be submitted to the OESC no later than **November 1, 2024** and be approved by the Governor's Council for Workforce Development at a regular meeting on **January 31, 2025**.

## Assurances

The Central Oklahoma Workforce Innovation Board agrees to the following assurances:

- The Local Workforce Development Board assures it will establish fiscal control and fund accounting procedures to ensure the proper disbursement of, and accounting for all funds received through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.
- The Local Workforce Development Board assures it shall keep records that are sufficient to permit the preparation of reports required by the Act and shall maintain such records, including standardized records for all individual participants, and submit such reports as the State may require.
- The Local Workforce Development Board assures it will collect and maintain data necessary to show compliance with the nondiscrimination provisions of the Act.
- The Local Workforce Development Board assures funds will be spent in accordance with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, regulations, written Department of Labor Guidance written Oklahoma guidance, and all other applicable Federal and State laws.
- The Local Workforce Development Board assures that veterans will be afforded employment and training activities authorized in the Jobs for Veterans Act and 20 C.F.R. Part 1010.
- The Local Workforce Development Board assures it will comply with any grant procedures prescribed by the Secretary, which are necessary to enter into contracts for the use of funds under WIOA, but not limited to the following:
  - General Administrative Requirements – Uniform Guidance at 2 C.F.R. Part 200 and 2 C.F.R. Part 2900.
  - Assurances and Certifications – SF 424B – Assurances for Non-Construction Programs; 29
  - C.F.R. Part 31,32 – Nondiscrimination and Equal Opportunity Assurance (and Regulation); 29
  - C.F.R. Part 93 – Certification Regarding Lobbying (and Regulation); 29 C.F.R. Parts 94 and 95 – Drug Free Workplace and Debarment and Suspension; Certifications (and Regulation)

## Attestation — COWIB 4 Year Local and Regional Plan

### Workforce Board Chair

Local Area	Printed Name	Signature	Date
Central	Richard Brown		

### Workforce Board CLEO

Local Area	Printed Name	Signature	Date
Central	Melissa Dennis		

### Workforce Board Executive Director

Local Area	Printed Name	Signature	Date
Central	Ashley Sellers		

## Source Links and Supporting Documents

	<p><a href="https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/OK.html#articles">https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/OK.html#articles</a> (pg. 7)</p>
	<p><a href="http://www.cowib.org">www.cowib.org</a> (pg. 8)</p>
	<p><a href="http://www.cowib.org">www.cowib.org</a> (pg. 8)</p>
	<p><a href="https://cowib.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/SWOT-for-COWIB-4-year-plan.pdf">https://cowib.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/SWOT-for-COWIB-4-year-plan.pdf</a> (pg. 9)</p>
	<p><a href="https://cowib.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/PY22-COWIB-Performance-Metrics.pdf">https://cowib.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/PY22-COWIB-Performance-Metrics.pdf</a> (pg. 16)</p>
	<p><a href="https://cowib.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/PY23-COWIB-Performance-Metrics.pdf">https://cowib.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/PY23-COWIB-Performance-Metrics.pdf</a>(pg. 16)</p>
	<p><a href="https://cowib.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/COWIB-Job-Seeker-and-Business-Services-Matrix.pdf">https://cowib.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/COWIB-Job-Seeker-and-Business-Services-Matrix.pdf</a> (pg. 16)</p>
	<p><a href="https://cowib.org/services/business-services-2/">https://cowib.org/services/business-services-2/</a> (pg. 17)</p>
	<p><a href="https://careerpathways.workforcegps.org/resources/2016/10/20/10/11/Enhanced_Career_PathwaysToolkit">https://careerpathways.workforcegps.org/resources/2016/10/20/10/11/Enhanced_Career_PathwaysToolkit</a> (pg. 25)</p>

	<a href="https://cowib.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Updated-Booklet-Tinker-Hiring-Forecast-FY2425.pdf">https://cowib.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Updated-Booklet-Tinker-Hiring-Forecast-FY2425.pdf</a> (pg. 26)
	<a href="https://docs.google.com/document/d/1eQ1pg3l1HvdVss2QTPp490ywB4E7VdR5gBOlfsJ2eH_E/edit#heading=h.o8ig7s1roq8t">https://docs.google.com/document/d/1eQ1pg3l1HvdVss2QTPp490ywB4E7VdR5gBOlfsJ2eH_E/edit#heading=h.o8ig7s1roq8t</a> (pg. 48)
	<a href="http://cowib.org/knowledge-base/informed-consumer-choice/">http://cowib.org/knowledge-base/informed-consumer-choice/</a> (pg. 58)
	<a href="https://cowib.org/knowledge-base/priority-of-service/">https://cowib.org/knowledge-base/priority-of-service/</a> (pg. 59)
	<a href="https://cowib.org/about/">https://cowib.org/about/</a> (pg. 60)