

Local Workforce Development Area (LWDA)

Permanent File and Annual Reporting

I BACKGROUND

Arkansas Department of Workforce Services (ADWS) has established a comprehensive and continuous monitoring system to fulfill its responsibility as a federal grant recipient and because effective monitoring is a key method for achieving our primary mission - quality services to job seekers and employers.

A critical component of the continuous monitoring system is a completed "LWDA Permanent File and Annual Reporting" form submitted annually by each LWDA. This form is a communication tool for LWDAs to apprise ADWS staff of challenges or achievements, new developments in the region, technical assistance needs or other concerns. Each LWDA will have an opportunity once every Program Year to help shape ADWS oversight, training and capacity building priorities through information presented in this form. The LWDA Permanent File and Annual Reporting form will cover key areas of WIOA including: governance, administrative and fiscal procedures, service delivery/operations and performance.

ADWS recognizes that initial completion of this process will require a significant investment of staff time by the LWDA; however, the information provided will be used to establish a permanent file for both financial and programmatic operations which will only require updating in subsequent years based on changes to governance, policies, procedures or other key elements of service design and delivery. ADWS will provide ample time for LWDA completion of this initial process and will continue with other oversight and monitoring activities. ADWS appreciates the local system's contribution to this process and recognizes that each LWDA's ability to accurately and thoroughly respond to this request reflects a commitment to ensuring full oversight of local service provider compliance and effectiveness.

The LWDA Permanent File and Annual Reporting form is provided below along with instructions for accurate and timely completion by each LWDA.

Monitoring is a shared responsibility across the federal, state and local partnership that comprises the public workforce system. Thank you for your effort to support our shared responsibilities and your commitment to ensuring a compliant and effective Arkansas workforce system!

II. INSTRUCTIONS

Each LWDA is required to adhere to the following:

- ◆ Engage in a process to complete the LWDA Permanent File and Annual Reporting form, which is your self-assessment and risk assessment, in an accurate and timely manner. This process may vary depending on the LWDA but should ensure that appropriate staff is charged with the responsibility of completing this form. Those identified to complete the LWDA Permanent File and Annual Reporting form should understand the purpose of the tool, how to complete it, and have the knowledge and understanding of the LWDA's management and operations to provide accurate information to ADWS.
- ◆ Fully respond to the questions and requests for additional information in this form. Submit this completed form with all required documents (e.g. policies, procedures, lists, etc.) as electronic copy to WIOA@arkansas.gov no later than close of business on September 30th of each program year. The initial request for completion of this form will be 90 days from the date of the issuance putting the LWDA on notice of the requirement.
 - Some of the requests below will include an "*" to identify which requests must be maintained throughout the year. Should the information change regarding these questions, the LWDA is required to update the information within 30 days of the change.
- ◆ Immediately notify WIOA's Accountability and Compliance at the email address above concerning any questions regarding how to complete this form or if there are any challenges that may impact timely submission. (Note: Attachments may be uploaded to the Financial Monitoring SharePoint Site via the link <http://dwssp.arkansas.gov/dfm/SitePages/Home.aspx>).

III. LWDA PERMANENT FILE AND ANNUAL REPORTING INFORMATION REQUEST FORM

Name of LWDA: Southwest Arkansas Planning and Development District

Name & Signature of Chief Elected Official (CEO)

Printed Name: Parnell Vann

Signature:  Date: 9/29/23

Please provide a point of contact for the following functions (name, title, phone, and email):

Individual Completing Form Shelda Garland, Southwest Arkansas Workforce Development Board Staff; (870)235-7509;
shelda.garland@arkansas.gov

Business Outreach Annette Hughey, Operations Manager; (870)235-7522; annette.hughey@arkansas.gov

Monitoring Shelda Garland, Southwest Arkansas Workforce Development Board Staff; (870)235-7509;
shelda.garland@arkansas.gov; Reese Broadnax, Project Manager (870)904-0074; reese.broadnax@arkansas.gov

Performance Contact Lori White, Program Manager; (870)235-7512; lori.a.white@arkansas.gov

Fiscal Lisa Stamper; lisa.stamper@arkansas.gov; (870)235-7505

A) Governance

Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB):

- 1) Please provide the name, title, category, position, and basis for policy-making authority in the organization. Highlight all members appointed during the previous program year.**

Refer to Board Member Roster, Attachment 1

- 2) * Please provide any current vacancies on your LWDB, the impact created by that vacancy, and your plan to fill the vacancy.**

Refer to Board Member Vacancies, Attachment 1-A

- 3) * Please provide all scheduled meeting dates and locations for this Program Year.**

Refer to SWAWDB Meeting Dates-Locations_PY23, Attachment 2

- 4) As supporting documentation, please provide a complete LWDB roster from your last meeting including committee structure/assignments.**

Refer to LWDB Roster, Attachment 3

5) Please provide any materials developed within the last Program Year that articulates the LWDB's vision, priorities/goals and planned activities for this Program Year.

The Southwest Arkansas Workforce Development Board (SWAWDB) recently partnered with the National Association of Workforce Boards to conduct board member orientation, which will provide new members with a comprehensive overview of the LWDB and its role in workforce development. This collaboration enhances the training process, ensuring all members are well-informed and ready to contribute effectively to meetings and workforce initiatives. The resources we utilize are instrumental in demonstrating the value of each member and guiding them in bringing their knowledge and expertise to the table. Refer to Board Training Materials, Attachments 4 and 4-A

6) Please provide a copy of the materials (agenda, roster, minutes, voting records, etc.) for the most recent board meeting.

Refer to Recent Board Mtg Materials, Attachment 5

One-Stop Operator and Title I Service Provider:

7) * Have you made any changes to your One-Stop Operator designation? Yes ☐ No ☒

The SWAWDB recently conducted a formal procurement process and Eckerd Connects (formerly Odle Management) was awarded the contract. Odle Management and Eckerd Connects merged.

If yes, please provide the name of the new organization serving as your one-stop operator and the supporting documentation of the procurement action including the following:

- Solicitation information

- **Proposals received**
- **Rating/selection factors**
- **Proposal scores**
- **Rationale for method of procurement**
- **Selection of agreement or contract type**
- **Contractor selection or rejection**
- **Appeals and disputes**
- **Basis for contract price**
- **Resulting contracts/agreements**
- **Minutes of all related meetings**

8) How does your LWDA ensure that 75% of Youth funds are spent on out-of-school youth? (Please submit any relevant local policy or guidance.)

Southwest's Local Workforce Development Area (LWDA) is committed to ensuring adherence to the 75% out-of-school youth expenditure requirement. This commitment is realized by focusing all efforts on services to out-of-school youth. To maintain transparency and effective tracking, our Fiscal Agent oversees an expenditure spreadsheet. This detailed document summarizes each grant's expenditures, allowing for tracking of the percentage of funds expended for in-school youth and out-of-school youth, ensuring we consistently meet the required expenditure standards.

9) How does your LWDA ensure that Youth Activities include a minimum of 20% Work Experience?

Southwest's Fiscal Agent maintains an expenditure spreadsheet, summarizing each grant's expenditures. This organized approach allows for seamless tracking of funds allocated for work experience for both in-school and out-of-school youth.

In addition to this, an obligations spreadsheet is in place. It is utilized to monitor budget approvals for work experience and other supportive services. This tracking ensures our LWDA consistently keeps a year-to-date total of work experience costs, ensuring they align with the minimum threshold of twenty percent of program funds. This method guarantees clarity and adherence to financial guidelines in our operations.

Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) (Which includes as an attachment bylaws and Local Board Policies):

10) * Does your LWDA have a fully executed and up-to-date MOU with all of the required One-Stop partners listed:

a. WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth (Title I)	Yes ☒	No ☐
b. Unemployment Insurance (UI)	Yes ☒	No ☐
c. Wagner-Peyser	Yes ☒	No ☐
d. Employment and Training Program Under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	Yes ☒	No ☐
e. Adult Education and Literacy Program (Title II)	Yes ☒	No ☐
f. Vocational Rehabilitation Program (VR)	Yes ☒	No ☐
g. Carl Perkins Career and Technical Education Programs	Yes ☒	No ☐
h. Community Services Block Grant	Yes ☒	No ☐
i. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Employment and Training	Yes ☒	No ☐
j. Senior Community Service Employment Program	Yes ☐	No ☒
k. Jobs for Veterans Program	Yes ☒	No ☐
l. Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Program	Yes ☒	No ☐
m. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)	Yes ☒	No ☐
n. Reintegration of Ex-Offenders Program under Second Chance Act	Yes ☐	No ☒
o. Work Program Authorized Under the Food and Nutrition Act	Yes ☐	No ☒

- 11) * Please provide a copy of the executed MOU required under WIOA Statute Sec. 121 (b), Bylaws, and Program Policies.**

Refer to MOU, Attachment 6

B) Administrative & Fiscal

- 1) * Please provide an organizational chart (should include all staff job titles) and job descriptions for each position.**

Refer to Organizational Chart, Fiscal Attachment A. Refer to Job Descriptions, Fiscal Attachment Q.

- 2) Please provide policies and procedures [e.g., cash management, purchasing, use of credit cards, contracting, accounts payable, equipment, issuance of Individual Training Accounts (ITA), types and limits on supportive service/needs-related payments, financial reporting, property management, etc.]**

Refer to Financial Management and Internal Control Policy – Approved December, 2022

Cash Management – Refer to Guidance for WIOA Title 1B Funds Request and Step by Step Funds Request

Accounts Payable, Supportive Services Limits, and Needs-Related Payments are guided by Career Planners. Career Planners request budget approvals for each participant from the Program Director. The Career Planners are guided by

the policies that the LWDB has approved. Upon participant budget approval from the Program Director, the Career Planners send Staff Accountants the setup with all the relevant information for that approved participant. Upon receipt of any invoice for a participant, Staff Accountant reviews participant's budget for available funds. If funds are available for each line item, the Staff Accountant will process the invoice for payment. Refer to Allowable Cost Policy, Fiscal Attachment F.

Refer to Individual Training Accounts, Fiscal Attachment P. Guidance for ITA's is provided by the LWDB approved policy.

Refer to Reporting Internal Controls for Workforce, Fiscal Attachment G.

3) Please Describe the LWDA's/One-stop operators' payroll cycle (how often, when)?

The payroll process occurs every two weeks. Employees submit their timesheets to their department heads for approval and the timesheets are sent to the Staff Accountant on Monday morning after the end of each payroll period. Department heads review the time charged to each funding stream by their staff members. Staff timesheets consist of one Excel sheet with a two-week calendar. The timesheet includes the funding streams that each staff member may be working on during that time. Staff members track the time they spend working on each funding stream each day and enter the amount of time in quarter hour increments. There is also a section on the timesheet for recording overtime. Overtime is calculated in the same way as regular working hours. The work week runs from Monday to Sunday, and overtime is paid for any hours worked over 40 hours in one week. The Excel timesheet calculates the total time worked on each project by using the fund codes.

The hours worked for payroll are entered into the Abila MIP Fund Accounting software module to calculate the payroll amounts and payroll liability amounts. The Staff Accountant enters each staff member's hours worked on each funding stream into the Timesheet Checklist to compare the total amounts. The Staff Accountant enters each staff member's hours worked, vacation hours, sick leave hours, and liability account amounts for that payroll. This ensures that the time recorded in the MIP payroll module is accurate. The Staff Accountant also enters the total hours worked on each fund code project into each staff member's distribution codes for that payroll period. The totals from the Timesheet Checklist report are compared to the totals for the payroll distribution codes for that payroll period. For example, if a staff member worked 80 hours in the pay period, their distribution code report should show a total of 80 hours. The hours are then broken down by the different projects that the staff member worked on during the pay period. Southwest is not responsible for the payroll of the One-Stop Operator.

◆ **Does the LWDA/One-stop operator post an accrual for any payroll earned but not disbursed at month end?**

Southwest follows an accrual basis for payroll, with each payroll period consisting of 10 business days. The amount accrued back to a previous month is determined by counting the number of days worked in that month. For instance, if 8 days are worked in the prior month, the payroll is accrued back at 80% (10% for each day worked). The payroll module allows the Accounting Department to adjust the payroll transfer percentage, and the accounting software automatically calculates the breakdown of the accrual and changes the effective day for the accrual amount to accommodate any changes made by the staff. Afterward, the Staff Accountant reviews and verifies the coding of the payroll transfer before posting it to the accounting system.

◆ Is the accrual reversed at the beginning of the next month?

No, the accrued payroll transfer is not reversed at the beginning of the next month. Accrued payroll is included in expenditure reports to DWS.

4) Describe the accounts payable cycle (every day; one specific day of the week; twice a week, etc.)?

Accounts Payable for Supportive Services uses attendance sheets and a bi-weekly schedule. Supportive Services are paid every other Tuesday - opposite of payroll week. Accounts Payable, Supportive Services Limits, Needs-Related Payments are guided by the Career Planners requesting budget approvals for each participant from the Workforce Program Director. Upon the Workforce Program Director's budget approval, the Career Planners send the Staff Accountant the setup for the approved participants. Upon receipt of any invoice for a participant, the Staff Accountant will review participant's budget for available funds. If funds are available for each line item, the Staff Accountant will process the invoice for payment. If the participant's budget does not have enough available funds for an individual line item, the Staff Accountant will forward the invoice and participant's current budget to their Career Planner and the Workforce Program Director. Workforce participant school invoices and other workforce invoices are processed as they are received by accounting staff. Participant budgets are checked for funds availability. Participant budgets are also checked to ensure that the invoice amount of the school bill does not exceed the amount of their training voucher, which was approved by the participant's Career Planner. Accounting also uses an Excel spreadsheet to reconcile participants' statement of student activities back to their invoice from the school program provider. This spreadsheet shows the breakdown of school charges (example: tuition, books, fees, and any Pell Grants or other third-party partners that area applicable) This form is primarily used for long term training programs. Refer to School Bill Breakdown Excel Form. Money Orders / Workforce Funds Request are processed on Monday and Thursday. Funds requested on Monday are received on Friday. Checks for funds requested on Monday must be written by Tuesday. Cash must not be on hand more than an average of 3 days. Funds requested on Thursday are received on the following Wednesday. Checks for funds requested on Thursday must be written by Friday. Cash must not be on hand more than an average of 3 days.

5) Please provide a full general ledger chart of accounts. If numeric or alpha-numeric accounting codes are being used on the general ledger rather than account descriptions, there should be sufficient information to cross-reference reported expenditures to the appropriate accounts.

Refer to General Ledger Reports for 7/1/22 – 12/31/22 and 1/31/23 – 6/30/23

Refer to Chart of Accounts, Fiscal Attachment I

Refer to Fund Codes Chart of Accounts, Fiscal Attachment J

Refer to Cost Codes Chart of Accounts, Fiscal Attachment K

6) * Provide staff names of individuals responsible for the following processes, and conclude if adequate separation of duties exists: (list title next to each duty below)

a. Approves purchase orders:

Executive Director – Renee Dycus

Department Heads – Blake Harrell, Lori White

b. Verifies receipt of order:

Staff member not responsible for ordering

c. Authorizes disbursements:

Executive Director – Renee Dycus

Department Heads – Lori White (workforce expenditures only and only when necessary)

Prepares checks:

Staff Accountant – Christina Tate

d. Signs checks:

Electronic two-party authorizations

e. Compares checks with vouchers:

Staff Accountant – Donna Harper

f. Distributes checks:

Staff Accountant – Donna Harper

g. Posts disbursements:

Staff Accountant – Christina Tate

h. Prepares request for funds from LWC:

Staff Accountant – Donna Harper (orders funds)

Staff Accountant – Christina Tate (approves funds)

i. Receives cash:

Staff Accountant – Donna Harper

j. Posts receipts

Staff Accountant – Christina Tate

k. Deposits receipts:

Staff member other than receipting in and recording in accounting software

- l. Controls petty cash; Non applicable
- m. Audits petty cash; Non applicable
- n. Prepares bank reconciliation
Staff Accountant – Donna
- Sept22 Staff Accountant – Lisa Stamper
- o. Maintains general ledger:
Staff Accountant – Lisa Stamper
- p. Prepares financial report: Staff Accountant Lisa Stamper with consultant. Approves financial report: Executive Director & SWAPDD District Board and/or SWAWDB

7) Please provide a copy of the approved cost allocation plan for distributing shared direct costs as well as an approved indirect cost rate (if elected or required).

- ◆ Please include any updates or amendments to the cost allocation plan completed in the last year.

Southwest has a FY23 acknowledgement from the Interior Business Center (IBS) on behalf of the Economic Development Administration for our Costs Allocation Plan (CAP). Refer to 2024 CAP Acknowledgment Letter-Southwest Arkansas Planning and Development District, Fiscal Attachment L

- ◆ Please include the methodology and documentation used to distribute joint direct/indirect cost between “administrative” and “program” cost categories and between WIOA program components.

Southwest follows the guidelines of Uniform Guidance and 20 CFR 683-.215 to differentiate between administrative and program cost categories. The Abila's MIP fund accounting software is used, which has a cost allocation process

that enables the Accounting Department to use cost codes for distributing indirect costs and distinguishing between administrative and program costs. Indirect costs related to the Workforce program that cannot be directly assigned to a specific funding source are assigned to the Workforce Cost Pool Fund 7000. These indirect costs are then allocated to each Workforce main funding stream based on the salaries directly charged for that month.

8) * Has the LWDA or its service providers purchased equipment (i.e., > \$5,000) with sub-grant funds? N/A

- ◆ Was prior approval obtained?
- ◆ Were competitive bids or quotes obtained?
- ◆ Has the equipment been included on an inventory listing?
- ◆ Please provide a list of current inventory.
- ◆ Does LWDA have an effective system of authorizing and approving capital equipment expenditures?

9) * How many service provider/One-Stop Operator contracts does the LWDA have?

Southwest Arkansas Planning and Development District serves as the Service Provider. Eckerd Connects serves as the One-Stop Operator.

- ◆ Are any of these agreements for a fiscal agent?
Yes
- ◆ When was the last time Service Provider/One-stop operator monitoring was performed?

The Service Provider monitoring was performed April 13-14, 2023. The One-stop operator monitoring was performed June 29, 2023.

- ◆ Any outstanding findings from those reviews?

No areas of concern were identified.

10) How does the LWDA allocate its administrative costs to its funding streams for financial reporting?

Refer to Fiscal WIOA Admin Procedure

11) When does the LWDA's One-Stop Operator obligate and expend Individual Training Accounts funds?

The Service Provider obligates and expends ITA funds upon the approval of the Program Manager.

12) Has there been staff turnover in the fiscal staff in the last year? What position? Was the staff replaced?

Southwest has not experienced turnover in the Accounting Department in recent years.

13) What is the leave policy for fiscal staff?

- ◆ Is staff required to take vacation time each year?

It is mandatory for the staff to utilize at least 80% of their accumulated vacation leave. For instance, if they have 80 hours of vacation leave, they must take a minimum of 64 hours within a year.

- ◆ Has any fiscal staff not taken any vacation in the last year? If so, who?

No.

14) Describe how cash needs are determined. (For example, how often are funds drawn?)

Refer to Cash Management Internal Controls, Fiscal Attachment E

Refer to Guidance for WIOA Title 1B Funds Request, Fiscal Attachment C

Refer to Step by Step Funds Request, Fiscal Attachment D

Funds to be drawn are calculated based on expenditures as they are received.

- ◆ Does LWDA have a cash forecasting process which will minimize the time elapsed between the drawing down of funds and the disbursement of those funds?

Southwest uses a spreadsheet called Workforce Check Register to keep track of funds ordered and funds disbursed. The spreadsheet also utilizes Worksheet No. 6.1B for Cash Management and Cash Analysis, which allows the input of the number of days in each month and the number of working days for each month. These figures are used to calculate the number of days the funds were available for that particular month.

15) Is the One-Stop Operator on an advance or cash reimbursement basis?

The One-Stop Operator is paid based on invoice and is on a reimbursement basis.

- ◆ Is the payment by wire transfer or check?

The One-Stop Operator invoice is paid by check.

16) Does the LWDA have a financial management system that provides records that can identify the source

and application of funds for award-supported activities? Please describe.

Southwest uses Abila MIP Fund accounting software and utilizes various tools such as fund costs, general ledger coding, and cost codes to track expenditures and costs accurately. The system also codes and tracks each participant based on their location, enabling the organization to track services by different areas. These costs and data can be accessed in the Monthly Open Grant Reports, which are used to reconcile program and funding stream expenses. Additionally, these reports are used to report monthly expenditures per funding stream to DWS through the AWIS site on a monthly basis. The allocation process within the system calculates the distribution of indirect costs to each funding stream.

17) Does LWDA's financial system provide for the effective control over and accountability for all funds, property, and other assets (including but not limited to comparison of expenditures with budget amounts for each award)?

Accounting uses spreadsheets to track and reconcile monthly and year-to-date costs related to workforce. The Workforce Check Register spreadsheet helps ensure that funds are properly tracked and expended according to grant awards. It also helps ensure timely ordering, drawing down, and disbursing of funds. The spreadsheet is reconciled with the AWIS monthly grant statement of financial positions report and the MIP Workforce Funds ordered Year-To-Date system generated report. Other spreadsheets include Funds Request calculations and Monthly WIOA expenditure reports. The 2022-2023 expenditure spreadsheet displays program and administrative expenditures by line item, as well as remaining costs per grant. It also includes information on work experience and its percentage. Additionally, there is a tab in the spreadsheet that shows the monthly allocation of WIOA administrative costs, broken down by cost code as of July 2021.

18) Are all disbursements properly documented with evidence of receipt of goods or performance of services?

Each accounts payable entry must have proper back up documentation in order to be processed by Accounting staff.

19) Are all bank accounts reconciled monthly?

Yes

20) * In the last 12 months, has LWDA implemented new or substantially changed systems related to its federal grant management? If yes, please explain.

There have been no substantial system changes.

21) Describe the method LWDA uses to support labor and benefit charges.

The payroll process occurs every two weeks. Employees submit their timesheets to their department heads for approval and the timesheets are sent to the Staff Accountant on Monday morning after the end of each payroll period. Department heads review the time charged to each funding stream by their staff members. Staff timesheets consist of one Excel sheet with a two-week calendar. The timesheet includes the funding streams that each staff member may be working on during that time. Staff members track the time they spend working on each funding stream each day and enter the amount of time in quarter hour increments. There is also a section on the timesheet for recording overtime. Overtime is calculated in the same way as regular working hours. The work week runs from Monday to Sunday, and overtime is paid for any hours worked over 40 hours in one week. The Excel timesheet calculates the total time worked on each project by using the fund codes.

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payroll. This ensures that the time recorded in the MIP payroll module is accurate. The Staff Accountant also enters the total hours worked on each fund code project into each staff member's distribution codes for that payroll period. The totals from the Timesheet Checklist report are compared to the totals for the payroll distribution codes for that payroll period. Other company benefits are allocated based on the distribution codes.

C) Annual Reporting Requests

Please use the area below to describe successes achieved over the last year towards improved outcomes for employers and job seekers in your region. (Please note: ADWS is interested in learning about positive practices for feel free to submit any supporting material regarding your positive practice.)

Specifically, also provide information on the following:

- 1) Progress made in achieving the state's strategic vision and goals, as described in the state's Unified or Combined State Plan, for developing its workforce and meeting employer needs in order to support economic growth and economic self-sufficiency.**

Southwest is committed to assisting Arkansas in achieving its strategic vision and goals for workforce development as outlined in the Arkansas Unified or Combined State Plan. This plan serves as a roadmap for enhancing workforce initiatives at both state and local levels.

A crucial aspect of Arkansas's strategic vision is the alignment of education and training programs with the needs of employers. The state is actively endorsing the ACT WorkKeys - National Career Readiness Certificate and Work Ready Communities Program. Southwest has embraced this initiative, effectively rolling out the program across a twelve-county region. Further details about Southwest's specific efforts will be outlined below.

In addition, Arkansas is dedicated to supporting underrepresented groups in the workforce. Recognizing the vital role of inclusivity and diversity in driving economic growth, the state has encouraged local workforce areas to intensify their outreach. Responding to this, Southwest has enhanced its outreach efforts, particularly focusing on out-of-school youth and individuals involved with the justice system. A more in-depth discussion of Southwest's initiatives in this area will be provided below.

2) Progress made in achieving the objectives in the local plan.

One prominent objective outlined in Southwest's local plan is Strategic Goal #1. This goal is centered on the development of an efficient partnership with various entities including employers, the educational system, workforce development partners, and community-based organizations. The aim is to establish a robust platform that prepares a skilled workforce to meet the demands of both existing and new employers in the region.

In alignment with this goal, a consortium of organizations including the Southwest Arkansas Development Alliance (SADA) and several educational cooperatives annually host an event known as Explore Success. This event is designed to provide 8th graders across all twelve counties with valuable exposure to the myriad of potential employment opportunities available within southwest Arkansas. Each year, around 1,200 students from diverse school districts actively participate, gaining insights and interacting with regional employers.

The Explore Success program, initiated in 2018, originally began as an in-person event. However, the unforeseen challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a shift to a virtual format from 2020 to 2022. Despite this change, the event has continued to offer significant value, featuring a nationally recognized motivational speaker, interactive breakout rooms, and employer panels, thereby enabling valuable student interaction with presenters and employers alike.

In recognition of its impactful contribution to workforce development, Explore Success was honored with the 2019 National Association of Development Organizations Impact Award. Looking ahead, the event is set to return to its in-person format this coming fall, specifically catering to 8th graders. Additionally, a comprehensive job fair and draft day is on the agenda, scheduled for the spring of 2024, targeting 11th and 12th graders, further underscoring the sustained commitment to workforce development in the region.



*Save the Date for Explore Success 2023

Strategic Goal #3 aims to enhance the awareness of the talent development system in southwest Arkansas. The objective is to launch an outreach campaign that effectively informs the community about the available services and career development opportunities in the region. To ensure the campaign's success, Southwest's community and economic development staff conducted comprehensive research and analysis of regional demographics.

This investigation identified counties with a high number of out-of-school aged youth, low youth employment, and other significant barriers. Targeting these counties, career planners and workforce staff organized outreach events to provide essential information about WIOA programs and other partner initiatives. These events, often featuring guest speakers, served as an informative platform for the attending youth.

As a result of these concerted efforts, new participants were successfully enrolled, and new partnerships were established, marking a positive step towards achieving Strategic Goal #3 and contributing to the overall development of the workforce in southwest Arkansas.

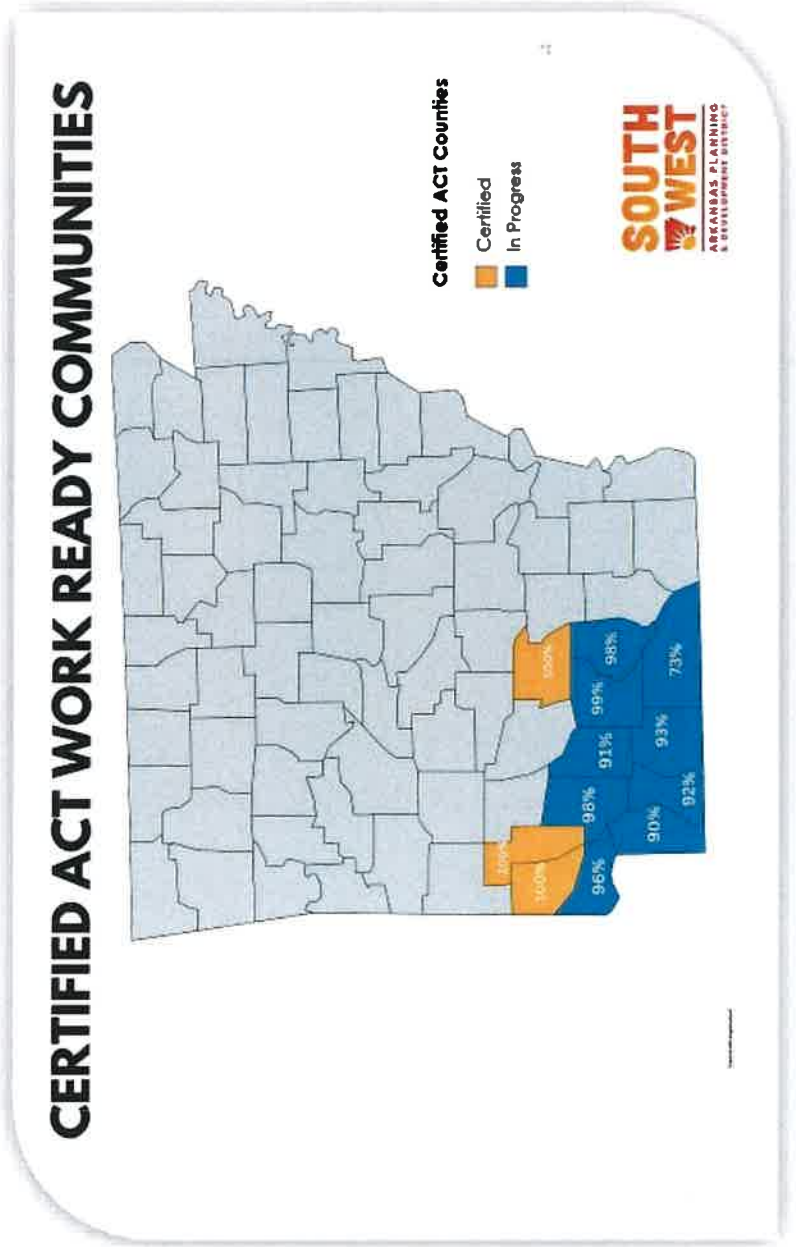


*Spanish version of youth outreach for work experience program

Another notable goal from Southwest's local plan is Strategic Goal #4 – Address Skills Gaps; Objective 3. This objective aims to work with each county of the Southwest Workforce Development Area to achieve certification as ACT Work Ready Communities, a program designed to ensure communities are equipped with a skilled workforce.

In collaboration with representatives from the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC), Southwest engaged with various stakeholders in all twelve counties to advocate for the ACT Work Ready Communities Program. This concerted effort has led to all twelve counties participating in the program, with three counties (Sevier, Dallas, Howard) already certified, bringing the Southwest region close to complete certification.

This initiative has successfully united economic development, education, and workforce development sectors. It encourages students to undertake the NCRC test, equipping them with essential tools and skills for workforce entry, and underscores the importance of employer recognition of the NCRC in hiring practices. To maintain momentum towards certification, meetings are being conducted across the southwest region. Highlighting the program's significance, both Renee Dycus (Southwest) and Rory Gulick (AEDC, Southwest workforce board member) presented at the 2022 ACT Workforce Summit, emphasizing the critical role of the ACT Work Ready Program.



To enhance the effectiveness of the ACT Work Ready Program, Southwest undertook a comprehensive profiling of the career planner position, a role identified as challenging to fill and retain due to stringent WIOA regulations and requirements. For this endeavor, the expertise of Rory Gulick (AEDC, Southwest workforce board member) and Camille Powell (Texarkana Chamber), both ACT authorized profilers, was enlisted.

Over a collaborative three-day process, Southwest's current career planners contributed as subject matter experts, aiding in detailed task analysis and skill requirement assessment. This collaboration led to the decision that Southwest should utilize WorkKeys assessments for Graphic Literacy, Workplace Documents, and Applied Math for the career planner position. The established effective levels for each assessment were determined as Graphic Literacy – 4, Workplace Documents – 5, and Math – 4.

Incorporating these insights, Southwest, which already recognizes the NCRC in hiring practices, will designate future career planner job openings as Silver. A deliberation is underway on whether to mandate the Silver certification or to permit current and prospective employees to undertake the test. For a practical understanding, an employee was requested to attempt the test and furnish feedback, contributing to a more informed decision-making process. The comprehensive job profiling document, meticulously prepared by the authorized profilers, is available for review, underscoring Southwest's commitment to a transparent and effective hiring process.

3) Progress made in implementing sector strategies and career pathways. The discussion may include: business engagement strategies, work-based learning (including apprenticeship), work experiences for youth and adults, transitional jobs, and incumbent worker training strategies and policies in the state.

Southwest is currently focused on expanding its collaboration with apprenticeship and work-based learning programs to enhance workforce development. As part of this ongoing commitment, we are actively developing relevant policies and procedures. To gain a deeper, practical insight into apprenticeship programs, Southwest recently engaged in the Arkansas Center for Data Sciences (ACDS) IT apprenticeship program.

This collaboration allowed Southwest to experience the apprenticeship process firsthand. ACDS played a pivotal role by advertising for an IT apprentice, managing applications, conducting interviews, and forwarding potential candidates for consideration. This streamlined process provided Southwest with the opportunity to interact with and select from a pool of qualified individuals.

The selected candidate benefits from comprehensive, position-relevant training provided by ACDS, covering areas such as IT management, website design, social media, and marketing. This holistic approach not only equips the apprentice with specialized skills but also offers on-the-job learning and cross-training opportunities within various organizational aspects. For a more detailed exploration of the apprenticeship programs offered by ACDS, please visit: <https://acds.co/apprenticeships/>



4) Discussion of layoff aversion strategies, including any metrics/outcomes developed and/or tracked by the state with respect to layoff aversion, such as return on investment or measures showing the economic benefits of Rapid Response and layoff aversion.

On April 28, 2023, a significant layoff was announced at Holcim (formerly Firestone Building Products) in Prescott, Nevada County, impacting approximately 95 workers effective May 21, 2023. In response to the Rapid Response – Dislocated Work Services Alert, the Southwest Business Services Team promptly reached out to local economic developer, Mary Godwin, proposing the organization of a Job Fair to assist the affected workers.

In a collaborative effort, the Department of Workforce Services, Southwest Arkansas Planning and Development District, and the Prescott Economic Development Office successfully planned and executed the Job Fair. Held at the Nevada County Fairgrounds, the event featured 24 booths from diverse businesses, organizations, and colleges from southwest Arkansas, including notable participants like Aerojet Rocketdyne, Georgia Pacific, and the Arkansas Department of Transportation.

This event not only provided a platform for the laid-off workers to explore new opportunities but also allowed Southwest to engage with employers, discussing available business services and programs. The Job Fair, as highlighted by Mary Godwin, the Prescott/Nevada County Economic Developer, witnessed an impressive turnout, standing as a testament to the effective collaboration between multiple agencies and their shared commitment to supporting job seekers in finding fruitful employment opportunities.



*Job Fair announcement for Holcim and public

5) Discussion of specific types of services or workshops provided to both companies and affected workers.

In the wake of recent layoffs across the region, Southwest has been actively engaging in support and response initiatives. The Lewisville Juvenile Treatment Center, which experienced a layoff in October of 2022, is one such example. Southwest, having received a list of affected employees, ensured that career planners reached out to individuals, offering crucial information and assistance regarding potential dislocated worker services.

A significant setback was also felt in Nashville, Howard County, with the announced closure of the Husqvarna plant, a development set to impact approximately 700 workers by the end of 2024. Additionally, a company in El Dorado, Union County, has disclosed forthcoming layoffs. In response to these unfolding situations, Southwest has promptly engaged in meetings with local elected officials and state agencies to discuss the companies' plans and explore collaborative strategies for worker support.

As these companies finalize their plans, Rapid Response will step in to augment the support framework. Southwest is prepared to outline the available Title I services to the dislocated workers, ensuring they have access to the necessary resources and assistance. This comprehensive approach, including the participation of other WIOA partners, underscores Southwest's commitment to providing unwavering support to workers facing the challenges of layoffs and company closures.

6) Any challenges the state workforce system faces, which may include policy, implementation, or other relevant challenge.

The state workforce system is consistently facing reduced funding year after year. With increasing costs, it's becoming a challenge to provide adequate services to individuals, which is essential for economic growth and developing our nation's workforce. Specific policies add to these challenges, particularly the in-school and out-of-school youth components.

For instance, many individuals meet the age criteria for out-of-school youth but have no other barriers, making it difficult to apply these policies effectively. Additionally, the 75%/25% requirement limits funding for in-school youth. There's a concern about not meeting the 75% rule and finding qualified out-of-school participants is challenging.

The 20% work experience for youth rule is also a hurdle due to the difficulty in finding eligible youth. These combined challenges highlight the need for a reevaluation and possible adjustment of existing policies and funding allocations to ensure the efficient development of the workforce.

7) Any challenges the local workforce system faces, which may include policy, implementation, or other relevant challenge.

Southwest is currently navigating a series of challenges, particularly regarding the implementation of new data systems and staff-related issues.

One of the most significant obstacles is the introduction of new data systems without sufficient training. The systems, as they stand, do not allow for efficient and accurate data entry and capture by front-line staff. The frequently updated reporting system, Arkansas Job Link, sometimes erases or fails to save entered data, leading to lost time and increased frustration among staff members. This issue exemplifies the duplication of services at the case management level.

Additionally, the collaboration with Eligible Training Providers is dwindling due to the cumbersome requirements of reporting and data entry into the new system. This decline is limiting the options available to participants for their training needs, inadvertently creating a barrier within the workforce system itself.

Staff turnover presents another challenge for Southwest, with significant changes in the last two program years. The constant shift in personnel, coupled with a steep learning curve, hampers the area's ability to deliver quality work and effective customer service. The recruitment and retention of out-of-school youth in Southwest Arkansas further exacerbate these issues, with low enrollment numbers and difficulties in finding suitable training sites for businesses.

The recent exit of the Department of Workforce Title III services from two of Southwest's workforce centers has left vacant spaces, with ongoing efforts to find new tenants. The subsequent challenge will be collaborating with these new tenants to fund a receptionist for both centers, especially in light of the potential increase in traffic flow if Southwest continues with UI identity validation.

In facing these challenges, Southwest is actively seeking solutions and is hopeful for the future, working closely with various stakeholders to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of its operations and services.

8) Please describe any projects or activities funded by the Governor's statewide funds, including Work-Based Learning and Regional and Sector Planning Funds.

Not Applicable

D) Technical Assistance Needs

*** Please use the area below to describe any training and/or technical assistance needs in your LWDA. Please include the topical area, specifics regarding the content to be provided and a suggested format for providing support (i.e. consultation, in-person training, virtual meeting or training, peer support, etc.)**

In order for Southwest to continually enhance our services and ensure we are at the forefront of meeting our customer's needs, we have identified key areas where additional training would be highly beneficial:

- **Tableau Reporting System:**
 - To enhance our data visualization and reporting capabilities, ensuring more efficient and understandable data presentation.
- **Customer Service:**
 - To further improve our interactions with our customers and ensure we are meeting their needs effectively and courteously.

- **Program Monitoring:**
 - To ensure all our programs are running optimally, achieving our goals, and providing maximum benefit to participants while maintaining compliance with policies and regulations.
- **ETP Monitoring:**
 - To ensure effective oversight and management of Eligible Training Providers, guaranteeing high-quality training opportunities for participants.
- **Local Board Engagement and Annual Retreats:**
 - To enhance the effectiveness, collaboration, and strategic planning of our local board, ensuring they are fully engaged and aligned with the mission and goals.

By focusing on these areas for additional training, Southwest is committed to continuous improvement, ensuring we provide the highest quality services and support to our region.

Looking Forward for Southwest Arkansas

Southwest is actively laying the groundwork for impactful future initiatives. We are in the process of finalizing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Department of Corrections and NorthArk College. This collaboration aims to provide credentialled manufacturing training to 10 justice-involved individuals, offering them valuable skills and opportunities for reintegration into the workforce. We are optimistic about continuing this program with additional cohorts and are actively seeking additional funding to ensure its sustainability.

In addition to this, Southwest is preparing for an anticipated economic boost with the announcement of new lithium plants in our region. We are proactively engaging in local meetings to effectively plan for the workforce needs that these new companies will generate.

With these promising developments, Southwest eagerly anticipates sharing positive and impactful results in next year's annual report, reflecting our commitment to fostering growth and opportunity in our region.