GROWING REGIONAL OPPORTUNITY FOR THE WORKFORCE:
PROJECT G.R.O.W TAKING ROOT IN THE TEXAS-MEXICO BORDER AREAS

Interim Process Analysis Report

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REPORT SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Project GROW (Growing Regional Opportunities for the Workforce) is an ambitious regional, multi-partner, strategically comprehensive effort that builds upon successful and innovative practices to accelerate certification, employment, and career advancement in demand occupations for an array of economically marginal target groups. The service area encompasses five Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) that span the entire Texas-Mexico border area from the City of Brownsville in the south to El Paso in the north. Despite significant economic expansion in recent years, this region remains one of the most disadvantaged areas in the state and the nation in terms of poverty, unemployment, literacy, limited English language proficiency, education, and income. Project GROW is designed to reduce the predominance of these characteristics for sections of the population that generally have the most difficulty successfully navigating available education, training, and employment opportunities and to prepare the workforce needed to meet the needs of employers in key growth industry sectors.

Project GROW is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor under the Workforce Innovation Fund Grant Program, which supports innovative approaches to the design and delivery of employment and training services that generate long-term, cost-effective improvements in the performance of the public workforce system in terms of outcomes for job seekers and employers. The Ray Marshall Center at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at The University of Texas-Austin is conducting a multi-method evaluation of Project GROW, including implementation/process, outcomes, net impacts, and cost effectiveness analyses. As part of the process analysis component of the evaluation, this report assesses early signs of progress, constraints, and operational status as Project GROW moved from the initial design through the early implementation phase, a time frame that encompasses the period from September 2012 through December 2013.

The present observations are based on detailed review of planning, policy and technical assistance documents, as well as quarterly progress reports to the U S.

Department of Labor; two-rounds of site visits (baseline in May-June 2013 and early implementation follow-up in October-December 2013) that deeply engaged administrators and staff of partners in extensive, guided conversations; participatory observations from the Project GROW committee structure; analysis of monthly progress reports (MPRs) for internal program management; and analysis of early demographic and participation data recorded in the Administrative System for Program Participation (ASPP), a real time, common information technology platform design specifically for GROW to facilitate operational alignment across partners, as well as to supplement management and evaluation capacity.

This Interim Process Report is largely descriptive in nature, and is intended to serve as a formative agent to abet continuing adoption, adaption, and improvements in the extensive strategic and operational features of the Project GROW demonstration. Comprehensive, multi-method research and analysis related to outcomes, net impacts, and cost-effectiveness will be presented in subsequent reports, as Project GROW further ramps up enrollments; significant numbers of participants attain their initial credential in a career pathway prepared to enter the workforce; and participants enter and retain employment in their chosen occupational field for durations long enough to assess the earnings effects of the demonstration. The ultimate purpose of the evaluation is to generate evidence for regional, state, and federal policy makers, workforce development system practitioners and other stakeholders about the experiences, achievements, and value of the demonstration.

The Border Workforce Alliance (BWA) – a consortium comprised of the 5 WIBs (Cameron, Lower Rio Grande, South Texas, Middle Rio Grande, and Upper Rio Grande) serving the region – is the regional entity guiding Project GROW implementation and managing WIF grant funding allocated under contract to each of their WIB areas. The Lower Rio Grande WIB is serving as project lead and grant administrator for the BWA. These stakeholders posit that there is insufficient alignment and capacity within and across the border WIBs to more effectively and quickly upgrade the skills and knowledge of the current and future workforce—particularly those least attached and often under-served through public education and training channels— to meet employer needs and sustain regional

economic growth. In response, BWA and identified stakeholders sought grant funding to demonstrate innovative regional efforts to develop and scale up integrated college and career pathways designs that result in more rapid and timely completion of credentials valued in the labor market; facilitate stronger employment connections with key industry sectors, and promote workforce system and institution level policy and programmatic reforms to support and sustain the model.

KEY FEATURES OF PROJECT GROW

Strategic Approach

Central features of Project GROW's comprehensive strategic approach include:

- Border region collaboration/systemic workforce development across and within the five WIBs of the BWA that aligns adult education, postsecondary, and workforce services.
- Accelerated credentialing in high demand occupations with identifiable career pathways.
- Partition of the target population into Service Cohorts (Cohorts A, B, and C and subgroups of these), by academic proficiency as determined by Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) scores, secondary education credentials, and college readiness to demonstrate the effectiveness of tailored service regimes. Accelerated learning program interventions aligned with service cohorts are:
    - College readiness efforts and occupational training for Cohort A participants, who already have a high school diploma or GED, but are not college ready as determined by standardized assessment;
    - Integrated pathways combining GED preparation and occupational training for Cohort B comprising individuals without a secondary credential, but generally functioning within the 9th through 12th grade levels; and
    - Contextualized or bridge learning curricula for Cohort C students who function below high school equivalency levels and require adult basic education and ESL to prepare for academic and occupational advancement.

- The development and use of a common information technology platform—the Administrative System for Program Participation (ASPP)—constructed by Business Access for Project GROW in order to facilitate real time client information exchanges between service delivery partners and to serve as the unique database for program performance management and evaluation purposes.
- A self-paced In Home Learning System (IHLS), including a laptop and internet access, randomly distributed and monitored by Business Access to subgroups of Cohort C to potentially accelerate learning gains.
- Provision of intensive or standard case management to different subgroups of the target populations, as well as intentionally enhanced, timely, supportive services for all participants to increase retention, completion, and employment entry.
- Advanced levels of employer engagement and introduction of industry cluster approaches through which workforce development efforts might more closely align with the human resource needs of related business in support of regional economic growth and development.
- Capacity-building services provided by Jobs for the Future (JFF), a national workforce intermediary, which also oversees evaluation services, and Abt Associates, which serves as the National Evaluation WIF Grant Coordinator for USDOL, and also provides technical assistance to the WIF grantees and program evaluators.
- Rigorous process, outcome, impact, cost effectiveness, and formative evaluation services provided by the Ray Marshall Center.
- Project GROW funding available for services at the WIB level totals approximately $3.45 million, supplemented by $1 million in committed leveraged resources across the 56-month award period.

Partnerships

Partnerships across the border region and within each of the Board areas are central to Project GROW's success. To advance the design and implement Project GROW, the WIB partners in the BWA have brought together their contracted WIA One-Stop/Career Center

operators (branded as *Workforce Solutions* centers in Texas), local community, and technical colleges as education and training providers, and prominent community-based organizations to align and strengthen workforce system structures and practices throughout the region. Streamlined services promise to accelerate credential attainment, career entry, and career advancement options for lower-skilled adult and older youth residents of the border region. Project GROW also strives to engage and meet the skilled workforce needs of key leading and growth industry sector employers.

Career Center operators—de facto partners in Project GROW—have lead responsibility for outreach, intake, eligibility determination, case management, support services, job placement, follow up, and information management reporting. Career Center contractors in BWA WIB areas at start-up for Project GROW were:

- Cameron: Southwest Keys
- Lower Rio Grande: C2 Global Professional Services (C2GPS)
- South Texas: ResCare, Inc.
- Middle Rio Grande: Middle Rio Grande Development Council (MRGDC)
- Upper Rio Grande: Serco, Inc.

Training providers include Texas State Technical College (Cameron WIB); South Texas College (Lower Rio Grande WIB); Laredo Community College (South Texas WIB); South Texas Junior College (Middle Rio Grande WIB); and El Paso Community College (Upper Rio Grande WIB).

The Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA), serving the Cameron and the Lower Rio Grande WIBs, and Advanced Retraining & Redevelopment Initiative in Border Areas (Project ARRIBA) in the Upper Rio WIB, are the primary CBO partners. Both are highly successful workforce intermediary organizations that link motivated job seekers to training in well-paying, career pathways identified in cooperation with engaged employers whose human capital needs their efforts aim to satisfy.

Business Access, a technology company committed to introducing advanced technologies into the social services realm for improving service delivery and outcomes, developed the ASPP system and administers the IHLS.

JFF provides oversight and technical assistance for Project GROW, as well as for the Ray Marshall Center's evaluation services. Abt Associates serves as the National Evaluation Coordinator across WIF grantees for USDOL.

Key Industry Sectors and Targeted Occupations

Based on local LMI analysis, supported by their Demand and Targeted Occupations Lists, the BWA WIBs identified key industries and occupations for Project GROW start-up. The WIBs selected five key, higher growth industry sectors across the border region in the initial design: Healthcare, Construction, Distribution and Logistics, Transportation, and Manufacturing. Within these industries, project partners selected six demand occupations, four by each WIB. WIB partners intentionally tried to select common demand occupations to support relative program consistency across the region. Project GROW expects to expand the range of career pathways during the demonstration period in response to local demand and opportunities identified by labor market analysts at the WIBs and local partners. Cameron, Lower Rio Grande, South Texas, and Middle Rio Grande selected four occupations in common for the early Project GROW training cohorts:

- Maintenance and Repair Workers/General (ONET Code: 49-9071)
- Medical Assistant (ONET Code: 31-9092)
- Truck Drivers, Heavy and Tractor-Trailer (ONET Code: 53-3032), and
- Emergency Medical Technicians and Paramedics (ONET Code: 29-2041).

Upper Rio also included Maintenance and Repair Workers/General, and Emergency Medical Technicians, but added:

- Medical Records & Health Information Techs (ONET Code: 29-2071), and
- Construction Carpenters (ONET Code: 47-2031)

Enhanced Capacity for Challenged Residents

One of the unique features of Project GROW is its effort to demonstrate effective services for Border residents on the margins of economic viability by further triaging participants in service cohorts into subgroups. Additionally, it attempts to integrate these more challenging populations (that are often not well served by advanced occupational training opportunities, in part because of their academic deficiencies) into the mainstream services array at the Career Centers by requiring that all Project GROW participants must be eligible and enrolled in WIA program services (Adult, Dislocated Worker or Youth) and are expected to meet WIA program performance expectations. Participants receive the promising, innovative services contained in the demonstration that will be rigorously evaluated. Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) scores are the common bases for assessing academic proficiency.

There are two subgroups within Cohort A (those with a high school diploma or GED, but not college ready): A1 participants are residents of Cameron or the Lower Rio Grande WIB areas who receive intensive case management from Project VIDA and enrollment in a sixteen-week *College Readiness Academy*, in addition to occupational training. A2 participants reside in any of the five participating WIB service areas and receive standard case management and a less extensive version of preparation, followed by occupational training. The duration and intensity of college readiness varies in the Project GROW model across Cohort A subgroups and respective training providers. As of September 1, 2013, the Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA) became the statewide, mandated instrument for assessing college readiness.

Cohort C (those without a secondary credential who exhibit very basic adult education/ESL needs) comprises subgroups that are differentiated by access to intensive case management (provided by VIDA and ARRIBA in their respective service areas), and by the provision (or not) of randomly assigned In-Home Learning System (IHLS) through Business Access to further accelerate their learning. Subgroups C1 and C2 receive intensive case management and supportive services; C1 also receives access to IHLS. Subgroups C3

and C4 receive standard WIA case management through Workforce Solutions—there is no CBO involved; C3 is assigned an IHLS, C4 is not. Cohort B initially designated B1 as out of school youth and B2 adults, a distinction dropped at start-up because of the common overlap of the sub-populations and services provided.

INITIAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Pre-implementation tasks such as design refinements, procurement, planning, and program/institutional alignment progressed from August 2012 through February 2013, at which point actual enrolments began in the Lower Rio Grande WIB area; all WIB areas had begun enrollments by May 2013. The early data available within ASPP through December 2013 and Monthly Participation Reports (cross-validated with WIA data in TWIST, the statewide integrated workforce performance management database) reveal several features of the initial achievements of the BWA WIBs and their local partners.

Registration, Eligibility and Enrollment

Eligibility and enrollment in Project GROW are dependent upon the alignment of the individual's interest in one of the selected demand occupations; testing within the TABE and college readiness assessment test scores; the availability of scheduled cohort training for that occupation; and WIA eligibility and assessments results supporting their ability to benefit from the training, in addition to the other program requirements. Within these parameters, WIBs and Workforce Solutions staffs have:

- Preliminarily registered basic contact information in ASPP for more than 2600 individuals;
- Assigned 44 individuals to Cohort A, 88 to Cohort B, and 15 to Cohort C as a result of assessment and eligibility determination (according to above criteria); and
- Initiated services for 144 individuals.

The majority of the initial registration and enrollments have occurred in the Lower Rio Grande WIB area, which had more experience and capacity with the demonstration

features than other areas. A few WIBs underwent lengthy procurement processes to secure a training provider, which delayed and constrained implementation. Only Lower Rio has enrolled Cohort C participants—five each in C1, C2, and C3 late in the year; Lower Rio is also the first to assign IHLS to participants.

Participant Characteristics

Reasonably completed fields extracted from available ASPP data generally indicate revealing features of participation through December 31, 2013.[1] Younger, Hispanic/Latino women prevail among enrollees. Nearly two-thirds of the participants are the first generation in their families to have access to postsecondary education; the depth of this representation is a remarkable accomplishment of Project GROW to date. Limited English proficiency is less prevalent among these early participants compared to the general border region population and shares of those served in-need of ESL services will likely increase as more Cohort C training is initiated. Overall, initial analysis indicates that:

- Project GROW participants are majority female (58%), Hispanic/Latino (94%), and single (61%), with an average age of 26.6 years (age ranges from 18 to 52);
- While a third are married and 61% are single, 61% have 3 or more dependents and 16% have a family size of 5 or more;
- 18% say their primary language is Spanish and 6% have limited English proficiency;
- About a third state their highest academic degree at intake is Grade 10 or higher;
- Nearly two-thirds (63%) are the first-generation in their family to access postsecondary education;
- A little over a third (36%) are first generation US citizens; and
- Two-thirds (67%) are receiving SNAP benefits only, while less than a third (28%) are not receiving either SNAP or TANF assistance.

[1] Preliminarily data regarding participant characteristics from the ASPP is likely biased by the selectivity of cohorts served to date, which is based on the emerging alignment between recruitment/enrollment and available training among other factors, including incomplete and inconsistent data entry in ASPP for many participants that WIBs are presently addressing.

Career Pathways Training

Despite basic target occupation commonality, there are noteworthy differences in the exact occupation for which training is offered, certification awarded, and career pathway prospects. In some instances, the initial occupational training conformed to an existing continuing education certificate in which curricula and contact hours articulated with academic credit programs in a career pathway, more commonly for Emergency Medical Services and Medical Assistant pathways. In others, specifically Maintenance and Repair and Construction Carpentry, postsecondary institutions developed new curricula and credentials. CDL training for truck drivers has been acknowledged as the most challenging to align with recognized, stackable credentials along a career pathway since licensing, not academic credentialing, is key to employment, and it is common for community colleges to contract with a proprietary school for driving classes.

The entry-level occupation may vary across WIBS and by cohort as well. For example, EMT/First Responders in Lower Rio Grande are receiving Emergency Care Assistant Training, which qualifies them as an ambulance assistant. Career pathway entry training at the Emergency Medical Technician I/ Basic EMT level—in Cameron, South Texas, and Upper Rio Grande, the other areas where training in this pathway have begun—prepare participants for entry level EMT positions. This latter credential may lead to more favorable job placement, entry wages, and advancement prospects.

Medical Assistant, the occupational area in which training enrollments have been prevalent in Lower Rio Grande, South Texas, and Middle Rio Grande, is also notably different across sites. Credentialing may align closer with nursing and allied health fields on the one hand or office technologies and administration on the other, dependent upon local discretion, tempered by labor market potential, and the availability of postsecondary training.

Preliminary Outcomes

Through December 2013, Project GROW has successfully helped 33 participants to obtain a GED and 28 to receive an occupational credential. At this initial phase, retention, completion, program exits, and employment entry rates are promising for those enrolled, and expected to increase as enrollments and completions continue to rise.

Through December 2013, the Project GROW claims five employment entries for those who have completed training, received their credential, and gone to work in their area of training. Fieldwork revealed that a few more were ready to enter employment, but were delayed due to additional requirements, such as medical screens or licensure requirements. Staff also reported instances where those exiting are interested in continuing training in their career pathway, temporarily self-selecting to defer employment.

Considering that Project GROW intends to serve 660 participants, to equip 330 individuals with GEDs and 502 with occupational credentials, and place 463 participants in employment, among other program performance measures, there is plenty of opportunity for improvement. The BWA WIBs and partners remain keen to the challenge ahead for the remaining 21-months of operations funding and are intent on ramping up enrollments to attain the performance goals. In addition to the WIB performance targets, the Ray Marshall Center will be assessing progress across an array of evaluation measures that include additional education, employment, systems change, and employer engagement measures.

CHALLENGES

Throughout the early implementation phase, the BWA WIBs and their local partners have encountered numerous challenges, both anticipated and unforeseen to introduce Project GROW. Procurement of training contractors consumed more lead time than expected and generally delayed start-up. Building capacity, aligning delivery processes, developing and selecting appropriate education and training curricula, estimating and negotiating costs, assigning responsibilities and training staff, and developing relatively standardized operating procedures, as well as refining and introducing ASPP across the region, require continuous effort by WIBs and partners. In the initial implementation phase,

negotiating these challenges postponed a regional January 1 2013 enrollment start date, which was replaced by incremental roll-out of program operations across the region between February and May 2013.

Since then, despite multi-method marketing and outreach efforts for a "phased roll-out," as well as streamlined Web-based, in-person, or telephone access for initial registration, intake and eligibility determination numbers have not been as robust as anticipated. Administrators and staff offered many explanations for this:

- Potential clients have reportedly self-selected out of participation due to lack of interest in the available training paths or education requirements, such as obtaining a GED alongside a CDL, or 16-week college readiness through VIDA. Individuals were interested in training and quick employment entry, not laying the foundation for a career pathway. This was especially noted in relation to CDL training.
- Individuals have expressed an unwillingness or inability to make the extensive time commitment required to participate. Staff report persons who wanted to enroll but could not adjust life and family responsibilities to comply with participation requirements.
- Most WIBs originally marketed all four of their occupational trainings, a practice that proved somewhat counter-productive, since under phased roll-out only one or two trainings were available at a time. With the passage of time, contact information for follow-up may have become invalid or participant interest or availability faded.
- Considerable numbers of potential participants have reportedly tested outside of the cohort academic grade level parameters for the training cohort level being recruited, i.e., tested out of Cohort A as college ready or too high or low TABE scores for Cohorts B or C.
- In a few instances, staff who knew that the desired occupational training would not be available in the near future, reportedly were reluctant to conduct a WIA eligibility determination, recognizing that the 45-day window for case activation would expire and eligibility would have to be redetermined.
- Occasionally, timely follow-up with those who expressed interest may have faltered due to unclear assignment of responsibility for this function.

- Lastly, Impending statewide changes in the GED curriculum and testing requirements affecting Cohort B and Cohort C, as well as the new college readiness standards for the TSI affecting Cohort A, caused WIBs and training providers to delay outreach and enrollments until new curricula and adequate lead time for preparation were available. There was widespread concern that students would not complete coursework and positively test in compressed timeframes prior to the introduction of the new tests, scheduled to be effective on September 1 (TSI) and January 1 (GED).

The net effect is that scheduling and delivering anticipated levels of cohort training has not yet proceeded at the anticipated pace. Low outreach responses, misalignment of client interests and availability, and low eligibility rates by cohorts have constrained the effectiveness of the process. Geographic distances, the disbursed populations, and locations of training sites in many areas of the border region exacerbate these challenges. It is difficult to schedule or fill training slots and to coordinate training starts without sufficient recruits.

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Project GROW has been subject to ongoing adjustments to its design and operations throughout the initial implementation phase to improve service delivery and increase positive in full support of the demonstration's innovative and comprehensive strategic approach. Administrators and practitioners might concentrate their effort in several areas to ensure Project GROW's success.

Systemic, Regional Advancement.

Regional collaboration led by the Border Workforce Alliance to introduce and nurture an innovative systemic workforce development model in the five border WIBs is the foundational component of the demonstration model. Early active support for the regional approach by executives and key administrators for the demonstration must be sustained and revitalized, particularly in a few areas where lead responsibility has been hampered by turnover of key personnel. WIBs have differential capacity and experience with elements of

the design and have had variable success in twining ongoing WIA and other program policies and practice with the innovative "add-ons" of Project GROW.

In the initial phase, Project GROW has continued to operate under somewhat of a mixed self-identity. The demonstration is both an accelerated certification and rapid employment program, as well as a career pathway program. WIBs have prior experience with the former and are progressively, if not always consistently, migrating service practices to the latter.

Project GROW seeks to move beyond "pockets of innovation" for effectively growing the workforce, while meeting the needs of local employers and supporting economic expansion through workforce development. Closer adhesion to successful practices across WIB areas will promote systemic development that might be more continuously improved and sustained locally, as well as replicated in other regions of the nation.

Contextualized Education and Career Pathway Training

Innovative program interventions have been introduced and supported in all WIB areas. Curricula and approaches vary notably by the:

- Method and extent of occupational integration within the academic instructional setting
- Duration (in terms of weeks) and intensity (in terms of hours per week) of instruction, and
- Sequencing of academic and occupational classes (concurrent, overlapping, or successive)

Community and technical colleges have articulated content in entry-level training, and aligned contact hours in workforce and continuing education divisions with academic credits to the extent practical in support of stackable credentials along a career pathway. There remains—both in the field and from the evaluator's perspective—an ongoing and residual concern about entry-level positions and continuing opportunities for career progression either within the workplace or through additional training and certification

offered at the postsecondary level. Career advancement is implicit in Project GROW's design and explicit in career pathway practices. Partners might revisit this issue and identify strategic approaches to support career advancement for those who are exiting Project GROW's first stage services.

Employer Engagement

The Project GROW design calls for growth in the number and depth of involvement by participating employers and employer associations or industry clusters in the targeted industry sectors as an essential element of the career pathway model. Each WIB has a target of twelve employers spread across the four selected industries as a minimum standard for measuring employer engagement. Although Business Service Units at the Career Centers and WIB employer relations staff have been enlisting support for Project GROW and marketing its potential benefits to individuals and firms in select industries, a more intensive level of employer engagement with the career pathway process, particularly though an industry cluster approach is still "incubating." Lessons drawn from across the nation repeatedly note that developing industry sector approaches require consistent effort over time; BWA WIBs are at the early stage of the learning curve to bring this approach to fruition. These efforts might be intensified for Project GROW to attain its objectives regarding employer engagement and industry sector relations.

Administrative System for Program Participation (ASSP)

ASPP is a significant feature of Project GROW that supports real time exchanges between program partners at local and regional levels to streamline service delivery and improve case management, as well as timely delivery of support services. These functions are primed to improve retention, advancement, and outcomes for participants. Additionally, ASPP promises unique data elements that are essential for the demonstration's program management and program evaluation. Universal and consistent use across the BWA area is still a work in progress. Partners in only one WIB area have fully

adopted and begun harvesting new operating efficiencies from the ASPP. Its cross-partner use is limited in the other areas.

The common information technology platform has proven effective for administrative management purposes, particularly for preparing the Monthly Performance Report. Complete and accurate data entry for more detailed evaluation analyses continues to be an area of concern that Business Access and Project GROW partners are addressing.

The use of ASPP sustained a major setback when the Texas Workforce Commission withheld permission to allow client intake and management data in TWIST, the statewide workforce system database, to migrate to ASPP. The BWA and Business Access had incorrectly assumed at start-up that TWC would support the data system exchange. This disallowance has resulted in dual data entry for frontline workers, a very unwelcome development.

POLICY CONTEXT: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Project GROW operates within state and national policy context that frame options and opportunities for the demonstration's potential success, especially those policies set by U.S. Department of Labor and the Texas Workforce Commission. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) portends positive developments in the national policy arena that will stimulate favorable opportunities for BWA and Project GROW to strengthen workforce services and outcomes. These include targeting services to disadvantaged populations, particularly youth; support for career pathways and industry sector approaches; extending WIA youth eligibility to age 24; expanding work experience opportunities, including on-the job-training; and strengthening alignment between adult education, postsecondary, and workforce services. Prior to regulatory clarification, there are immediate steps USDOL and TWC may support. Innovations, such as those in the Project GROW demonstration, by their very nature merit a few degrees of leeway regarding policy, regulatory, and institutional compliance standards to fully test their effectiveness.

USDOL and Career Pathways Policy. The results of WIF grantee efforts will inform prospects of career pathway policy in the national workforce development arena. Successful implementation in the present depends on flexibility to improve practices and remove barriers in the short term, as well as receive supportive signaling that the strategy and practices will be allowed and backed in the future. Project GROW is a demonstration project to test innovative strategies operating in the mainstream context and compliance with workforce performance expectations. Concern for the latter may be inhibiting the accomplishments of the former. Any policy or regulatory adjustments that USDOL might introduce to hold harmless and further encourage innovation could be helpful to Project GROW.

USDOL might immediately support the demonstration by:

- Allowing TWC to remove or suspend Project GROW participants from WIA performance requirements, since many of these individuals would not commonly access training services.
- Committing to a continuation of support for successful policy and practices generated in the demonstration, especially those tenets common to Project GROW and WIOA.

USDOL might also continue or initiate open discussion of innovative methods to:

- Support and fund progress beyond initial certification toward additional credentialing in a career pathway.
- Develop measures applicable to career pathway progressions that go beyond entry and retention.
- Provide mechanisms for incumbent worker training which will allow advance training of current entry level employees for career advancement; create openings for new hires; help close the skills gap for employers; and strengthen employer services and engagement with the workforce system.

Strengthening Support and Cooperation with the Texas Workforce Commission. To date, Project GROW appears to have garnered limited support and recognition for its

challenging, comprehensive efforts at the state level. Although the USDOL awarded the WIF Grant to BWA as a consortium of workforce boards, led by a workforce board, Project GROW would do well to cultivate stronger support from the Commissioners, Executive Director, and Program Administrators at the Texas Workforce Commission. TWC might exhibit support for the demonstration in at least three immediate ways that could be a catalyst for systemic integration at the WIB-level, point of service delivery that the Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC) is pursuing across agencies and stakeholders at the state level. These are:

- Strengthening the availability of and access to consistent TABE testing and reporting throughout the workforce system. Currently, written or computer tests are used, and the use of different versions (Locator, Battery, Survey)—at times inappropriately—limit statewide and BWA comparability.
- Determining a method to remove or suspend the inclusion of Project GROW's harder to serve participants from WIA and state performance measures.
- Allowing the migration of TWIST data to ASPP to remove duplicate data entry, which undermines its use and effectiveness.

TWIC, which provides oversight and policy guidance to the Texas workforce system, acknowledges the importance of accelerated learning options, the value of postsecondary certifications, expanding opportunities to populations at the margins, addressing the skills gap, industry sector strategies, and other program and policy issue areas central to Project GROW. The demonstration's efforts at institutional alignment between the adult education networks, community and technical college systems, and the *Workforce Solutions* system reflect the type of systemic integration that TWIC strives to achieve. *Strong support for a career pathway model could be the capstone that ties these issue areas together in a single structure.* Project GROW has the potential in its design and initial implementation experiences to be that structure.

NEXT STEPS IN THE EVALUATION

The Ray Marshall Center will continue to monitor operational status through fieldwork, document review, and data analysis, including financial data. As ASPP matures, researchers will prepare ongoing sub-analyses of client demographics, cohort formation, services, and outcomes. Combined with TWIST, TWIT, UI wage records, and other administrative data sets, these sub-analyses will be included in the series of reports scheduled throughout the duration of the demonstration. Researchers will prepare a full Implementation Report in December 2015 and a Final Report in October 2016 that will contain the process, outcome, cost-effectiveness, and net impact analysis that comprise the comprehensive evaluation of Project GROW.

BACKGROUND

INTERIM PROCESS REPORT

Project GROW is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor under the Workforce Innovation Fund Grant Program, which supports innovative approaches to the design and delivery of employment and training services that generate long-term, cost-effective improvements in the performance of the public workforce system in terms of outcomes for job seekers and employers.[2] The Ray Marshall Center at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at The University of Texas-Austin is conducting a multi-method evaluation of Project GROW, including process, outcomes, net impacts, and cost effectiveness analyses. As part of the process analysis component of the evaluation, this report assesses early signs of progress, constraints, and operational status as Project GROW moved from the initial design through the early implementation phase, a time frame that encompasses the period from September 2012 through December 2013.

The Interim Process Report is based on detailed review of planning, policy and technical assistance documents, as well as quarterly progress reports to the U S. Department of Labor; two-rounds of site visits (baseline in May-June 2013 and early implementation follow-up in October-December 2013) that deeply engaged administrators and staff of partners in extensive, guided conversations; participatory observations induced within the Project GROW committee structure; analysis of monthly progress reports (MPRs) for internal program management; and analysis of early demographic and participation data recorded in the Administrative System for Program Participation (ASPP), a real time, common information technology platform designed specifically for GROW to facilitate operational alignment across partners, as well as to supplement management and evaluation capacity.

The Workforce Innovation Fund Grant Program is authorized by the Full-Year Continuing Appropriations Act, 2011 (P.L. 112-10). WIF grants support innovative approaches to the design and delivery of employment and training services that generate long-term, cost-effective improvements in the performance of the public workforce system in terms of outcomes for job seekers and employers. The U.S. Department of Labor has awarded nearly $150 million in competitive four-year grants to 26 grantees across the nation through the Workforce Innovation Fund program. Independent project evaluators and a national evaluator are assessing funded demonstrations. (http://innovation.workforce3one.org/)

This Interim Process Report is largely descriptive in nature, and is intended to serve as a formative agent to abet continuing adoption, adaption, and improvements in the extensive strategic and operational features of the Project GROW demonstration. Comprehensive, multi-method research and analysis related to outcomes, net impacts, and cost-effectiveness will be presented in subsequent reports, as Project GROW further ramps up enrollments; significant numbers of participants attain their initial credential in a career pathway prepared to enter the workforce; and participants enter and retain employment in their chosen occupational field for durations long enough to assess the earnings effects of the demonstration. The ultimate purpose of the evaluation is to generate evidence for regional, state, and federal policy makers, workforce development system practitioners and other stakeholders about the experiences, achievements, and value of the demonstration.

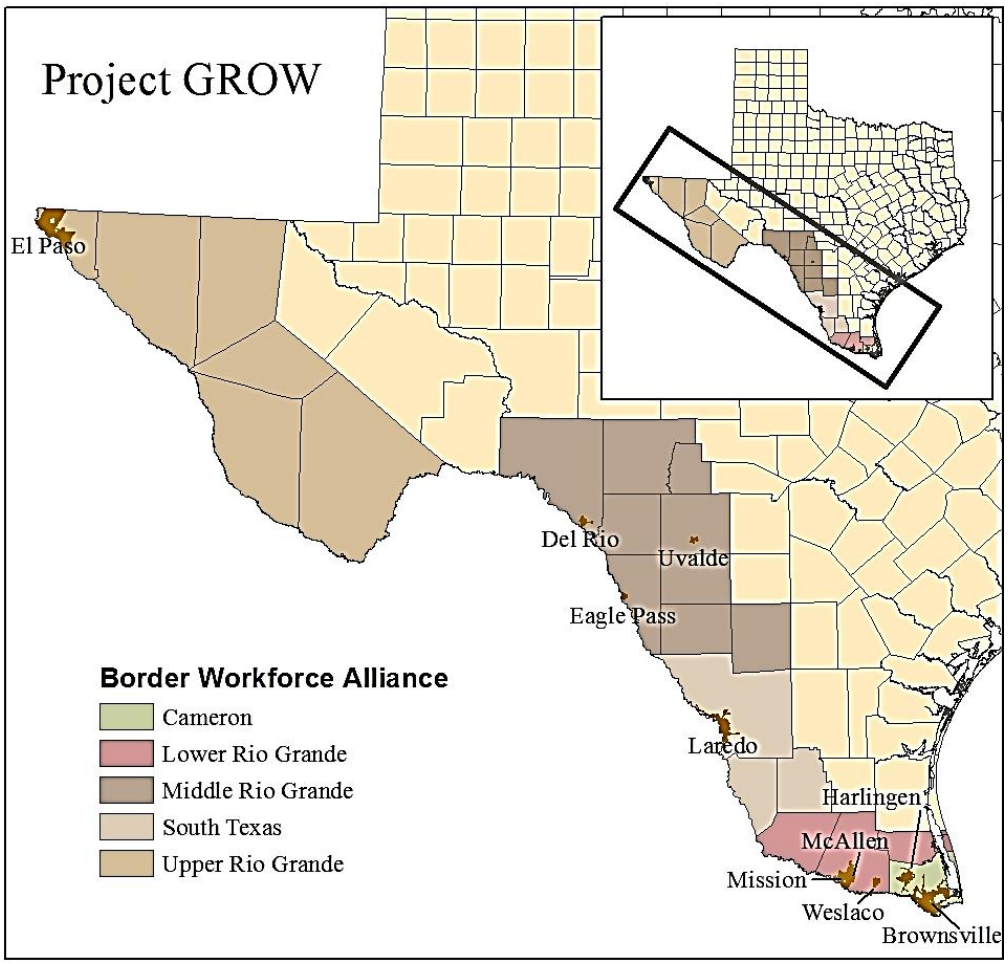
PROJECT GROW OVERVIEW

Project GROW (Growing Regional Opportunities for the Workforce) is an ambitious regional, multi-partner, strategically comprehensive effort that builds upon successful and innovative practices to accelerate certification, employment, and career advancement in demand occupations for an array of economically marginal target groups. Project GROW aims to transform the workforce development system within and across five contiguous Workforce Investment Board areas along more than 800 miles of the United States-Mexico border within the state of Texas, stretching from below the city of Brownsville near the Gulf of Mexico in the south to El Paso, near the New Mexico state line in the north. The Border Workforce Alliance (BWA) – a consortium comprised of the Cameron, Lower Rio Grande, South Texas, Middle Rio Grande, and Upper Rio Grande Workforce Investment Boards serving the region – is partnering with national workforce intermediary, Jobs for the Future, to guide Project GROW implementation and to administer U.S. Department of Labor funds awarded under the Workforce Innovation Funds grant program. The Lower Rio Grande WIB is serving as lead program operations and contract administrator for the BWA.

Across the region, the BWA affiliates have partnered with employers, Career *Workforce Solutions*/Career Center operators, community and technical colleges as education and training providers, and community-based organizations to align and

strengthen workforce system structures and practices throughout the region that promise to accelerate credential attainment, career entry, and career advancement options for lower-skilled adult and older youth residents of the border region. Inextricably, Project GROW also strives to meet the skilled workforce needs of key leading and growth industry sector employers.

Map 1. Project GROW: Border Worker Force Alliance WIB Areas in Texas



Training providers include Texas State Technical College (Cameron); South Texas College (Lower Rio Grande); Laredo Community College (South Texas); South Texas Junior College (Middle Rio Grande); and El Paso Community College (Upper Rio Grande). The Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA), serving the Cameron and the Lower Rio Grande WIBs, and Project ARRIBA in the Upper Rio Grande WIB, are the primary

CBO partners. Business Access, a technology company committed to introducing advanced technologies into the social services realm for improving service delivery and outcomes, developed the ASPP system and administers the In Home Learning Systems (IHLS), composed of laptop computers distributed to subsets of participants to provide access to self-paced educational materials. JFF provides oversight and technical assistance for Project GROW, as well as for the Ray Marshall Center's evaluation services. Abt Associates serves as the National Evaluation Coordinator across WIF grantees for USDOL.

REGIONAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES

Project GROW has introduced an ambitious agenda in a challenging region. The 22 counties comprising the service area of the BWA have a population of approximately 2.6 million people - about 10% of Texas's population.[3] Despite a history of employment and poverty challenges, the Texas-Mexico border region is also a region of job growth and significant labor demand in key industry sectors such as health care; construction; transportation; distribution and logistics; and manufacturing. At the root of the region's challenge is the deep mismatch between many of the in-demand jobs and the skill levels of residents (TIP Strategies, 2012). As in other parts of the country, an increasing number of jobs along the border require post-secondary certificates and degrees. However, in the BWA service area 36% of adults lack a GED or high school diploma (compared to 13% statewide and 8% nationally) and a high percentage speak English less than "very well" (33.5%, compared to 15.5% statewide and 8.7% nationally). (TIP Strategies, 2012) With these skills barriers, many employers find it difficult to find the workers they need, and many job openings—as many as 6,000-9,000 in the Lower Rio Grande Valley alone—go unfilled. Because of low-skill levels and labor market challenges, border residents are more likely to be low-income ($14,766 per capita in 2010 compared to $24,870 statewide), unemployed (a 2010 rate of 10.4% in the region, compared to 8.8% statewide), and have families living in poverty (more than 26% in 2010 compared to 10% statewide). (TIP Strategies, 2011) In terms of population demographics, settlement patterns, and economic

[3] Based on 2013 population estimate. (http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48000.html)

opportunities, the border area served by Project GROW is one of the most distinctive regions of the nation. Rapid growth notwithstanding, this region remains one of the most economically disadvantaged areas in the state and the nation.

While elements of the public workforce development system along the border have made strides in addressing these challenges, significant gaps remain. The overarching problem identified by regional stakeholders is that there is insufficient alignment and capacity in the system to more quickly meet employer needs. There are several dimensions to this problem:

1. ***Inefficient alignment within board areas***. Within the five workforce board areas, the programs and services offered by key workforce development and education actors are not well coordinated. Outreach, recruitment and intake and assessment processes vary across WIB/One Stop, community college/training, and CBO providers, often resulting in a duplication of intake information. Diverse assessments tools are used (e.g., TABE, SUPERA, BEST Plus/Literacy, CASAS and specially developed assessments) and are not consistently employed. Such inefficient practices and procedures lengthen the intake process, often delaying training program entry.

2. ***A "one-size fits all" approach to the education and training of lower-skilled adults***. Linear models of educational advancement (e.g., multiple levels of ESL, then adult basic education, then GED preparation, and then college readiness before finally accessing training) predominate, diminishing the likelihood of persistence toward college and career success by lower-skilled adults. Further, both federally- and privately-funded adult basic education and ESL programs are not well coordinated with the requirements for training and careers in key industry sectors. A perceived lack of relevance to employment, combined with lengthy routes to a credential and participants' family and other responsibilities, make retention and persistence difficult (TIP Strategies, 2011). Indeed, Title II funded programs in the region are finding it difficult to help participants obtain a GED and transition to post-secondary education. The four federally funded providers in the region report that 55% of their participants had a higher education goal upon exiting their programs in 2010, but only 9% actually enrolled in college – in an academic area, developmental education, or continuing education.

3. ***Insufficient "real-time" information and intensity of services to facilitate stronger participant case management and progress.*** There are multiple "touches" of participant customers across partner organizations. Participants often receive supportive services from the WIBs/One Stops, community college/training providers, and/or a CBO provider. But few efforts exist to share information and align services, and there is no uniform approach to assisting participants address the myriad academic, social, and economic issues and barriers to completing training and entering a career. At the same time, services offered by partners are not marshaled strategically, and the "hardest-to-serve" often receive insufficient assistance to overcome obstacles to their progress and success.

4. ***Labor market connections are fragmented.*** Multiple approaches to general career exploration are offered by One Stops, community colleges/training providers, and CBOs with little *concrete and consistent* information provided *by all partners* about the *specific requirements of particular occupations* for which participants might be trained. In addition, although individual employers are engaged with WIBs, education and training programs, and CBO providers within each of the five border areas, consistent business intelligence about the *aggregate demand and needs* of multiple employers in key industry sectors is not well understood. Also, there are few sector-based standards adopted by multiple regional employers that drive the skills and competencies infused in the education and training offered. Multiple partners offer duplicative work readiness components in their service provision. Likewise, job search and placement services are duplicated by some partners and not well-developed by others, with no clear lead partner engaging with employers on behalf of specific participants.

5. ***No systematic approach to strengthening capacity within and across board areas.*** Though the five workforce boards along the Texas-Mexico border region serve a common population with similar challenges, each board area has developed its own approach in response to its local area needs. While "pockets of innovation" in the workforce system exist across the border region, there are no venues for the sharing and extending of best practices that can lead to more effective implementation by all elements of the workforce development system (TIP Strategies, 2011). In addition, strategies to scale and sustain these practices are under-developed.

PROJECT GROW STRATEGIC RESPONSE

Project GROW adopted a strategic approach that is designed to meet these region-wide challenges. GROW aims to produce sustainable improvements in education, training, and employment outcomes across the borderlands service areas by:

- Developing and implementing career pathways aligned with demand occupations in key and growth industry sectors;
- Introducing new operating efficiencies gained through program alignment and a common information technology platform, known as the Administrative System for Program Participation (ASPP), developed by Business Access;
- Tailoring of programs and services to specific sub-populations, distinguished primarily by variations in lower educational achievement;
- Improving access to and coordination of case management and support services between service delivery partners;
- Enhancing employer and industry sector engagement practices; and
- Strengthening regional system capacity through collaborative practices that benefit resident job seekers, employers, and regional economic growth.

EVALUATION OVERVIEW

The Ray Marshall Center at the LBJ School of Public Affairs is providing evaluation services to Project GROW. The multi-method, multi-year evaluation combines qualitative and quantitative methodologies to develop comprehensive analyses of Project GROW from the initial design and implementation phases of the project through the fully operational phase and conclusion of the 52-month evaluation period (September 1, 2012 through December 31, 2016). The four methodological approaches of the evaluation are:

- Quantitative outcomes and net impact evaluations, the latter based upon a quasi-experimental design methodology;
- Process evaluations tracking the implementation and adaptation of program-related policies, practices, and structures from design through fully operational status;
- Formative evaluation services that provide short-term feedback on Project GROW's progression toward stated objectives and goals, based on current

analyses and field observations generated by the above approaches and best practices in the field of workforce development; and

- Cost-effectiveness analyses estimating the net economic value and returns on the investments made to Project GROW in the border area.

Questions

Major evaluation research questions for Project GROW include:

1. Key Research What components of career pathway designs were implemented by the five participating WIBs as part of Project GROW, and, as implemented, how were they similar or different across the region?

2. To what extent did integrated college and career pathway designs achieve scale within and across areas of the region and within individual colleges? What design and implementation steps, including career center-, college-, and non-governmental organization (NGO)-level activities, as well as changes to practices, policies, and systems, were essential to scaling up these programs?

3. What impact did integrated college and career pathway designs have on student progress and outcomes in college and in the labor market relative to comparison groups of students similar to the population in Project GROW, but not participating in the program?

4. What was the return-on-investment (ROI) from Project GROW and its component strategies, considered from the participant, taxpayer and societal perspectives? What economic impacts did the Initiative have in the region and each of the participating WIBs?

5. To what extent did Project GROW lead to significant changes in systems and processes in the region and the participating WIBs?

Process Evaluation

The process analysis is the primary qualitative research component of the evaluation for describing, monitoring, and improving the operational dimensions of Project GROW. Specifically, the process analysis serves to:

a) Describe the initial program design and monitor the continuing development and improvement of the operational model across the evaluation time frame;

b) Provide a basis for formative recommendations regarding positive adjustments to enhance program performance from an operational perspective, as well as to advance scalability, replicability, and sustainability of the service delivery model;

c) Enhance the explanatory power of program outcomes, including the net impacts observed by the quasi-experimental design;

d) Provide a basis for identifying cost centers and expenditures in support of cost-effectiveness and return-on-investment estimates; and

e) Enrich the literature of workforce development through its detailed portrayal of the accomplishments and constraints experienced by Project GROW regarding the implementation and operations of its innovative, regional employment and training model across the five WIBs that comprise the Border Workforce Alliance.

Organization of Interim Report

Section II depicts key elements of Project GROW's original design as proposed and refined to begin implementation in the early 2013. Section III presents the implementation analysis that presents experiences and adaptive practices related to policies and procedures observed during baseline and follow-up fieldwork. The analysis is supplemented by descriptive data from ASPP and management reports through December 2013. The final section summarizes Project GROW status at the end of this time frame, and provides observations and considerations intended to enhance program performance in behalf of goals and objectives of the Project GROW demonstration.

PROJECT GROW: DESIGN FEATURES

OVERVIEW

After successfully submitting a proposal in March 2012 led by the Workforce Solutions-Lower Rio Grande WIB, the U.S. Department of Labor awarded the Border Workforce Alliance a $6 million demonstration grant for a 52-month operations and evaluation period extending from September 1, 2012 through December 31, 2016, for Project GROW. In addition to direct federal funds, BWA partners committed $2,246,000 of leveraged resources for operations. Project GROW, as a "Type B" WIF grantee, aims to adapt, expand, improve, and evaluate promising practices and outcomes for accelerating credential attainment and career entry for lower-skilled adults that originated in *Breaking Through*[4], a nationally-recognized career pathways initiative that increases post-secondary and career access and success for lower-skilled adults (TIP, 2011). Through Project GROW, BWA intends to transform the workforce development system along the Texas-Mexico border. Regional stakeholders have united efforts to develop and scale up integrated college and career pathways designs that result in more rapid and timely completion of credentials valued in the labor market; facilitate stronger employment connections; and promote workforce system and institution level policy and programmatic reforms to support and sustain the model. The purpose of the Ray Marshall Center evaluation is to provide formative guidance to the project and to document evidence for regional, state, and federal policymakers, workforce development system practitioners, and other stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of the program.

Project Grow partners convened in August 2012 to determine priorities as grant funding became available September 2012. The BWA consortium members—the Cameron, Lower Rio, Middle Rio, South Texas and Upper Rio WIBs—immediately began to market the effort and initiate or strengthen partnerships with regional employers, Career Center operators, community colleges, training providers, and community-based organizations.

[4] For more information, see www.breakingthroughcc.org.

With the assistance of national workforce intermediary Jobs for the Future, Project GROW partners began refining the program model in preparation for implementation. Early activities through February 2013 included design and management structure clarification, ASPP development, staff assignment and trainings, and training contractor procurement. In late January 2013, the Project GROW administrative leadership at the Lower Rio Grande WIB organized a multi-partner, regional kick-off meeting of BWA WIB personnel and affiliated partners in McAllen, Texas. At this convening, central administration staff at Lower Rio Grande and Jobs for the Future, as well as Ray Marshall Center staff, presented and discussed the initial design structures, procedures, and policies, as well as program evaluation methods and objectives.

COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIC APPROACH

The Project GROW operational design includes regional and local partnerships, target group specific interventions and outcome expectations, relatively standardized client flow features, education and training in career pathways, management information systems, and performance measures. The regional approach, a common services model for challenged populations, the ASPP system, and a heightened level of employer engagement in career pathways development are significant features of Project GROW. Central features of Project GROW's comprehensive strategic approach include:

- Border region collaboration/systemic workforce development across and within the five WIBs of the BWA that aligns adult education, postsecondary, and workforce services;
- Accelerated credentialing in high demand occupations with identifiable career pathways;
- Partition of the target population into Service Cohorts (Cohorts A, B, and C and subgroups of these), determined by academic proficiency, secondary education credentials, and college readiness to demonstrate the effectiveness of tailored service regimes;
- Accelerated learning program interventions aligned with service cohorts, including:

- College readiness efforts and occupational training for Cohort A participants, who already have a high school diploma or GED, but are not college ready as determined by standardized assessment;
- Integrated pathways combining GED preparation and occupational training for Cohort B comprising individuals without a secondary credential, but generally functioning within the 9th through 12th grade levels; and
- Contextualized or bridge learning curricula for Cohort C students who function below high school equivalency levels and require adult basic education and ESL to prepare for academic and occupational advancement;

- The development and use of a common information technology platform—the Administrative System for Program Participation (ASPP)—constructed by Business Access for Project GROW in order to facilitate real time client information exchanges between service delivery partners and to serve as the unique database for program performance management and evaluation purposes;
- A self-paced In Home Learning System (IHLS), including a laptop and internet access, randomly distributed and monitored by Business Access to subgroups of Cohort C to potentially accelerate learning gains;
- Provision of intensive or standard case management to different subgroups of the target populations, as well as intentionally enhanced, timely, supportive services for all participants to increase retention, completion, and employment entry;
- Advanced levels of employer engagement and introduction of industry cluster approaches;
- Capacity-building services provided by Jobs for the Future (JFF), a national workforce intermediary, which also oversees evaluation services, and Abt Associates, which serves as the National Evaluation WIF Grant Coordinator for USDOL, and also provides technical assistance to the WIF grantees and program evaluators;

- Rigorous process, outcome, impact, cost effectiveness, and formative evaluation services provided by the Ray Marshall Center; and
- Project GROW funding available for services at the WIB level totaling approximately $3.45 million, supplemented by $1 million in committed leveraged resources across the 56-month award period.

PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURES

Border Region Collaboration

The Border Workforce Alliance is committed to the development of a highly qualified local workforce and a competitive economic advantage for the Texas/Mexico border region through increased literacy, skills development, and education of the resident population. In addition to Project GROW, the BWA has previously unified efforts to advance STEM initiatives throughout the region, and currently several WIBs and community colleges are deeply engaged with the Eagle Ford Shale Consortium, an oil and gas regional working group, to secure resources for the education and training of the extractive and refining workforce for the oil and gas supply chain. The stated purpose of the BWA is to:

- Create a unified voice for the Texas/Mexico border workforce board region.
- Expand and initiate innovative "evidence- based" practices to rapidly accelerate literacy and skill level gains.
- Research and analyze data for the development of responsive programs.
- Leverage partnerships and secure funding to further the vision of the BWA.

  (http://bwapg.org/grow/CMS/Page/673)

The Lower Rio Grande is the lead agency and administrative entity for the WIF Grant. As such, operational and fiscal management and reporting for Project GROW reside with the WIB. The Director of Workforce Systems for the WIB is the chief administrator for Project GROW and provides direction and oversight to cross-functional teams involving Data and Evaluation, Fiscal Accountability, Strategic Communications, Employer Engagement, and Compliance. The WIB hired a full-time Project Coordinator to liaison with partnering

WIB staff and their local partners and to provide day-to-day oversight and support for Project GROW.

In addition to providing guidance regarding policies and implementation practices to the WIBs and local partners, the Project Coordinator also serves as the intermediary between the WIBs, Business Access, Jobs for the Future, and the Ray Marshall Center. To do so, the Coordinator directs a number of dedicated committees that convene regularly by teleconference and Webinars. These include a Partners Committee of key BWA administrators and staff, an Employer Engagement Committee, and an Evaluation Advisory Committee. The Coordinator is a critical agent for implementation of Project GROW demonstration features across the region.

Each WIB designated a manager-level Board lead with responsibility for oversight and management of administrative and operations functions of Project GROW. As in other workforce programs, the individual WIBs and Career Center contractors are responsible for fiscal accountability, program and performance management, compliance, reporting, procurement, and other functions.

Border Workforce Alliance WIBs

The five BWAS WIBS share much in common beyond their border location and common workforce development challenges. Despite significant economic expansion in recent years, this region remains one of the most disadvantaged areas in the state and the nation in terms of poverty, unemployment, literacy, limited English language proficiency, education, and income. Yet distinctive features in terms of spatial distances, population distribution, settlement patterns, and other factors account for variations in service delivery and implementation challenges.

The BWA region encompasses nearly 46,000 square miles (sq. mi.) of south and west Texas and is home to 26 million people. The geographic coverage within the WIB areas ranges from 21,700 sq. mi. in Upper Rio Grande to 891 in Cameron. (Table 1) Resident populations in the service area ranges from a low of 169,036 in Middle Rio Grande to a high of 881,620 in Lower Rio Grande. Population concentrations and settlement (large- to small-

urban and rural disbursed) are significantly varied across and within WIB areas as well. For example, almost all of the Upper Rio Grande's population (97 percent) resides in El Paso County, which in turn is dominated by the population in the City of El Paso. More than 90 percent of the South Texas WIB population lives in Webb County, dominated by the City of Laredo. Fully two-thirds of the entire BWA population resides in two WIBs—Upper (34 percent) and Lower Rio Grande (32.7 percent)—and most of these are residents of two counties, El Paso County and Hidalgo County. (TIP Strategies, 2012)

Table 1. Border Workforce Alliance WIB Area Characteristics

BWA WIB	Settlement Pattern	Geographic Expanse	Population2011
Cameron	Dense small-medium urban Limited rural disbursed	1-County 890.92 mi.2	414,123
Lower Rio Grande	Dense small-medium urban Limited rural disbursed	3-County 3,384.60 mi.2	881,620
South Texas	Laredo core urban Disbursed small urban /rural	3-County 5,496.03 mi.2	276,043
Middle Rio Grande	Disbursed small urban /rural	9-County 14,266.06 mi.2	169,036
Upper Rio Grande	El Paso core urban Disbursed small urban /rural	6-County 21,700.00 mi.2	846,031

Source: Geography and population from
http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/searchresults.xhtml?refresh=t

Partners may or may not offer complete geographic coverage for Project GROW within their area as a result of population distribution and service delivery locations. For example, one-county, Cameron WIB has comprehensive coverage, whereas six-county, Upper Rio Grande offers Project GROW only in El Paso County, where nearly the entire population resides. Similarly, Project GROW services in the South Texas WIB are available in the City of Laredo in Webb County, but not in the other two counties in the WIB area. WIBs additionally may have concentrated Project GROW services in select offices for initial start-up, as Middle Rio Grande did by selecting Del Rio and Eagle Pass Workforce Solutions offices

first, before expanding to an additional office (Uvalde Workforce Solutions) in the disbursed small-urban and rural service area.

Cameron WIB

The Cameron WIB serves its single, namesake county service area. The WIB operates two full-service One-Stop Workforce Centers, a satellite Workforce Center, and a Mobile Resource Lab. The WIB has contracted with Southwest Keys to operate the centers. The two full service centers—one in Brownsville and one in Harlingen—provide Project GROW services. Cameron County has a population of 414, 123 people and a density of 456 people per square mile across its 890 sq. mi. area.[5] Settlement is concentrated in the Brownsville-Harlingen Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and distributed across several other small urban and rural areas.

Lower Rio Grande WIB

The Lower Rio WIB serves Hidalgo, Willacy, and Starr Counties. Ninety percent of its 881,620 population resides in Hidalgo County—mostly in the McAllen-Edinburg-Mission MSA where Project GROW is available at the Mission, Weslaco, and Edinburg Career Centers. The two remaining offices in the area are located in more sparsely populated Raymondville (Willacy County) and Rio Grande City (Starr County). C2 Global Professional Services (C2GPS) operates the Career Centers under contract for the WIB.

South Texas WIB

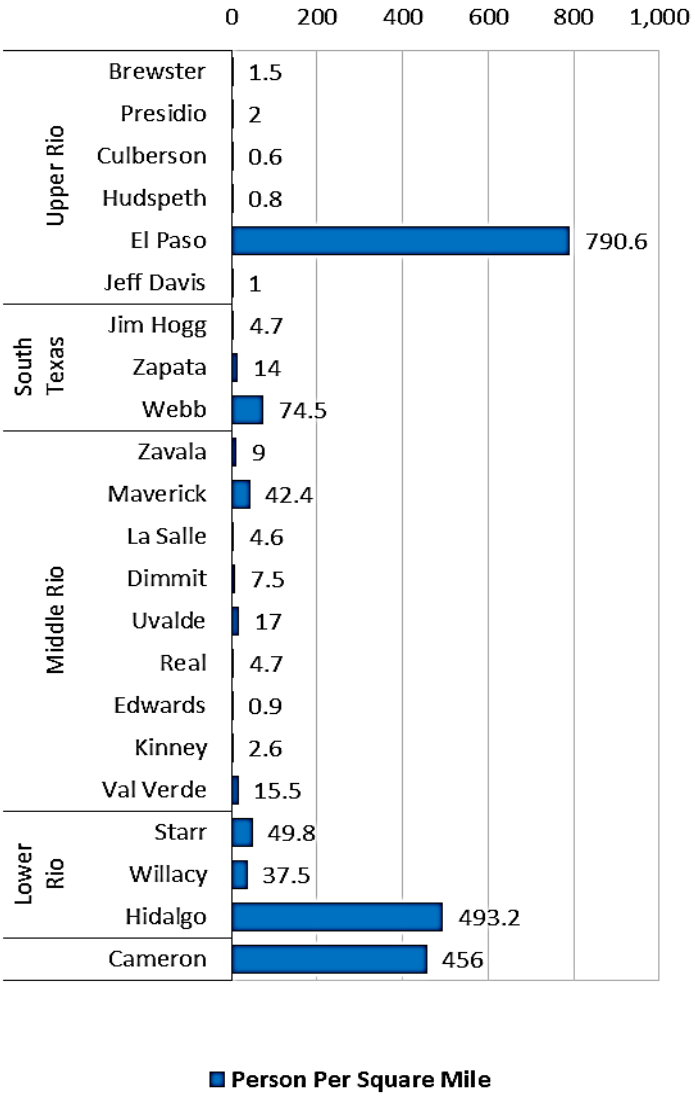
The South Texas WIB serves Webb, Zapata, and Jim Hogg Counties, an area totaling nearly 5,500 sq. mi. with a population of 276,043, most of which is concentrated in the City of Laredo and the Laredo MSA in Webb County. Ninety-three percent of the population

[5] The data in this discussion is taken from US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 year estimates (2006-2010) using the American Fact Finder. Data, except for population, is for the year 2010. The data on population is from the year 2011 (American Community Survey, 1 year estimate 2011, US Census Bureau).

http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/searchresults.xhtml?refresh=t

lives in Webb County with a population density of 74.5 people per square mile; density falls sharply in Zapata and Jim Hogg Counties to 14 and 4.7 persons per sq. mi., respectively. The WIB contracted Career Center operations to ResCare, Inc. thru September 2013, and subsequently to C2GPS (the same operator for the Lower Rio Grande) to operate a full service center in Laredo and satellite offices in Zapata (Zapata County) and Hebronville (Jim Hogg County). Project GROW services are delivered through the Workforce Solutions office in Laredo.

Figure 1. BWA WIB Population Density by County – 2010



Source: http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/searchresults.xhtml?refresh=t

Middle Rio Grande WIB

Moving north up the Rio Grande, spatial coverage and population distributions begin to exhibit more dramatic features. The Middle Rio Grande WIB serves a 14,266 sq. mi. area that includes the nine counties of Val Verde, Kinney, Edwards, Real, Uvalde, Dimmit, La Salle, Maverick, and Zavala Counties. Most of the areas 169,036 population resides in one of the Micropolitan Statistical Areas of Del Rio (Val Verde County), Eagle Pass (Maverick County), or Uvalde (Uvalde County). The population density tapers off quickly outside of Eagle Pass at 42.4 persons per sq. mi., and residents are disbursed across small towns and expansive rural tracks characteristic of the area. The Middle Rio Grande Development Corporation (MRGDC) operates three full service "One-Stop" Workforce Centers—one each in Carrizo Springs (Dimmitt County), Eagle Pass (Maverick County), and Del Rio (Val Verde County) and more limited or satellite services in the other counties. MRGDC also serves as the WIB staff. Project GROW is available at the Eagle Pass, Del Rio, Carrizo Springs, and Uvalde Workforce Solutions sites.

Upper Rio Grande WIB

The Upper Rio Grande WIB, covering 21,700 sq. mi., is fifty percent larger than Middle Rio Grande, the second most expansive WIB in the BWA, and accounts for nearly half (47.4 percent) of all the land area in the entire BWA region. The WIB serves six counties - El Paso, Jeff Davis, Hudspeth, Culberson, Presidio, and Brewster. Project GROW services are concentrated in the El Paso MSA that surrounds the City of El Paso. The WIB's resident population is 846,031, and 820,789 of these persons are living in densely populated El Paso county (790.6 persons per sq. mi., compared to the remaining counties in the area that have 2 or fewer residents per sq. mi.). The Upper Rio Grande selected Serco, an international service company, as its Workforce Solutions/One-Stop contractor. Upper Rio Grande has eight Workforce Solutions sites, six in the El Paso area, three of which are in the core city (Downtown, Northeast, and Lower Valley) and provide Project GROW services. Others in El Paso County are located at Fort Bliss, Canutillo (northwest El Paso County), and

Fabens (south El Paso County). There are career centers in Alpine (Brewster County) and Presidio (Presidio County), both cities of well under 10,000.

Career Center Contractors

WIBs contract service delivery for "Career Centers," the designated One-Stop employment and training centers branded as *Workforce Solutions* offices in Texas, and these contractors are de facto partners in Project GROW. Contractors have lead responsibility for outreach, intake, eligibility determination, WIA case management, support services, job placement, follow-up, and information management reporting. The Career Centers operators negotiate service delivery practices with the WIBs to attain performance expectations for which the WIBs and themselves are held accountable. Career Center contractors in BWA WIB areas for Project GROW are:

- Cameron: Southwest Keys
- Lower Rio Grande: C2 Global Professional Services (C2GPS)
- South Texas: ResCare, Inc. thru September 2013; hence, C2GPS
- Middle Rio Grande: Middle Rio Grande Development Council (MRGDC)
- Upper Rio Grande: Serco, Inc.

Training Providers

Each WIB is required to procure a training provider for contextualized education and accelerated training along a career pathway in a stable or growth industry with high occupational demand. WIBs released Requests for Assistance in Fall 2013, and by the Spring 2013, contracts for services were signed or under advanced negotiations. Training providers identified or procured at the time of the first round site visits were:

- Cameron:
  Texas State Technical College (TSTC);
  Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA)[6]
- Lower Rio Grande:
  South Texas College (STC));
  VIDA
- South Texas:
  Laredo Community College (LCC).
- Middle Rio Grande:
  Southwest Texas Junior College (SWTJC)
- Upper Rio Grande:
  El Paso Community College (EPCC);
  Advanced Retraining & Redevelopment Initiative in Border Areas (Project ARRIBA)

The community and technical colleges, WIBs, and Career Center operators share responsibility for developing and providing education and training for Project GROW's accelerated career pathways. In conjunction with Business Services Representatives in the career centers, they identify the specific skills and competencies that employers are seeking in high growth industries and demand occupations and develop programs and career pathways accordingly. The community colleges make necessary and available referrals for internal student support, as well as coordinating support services and sharing best practices to make the program more successful with local and regional partners. VIDA and ARRIBA provide intensive case management to subsets of Cohorts A and Cohort C participants, as well as offer the College Readiness Academy for subsets of Cohort A in Cameron and the Lower Rio Grande WIB areas.

[6] Texas Southmost College (TSC) in Brownsville, Cameron County, had originally anticipated a role as training provider also, but withdrew from the emergent service delivery configuration due to administrative restructuring of the college as a separate entity from The University of Texas-Brownsville. In March, 2011, the Texas Southmost College District Board of Trustees voted to withdraw TSC from the 20-year partnership agreement entered in 1991. The dissolution of the partnership and reorganization hampered partnership development and contract negotiations for Project GROW.

Texas State Technical College

TSTC Harlingen is part of the Texas State Technical College System, the sole state-supported technical college system in Texas. TSTC Harlingen is one of four colleges (along with TSTC Marshall, TSTC Waco, and TSTC West Texas) and five extension programs providing academic credit and non-credit programs to prepare technical skills-competitive students in cooperation with business and industry, government agencies, and other educational institutions.[7] TSTC emphasizes "learning by thinking and doing," and is noted for its state-of-the-art laboratories and the quality of its offerings, which are reflected in its graduation and placement success rates.

TSTC Harlingen has historically provided education and training to individuals served by the Cameron and Lower Rio Grande WIBS, as well as Project VIDA. Students earn regular academic degrees as well as Continuing Education Units (CEUs) that articulate with academic credits when the course meets established criteria. The Corporate & Community Education division provides targeted training and services, including customized training through its Corporate Education Office and an array of more standard curricula, through its Continuing Education Office, both within the division under a common Dean. The Director of Continuing Education is the TSTC Project GROW lead with support and commitment across areas of responsibility within the division.

South Texas College

Since 2009, South Texas College has been working with the Lower Rio Grande WIB in successful efforts to integrate adult basic education with career and technical pathways training leading to credentials that help ensure success in high demand occupations. The accomplishments and experiences of the partnership between VIDA, Lower Rio Grande, and STC with the “Breaking Through” initiative formed the basis for Project GROW’s integrated education and career pathways model. As the contractor for Project GROW, STC provides

[7] For example, TSTC’s University Center serves as an extension for at least seven 4-year universities, including the University of Texas, and Texas A&M University, as well as private universities.

college readiness, GED, adult basic education, and ESL classes, in addition to occupational training.

STC is one of three community colleges in Texas authorized by the THECB to award Baccalaureate, as well as Associate degrees. The College serves Hidalgo and Starr counties in the service delivery area of the Lower Rio Grande WIB, and has five campuses—three in McAllen, one in Weslaco, and one in Rio Grande city.

Laredo Community College

Laredo Community College serves the three county area of Webb, Jim Hogg, and Zapata counties contiguous with the South Texas WIB. LCC has two campuses, both in Laredo: one in the new and refurbished facilities at the historic Fort McIntosh site in central Laredo; the other, a relatively new (2001) campus in south Laredo. The Division of Workforce Education offers numerous programs of study designed for employment and career advancement and lead to either an Associate of Applied Science Degree or a Technical Vocational certificate. The Division of Workforce Education contains both the Continuing Education Department, which also arranges customized training classes for business, and the Adult Basic Education Department. These Departments are most directly responsible for Project GROW training provider services.

Southwest Texas Junior College (SWTJC)

Southwest Texas Junior College (SWTJC) operates three campuses—the main campus in Uvalde (Uvalde County) 70 miles east of the Mexican border, and two additional campuses in the border cities of Del Rio (Val Verde County) and Eagle Pass (Maverick County). SWTJC also operates instructional facilities in Crystal City (Zavala County), Pearsall (Frio County), and Hondo (Medina County), the latter two of which are located beyond the boundaries of the Middle Rio Grande WIB. The Workforce Development and Adult Basic Education Office comprises the Adult Education and Literacy division, as well as the Workforce Training and Development division, the adult and continuing education units that provide the Project GROW education and training services. The Adult Education and

Literacy offices in Eagle Pass are collocated with the workforce programs operated by MRGDC at the Career Center and offer ABE/GED/ESL and academic assessments on-site. College Readiness for Project GROW is delivered at the SWTJC Del Rio campus. The Dean of Workforce Development and Adult Basic Education and two Workforce Training and Development Program Coordinators have lead responsibility for Project GROW at SWTJC.

El Paso County Community College

El Paso County Community College (EPCC) operates five campuses in the greater El Paso area: the original Rio Grande Campus in central El Paso; Valle Verde in southeast El Paso; the Trans mountain Campus in northeast El Paso; the Northwest Campus in the county's upper valley; and the Mission del Paso Campus, serving the Eastside/Lower Valley area of the county. Additionally, EPCC offers student resources at the Administrative Services Center, which houses the offices of the Workforce/Economic Development and Continuing Education department, near the Val Verde Campus.

EPCC has a long history of promoting English language proficiencies for Spanish speaking residents of El Paso in order to enhance their workforce and civic viability. The college's occupational training programs, academic support courses, and basic academic skills programs are well developed to meet the needs of the Project GROW participants, and in recent years EPCC has increasingly focused on contextualized ABE/ESL/GED curricula, as well as initial and continuing education credentialing that assists student advancement from non-credit, continuing education coursework to regular academic credit programs along a career pathway. EPCC is poised to wrap Project GROW participants into these educational offerings, which are supplemented by academic and career counseling and assessment services. It's "On-RAMP" recruitment efforts at area adult education and workforce centers provides "Career-College Exploration and Readiness" instruction to help challenged populations transition to postsecondary opportunities. The Director of Workforce Development and the Director of Workplace Literacy Programs, as well as in the Career Pathways Coordinator in the Workforce/Economic Development and Continuing Education Department share key management responsibility for Project GROW.

Project VIDA and Project ARRIBA

The Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (Project VIDA), serving the Cameron and the Lower Rio Grande WIBs, and Advanced Retraining & Redevelopment Initiative in Border Areas (Project ARRIBA) in the Upper Rio WIB, are the primary CBO partners. Both are highly successful workforce intermediary organizations that link motivated job seekers to training in well-paying, career pathways identified in cooperation with engaged employers whose human capital needs their efforts aim to satisfy. Projects VIDA and ARRIBA are "sister" organizations that provide educational, personal, and financial supports to economically disadvantaged adults to obtain postsecondary credentials (Occupational Certificates and licensing, Associate or Bachelor's degrees) and high wage jobs.

KEY INDUSTRY SECTORS AND TARGETED OCCUPATIONS

Based on local LMI analysis, supported by their Demand and Targeted Occupations Lists, the BWA WIBS identified key industries and occupations for Project GROW start-up. The WIBs selected five key, higher growth industry sectors across the border region for the Project GROW initial design: Healthcare, Construction, Distribution and Logistics, Transportation, and Manufacturing. Within these industries, project partners selected six demand occupations, four by each WIB. WIB partners intentionally tried to select common demand occupations to support relative program consistency across the region. Cameron, Lower Rio Grande, South Texas, and Middle Rio Grande selected the same four demand occupations for the early Project GROW training cohorts:

- Maintenance and Repair Workers/General (ONET Code: 49-9071)
- Medical Assistant (ONET Code: 31-9092)
- Truck Drivers, Heavy and Tractor-Trailer (ONET Code: 53-3032), and
- Emergency Medical Technicians and Paramedics (ONET Code: 29-2041).

Upper Rio also included Maintenance and Repair Workers/General, and Emergency Medical Technicians, but added:

- Medical Records & Health Information Techs (ONET Code: 29-2071), and
- Construction Carpenters (ONET Code: 47-2031)

PARTICIPATION CRITERIA

Eligibility Requirements

Project GROW participants must be 18 years of age or older and eligible or enrolled in WIA youth or adult or dislocated worker programs. Project GROW also anticipated enrolling TANF recipients who are co-enrolled in WIA programs and veterans who are a service priority for all of the WIBs. Additionally, a prospective participant must:

- Be U.S. citizen or eligible to work in the United States.
- Meet applicable Selective Service requirements.
- Commit to one of the four targeted occupations for their respective Workforce Area to obtain training and be considered suitable for such training
- Fit the criteria of the service cohort assignment process

Participant Cohorts

To promote differentiation and alignment of program model interventions with the needs of specific target populations, Project GROW has segmented the lower-skilled adult population into three major service cohorts, each comprising sub-populations, permitting the testing of various service delivery features. These groups of sub-populations by design are expected to form education and training cohorts for targeted occupations. Participants are assigned to cohorts based on their level of academic attainment and Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) scores. The TABE test is administered to all prospective participants at eligibility determination.[8] The criteria for triaging participant service cohorts are:

[8] Pre/post TABE test scores are also an outcome measure for Educational Learnings Gains, specific to Project GROW and not to be confused with Education Functional Learning (EFLs) levels, which are associated with WIA

- ***Cohort A: Adults with a GED or high school diploma with high school level TABE scores (all scores must be within between 9th & 12th grade score equivalencies), but not college ready.*** College readiness is determined by the postsecondary training provider using a recognized assessment tool.[9] Cohort A participants receive college readiness training that prepares them to enroll in regular postsecondary academic credit programs leading to a certificate or associate degree, while avoiding the need for developmental education that might slow or divert their career progressions.
- ***Cohort B: Out of school youth and adults without a GED or high school diploma, but with high school level TABE scores.*** Cohort B test scores must generally be within 9th & 12th grade score equivalencies, and participants participate in contextualized GED classes, while receiving occupational training.[10]
- ***Cohort C: Adults who do not have a GED or high school diploma, and score below high school level equivalencies***. At least one section of the Cohort C participant's TABE scores must fall within 6th & 8th grade score equivalency range, and all scores must be higher than a 6th grade-level equivalency. The design anticipates that the majority of Cohort C has limited English proficiency and requires ESL services as part of their contextualized adult basic literacy classes.[11] Project GROW expects that notable numbers of Cohort C participants will advance and successfully complete integrated GED/occupational training pathways available to Cohort B participants.[12] Adults in this cohort—lacking

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Out of School Youth (OSY) measures. TABE tests are among several federally-approved test to assess adult basic and ESL skills, and are the de facto standard tests in Texas.

[9] Community and technical colleges have historically used THEA, Accuplacer or Compass placement tests approved by the THECB as part of the Texas Success Initiative (TSI). In September 2013, technical and community colleges began to migrate to a statewide, standardized TSI Assessment (TSIA). Pre/post TSI-approved tests are required of all Cohort A participants. A failed pre-test is a requirement for Cohort A selection. Successful post-testing certifies college readiness and indicates that the individual is not required to attend developmental education classes, resulting in cost- and time-savings for the Project GROW participant. RMC will report score increases as an evaluation measure.

[10] Project GROW initial functional equivalencies called for 9th grade scores or better, but policy permits slightly lower scores to align and leverage similar postsecondary funding streams (e.g., Accelerate Texas and other Adult Basic Education – Innovation Grants.) and allow those conducting eligibility determination some flexibility based on their personal judgment of the prospective participant's willingness and ability to benefit from services.

[11] One strategy Project GROW intends to explore is the acquisition of a Spanish GED plus intensive English language development as an "on-ramp" into occupational training. For example, El Paso Community College has used this approach effectively to help English language learners access training and increase English skills.

[12] Those enrolled as Cohort C participants will remain so identified for evaluation purposes.

secondary equivalencies or exhibiting limited English proficiency—are not usually enrolled in staff-assisted, intensive, or training services under WIA. Since Project GROW requires WIA eligibility determination and program enrollment, this cohort represents opportunities for innovative but challenging service practices. Cohort C, as WIA Adult or Dislocated Worker participants, must attain a secondary academic or occupational credential for positive performance outcomes as required by these WIA programs. (WIA Youth retain the prospect of attaining Education Functional Learning increases as a positive performance outcome).

Table 2. Participation Targets by Cohort and Cohort Sub-Group

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2	C3	C4	Total
Cameron	30	30	30	15	15	15	0	0	135
Lower Rio	30	30	30	15	15	15	15	0	150
South Texas	0	30	15	30	0	0	15	30	120
Middle Rio	0	30	30	15	0	0	15	30	120
Upper Rio	0	45	15	30	15	15	15	0	135
BWA Total	60	165	120	105	45	45	60	60	660

Table 2 portrays the target number and distribution by WIB of subgroups within the major service cohorts in the Project GROW design. Cohort A is into divided into subgroups A1 and A2.[13] A1 includes individuals in Cameron and Lower Rio Grande WIB referred to VIDA for assessment and potential participation, via random assignment, in its Innovative Strategies for Increasing Self-sufficiency (ISIS) project, funded by the Administration for Children and Families office at the United States Department of Health and Human Services and the Open Society Foundation. Selected A1 participants were to receive VIDA case management, intensive supplemental instruction, support services, and enrollment in its

[13] In the original design, Cohort A was originally further divided into three subgroups. A2 and A3 were combined as the project design was refined and contracts negotiated prior to start-up, and only A1 has access to VIDA's College Prep Academy.

semester-long College Prep Academy prior to beginning occupational training at TSTC or STC.[14] A2 comprises persons scheduled to receive supplemental college readiness instruction and case management before entering occupational training in one of the key industry sectors; they are not referred to a CBO for more intensive case management and supportive services.

In the initial design, Cohort B originally comprised two subgroups: B1, out of school youth (OSY); and B2, adults. Both subgroups participate in integrated, contextualized GED preparation and occupational pathway training in an accelerated format that lead to both a high school credential and a post-secondary credential in 1-2 semester time frame. By June 2013, partners had decided to collapse these distinctions, noting the overlap between OSY and young adults obfuscated the practical difference in target groups. Project GROW originally anticipated that the two groups might be different based on their skill levels (perhaps favoring younger adults) and motivation and persistence skills (perhaps favoring older adults). Both subgroups also receive case management and support services.

All Cohort C participants receive contextualized bridge programs at basic adult literacy levels and support services. Cohort C also comprises subgroups that are differentiated by access to intensive case management (provided by VIDA and ARRIBA in their respective service areas) and by the provision (or not) of randomly assigned In-Home Learning System (IHLS) through Business Access to further accelerate their learning. Subgroups C1 and C2 receive intensive case management and supportive services; C1 also receives access to IHLS. Subgroups C3 and C4 receive standard WIA case management through the Career Center contractor—there is no CBO involved; C3 is assigned an IHLS, C4 is not.

[14] Those deemed eligible and not randomly assigned to ISIS are banned from receiving workforce services for two years.

ACADEMIC PREPARATION

College Readiness

Cohort A participants are enrolled in a college readiness academy or course that will prepare them to pass an accepted TSI assessment (such as Accuplacer, Compass, T-Comp, etc., prior to statewide standardized TSI testing in September 2013) without testing into developmental education and directly enter content and theory-based credit classes at the postsecondary level leading to an academic certificate or degree in one of the career pathways. College readiness fills the gap between the acquisition of a high school diploma or GED and the functional academic skills required for college-level studies.

The structure of college readiness varies distinctively in the Project GROW model across Cohort A subgroups and respective training providers. A1 participants from Cameron and Lower Rio Grande, who are determined eligible and selected to participate in ISIS, are to be enrolled in VIDA's College Prep Academy, a well-established program that provides 480 hours of instruction during a 16-week semester period. Students receive reading (120 hours instruction), writing (160 hours of instruction), and math (200 hours of instruction).

A2 participants in these two and the three other WIB areas receive similar instruction of lesser duration. For example, South Texas College has developed a 10-week course that provides students 320 hours of instruction: reading (80 hours instruction), writing (106 hours of instruction), and math (134 hours of instruction). Laredo Community College offered a more streamlined version of college readiness test preparations, comprised of 8 hours orientation to college followed by 36 hours of T-Comp preparation spread over a three-week period. Instructional details may vary, but all have pre/post TSI recognized tests, as well as practice tests to gauge student progress and adjust the learning plans, if necessary.

College readiness classes precede occupational skills training. Participants may receive a training credential based on continuing education units (CEUs) after the college readiness class and seek employment based on that credential. There is an expectation, but

no performance requirement, that the individual pass the exit TSI exam or enroll in an academic credit-based credentialing course.[15]

Contextualized or Bridge GED/ABE/ESL

Cohorts B and C are provided adult education classes infused with occupational content matter to increase the relevancy of the learning process to the participant's occupational interests, support their occupational skills and knowledge development, and to accelerate their advancement toward credentialing and career pathway employment entry. Cohort B integrated pathway preparation contains both the contextualized GED coursework, as well as occupational skills training leading to a certificate. The project design expects that almost all Cohort B participants will attain a GED during their enrollment. It also suggests that significant numbers of Cohort C participants will move from contextualized basic literacy/math levels and ESL into GED preparation classes available to Cohort B participants, and that many of these will also earn a GED. Project GROW's first enrolled Cohort C at South Texas College in the Lower Rio Grande WIB is also receiving training for Medical Receptionists credential in addition to their contextualized ABE/ESL.

In Home Learning System

Project GROW is demonstrating the effectiveness of providing an In-Home Learning System (IHLS) to randomly assigned subsets of Cohort C participants. IHLS is expected to support persistence, learning gains, and accelerated advancement through career pathway education and training. IHLS includes a laptop, wireless Internet access (filtered and restricted from international roaming), access to a full suite of online education and training resources, help-desk support, and a mentor. Business Access will distribute IHLS and

[15] TSI test scores, academic milestones, and credentials obtained are among the evaluation measures.

electronically track utilization. Business Access will also conduct customer satisfaction surveys with assigned participants.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SYSTEMS

Project GROW initiative is capturing program and participant data using three systems, two of which—The Workforce Information System of Texas (TWIST) and Work In Texas (WIT)—are operated by the Texas Workforce Commission. The third system is previously identified, customized data collection and project collaboration platform developed by Business Access, the ASPP. ASPP is a significant feature of Project GROW because it is the proposed nexus of real time exchanges between program partners at local and regional levels and is the database for unique data elements that are essential to the demonstration's program management and evaluation purposes.

ASPP records data using a proven web-based administration system created by BA for social service programs that has been adapted to track the participation, service delivery, costs, and outcomes of Project GROW. In addition to demographic information and assessment results, ASPP has the ability to capture service category, the funding source associated with the service, the provider, start date, completion date, follow-up milestones, results of follow-up, case notes, costs, and payment records. The system also has the ability to track key educational outputs and outcomes, such as course enrollment, course completion, grades awarded, key test scores, credentials awarded, etc. Whereas TWIST and WIT are the primary databases for management and performance measurement in the Texas workforce system,[16] the flexibility and customization of the ASPP position it as the more comprehensive database, to be supplemented, as needed, by TWIST and WIT for evaluation purposes. ASPP supports program and participant progress to be monitored real-time throughout the duration of the demonstration.

[16] For evaluation purposes, the Ray Marshall Center is supplementing these databases with others such as longitudinal UI wage and claims records from the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), and TANF, Medicaid and related participation data from the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC).

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

Project GROW is modeled to work closely with the employers in prominent regional and growth industries with expected high demand in targeted occupations. Project GROW aims to recruit, maintain, and strengthen relations with business in key industry sectors, significantly so through industry cluster associations.

Workforce and postsecondary providers are entwined with both private and public sector business interests. WIBs are based on a private sector leadership model, and WIB administrative offices and Career Center operators' house personnel known as Business Service Representatives (BSRs) in primarily Wagner-Peyser funded Business Services units. Employers are a major customer of workforce services, particularly labor exchange, job development, and job placement services. Texas WIBs are subject to state business service measures regarding job orders, placements, and employer services units.

Community and technical colleges also have structured business relations through departmental and program advisory committees of private sector and community representatives, and increasingly so through career development and placement offices, as postsecondary institutions become more focused on completion rates and employment success of their graduates. These providers are also keen to business interests by association through customized training services and continuing education courses that serve employer/employee workplace needs. WIBs and postsecondary institutions are both major players in local and regional economic development activities.

Project GROW builds upon these workforce and postsecondary efforts. Key areas of interest to strengthen employer engagement include the number of employers involved and the industries/occupations they represent; the introduction or expansion of the industry sector approach to workforce and economic development; and the extent to which employers participate in curriculum development and review to assure responsiveness to industry standards and practices, as well as employer skills and competencies; and the direct participation of employers as supplemental instructors, sources of referrals to services and support of incumbent workers, and placement prospects for training

participants–including internships/clinicals, work experience, and employment—pursuant to career pathways.

GAUGING SUCCESS

Workforce Performance Measures

Project GROW focuses on a short list of education, training, and employment performance measures similar to current state and federal workforce measures, as well as a single employer engagement measure. Except for the latter, standards (target number and shares) are based on recent year outcomes, but have been adjusted to reflect somewhat stronger outcomes expected from the Project GROW interventions, as well as the total operational resource allocation and program size of each WIB. In the areas of education and training, Project GROW planned to help 330 participants— half of those 660 to be enrolled—to successfully *attain GEDs*, 502 to receive *occupational credentials in the targeted industry sector*, and 528 to achieve educational learning gains. WIBS planned to facilitate 462 successful job placements, and that across all participants, 479 would be retained in employment for 60 days.[17] The design also required the WIBs to build-in partnerships with at least 60 engaged employers, twelve from each WIB.

Table 3. Workforce Performance Targets

Outcome Measure	Cameron	Lower Rio Grande	Middle Rio Grande	South Texas	Upper Rio	BWA Total
GED	54	68	68	68	45	330
Occupational Credentials	103	114	91	91	103	502
Retained Employment	98	109	87	87	98	479
Achieving Educational Learning gains	108	120	96	96	108	528
Placed in Employment	94	105	84	84	95	462
Employer Engagement	12	12	12	12	12	60

[17] BWA has sought USDOL permission to adjust the employment retention standard, since a technical error has set the retention higher than employment entry. There is concern about revisiting the GED target as well.

Evaluation Measures

In conjunction with its performance measures, Project GROW has an array of evaluation measures that provide a more refined perspective on the Project's accomplishments. These include education, employment, systems change, and employer engagement measures. These measures are informed by administrative databases, internal performance and management reports, and on-site observations of program practices.

Education measures track accomplishments related to the academic advancement and occupational learning gains of program participants and include:

- The number of GEDs or high school diplomas earned attributed to Project GROW, as well as the number of college readiness completers.
- Pre-enrollment and post-exit reading, math computation, applied math, and language scores, as well as ESL scores, as indicated by the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) for assessing adult basic and ESL skills.
- For Cohort A students enrolled in college readiness, pre/post scores in the new Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA) tests or other TSI-approved instrument will be reported for purposes of measuring college readiness gains attributed to Project GROW.
- Retention patterns after enrollment in educational track (college readiness, adult basic education/GED or ESL classes) and postsecondary career pathway education and training coursework.
- Number of completed career pathways courses per participant and all participants.
- Credit completion milestones in academic postsecondary career pathway (6, 11, 15, and 30 semester credit hours).
- Total academic credits (and/or continuing education contact hours) earned by participant.
- The number of awarded postsecondary credentials through either regular academic or continuing education course participation.
- Name and type of credential (e.g., marketable skills award, certificate or degree) awarded to participants.

Employment measures provide a foundation for describing Project GROW's participant earnings and socioeconomic outcomes, as well as data for net impact analysis and benefits/costs estimation. These include measures such as:

- The number of individuals exiting Project GROW to employment entry in their targeted occupational field and growth industry sector.
- Hourly wage or salary and hours worked at placement and during subsequent follow-up contacts.
- Quarterly employment retention and earnings from placement date through the end of the evaluation period.
- UI eligibility status as a function of employment and earnings.
- Eligibility status and receipt of TANF or SNAP benefits.
- Taxes paid resulting from earnings and employment.

Systems change measures indicate the growth and development of demonstration features within and across operational partners that support sustainability after the evaluation period. Researchers have identified several measures of regional, systemic capacity-building, including:

- Growth in the number of active participants and increased access to a larger number of promising career pathways programs.
- Changes in total program funding amounts and sources of direct and leveraged funding committed to Project GROW across the border region.
- Institution-level (WIBs, community and technical colleges, and community-based organizations) changes in policies and practices to strengthen and sustain demonstration features throughout the region.
- Improvement in WIB-level and regional partnership's ability to collect and share detailed administrative data, particularly the ASPP database for program and performance management.
- Adoption and ongoing refinement of contractual and operational agreements to improve and sustain demonstration features.

- Expansion, improved coordination, and timeliness of support services offered by partners to support client persistence and completion of career pathway service plan.
- Use and alignment of industry-approved technical skill assessments with training curricula.
- Changes in the number of entries and job placement rates of participants in their chosen occupational area.

Employer engagement is an essential component of the accelerated career pathway model, and pertinent measures are critical indicators of ongoing progress and prospects for sustainability of Project GROW features. Adopted measures are more amenable to qualitative research than the preceding measures, many of which are informed through administrative data sets. All are supplemented by field assessments. Aspects of employer engagement to be measured include:

- Changes in the number and depth of involvement by participating employers and employer associations or industry clusters in the targeted industry sectors.
- Initial and progressive levels of employer contributions to curriculum development and adjustments to industry standards and practices, as well as employer needs.
- Initial and progressive levels of employer engagement in Project GROW as indicated by incumbent worker referrals to the program, and payment or reimbursement of postsecondary tuition for career progression.
- Incremental use of employer subject matter experts as program instructors in direct training or academic bridge classes.
- Changes in the number of employers actively providing advocacy for Project GROW and marketing the program.
- Changes in observed types and levels of employer willingness to “screen-in”, interview, or hire program graduates

PROJECT GROW: IMPLEMENTATION ANALYSIS

INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION OVERVIEW

The implementation analysis for the Interim Report assesses Project GROW as it progressed from the planning and design stage into the initial operational phase, a time frame broadly encompassing the period of August 2012 thru December 2013. Actual enrollments began in February 2013, and this section presents operations and preliminary outcomes since, including readiness and ramp-up activities; contextual descriptions of partners and service areas; and procedures related to the client flow from outreach and intake through employment entry, noting the adjustments that emerged from experience, as well as the variability across WIB areas and partners.

The formation of eligible service cohorts aligned in a timely manner with prospective client interests/availability and the academic and occupational training offered is arguably the most significant challenge face to date. Despite considerable and strategically varied outreach and intake efforts across areas, enrollments have proceeded at a slower pace than anticipated. Several factors account for this, including prospective participants self-selecting out for personal reasons (e.g., not available or able to commit for duration of training, or disinterest in academic or training services currently offered) and significant numbers testing outside of TABE test ranges for cohort and career pathway being recruited.

Additionally, the capacity and experience structuring and operating a career pathway programs varied considerably at start-up among the WIBs, Career Center contractors, and training providers in the border region. While the concept and practice of accelerated credentialing for demand occupations in stable and growth industries was commonplace, Project GROW's comprehensive strategic approach further challenged every area to attain measurable advances in academic preparation (college readiness, contextualized GED prep and bridge ABE/ESL, as well as IHLS); develop or adapt college-level training curricula and articulate workforce/continuing education units with regular academic credits; introduce a new tool for shared services delivery, as well as program performance management and evaluation (ASPP); deepen the engagement of employers with the workforce development system, particularly through industry sector approaches.

Moreover, Project GROW aims to shape these emergent practices into a sustainable, systemic regional model that may inform programs and policies elsewhere in Texas and the nation. The BWA partners—with guidance from Jobs for the Future—continue to refine and improve their approaches to these important demonstration features.

Preliminary analysis of the available data suggests that participation rates and outcomes are less robust than original intended through the initial implementation phase. More than 2600 individuals have expressed interest and preliminarily registered in Project GROW, and partners have enrolled 144 of the 660 target participant total through December 2013. Most of these have been younger Hispanic, single women, many of whom are the first generation in their families to access postsecondary education. Project GROW has helped 33 participants to obtain a GED and 28 to receive an occupational credential. At this initial phase, retention, completion, program exits, and employment entry rates are promising for those enrolled and expected to increase as outreach efforts and enrollment rates continue to improve. Through December 2013, the Project GROW claims five employment entries for those who have completed training, received their credential, and gone to work in their area of training. Fieldwork revealed that a few more were ready to enter employment but were delayed due to additional requirements, such as medical screens or licensure requirements. Staff also reported instances where those exiting are interested in continuing training in their career pathway, temporarily self-selecting to defer employment.

The BWA WIBs and partners remain keen to the challenge ahead for the remaining 21-months of operations and are intent on ramping up enrollments to meet performance expectations. The remainder of this section provides details regarding the early progress of Project GROW.

EVALUABILITY ASSESSMENT

As suggested by Abt Associates, the National Evaluation Coordinator, RMC conducted an evaluability assessment prior to initiating fieldwork for the Implementation Analysis. RMC scheduled baseline fieldwork in the May-June 2013 time frame, having

deemed in consultation with administrators/management that Project GROW's design features and service delivery configurations had been satisfactorily consolidated to enter the initial implementation phase, and that the following had been sufficiently achieved, though to variant extents within the WIB areas. These included:

- Partner convening and engagement activities had occurred to suggest that the purpose and goals may be clearly understood and supported by managers and staff of partnering entities;
- Training provider services had been procured by each WIB;
- Staff roles and responsibilities determined;
- Staff initial training completed;
- Employer engagement activities initiated;
- ASPP project database attained basic functionality;
- The structures and processes for enrolling and serving participants in place; and,
- Client intake, enrollment and service provision had begun.

Although each WIB area generally met these conditions, ongoing contracting negotiations, scheduling cohort training, refining staff responsibilities, and other implementation factors associated with internal capacity contributed to inter-site variance. Because of this variance, researchers schedule additional site visits in the fall of 2013, permitting WIBs additional time to further refine and consolidate their partnership, service delivery, and management practices. Researchers conducted follow-up implementation site visits late October through early December 2013. This section presents implementation experiences and observations based on these two rounds of site visits, supplemented by data compiled in Monthly Participation Reports and data extracted from the ASPP system through December 31, 2013.

RAMP-UP ACTIVITIES

The Project GROW administrative personnel at the Lower Rio Grande WIB initiated preparatory action for implementation upon notification of the WIF Grant award. Among the early activities, Lower Rio Grande:

- Executed contracts with the participating WIBs, Business Access for the IHLS and ASPP database, and JFF;[18]
- Encouraged partner participation in Webinar Technical Advisory Panel Workshops conducted by the National Evaluation Contractor (NEC), Abt and Associates, as well as those technical assistance and training provided by JFF;
- Issued policy guidance notes and developed a manual for Standard Operating Procedures;
- Issued a template and guidance for training provider procurement; and
- Held teleconferences with project leadership across the region, leading to the formulation of functional area committees that meet regularly, including the Project GROW Partners Committee, an Employer Engagement Committee, and an Evaluation Advisory Committee.

Upon notice of award, Lower Rio Grande and partners, including JFF, convened to lay the groundwork for the above activities. These efforts culminated in the aforementioned Project GROW "operations" kick-off meeting held in McAllen, Texas in late January 2013. Since then the Project Coordinator, Grants Specialist, Financial Administrator, and other technical staff have had regular contact with key and parallel staff of the local partnership configurations to address policy concerns, trouble-shoot areas of challenge, and develop consistent, effective service delivery, management, and reporting practices, both through the committees structure and regular, weekly check-in calls. Additionally, the Lower Rio Grande led the development of the Project GROW website with Business Access and the WIBs, as a key marketing tool, basic information source, and initial

[18] JFF subcontracted with RMC for evaluation services.

point of client contact. (http://bwapg.org/grow). The Project Coordinator places Project GROW planning and policy documents, service forms, meeting notes, technical assistance guidance, and other project-related documents on cloud-based BaseCamp, a common location for convenient access by all partners in support of regional systemic development of the demonstration's model. JFF has continuously offered capacity-building Webinars, coaching, and other supports, as identified necessary by WIBs and partners. These often reinforce and adapt practices presented by the NEC to the border contexts.

PARTNERSHIPS AND PROCUREMENT

Under the umbrella of the BWA, WIB-based partnerships for the WIF Grant began to develop from the onset of the proposal. The Workforce Solutions/Career Center contractors in each WIB area already had an existing connection with the local community and/or technical colleges as a substantial training provider, and the postsecondary institutions and WIBs shared common interest in the target population, improved services, and stronger outcomes envisioned for Project GROW. WIB/community-based partnerships were also in place. VIDA was already an engrained partner with Lower Rio Grande and Cameron WIBs, as well as Texas State Technical College and South Texas College. VIDA's sister program, Project ARRIBA in El Paso, had an incipient partnership with the Upper Rio Grande. Key representatives from business and industry signed on with letters of support for the Project's goals and objectives. There was overall regional "buy-in" to the demonstration. However, operationalizing the initial commitment required aligning services, resources, and practice across partners and specifying roles and responsibilities to the extent possible under contracts for services between WIBs and training providers.

Procurement and contract negotiations for training providers absorbed more time than anticipated and pushed back the January 1 target launch date. Using a common template of detailed program services and performance expectations (*Project GROW Accelerated ESL/GED and Occupational Training Services*); adjusted by each WIB to area specifications, WIBs issued the first round of Requests for Applications (RFA) from training providers in early October 2012. By the November due dates three of the five WIBs had

received responses. In the other areas, responses were slower. For example, Upper Rio Grande received one application deemed "non-responsive" and re-opened applications, resulting in a reset of the enrollment start date until April.

Lower Rio Grande represents the more streamlined procurement experience. In that area, South Texas College submitted a proposal in early November; contract negotiations proceeded through January, culminating in a signed agreement by the end of the month. This area began enrolling clients in February. Yet, the agreement was subject to further amendment in May, as expected leveraged funds from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to the college for adult basic education, were disallowed by the THECB due to incompatibility of eligibility requirements between Project GROW and the funding stream, the Accelerate Texas grant.[19]

Cameron encountered unanticipated procurement constraints as the intended collaboration between Texas Southmost College and TSTC failed to materialize.[20] Cameron eventual procured a service agreement with TSTC in late April, resulting in delayed implementation in that area. As of the October 2013 site visit, Cameron and Project VIDA had not yet signed an MOU for services due to ongoing negotiations about recruiting and serving Cohort A1. Furthermore, Cameron and TSTC were probing alternate funding mechanisms to establish a cost-effective training price based on a minimum number of students enrolled in training. This suggests a possible movement away from the originally negotiated 8-10 minimum participants per cohort, raising the need for the Career Center operator to seek clarification from the Cameron Board, and to modify payment procedures specified in the current contract. Additionally, low enrollments are challenging cohort

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[19] Accelerate Texas funds, which provide similar services for students with 6th through 8th grade proficiencies, could not be applied to contextualized GED classes for Cohort B participants because the eligibility (9th grade) floor was higher than that allowed for Accelerate Texas

[20] Texas Southmost College (TSC) in Brownsville, Cameron County, had originally anticipated a role as training provider also, but withdrew from the emergent service delivery configuration due to administrative restructuring of the college as a separate entity from The University of Texas-Brownsville. In March, 2011, the Texas Southmost College District Board of Trustees voted to withdraw TSC from the 20-year partnership agreement entered in 1991. The dissolution of the partnership and reorganization hampered partnership development and contract negotiations for Project GROW. The Cameron WIB looks forward to future training enrollments at the College.

formation in other WIB areas also. Partners are leaning more towards "mainstreaming" individual or small numbers of participants in regularly offered training classes and "braiding" clients and funding streams at the community and technical colleges. Each area will likely revisit service contracts driven by concerns for meeting performance expectations, modifications in the cohort model, and less than planned enrollments and referrals to training.

CLIENT FLOW

Client flow in Project GROW consists of:

- Outreach and orientation strategies to instigate prospective interest and provide basic information about Project GROW;
- Intake encompassing preliminary registration, follow-up, and pre-screening of prospective participants;
- Eligibility determination based on TABE scores, WIA eligibility, suitability of training, and other requirements;
- Case management to develop and monitor service plan, address support service's needs and aid persistence, and completion of the training;
- Job readiness, job search, and job development assistance to assure job entry; and
- Follow-up services to support job retention and advancement in a career pathway.

Outreach and Orientation

Project GROW partners have to date assigned significant time and effort to a broad array of outreach practices and strategies. The most common forms of outreach are through information sessions at WIA and workforce center orientations; posters and flyers at Workforce Solutions Centers and training provider campuses; and the Project GROW

website.[21] (A few offices use the website as the computer screensaver in their Career Center resource areas.) Other common outreach practices consist of Public Service Announcements (PSAs) and presentations at local ISDs, high schools, dropout recovery/alternative schools, and adult education centers, as well as at community-based organizations. One Workforce Center advertised Project GROW opportunities on its electronic banner fronting the parking lot. Some WIB areas are using Twitter and Facebook to reach potential clients. "Success stories" of graduates are featured on the Project GROW website.

In addition to add-on information sessions at ongoing workforce orientations, WIBs have also offered "stand alone" Project GROW orientations as part of their outreach and recruitment efforts. These orientations have been linked to various outreach strategies distinguished by combinations of geography/location, occupations/career pathways, and cohort target groups. Outreach strategies have included a more generalized "blanket outreach" within the active service catchment[22], aimed at attracting a broad response from individuals who are interested in any of the selected trainings. More commonly, outreach has been targeted to specific occupations and/or cohorts for which training is available.

Those who "show" are pre-screened and may advance through eligibility and enrollment. The eventual "shake out" determines which cohorts and trainings have sufficient numbers to be initiated. Low outreach responses, misalignment of client interests and availability, and low eligibility rates by cohorts have constrained the effectiveness of the process. It is difficult to schedule or fill training slots and to coordinate training starts in response to sufficient recruits.

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[21] In addition to the informative value of the Project GROW website, each WIB is encouraged to predominantly display Project GROW on its own website homepage. A recent review of homepage presence found that one WIB does so; another includes it as part of a streaming banner; and one has an easy to find link. Project GROW has no readily visible presence on two WIB websites.

[22] Partners may or may not offer complete geographic coverage for Project GROW within their area as a result of population density and spatial coverage. For example, one-county, Cameron WIB has comprehensive coverage, whereas six-county, Upper Rio Grande offers Project GROW only in El Paso County and only in the City of El Paso, where nearly the entire population resides. Similarly, South Texas is concentrated in Laredo, Webb County. WIBs additionally may have concentrated Project GROW services in select offices for initial start-up, before expanding to additional offices in the catchment area.

As an illustration of these recruitment challenges, the Middle Rio Grande WIB and SWTJC agreed to initial cohort training for Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) and Clinical Medical Assistant (CMA) occupations. Multi-method outreach (orientations, community events, Website, electronic banner, etc.) produced 140 individuals who expressed interest, but only 45 recruits attended one of the three scheduled full day orientations/intake events.[23] Due to eligibility requirements and client interests, these considerable efforts yielded 16 enrollments: one individual for Cohort A EMT training, 11 Cohort A for CMA training, and 5 Cohort B for CMA training. As another example, Cameron's Workforce Solutions attempted to enroll Cohort C participants from among 54 adult basic education students with limited English proficiency, nearly one-third of whom were foreign born. All of the prospective participants scored below the 6th grade equivalence in at least one of the TABE sections. Unable to meet this minimum requirement, none were eligible for Project GROW.

In-reach to current WIA, TANF Choices, and Veterans Services caseloads has also been attempted to some extent with limited success. A few current TANF and WIA participants have been successfully enrolled, but the numbers are less than expected from these sources.[24] El Paso rolled a group of WIA Out of School Youth (OSY) into a Construction Pathway for Cohort B. In an effort to recruit Cohort A prospects, one postsecondary training provider produced a contacts list for Career Center staff recruitment of recent students who had failed the college placement tests and had been referred to Developmental Education but did not enroll or withdrew. Reportedly, client contact information was frequently invalid or clients were not interested in Project GROW.

[23] Middle Rio Grande initially compressed the orientation/intake process into a full-day event, concluding with case staffing of WIB, Career Center, and SWTJC continuing and adult education personnel to reach consensus on enrollment decisions of those eligible.

[24] TANF recipients may have to fulfill their more stringent program requirements in the Texas "Choices" program, in additional to the education and training hours commitments of Project GROW.

Intake and Registration

Web-registration and Public Access Queue. Preliminary intake often begins with self-registrations on the Project GROW website. Individuals may find the website on their own or through outreach media, and are regularly directed to go there and do so at group orientations; by the front-end, Wagner-Peyser Employment Services staff at the Career Center; and by instructors, counselors, and other personnel of the training providers. Individuals interested in Project GROW's training opportunities pre-intake register by providing basic personal and contact information on the limited intake form found there. Submission of contact information places persons in a Public Access Queue, from which prospective clients are drawn for staff follow-up.

Business Access designed the Public Access Queue to "push" clients through to formal intake. Residential contact information is geocoded to the county and WIB area, and the Project Coordinator "cleans" the queue weekly by sorting and assigning clients to their respective WIB area. Designated staff at the WIB or Career Center can pull down the names list in the Queue and, by selecting a name, auto-populate the respective fields in the ASPP database. As designed, this enables local staff to contact the person, pre-screen for eligibility, and possibly refer the person to a group orientation, directly to a formal individual intake appointment, or to a consultation with a WIA Career Counselor/Case Manager.

Project GROW regularly reports initial registrants in the "ASPP Data Entry" count in the Monthly Participation Report (MPR), a management report prepared by the Project Coordinator once the case is opened in ASPP by the designated local staff. In addition to those who independently self-registered on the Project GROW website, this count includes walk-ins, internal referrals at the Workforce Center, and referrals from the training providers or others who have provided limited information and whose cases have been opened in ASPP. This pool is available for pre-eligibility screening and eligibility determination upon passing the screen.

Currently there is no mechanism to determine the time lapse between self-initiated, preliminary registration and staff follow-up for pre-screening and possible intake. Initial

registration is recorded by date when the applicant is opened locally on ASPP by assigned staff. Since one of the stated objectives of the Project GROW is to expand opportunity for those individuals who are often less well served by traditional workforce offerings, rapid, timely response to the prospective client's expression of interests is important. The length of time between self-registration and follow-up could serve as a program efficiency indicator.

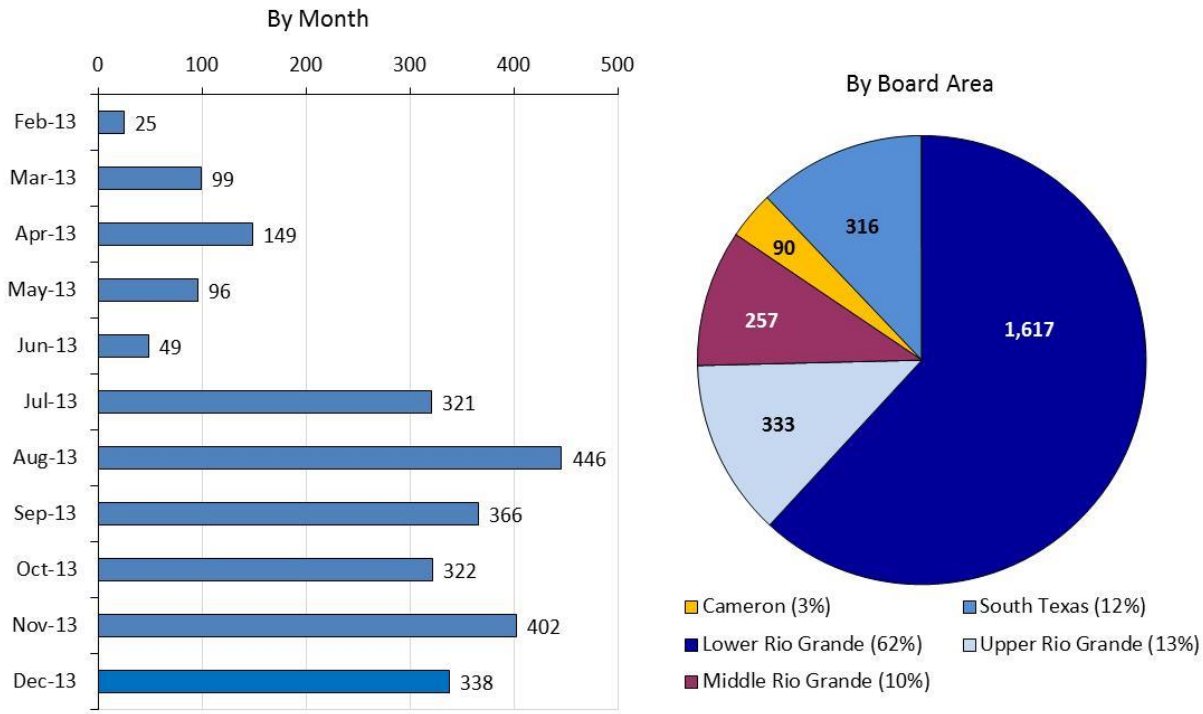
Follow-up and registration in the ASPP system is also important for evaluation purposes. There are two separate stages early in client flow where those interested may drop off. The evaluation design calls for collecting individual demographic information from prospective participants and the reasons they decide not to pursue enrollment beyond the initial eligibility screen, as well as the reasons that those who do continue through eligibility are determined ineligible or choose not to enroll. Regarding those who drop out at the screening stage, it has been anticipated that—given the potentially brief contact between the individual and follow-up staff—there is limited opportunity to collect additional demographic and other information regarding their reasons for non-participation. Discussions and data analysis indicate that very little data has been collected at this first stage. Yet analysts have found that many relevant data fields are vacant for those who have completed eligibility determination. Project GROW staff are committed to accurately entering this data.

Registrations to Date. Case activations or registrations in Project GROW in which a prospective client is moved from the Queue and opened in ASPP indicate that some form of direct client contact has been attempted or occurred. Data entry into the ASPP system through December 2013 indicates that registration for Project GROW began in February 2013 with monthly recruitment ranging from a low of 25 registrants in that month to a high of 446 registrants in August 2013.[25]

[25] Data from the ASPP system was exported to the Ray Marshall Center in early January to capture all participant data from the start of the project to December 31, 2013. The data was cleaned and analyzed using STATA software for the charts and discussions herein. Additional charts and discussion are drawn from the published MPRs. There are minor numerical differences in a few counts based on different processing methods.

Figure 2. Registrations in Project GROW

(N=2,613)



Case registration by board area across the early implementation period varies considerably, ranging from a high of 1,617 in the Lower Rio Grande to a low of 90 in Cameron. (Figure 2) This large variation and lower registration numbers through June are due to a number of inter-related factors:

- Varying capacity at start and ramp-up related to contract negotiations, pathway and bridge curriculum development, coordinating training schedules, and local knowledge and experience with demonstration features and practices.
- Variance in the structured responsibility and effort for follow-up with interested individuals between sites.
- Differences in the number, type, and success of outreach and recruitment methods across sites.
- Failure to accurately capture pre-registration of interested individual in the ASPP system due to error, oversight, or underutilization of the ASPP system.

WIBs and Career Centers have also structured administrative responsibility for follow-up and full registrations differently, dependent upon local discretion. For descriptive purposes, three general structures can be identified:

1. Single point of contact (SPOC) model wherein a dedicated career counselor/case manager serves as the WIB area specialist for Project GROW;

2. Modified SPOC model in which a dedicated career counselor/case manager in the WIA unit at the Career Center serves as the Project GROW intake specialist for that specific office; and a

3. Diffused model in which intake may be conducted by one of a number of career counselor/case managers within the WIA unit at the Career Center.

Lower Rio Grande represents the SPOC model. The WIB and C2GPS, the local workforce contractor, assigned a dedicated career counselor, housed at the WIB office, to follow-up on self-registrants and referrals, guide the eligibility process, and provide ongoing case management to those enrolled. As the number of participants has grown, the SPOC has been transferring case management responsibilities to career counselors at the three workforce centers serving Project GROW in the WIB area. The SPOC retains the lead responsibility for registration and partner relations, working closely with the C2GPS Program Manager and frontline staff at the Career Centers.

Cameron most closely represents the diffused model, having decided that Project GROW funds are insufficient to dedicate a full-time staff assignment and that clients are better served when "mainstreamed" with WIA clients in the Career Centers. Individuals in the Queue are assigned to career counselors in the Career Centers for intake processing. Southwest Keys and the Cameron WIB require that prospective demonstration participants must not only be WIA eligible, but also complete the WIA service sequence of core and intensive services prior to an offering of one of Project GROW's pathway trainings.

The remaining three WIBs and their contractors originally followed a modified SPOC model; Upper Rio Grande and South Texas have since moved toward the more unified SPOC approach. In October, Upper Rio Grande brought on an intern to follow-up and pre-screen

self-registrants, referring promising prospects to one of the career counselors at the three El Paso offices. Originally, a single career counselor with a full WIA caseload had responsibility for follow-up, registration, pre-screening, and case management at the single office serving Project GROW at start-up. South Texas re-bid their workforce services this past year and awarded the contract to C2GPS and is presently implementing the SPOC model adopted in Lower Rio Grande. Middle Rio Grande and MGRDC assigned a Project GROW lead in each of the three Project GROW offices, supported by a high level of coordination of WIB, contractor, and training provider personnel.

Eligibility Determination

Project GROW eligibility determination is a multi-step process that involves meeting demonstration-specific criteria related to target population and cohort assignment (age, education attainment, TABE scores, TSI scores, etc.) and WIA eligibility requirements.[26] Service flow required melding WIA procedures and Project GROW procedures in a seamless manner. After positive pre-screening, the staff person assigned to Project GROW intake guides the eligibility process through enrollment. Regular eligibility specialists determine that WIA requirements are met according to standard procedures and case managers assure that adequate occupational and aptitude assessment tools (AVIATOR, Cops/CAPS, etc.) verify the suitability of training for the WIA participant.

Although these practices are standard, frontline staff occasionally reported reluctance to *determine eligibility and enroll prospective Project GROW participants in WIA* when the cohort training they seek is not scheduled to start or recruiting the minimum cohort size (established by the training provider) is unlikely. Eligibility and other staff are concerned that the 45-day window for initiating WIA services will expire prior to the desired

[26] To a much lesser extent, but nonetheless a consideration, individuals may have to meet the readiness standards of continuing or regular academic classes for entry into a mainstream curricula at the college. For example, a Cohort A or B participant may be required to have a 10th grade equivalency in Math on the TABE to qualify for health or technology courses in which they are braided with other students. Although under the terms of their agreements colleges have developed or are developing suitable curricula for the target group and cohorts, situational constraints may also occur that need to be addressed.

training start and eligibility will lapse. WIA trainings must begin within this period or eligibility must be re-determined, requiring additional time and effort from the eligibility specialist, the WIA case manager, and the client.

Project GROW required developing and introducing new practices for integrating adult education and TSI assessment test scores into the eligibility process, and WIBs have approached testing and information sharing in several ways. TABE test scores that fall within the specified range are a primary requirement for Project GROW eligibility and cohort assignment. As noted earlier, new college readiness standards and assessments, though not fully implemented yet, are being codified under TSI, and responsibility for Adult Education programs has transferred to the Texas Workforce Commission. For adult education assessment, Project GROW requires that TABE pre/post testing methods be consistent within the WIB area, but not across all participating WIBs. As a result:

- In four of the five WIBs, the test is administered prior to determining WIA eligibility; only Cameron determines WIA eligibility prior to TABE testing.
- The location of the testing varies between WIBs. The TABE test is administered either at the Career Center or at the college assessment center, and at both in at least one instance.[27]
- State workforce and project policy do not yet specify procedures and permits WIBs to use different versions of the test (Locator, Survey, and Battery) and testing/scoring methods (computer or paper versions).[28]
- Project GROW also does not specify which entity or funding source pays for the TABE test. Currently funding may be provided from Wagner-Peyser, WIA, adult

[27] Under adult education program requirements, pre/post testing of learning gains must be consistent. In this instance, South Texas and Laredo Community College are using different versions of TABE. Post-testing is the responsibility of the training provider in Project GROW, and if pre-testing at the Career Center is inconsistent with that test, the ABE provider must retest at baseline using their preferred version and method.

[28] On September 1, 2013, responsibility for adult education programs was transferred from the Texas Education Agency to the Texas Workforce Commission. While still in transition, it is anticipated that more statewide consistency is forthcoming.

education, or postsecondary sources. There is no standard practice for payment across WIBs, streamlining access to tests, and sharing test scores.[29]

TABE test scores within specified ranges have proven to be a major eligibility challenge to cohort assignment and enrolling training cohorts. With few exceptions—for example, Cohort C Training for Medical Receptionists in Lower Rio Grande and Cohort A Training for Medical Office Assistants in Middle Rio Grande—discussions with partners emphatically reveal that TABE scores outside of specified ranges have hampered enrollments and training starts. WIBs report instances where Cohort B recruits for a scheduled training test out as Cohort C and Cohort C recruits test below the 6th grade level. TSI scores affect entry as well. In Cameron, 6 of 9 recruits for Cohort A EMT pathway were determined ineligible because they had passed college readiness assessment test or had prior training in the occupational field. As a result of these challenges, WIBs and training providers discussed changing the skill level range assumptions for each cohort. After much discussion, the Project GROW partners decided to maintain the present criteria.

Project GROW's original design called for training cohorts to be in the 12-15 student range, and sites have rarely been able to attain this number to schedule and begin the career pathway sequence, resulting in starting with a smaller class size or postponing training starts. The cohort training approach has not yet met expectations, and several sites have move to enrolling very numerically small cohorts or even single individuals in order to initiate training. Again, it is anticipated that the "mainstreaming" of individual or small cohort participants and the "braiding" of clients and funds at the training site will expand as the demonstration progresses.

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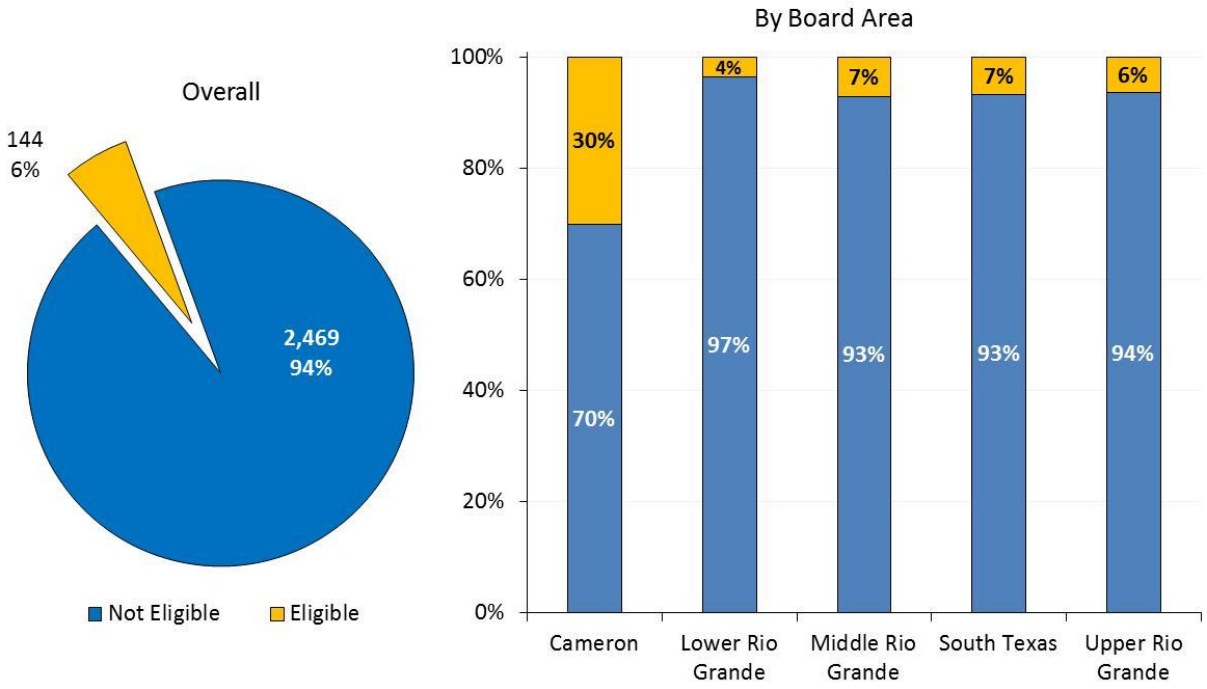
[29] Although ASPP is structured to share test scores and other client information, its use had not been evenly adopted within and across all sites—particularly for sharing test scores and information between the Career Center and postsecondary staff. Who delivers and pays for TABE tests is a result of alignment process that Boards and their providers have undergone, and the flexibility they have to identify the approach that works best for them. The ongoing negotiations and inconsistencies suggest that In terms of systemic regional development and a service model that can be replicated, Project GROW might advance a best practice I this area that may be adopted by the new adult education division at TWC.

Eligibility Patterns. Figure 3 indicates a large drop-off rate from initial ASPP data entry to eligibility determination; the share of registrants in ASPP that are determined eligible is small. In total, 2,613 Project GROW registrants were found in the ASPP system thru December 31, 2013. Of these, 144 individuals (6%) were eventually approved as eligible for Project GROW. Eligibility approval rates are highest for Cameron (30%), lowest for Lower Rio Grande (4%), and similar for Middle Rio, Upper Rio, and South Texas (7%, 6% and 7% respectively). Given that Cameron requires completion of WIA service sequencing prior to Project GROW eligibility determination, the higher rate is expected. Lower Rio Grande has a very aggressive outreach effort and has been most effective in opening cases in the ASPP, outpacing the other WIBs in terms of client volume.

Figure 3. Eligibility Approvals for Project GROW
(N=2,613)



From the point of full registration in the ASPP data entry count, the average time taken to make an eligibility decision is 27 days, with a range of 0 to 196 days. The eligibility decision was made on the same day as registration for 60 individuals, well over 40 percent

of those determined to be eligible. Same day registration/eligibility determination may be attributed to Cameron's preference for WIA sequencing, Middle Rio's initial practice of full-day eligibility workshops, and successful in-reach to current caseloads. The high end of the range may be attributable to generalized outreach and staff follow-up where the local area drew from a pool of those interested when the appropriate cohort and training were ready to start outreach.[30] WIA regulations require that client services must be initiated within 45 days of eligibility; as such WIBS are generally reluctant to complete eligibility unless the Project GROW training is scheduled in the very proximate future.[31]

Among the other 2,469 individuals in the ASPP database, only 77 (3 percent) were recorded as being 'ineligible' for Project GROW. The eligibility field is missing for the remaining 2,392 individuals (97%) individuals, suggesting that the remaining were interested in GROW but did not advance through the eligibility sequence, pre-screened out, or were never contacted and drifted away from Project GROW. For the 77 individuals who advanced through the intake process and were recorded as 'ineligible' for Project GROW, the non-eligibility reason is unknown for 62 (81 percent) of these individuals.[32] This is a significant data gap. For the other 15 individuals:

- Three (4 percent) were ineligible because of a low TABE scores;
- Eleven (14 percent) were ineligible because of an incomplete application; and
- One was ineligible because they were not available for class times.

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[30] As the ASPP data set matures, analysts will more closely investigate these observations.

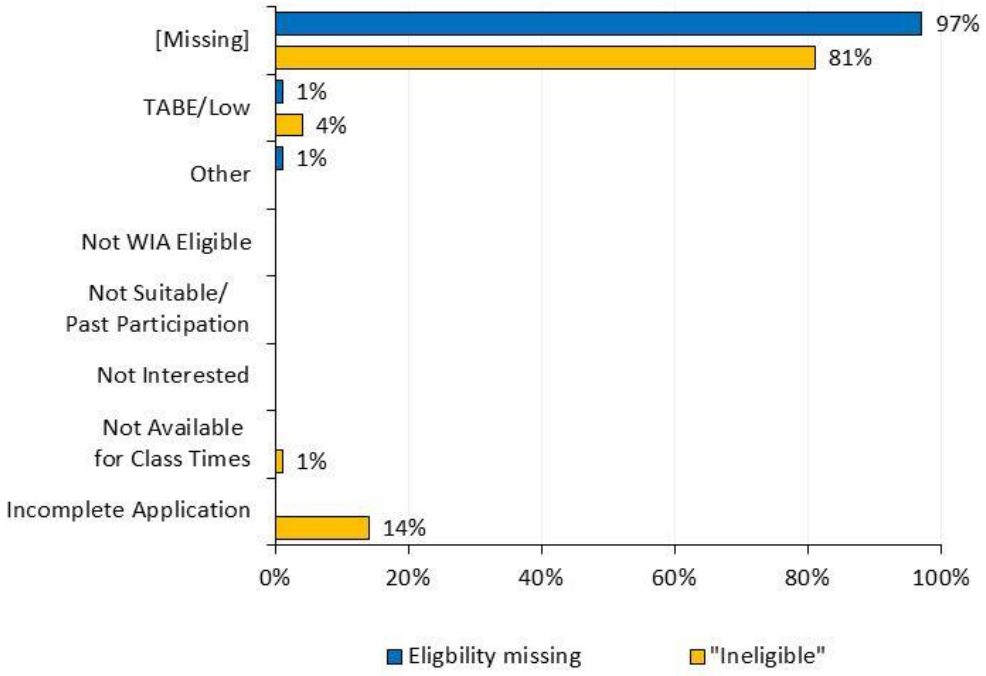
[31] WIBs have taken different approaches to this requirement, ranging from suspending or delaying eligibility determination to enrolling participants in other available WIA Intensive Services in the interim.

[32] Those who do not meet eligibility requirements or for whom Project GROW trainings are not suitable may be offered access to other services. In Middle Rio Grande and to some extent in other WIB areas, no one is turned back without an offer of services. Applicants are either:

1. GROW enrolled
2. Not enrolled, but determined college ready and WIA eligible
3. Not enrolled, but may benefit from Accelerate Texas or similar program offered through postsecondary providers
4. Referred to ABE classes
5. Referred to core Employment Services

For the 2,392 individuals who appear not to have advanced through the eligibility process, non-eligibility reason or—perhaps more precisely—the reason these individuals pre-screened out, is unknown for 2,331 (97 percent) of these individuals. Surprisingly 32 (1 percent) were "ineligible" because of TABE scores, indicating that eligibility determination for Project GROW had been conducted but the binary response eligibility field had been left blank. They are not recorded as "ineligible" for Project GROW, yet a reason for ineligibility is recorded.

Figure 4. Non-Eligibility Reason
(N=2,613)



It is unclear whether staff are not filling out this "non-eligibility reason" field for those who may pre-screen out or are determined ineligible because they have not been adequately instructed to do so. Staff may also not have received clear instructions on how to record this field; specifically, how to indicate the differences between data on those pre-screen out (whether for personal or program requirement reasons) and those for whom

formal eligibility is initiated (including the ability to meet demonstration and WIA eligibility requirements).

There may also be lack of clarity in the response options presented in the ASPP. "TABE/Low" might more appropriately record "Assessment Scores Not Within Range" for cohort, covering both TSI and TABE qualifying scores. "Not Interested" might more precisely be refined to specify lack of interest in the academic/ABE requirement or occupational training offered. Staff very frequently noted that scores outside of cohort assignment for which recruiting is conducted have resulted in low enrollments or cancellation of scheduled training because of failure to reach minimum class size requirements. Staff also often stated that prospective participants often balked at GED or college readiness requirements: they were interested in training and quick employment entry, not laying the foundation for a career pathway. (This was especially noted in relation to CDL training.) However, these can be important indicators that help stakeholders and policymakers to better understand personal and program constraints to intake and enrollments for the demonstration and its target populations.

Additionally, limited demographic data is collected on the 2,469 individuals who are not approved to participate in Project GROW. There is no set minimum as to how much information is to be collected, due to the variety in efforts made to recruit individuals. These methods may occur over the phone, in person at the office, or at a recruitment event, and in some cases it may include a preliminary intake form. When staff encounter an individual, it is unknown how much information an individual will provide, how much time is available at the contact, and at what point in the recruitment process an individual will say they are not interested or are screened-out due to eligibility criteria.

Demographic Features of Eligible Individuals. A rich array of demographic information can be collected on individuals approved as eligible for Project GROW, through the ASPP data system. However, there is widespread inconsistency in demographic data captured across the WIB areas. As a result, a number of demographic fields in the ASPP

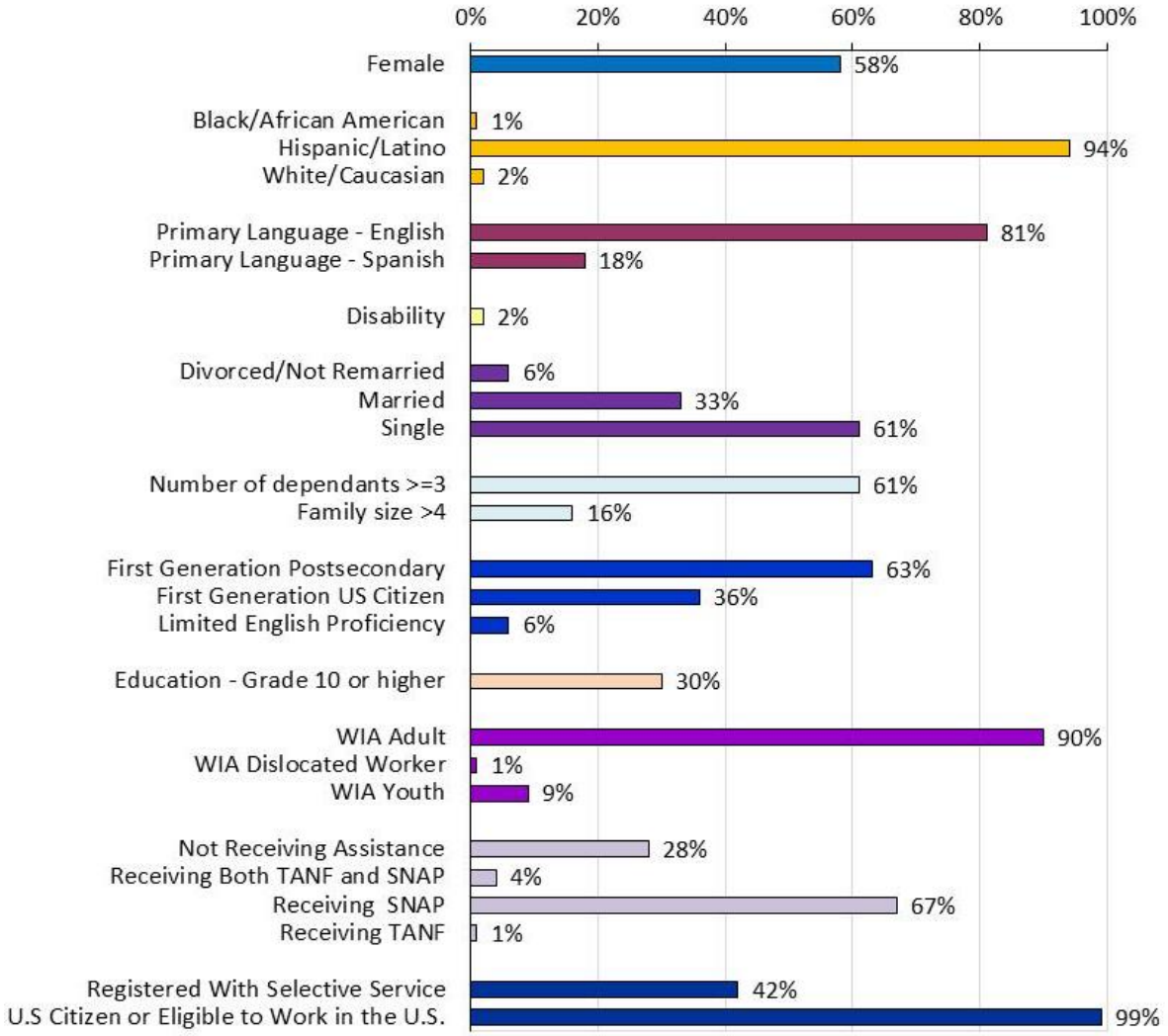
data system are missing information for a majority of participants.[33] The amount and extent of missing data for GROW participants in the ASPP system suggests that ASPP as a tool for inter-partner communication is not being utilized effectively. The inter-site variation in data entry for ASPP also suggests that unassigned or loosely defined responsibility is contributing to the inconsistency in data entry for ASPP.

The following Figure 5 presents those characteristics where data is available for 75% or more of the individuals. These limited data fields indicate preliminarily that younger, Hispanic/Latino women prevail among enrollees and that in general limited English proficiency is not extraordinarily high for the early participants compared to the general border region population. The shares of the latter will likely increase as more Cohort C training is initiated. It is significant that nearly two-thirds of the participants are the first generation in their families to have access to postsecondary education; the depth of this representation is a remarkable accomplishment of Project GROW to date.

- Project GROW participants are majority female (58%), Hispanic/Latino (94%), and single (61%), with an average age of 26.6 years (age ranges from 18 to 52).
- While a third are married and 61% are single, 61% have 3 or more dependents and 16% have a family size of 5 or more.
- Fully 18% say their primary language is Spanish and 6% have limited English proficiency.
- About a third state their highest academic degree at intake is Grade 10 or higher.
- Nearly two-thirds (63%) are first-generation postsecondary.
- A little over a third (36%) are first generation US citizens.
- Two-thirds (67%) are receiving SNAP benefits only, while less than a third (28%) are not receiving either SNAP or TANF assistance.

[33] Quite notably for evaluation purposes, identifiers such as SSN and TWIST ID are missing also for 40% and 42% of participants respectively. This is a concern for evaluators as such identifiers are necessary to link participants data from all the other databases (TWIST, WIT, SNAP, TANF etc.).

Figure 5. Demographics of Project GROW Participants

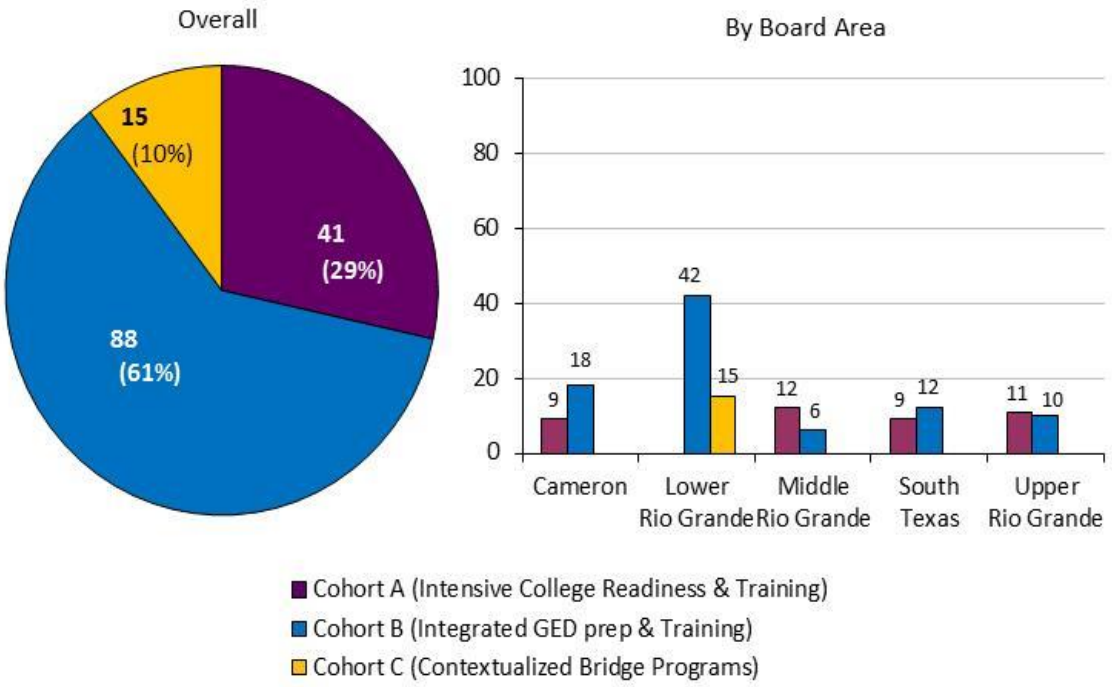


Enrollment and Training

Of the 144 individuals enrolled in Project GROW through December 31, 88 (61 percent) were assigned to Cohort B (Integrated GED Prep & Training); 41 (29 percent) to Cohort A (Intensive College Readiness & Training), and 15 (10 percent) in Cohort C (Contextualized Bridge Programs). Cohort assignment varies by board area. Cameron, Middle Rio Grande, South Texas, and Upper Rio Grande had a mix of Cohort A and Cohort B

participants. Lower Rio Grande had a mix of Cohort B and Cohort C participants, and was the only area that had enrolled participants in Cohort C as of December 31, 2013.

Figure 6. Project GROW Participants, by Cohort



The charts in Figure 6 present Project GROW enrollments over time by cohort subgroup for each WIB area and the BWA regional as a whole for the last three calendar year quarters of 2013 (Q2-Q4, April—December) based on data from the Monthly Performance Reports. Q2 (April—June) includes the cumulative, but limited enrollment counts in the months prior to the release of the first MPR in June. The bars in the charts represent cohort subgroups pertinent to each WIB's targeted performance goals.[34] Training providers were not required to start implementation of all cohorts simultaneously and

[34] By June, project administration and BWA partners had decided to remove the distinction between Out of School Youth and Adults in Cohort B for reporting purposes.

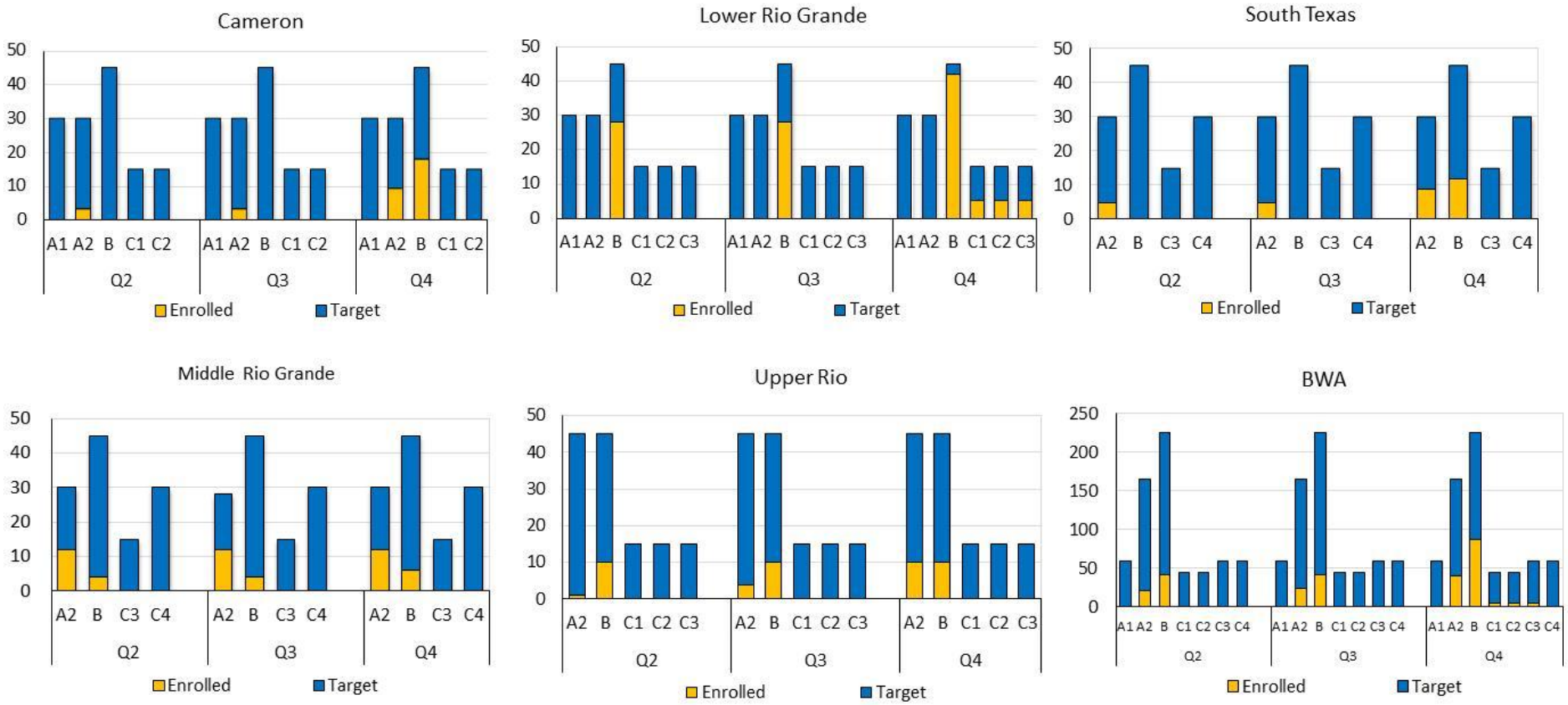
many decided to take a "phased approach" to starting new cohorts. Several observations can be induced from these charts:

- Beginning in Q2 and continuing, Lower Rio Grande has enrolled more clients than other WIBS, accounting for well over one-third of the 144 total enrollments in the BWA region.
- All WIBs reported enrollments and initiated trainings in Q2, but Cameron with 3 Cohort A2 members in Maintenance and Repair training, and South Texas with 5 starting Commercial Driving License (CDL) training, had slower starts.
- Through Q2, enrollments were concentrated in Cohort B (42 participants) and Cohort A2 (21 participants). The prevailing enrollment numbers and cohort pattern continued through December at which time there were 62 Cohort B and 40 Cohort A2 participants across all WIBs in the BWA
- Enrollments basically came to a halt in Q3 for all WIBs except Upper Rio Grande, which reported 4 additional Cohort A2 enrollments, in part influenced by concerns with changing TSI and GED testing and unmet need for new curricula.
- There were no Cohort C enrollments until Q3 in which Lower Rio Grande enrolled 5 individuals in each subgroup: C1, C2, and C3.
- There have been no Cohort A1 enrollments in Cameron and Lower Rio Grande, the only two WIBs responsible for that subgroup.
- Only Cohort B in Lower Rio Grande was well on-track to attain its enrollment target.

Enrollments have fallen short of expectations due to a number of reasons. Eligibility and enrollment in Project GROW are dependent upon the alignment of the individual's interest in one of the selected demand occupations, the availability of scheduled cohort training for that occupation, and WIA assessments results supporting their ability to benefit from the training, in addition to the other program requirements. Cohort A1 assignments have faltered in part due to academic assessment scores, difficulties at VIDA and Career Centers in attracting individuals who are currently interested in committing to 16 weeks in the College Prep Academy, and a residual reluctance to refer individuals to VIDA for services

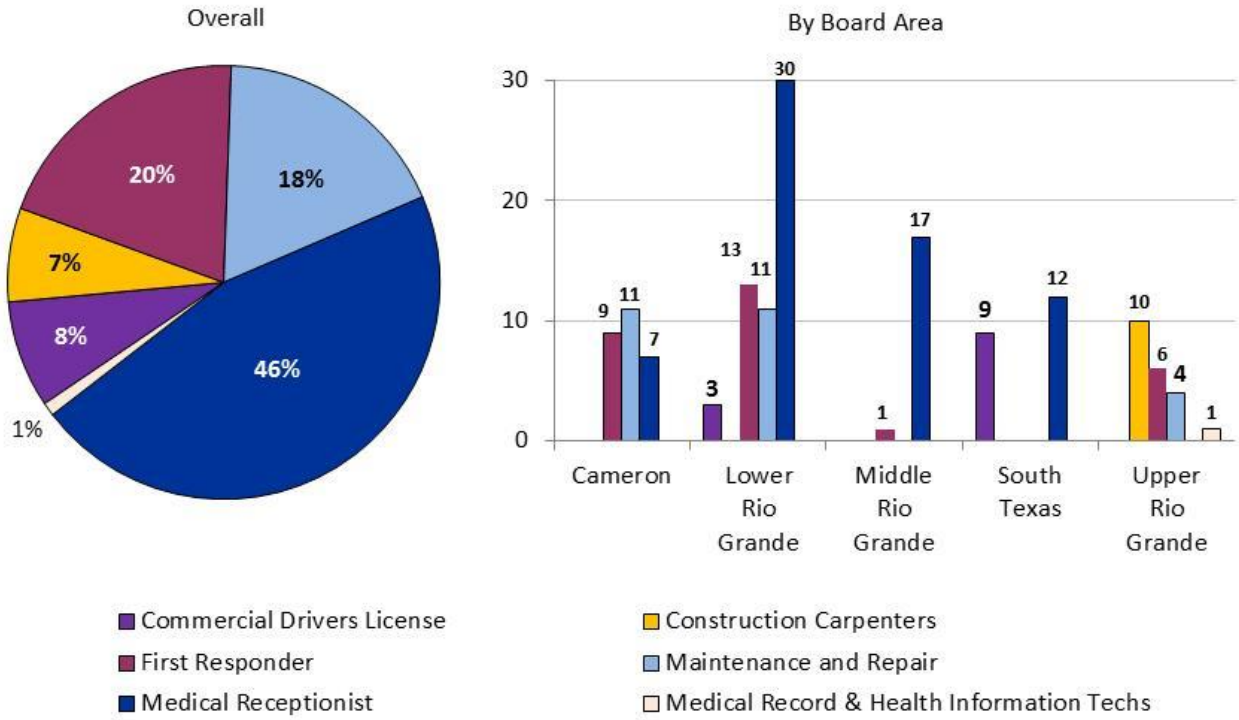
while random assignment is still being conducted for the ISIS program evaluation. Impending statewide changes in the GED curriculum and testing requirements affecting Cohort B and Cohort C, as well as the new college readiness standards forthcoming for the Texas Success Initiative affecting Cohort A have caused WIBs and training providers to exercise caution with outreach. Sites were reluctant to enroll students in classes designed for current tests and being caught in the bind of uncertain outcomes with changing standards. There was widespread concern that students would not complete coursework and positively test in compressed timeframes prior to the introduction of new tests, originally scheduled to be effective on September 1 (TSI) and January 1 (GED). Lower Rio Grande and South Texas College have been early adopters of new curricula and enrolled additional Cohort B and Cohort C participants in Q4. STC has since taken a leading supportive role among other providers to help them adopt curricula meeting the new standards. Figure 7 portrays the quarterly enrollments by cohort subgroups through December 2013. Part of the uneven pattern is attributable to “phased” roll out in the WIBs.

Figure 7. Quarterly Enrollment by Cohort Subgroups



Source: Monthly Performance Reports: June-December 2013.

Figure 8. Career Interest for Project GROW Participants



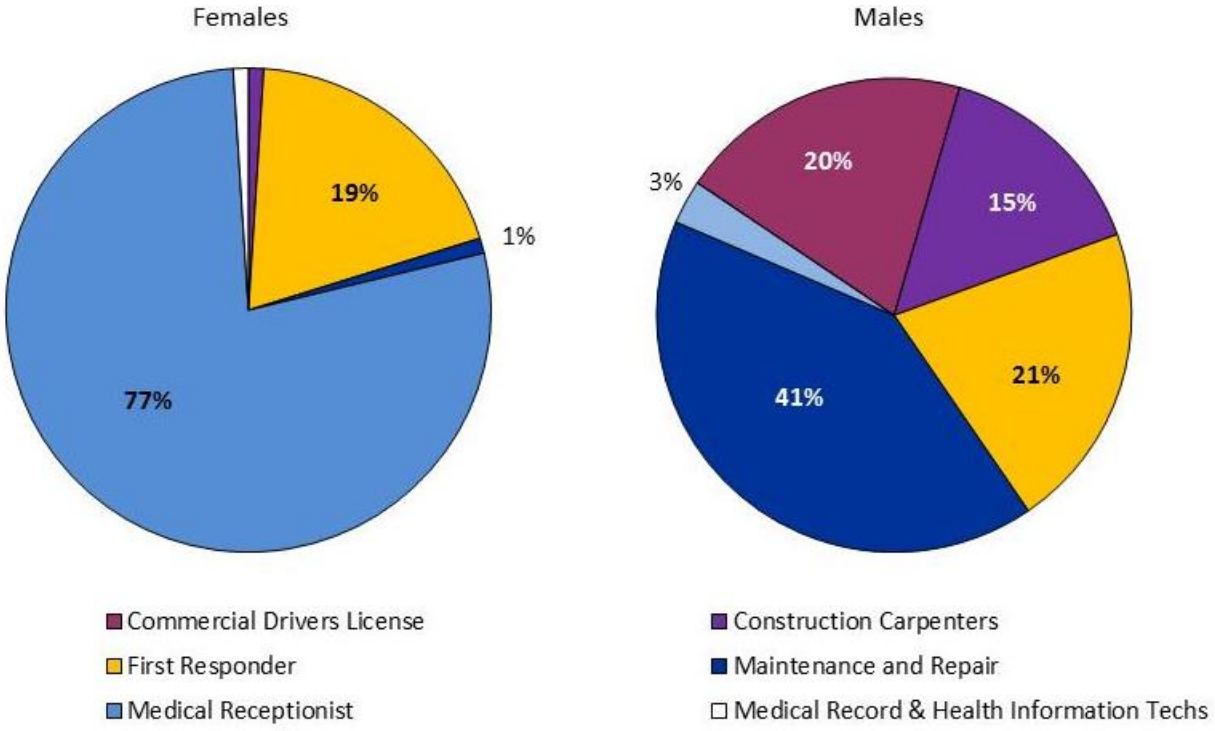
Demand Occupation Interest. As would be expected, for those determined eligible, their interests align with the cohort trainings by occupation that WIBs were preparing to initiate. The ASPP data indicate that fully 66 percent of those eligible were interested in health care careers through entry into Medical Assistant (46 percent) occupations and Emergency Medical Technician/First Responder (20 percent) occupations. One-fifth of participants sought entry to the field of Maintenance and Repair technician (18 percent) with smaller shares choosing Construction Carpentry (7 percent) and CDL training (8 percent). One person in Upper Rio Grande expressed interest in Health Information Technology.

Concentrations of occupational interest by WIB area are apparent. A majority of participants from Lower Rio Grande (53 percent), Middle Rio Grande (94 percent), and South Texas (57%) seek a career in the health care industry as Medical Assistant/Medical

Receptionists. In Upper Rio Grande, Constructions Carpenters (48%) and EMTs (29%) dominate. In Cameron, participants were interested in careers more equally distributed across EMT (33%), Maintenance and Repair (41%), and Medical Assistant (26%).

Career interests also varied by gender. Male participant career interests crossed all occupations, with the exception of a very modest interest in careers as Medical Assistants. The most popular career among men was Maintenance and Repair (41 percent). In contrast, vast majorities of female participants were interested in careers as Medical Assistants (77%), and none expressed real interest in CDL training. About equal shares of men (21 percent) and women (19 percent) were interested in careers as EMT/First Responders.

Figure 9. Career Interest for Project GROW Participants, by Gender



Target Occupations

Recorded occupational interests identified by clients track closely in ASPP with cohort enrollments in relevant skills training. Nevertheless, despite basic target occupation

group commonality within the ONET classification, there are noteworthy differences in the exact occupation for which training is offered, certification awarded, and career pathway prospects.[35] In most instances, the initial occupational training conformed to an existing continuing education certificate or credential in which curricula and contact hours articulated with academic credit pathway programs or, as in the case of CDL, with strong demand and potential for wage growth, but not directly linked with academic and advanced skills training found in other postsecondary certification programs. In others, specifically Maintenance and Repair and Construction Carpentry, postsecondary institutions developed new curricula and credentials.

All WIBS chose Maintenance and Repair Workers/General and Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT)/First Responders as demand occupations. Yet within these occupational titles, WIBs have selected various subsets of skills training to prepare for employment and career advancement aligned with regional demand. For example, Lower Rio Grande, Cameron, and Upper Rio Grande have all initiated training in Maintenance and Repair. Lower Rio Grande and STC began Cohort B training for a dozen participants in December comprised of immersion in HVAC, plumbing, electrician, and carpentry basics, leading to a Continuing Education Certificate in Maintenance and Repair developed specifically for the demonstration. In Cameron, TSTC carved out a section of its welding program as an area of specialization, complemented by other workplace skills, for 3 Cohort A participants to begin Maintenance and Repair training in June and began training for an additional 11 Cohort B participants in October. Upper Rio Grande and El Paso Community College started 3 Cohort A participants in Maintenance and Repair skills centered about HVAC skills and knowledge training in June.[36] Each prepares the participant for entry in a career pathway, but the starting point and labor market outcomes will likely vary. Similarly, EMT/First Responders in Lower Rio Grande are receiving Emergency Care Assistant (ECA) Training. Career pathway entry training begins at the Emergency Medical Technician I/ Basic EMT in Cameron and

[35] Project GROW partners and JFF plan to do additional work to understand these similar occupations and support greater alignment across these occupational pathways in the future.

[36] EPCC records indicate five students started classes.

Upper Rio Grande, the other areas where training in this area has begun. The ECA credential may not be as enticing to employers and corresponding placement wages may be lower than those associated with the basic EMT credential. In either scenario, the initial credential is "stackable" with more advanced credentials along the career pathway.

Medical Assistant, the training area in which enrollments have been prevalent in Lower Rio Grande, South Texas, and Middle Rio Grande, is notably variant across sites also. Credentialing may align closer with nursing and allied health fields on the one hand or office technologies and administration on the other. Middle Rio Grande has been training Cohort A and Cohort B participants for career entry as a Clinical Medical Assistant through continuing education classes articulated with academic requirements at Southwest Texas Junior College to advance in the healthcare field. Lower Rio Grande and South Texas College developed a Medical Receptionist curriculum that draws from the Medical Office Specialist certificate program for the first career path step. Laredo Community College in South Texas provides a "Certificate of Completion" to Cohort B participants who complete the Medical Office Clerk training in the Continuing Education division. Laredo Community College was the only site that reported significant administrative concern to a Medical Assistant credential in the Continuing Education that might be confused with by employers and students with the "Office Assistant – Level I Certificate" (one-semester) offered through the academic certificate program in the Business and Management Department at the College.

Cameron, Lower Rio Grande, South Texas, and Middle Rio Grande completed demand occupation selection by adding Truck Drivers, Heavy, and Tractor-Trailer. Commercial Driver's License (CDL) might be an "industry-limited career", as one Continuing Education director noted, but the employment prospects are strong.[37] Upper Rio Grande

[37] The CDL opportunities are driven by demand in the oil and gas industry, currently in a "boom" phase throughout much of Texas, particularly in the Eagle Ford Shale. The industry promotes hydraulic fracturing as a long-term basis for strong employment prospects in extractive and the related gas refining sector (Center for Community and Business Research 2013). High demand has attracted truck and bus drivers in the BWA to transfer into the industry, creating replacement jobs. Most over-the-road haulers require one to two years experience for these better paying jobs, but local entry positions are being reported for those who obtain their CDL. WIBs posit that these career prospects and the potential to branch into other industry-related

alone chose Medical Records & Health Information Techs, for which no training activity has occurred, and Construction Carpenters, for which the single training Cohort B to date was comprised of out-of-school youth rolled into Project GROW.

Case Management

Case management type services are provided by Project GROW partners in multiple ways at various points in the integrated services model. The common feature is that primary case management responsibility for most clients resides in the workforce system, and WIA case managers have responsibility for service planning, formal needs assessment, and timely provision of support services. By design, WIB areas are taking a "multiple touches" approach to supporting students, which involves partners in a mostly complementary, not duplicative, way. Project GROW case management can be understood to include all or parts of the following, depending on the local area and the integrated services model that the partners have adopted.

- Individual Case Management as provided under WIA;
- Intensive Individual Case Management, the "high touch" services provided by Project ARRIBA and VIDA; and
- Ancillary Case Management, ongoing direct exchanges regarding student status between ABE/postsecondary and Career Center staff.

All Project GROW participants receive individual case management with leveraged WIA resources and a small amount of Project GROW funds for case management and supportive services. However, individual case management approaches may vary between Career Center contractors based on their service delivery practices. For example, WIA may require at least one, in-person client contact per month for clients in training. In some

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occupations like diesel mechanic substantiate the CDL training as a career pathway. However, the occupation selection continues to be controversial among some in the training provider community. Community Colleges mostly subcontract the driver-training component to proprietary providers.

instances, this may be limited to a brief meeting to provide transportation assistance. In other areas, case manager practice may promote more scheduled and as-needed contact, leading to deeper involvement in client progress. Normal WIA caseload size per worker also varies between and within BWA WIBS, suggesting that available time per case in some WIBs is more restrictive than others.

Overall, the case management approach may vary to some degree by the frontline community college or Career Center staff's understanding of Project GROW's demonstration features and the demonstration's intent to provide comprehensive wrap around case management and supportive services in a timely manner to improve retention and advancement. Career Centers and WIBS are moving beyond their prevailing focus upon WIA programs, which account for a major share of their operating budgets, and WIA performance measures for which they are held strictly accountable. Local partners are moving toward more effective information exchanges, anticipated by the introduction of the ASPP and the ongoing alignment of education, training, and support services contained in the Project GROW model.

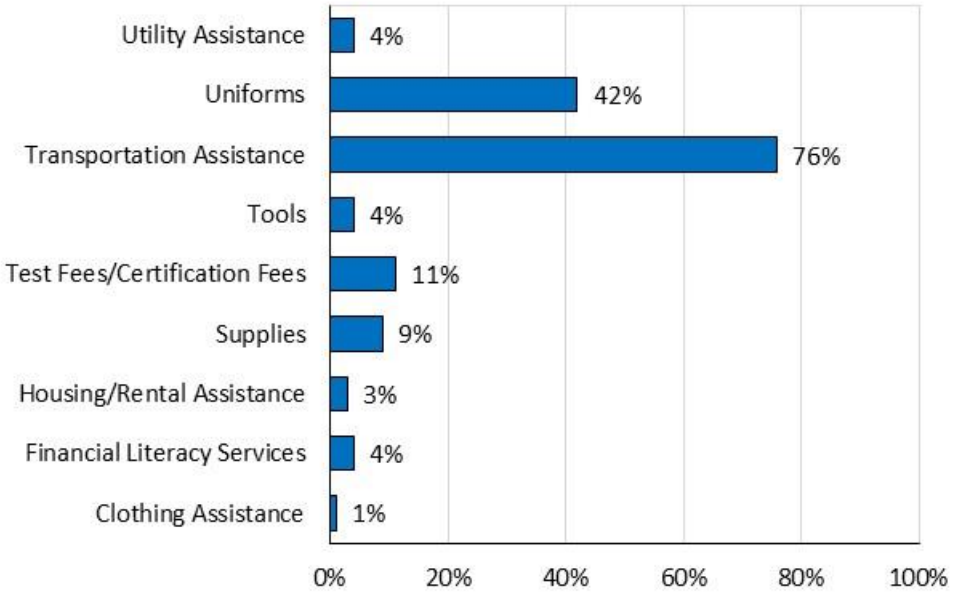
VIDA and Project ARRIBA by design provide Intensive Case Management to assigned clients. Through December, only Lower Rio Grande has enrolled and referred Project GROW Cohort C customers to VIDA for these services. Boosting referrals and enrollments to these partners is an ongoing challenge in the other two WIBs that assign participants to subgroups C1 and C2. Cameron has had promising enrollments vanish when prospective participants test below the 6th grade level, and Upper Rio has not yet been able to align cohorts with El Paso Community College, leaving Project ARRIBA waiting in the wings for clients.

Ancillary Case Management is inherent in the Project GROW model. All Project GROW participants are deemed to receive a limited functional amount of shared case management, since class instructors, WIA case managers, and other college and WIB staff share information concerning participation, service delivery, and progress. Conversations with technical and community college staff consistently revealed that these providers are deeply committed to student success in the classroom, as well as the work place.

The potential strength of the Project GROW model is the coordination across partners serving the same clients to achieve results. ASPP is intended to strengthen capacity to do so by means of real time information sharing. To date, only Lower Rio Grande and South Texas College are fully tapping into this potential, and are using case notes and ASPP data exchanges effectively. Other sites have only partially adopted the system, and are relying on e-mail and other exchange mechanisms.

Elements of strong coordination are found in the Lower Rio Grande WIB area, where Career Center and South Texas College staff meet regularly to discuss enrollments and client progress. Additionally, constant communications through ASPP have strengthened capacity to more effectively respond to daily challenges faced by low-income populations and to address those needs. Timely provision of support services and deeper, shared understanding of client situations have reportedly helped persistence and completion of service plans. Early in implementation, the Middle Rio Grande WIB area conducted Joint assessments at program entry. Multi-party case "staffing" was part of the one-day eligibility and enrollment workshops held to populate training cohorts. Adult Basic Education, Southwest Texas Junior College, and Middle Rio Grande Development Corporation's Career Center staff jointly agreed upon who was prepared to enter and likely to benefit from Project GROW as the final step prior to enrollment.

Figure 10. Support Services Delivered to Project Grow Participants



Source: ASPP through December 31, 2013

Analysis of support services is constrained by data availability at this point in the evaluation.[38] Field staff clearly indicate that child support services are important to many of the female householders enrolled in Project GROW. Data contained in ASPP reveal that transportation assistance is the prevalent support service. (Support services distributions reported in ASPP are contained in Figure 10.)

Employment Entry and Follow-up Services

Towards the end of training, Project GROW participants receive job readiness, job search, and job development/job placement assistance to assure successful employment entry. Through December, the demonstration claims only five employment entries for

[38] Childcare is not recorded in ASPP. ASPP is capturing services provided using the $400 of Project GROW funding available to each participant. TWIST will contain data entries regarding WIA support services provided.

those who have completed training, received their credential, and gone to work in their area of training. Reportedly, a few more were ready to enter employment but were delayed due to additional requirements, such as medical screens or licensure. Staff also report instances where those exiting are interested in continuing training in their career pathway, temporarily deferring employment.

WIA Career Counselors, working closely with Business Service Representatives (BSRs), retain primary responsibility for job placements. Standard employment services resources are available and BSRs are increasingly marketing the program as part of the employer engagement activities. Now that individuals are starting to come out of the training pipeline, BSRs have included job development as part of their engagement strategy. Completers will also benefit from the job development and placement offices at the community and technical colleges. Graduate placements have historically been a strong component of TSTC programs and participants will likely benefit from these services. Community colleges are increasingly focused on placements for those in their programs as well. Follow-up services to support job retention and advancement in a career pathway—beyond that conducted for the employment retention measures at the Career Centers, are not yet well developed, and will likely become better defined in the immediate future.

BUDGET AND EXPENDITURES

WIB budget allocations for Project GROW were determined by formula according to proportion numbers of clients served by cohort and the estimated cost of different cohort services. Resources leveraged by WIBs from federal sources for training, support services, and operational costs incurred serving eligible participants were estimated at 30 percent of the budgeted amount. Table 4 presents the total project budget and leveraged contributions to Project GROW by WIB and BWA totals. (Appendix D presents the total Project GROW Budget.) Funds totaling approximately $3.45 million, supplemented by $1 million in leveraged resources, are available across the 56-month award period.

Table 4. Budget and Leverage Amount Allocations by WIB and Total

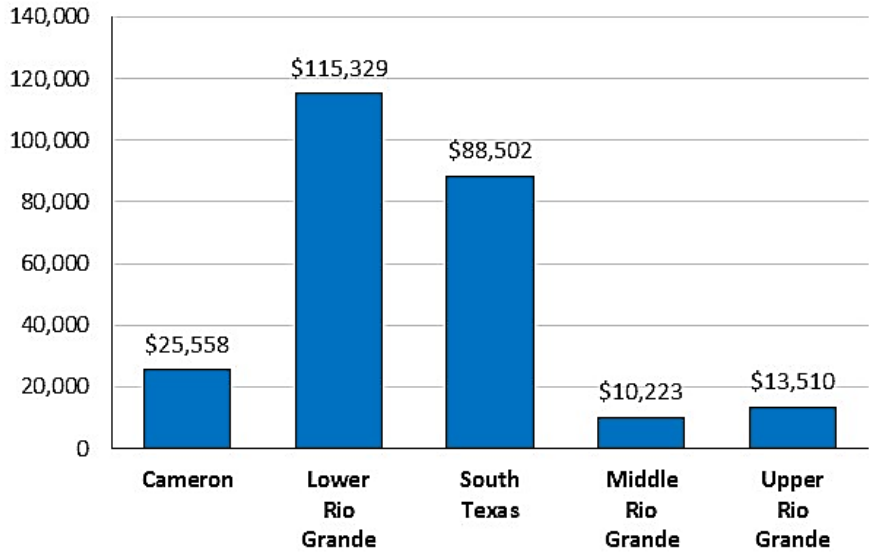
WIB	Budget	% of Total	Leverage Amount
Cameron	709,415	20.60%	205,593
Lower Rio	783,405	22.70%	227,036
South Texas	591,924	17.20%	171,543
Middle Rio	591,924	17.20%	171,543
Upper Rio	773,915	22.40%	224,285
Total	3,450,582	100.00%	1,000,000

Reported expenditures to date have been notably uneven, but these expenditures should be approached cautiously since billing and reporting have been inconsistent. (Figure 11) Lower Rio Grande alone has expended an amount ($115,329) almost approaching the amount spent by all other WIBs combined ($137,792). Only South Texas also had a significant amount billed to Project GROW ($88,501), far more than Cameron ($25,558), Middle Rio Grande ($10,223), and Upper Rio Grande ($13,510). The large variance is due to a number of inter-related factors revolving around allowable charges billed to the demonstration:

- **The numbers of individuals processed and enrolled**. Enrollments are notably variant from a high of 57 in Lower Rio Grande to a range of 18-27 participants in other WIBs.
- **Lags in the anticipated first year enrollments for higher cost case management services**. Cameron and Lower Rio Grande have yet to refer A1 Cohorts to VIDA, and Upper Rio had not yet referred Cohort C to Project ARRIBA.
- **Staffing assignments and time charged to Project GROW**. For example, Lower Rio Grande has billed one FTE and shares of several other staff billed to the project. Other sites have only charged a fixed or floating relatively small share of staff time, if any.

- **Types of training and payment basis to the training provider**. WIBS may pay all or part of training costs at enrollment, or tie contractor payments to completion. Additionally, training costs may vary by occupation.[39]
- **Support services cost assignment**. Initially, support services costs were leveraged from WIA funds or spent down from the $400 per participant allowed under Project GROW. WIBs took different initial approaches to funding support services—either spending GROW or WIA funds first, or possibly alternating sources, and leveraged funds may have been under-reported. As of January 1, 2014, Project GROW support service funds must be depleted prior to spending WIA funds.[40]
- **Lags in billing**. WIBs have not yet fully billed to draw down for allowable costs.

Figure 11. Project GROW Expenditures by WIB through December 2013



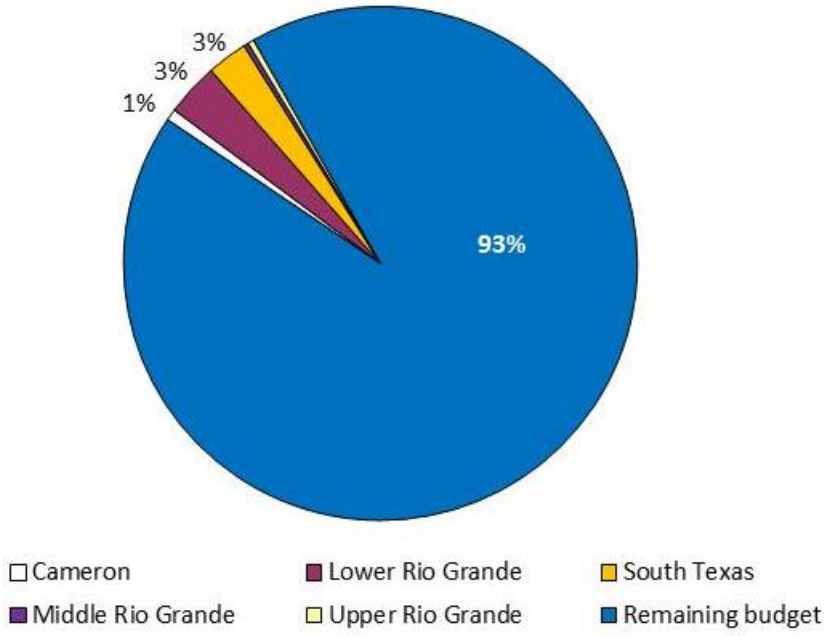
Source: December 2013 MPR

[39] For example, CDL training may exceed the $3750 training cap, reportedly up to as high as $4950 per enrollment, but the per enrollment reimbursement to the training provider will not exceed the training cap, when averaged with the cost of lower priced training. A WIB may pay the full price for each enrollee, recovering the overspending by averaging the expense with lower cost training such as Medical Office Clerk.

[40] A late interpretation by TWC during the preparation of this Report, ruled that all Project GROW funds for support services must be expended first, prior to spending any WIA funds on support services. This reportedly has adverse effects on prior WIA expenditures in several WIB areas. The extent to which these expenditures were disallowed is not yet available.

All sites are assuredly intent on expending all available resources for the project during the award period. As Figure 12 portrays, WIBs billed only 7 percent or $253,122 of their combined $3,450,582 total budget through the first 16 months of the 56-month award.

Figure 12. Expenditures by WIB as Shares of Total Project GROW Budget

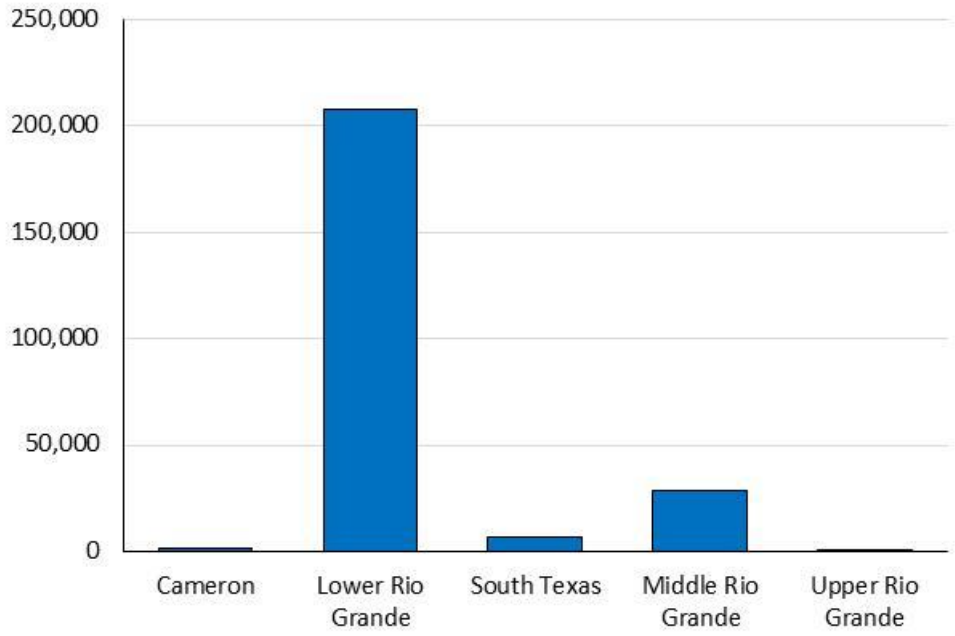


Source: December 2013 MPR

Leveraged resource amounts reported by WIB through December 2013 are also notably uneven. (Figure 13) WIBs report leverage amounts by completing and submitting a standardized Leverage Resource Report developed specifically for Project GROW. Lower Rio Grande has reported $207,657 in leverage value—nearly all (91.5 percent) of its $227,036 assignment target in the first 16 months. Cameron (at $1,371) and Upper Rio Grande (at $937) have only reported very minimal amounts, accounting for 0.7 percent and 0.4 percent, respectively, of their targeted leverage amounts. South Texas has reported $7,052 in leveraged resources—about 4.1 percent of its leverage target. Middle Rio Grande (at

$28, 465) has accounted for 16.6 percent of its target, and is the only WIB to exhibit expenditures/leveraged resources rate near 30 percent at this time. [41]

Figure 13. Leveraged Project GROW Amounts by WIB through December 2013

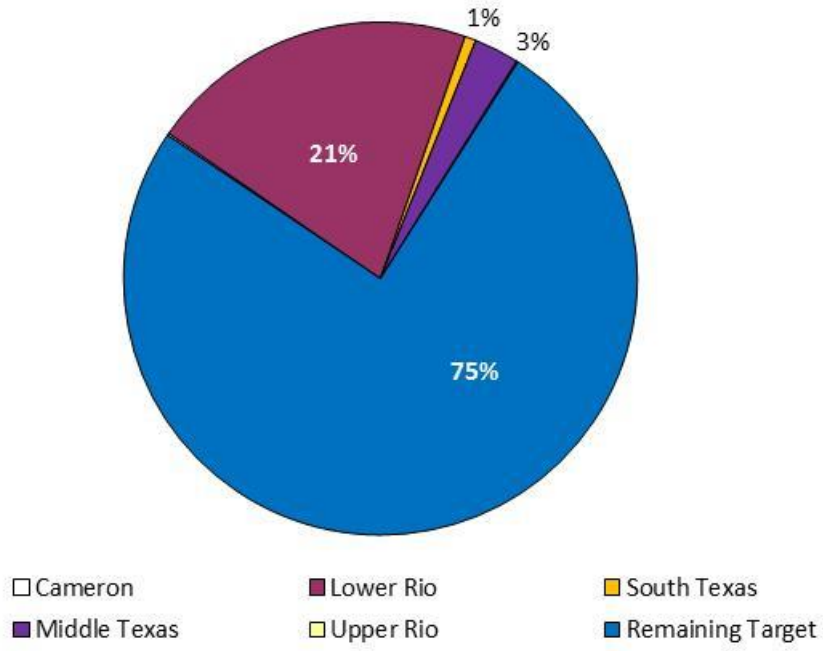


Source: December 2013 MPR

Figure 14 indicates that WIBs have achieved nearly 25 percent of the leverage resource target overall for Project GROW, and that the regional success is carried almost entirely by the Lower Rio Grande.

[41] Only Middle Rio Grande comes close—at 32 percent—to reporting a 30 percent share of leveraged resources to reimbursed expenditures. Lower Rio has leveraged almost twice as much as it has billed to project funds. South Texas has reported $7,052 in leveraged resources—an amount equal to 70 percent of its $10,222 in billed costs. Much smaller leveraged/reimbursed shares have been reported in the remaining two WIBs; 7 percent in Upper Rio and 5 percent in Cameron.

Figure 14. Project GROW Leverage Target Shares Amounts by WIBs



INTERIM IMPLEMENTATION OBSERVATIONS

Project GROW is an ambitious effort to implement a complex and comprehensive model that delivers effective services leading to gainful employment along a career pathway for participants at the margins of workforce viability.[42] Despite considerable advances throughout the initial implementation phase, Project GROW has yet to become fully operational in key areas of its comprehensive strategic approach. This section presents a brief status assessment of the demonstration's progress, constraints, and continuing challenges regarding key strategic elements, and offers suggestions regarding areas of focus and potential adjustments that may strengthen operations and outcomes. In the larger context, Project GROW might also lever additional support within state and national policy arenas to foster implementation, sustainability, and replicability of the demonstration model. Innovations, such as those in the Project GROW demonstration, by their very nature merit a few degrees of leeway regarding policy, regulatory, and institutional compliance standards to fully test their effectiveness.

STATUS ASSESSMENT

Systemic, Regional Advancement.

Regional collaboration led by the Border Workforce Alliance to introduce and nurture an innovative systemic workforce development model in the five borderlands WIBs is the foundational component of the demonstration model. Early active support for the regional approach by executives and key administrators for the demonstration must be sustained and revitalized in a few areas where lead responsibility has been mitigated by turnover of key personnel. WIBs have differential capacity and experience with elements of

[42] Site visits and regularly scheduled and as-needed teleconferences of the demonstration's sub-committees, supplemented by policy notes, management reports, and other documents provide the basis for assessing present implementation status and continuing challenges, as well as prospective opportunities to support continuing success.

the design and have had variable success in twining ongoing WIA and other program policies and practice with the innovative "add-ons" of Project GROW. WIBs are acutely focused on the more traditional workforce performance measures (employment entry, retention, GED attainment, etc.), and attentiveness to additional and distinctive evaluation measures of the demonstration features (employer engagement, systemic development, etc.) tend to receive less "ownership" by WIBs. This has been articulated in the field as tension between Project GROW as a workforce development program and its purpose as a comprehensive demonstration model subject to rigorous evaluation. WIBs and their partners have committed to implementing these challenging innovations and continue to strive to succeed.

In part, capacity-building and systemic regional development challenges are a by-product of resources constraints. Project GROW provides resources for contract services and some WIB support but does not provide additional line item funds dedicated specifically for developing capacity to implement demonstration features. Beyond service delivery operations, there is no additional support for features such as employer engagement through industry clusters or associations—an endeavor new to Business Services Representatives and widely recognized as requiring intensive efforts usually over a period of years; aligning staff and operations between postsecondary providers and Career Centers; or new curriculum development and guidance counseling for individuals not prepared for college. There is no direct funding for additional WIB or Career Center contractor staff to coordinate partnerships and administer additional reporting requirements in ASPP for evaluation uses.

Additionally, the Project GROW demonstration project resources are significantly smaller than the ongoing program funding received by WIBs, while its performance expectations around engaging and supporting under-prepared participants are significantly greater than current practice, though the number of participants are smaller. Project GROW will benefit from renewed commitment of BWA administrators to the demonstration goals and the "messaging" of their joint commitment to WIB leads and Career Center

contractors to achieve success regarding both the workforce and the demonstration measures applicable to regional systemic development.

Service Cohorts.

Overall, implementing appropriate services regimes to more effectively strengthen enrollments for cohorts of targeted participants is a recurring task for local program partners. WIBs were free to implement a "phased" roll-out of services by cohort and training type, as negotiated during the process of aligning college and Career Center services. Considerable effort has been expended trying to coordinate intake and eligibility, cohort enrollment size, and timely scheduling of education and training classes. Despite multi-method marketing and outreach efforts, as well as streamlined Web-based, in-person, or telephone access for initial registration, intake and eligibility determination numbers have not been as robust as anticipated in most WIB areas, and the demonstration is migrating away from a pure cohort model to a flexible approach strategy. Administrators and staff offered many explanations for the limited success with the cohort training model.

- Potential clients have reportedly self-selected out of participation due to lack of interest in the available training paths or education requirements, such as obtaining a GED alongside a CDL, or 16-week college readiness through VIDA. Individuals were interested in training and quick employment entry, not laying the foundation for a career pathway. This was especially noted in relation to CDL training.
- Other prospects have expressed an unwillingness or inability to make the extensive time commitment required to participate; staff report individuals who wanted to enroll but could not adjust life and family responsibilities to comply with participation requirements.
- Most WIBs originally marketed all four of their occupational trainings, a practice that proved somewhat counter-productive, since under phased roll-out only one or two trainings were available at a time. With the passage of time, contact

information for follow-up may have become invalid or participant interest or availability faded.

- Considerable numbers of potential participants have reportedly tested outside of the cohort academic grade level parameters for the training cohort level being recruited, i.e., tested out of Cohort A as college ready or too high or low TABE scores for Cohorts B or C.
- In a few instances, staff equipped with the knowledge that the desired occupational training would not be available in the near future, reportedly were reluctant to conduct a WIA eligibility determination, knowing that the 45-day window for case activation would expire and eligibility would have to be redetermined.
- Occasionally, timely follow-up with those who expressed interest may have faltered due to unclear assignment of responsibility for this function.
- Lastly, impending statewide changes in the GED curriculum and testing requirements affecting Cohort B and Cohort C, as well as the new college readiness standards for the Texas Success Initiative affecting Cohort A, caused WIBs and training providers to delay outreach and enrollments until new curricula and adequate lead time for preparation were available. There was widespread concern that students would not complete coursework and positively test in compressed timeframes prior to the introduction of the new tests, scheduled to be effective on September 1 (TSI) and January 1 (GED).

The net effect is that scheduling and delivering anticipated levels of cohort training has not yet proceeded at the anticipated pace. Low outreach responses, misalignment of client interests and availability, and low eligibility rates by cohorts have constrained the effectiveness of the process. It is difficult to schedule or fill training slots and to coordinate training starts without sufficient recruits.

Project GROW's design included cohort service delivery for groups of 12-15 participants to move through education and training sequences to employment in the chosen entry occupation along a career pathway. RFAs and subsequent contract negotiations generally assumed sufficient class size would be recruited for each training and

that planning and scheduling classes would be a basically linear process. Recruitment and enrollment numbers have not however met these expectations, and timely scheduling has often proven challenging.

As a result, WIBs, Career Center staff, and educators, with few exceptions, have more often than not started training sequence with smaller numbers of participants rather than a full cohort size. For example, training for a single Cohort A2 EMT was approved in one WIB, and this individual was co-enrolled in college readiness classes with 11 Medical Assistant candidates to initiate services. Groups of 4-10 have been approved and started in other areas. Often these Project GROW participants have been "braided" with Accelerate Texas and other college grant-funded students or "mainstreamed" into existing classes with other continuing education or regular academic students to ensure adequate class sizes and to keep per participant fees within funding ranges. In a few basic trainings, Cohorts B and C may be comingled in a Continuing Education class without jeopardizing the integrity of the educational process; both groups are capable of benefitting from the basic curricula. In several instances, scheduled training was simply being cancelled because minimum class size thresholds were not met. To various extents and through multiple means, WIB areas are juggling class size and cost parameters to engage the various service cohorts.[43]

Case Management

Every participant receives case management from the WIA Career Counselor and a notable injection of "case management-like" supports available at the technical and community colleges, which in at least two college systems is purposefully extensive.[44] Although it is a major piece of the demonstration design, improving access to and

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[43] Low enrollments also are poised to effect performance expectations to the extent that they have delayed training starts and completions. There is less downstream time to attain education and credentialing outcomes, or measure employment results during the Project's time frame.

[44] The *intensive case management* planned for Cohort C participants had begun only in the Lower Rio Grande at the end of this initial study period. A major boost in Cohort C is expected across the border area in the Spring 2014.

coordination of case management and support services between WIA case managers, instructors, and CBO case managers (in the two relevant WIBs) is more apparent in some areas than others. Noted variations include case manager style and practice at the Career Centers.

The level and intensity of WIA case management varies somewhat across Career Center contractors. Local practice varies by the number of required "contacts" per month with active clients. In one area, the case manager stated that one contact per month was required and this was basically limited to a single monthly contact to transact transportation support services at the training provider site. In other sites, case managers may meet with clients bi-weekly and as-needed by circumstance to discuss plans, progress, and client needs. Case manager practices are also shaped by caseload size and whether the case manager is "dedicated" to Project GROW or carries a mixed caseload of WIA and possibly other program participants. The point in service delivery when support service needs are determined.

At one site support service needs are determined prior to enrollment as part of the assessment of whether the individual is able and likely to succeed with the training commitment. In another, they are assessed *after* eligibility has been determined. While both approaches may prove effective, the former has the advantage of pre-emptive planning of service provision without which participation is not likely to succeed. In either case, contingency planning for unanticipated, but possible support services needs is recommended as a program practice. Lastly, instructors and training provider staff should be encouraged to identify and share unmet support needs that may be restricting student progress with WIA case managers, who have the capacity to provide such services. The extent to which local partners use of the ASPP for real time case management purposes.

In the single site fully using the ASPP, partners have reported notable success in communicating student progress and strengthening retention. Real time communication between the case managers and training instructors can detect absence patterns immediately, rather than waiting for a monthly report or weekly attendance sheet. For example, dramatic family events led to excessive absences by one Lower Rio Grande

participant that normally would have triggered auto-expulsion had it not been for the case management like concern by the adult education instructor and the timely communication with the WIA and Project VIDA case managers. The effectiveness of the ASPP as a shared case management tool is a promising prospect of the demonstration that would benefit from wider use.

In all sites, but perhaps more importantly in those not yet fully using the ASPP, the regularity of direct contact between ABE, postsecondary, CBO, and workforce staff, as well as the physical locations of the Career Center and the instructional sites, play an essential roles in promoting effective shared client information. In Project GROW, partnering staff may be co-located or as far as 50 miles apart, which can make non-virtual coordination between case management staff difficult.[45]

The summative point is that case management and timely provision of support services to assist client enrollment, retention, and success in a career pathway program is a strategic feature of Project GROW that merits continuing improvement and greater emphasis in most sites and between local partners. Timely, relevant case manager guidance and wrap-around services are recognized factors in career pathway program success.

Contextualized Education and Career Pathway Training

Project GROW partners are committed to the academic advancement and occupational credentialing of program participants that enhance their livelihood prospects along a career pathway in a growth industry sector. This requires introducing and improving several recognized practices that form the innovative core of the demonstration

[45] The Eagle Pass Workforce Solutions Office had an EMT in college readiness at SWTJC in Del Rio, 50 miles away. Middle Rio Grande is unique among the border WIBs in that it's population concentrations are in diffused small urban settlements across a nine-county expanse. Upper Rio Grande and South Texas each provide Project GROW services in their core urban centers, El Paso and Laredo, respectively. Cameron and Lower Rio Grande serve small urban areas, which are tightly knit together in the densely populated counties of Cameron and Hidalgo. Even so, TSTC, the training provider in Cameron, is located in Harlingen, 30 miles distant from the Brownsville Workforce Solutions Office.

model, specifically, intensive college readiness services, contextualized GED preparation integrated with occupational training, and contextualized ABE/ESL supplemented by In Home Learning Systems for a subset of Cohort C participants. These learning opportunities are followed by or concurrent with enrollment in demand occupational training in selected industries. The latter at times has required training providers to develop new curricula and certification for trainings previously not offered at the college (e.g., Maintenance and Repair; variations on Medical Assistant) or purchase services from a private vendor, as some colleges have done for CDL training.

These innovative program interventions have been introduced and supported in all WIB areas. The curricula and approaches vary notably by the: method and extent of occupational integration within the academic instructional setting; duration (in terms of weeks) and intensity (in terms of hours per week) of instruction; and sequencing of academic and occupational classes (concurrent, overlapping, or successive).

Cohort A services include preparing participants for advanced occupational credentials through college readiness preparation. Enrollment efforts have constrained by concern for new TSI standards and appropriate curriculum development, weak recruitment response rates, higher ineligibility determinations, and reservations to enrolling during the random assignment period for ISIS in Cameron. In those WIB areas where Cohort A2 services have been provided, only limited numbers—one of nine completers at one site, zero of four in another—have actually passed the respective college placement exam. These both involved compressed timeframe curricula and it is uncertain whether any of the four CDL trainees who failed the exit exam had any intention of enrolling in academic credit coursework.[46]

More than one-third (33) of the 88 Cohort B participants had obtained their GED during this initial period (MPR December 2013). Cohort C enrollment have been limited to a

[46] RMC will compare outcomes between sites regarding the curricula duration and intensity for college readiness across sites and occupations in future analyses, as richer data is available, including new curricula adopted/adapted for TSI assessments. An ancillary question might be, "Are WIBs/training providers appropriately matching student interests and needs with the right occupational pathways and program interventions?"

single site late in the year and the service model is doing remarkably well, based on field discussions and observations. As noted in the prior text, sites became reluctant to enroll Cohort C until greater certainty regarding new GED requirements had been ascertained and supportive curricula available. Since only a few participants have been assigned computers, the preliminary efficacy of self-paced In Home Learning System (IHLS) as a tool to advance learning gains for Cohort C participants cannot be assessed.

Accelerated credentialing in high demand occupations with identifiable career pathways has reportedly been successful for those individuals that actually complete the service sequence. Those exiting with a credential are finding employment in their field of choice. Employment entry has been briefly delayed for a few certificate holders who needed to pass a licensing exam or satisfy an employment requirement, such as health screening or vaccinations. Staff report that a few individuals are interested in or planning to continue training at an advanced level in their career field.

However, there is an ongoing and residual concern among a few Business Services Representatives (BSR) and employers about entry-level employment prospects, starting wages, and/or opportunities to advance with the initial pathway credential attained in Project GROW for certain occupations. Put bluntly, the credential held little value for the employer. Moreover, it is yet unclear what support for access to advanced training, beyond possible Pell Grants and student loans, might be available to participants. WIBs clearly stated that WIA dollars are not likely to be spent to provide training in an occupation for which an individual has already received training, unless they have very low earnings.[47] One discussion mentioned "re-capturing" part of Continuing Education revenues to support scholarships or additional support for disadvantaged students to advance in their chosen path.

In response to the effect that the limited array of occupations has not adequately aligned with individual interest has acted as constraints to enrollments, WIBs might

[47] At this time, the proposed Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) portends positive developments in the national policy arena that will stimulate favorable opportunities for BWA and Project GROW to strengthen workforce services and outcomes by endorsing and supporting career pathways.

consider the option to expand career pathway entry occupations beyond the four selected for GROW. There are a number of supporting conditions for this:

- WIBs can readily identify other demand occupations in their areas;
- Project ARRIBA and Project VIDA have extensive lists of career pathways and a strong record of success in employment entry and wage gains that can be replicated;
- Community and technical colleges have articulated content in entry-level training, and aligned contact hours in continuing education divisions with academic credits to the extent practical in support of stackable credentials along a career pathway in many fields;
- Responsiveness to local/regional employer and jobseeker needs might be better addressed through expanded pathways that support economic growth in the area; and
- The evaluation design anticipates and measures the growth in career pathways as a systemic development.

Employer Engagement

Expanding capacity for deepening employer engagement through the Project GROW model has proven equally challenging to WIBs and their partners. The Project GROW design clearly calls for growth in the number and depth of involvement by participating employers and employer associations or industry clusters in the targeted industry sectors as an essential element of the career pathway model. Each WIB has a target of twelve employers spread across the four selected industries as a minimum standard for measuring employer engagement. Although Business Service Units at the Career Centers and WIB employer relations staff have been enlisting support for Project GROW and marketing its potential benefits to individuals and firms in select industries, a more intensive level of employer engagement with the career pathway process, particularly though an industry cluster approach is still "incubating." Lessons drawn from across the nation repeatedly note that developing industry sector approaches require consistent effort over time and BWA WIBs are at the early stage of the learning curve to bring this approach to fruition.

Project GROW early recruited key employers and industry representatives to support the proposal and immediately surveyed those expressing initial support to gauge their preparedness for expanding their involvement. Limited contacts with supportive employers during field visits indicated that their level of knowledge of the project and perceived benefits of involvement were uneven and in a few instances quite weak—despite the fact that the referral to contact them came from the BSRs responsible for employer engagement. In part, this gap may be attributed to reliance on standard operating procedures by BSRs and other workforce staff that frame employer relations in terms of more conventional labor market exchanges, i.e., successfully matching job orders and job placements, the latter at times accompanied by job development efforts for workforce programs at the Career Centers.

Project GROW does not provide additional resources for deepening employer engagement, requiring instead a considerable amount of leveraged effort towards a new arena of practice. Administrators and responsible staff are increasingly focusing on employer engagement practices to build capacity in this area and meet the performance expectations of the demonstration. Some success is notably apparent in efforts to elicit progressive levels of employer contributions to curriculum development and subsequent adjustments to industry standards and practices, as well as employer needs. For example, phlebotomy and taking "vitals" were recommended and added to a Medical Assistant curriculum in one area, which proved helpful in placing a student as a Clinical Medical Assistant with a local employer. Curriculum review initiated discussions to determine and negotiate:

- Format and content of curriculum to be reviewed, which could range from a simple course overview description or outline to a detailed binder of lessons plans, instructional materials, and student assessment instruments;[48]

[48] Colleges do not consistently have program or course materials that identify the skills and competencies they are incorporating, so that employers can more easily review and comment. This has made it more difficult to engage employers in this review in some areas than others, and is particularly noticed when new curriculum are quickly assembled for imminent classes.

- Perceived redundancy of requirement to review, since colleges have already vetted many curricula with departmental advisory groups comprised of employers and industry experts; aligned them with state or national industry criteria and academic standards; or simply adopted curricula set to accepted state/national credential or licensing requirements;
- Timing of review, since employers may have been recruited after instruction began; and
- Feedback loops to inform employers of the value and result of their input.

Nonetheless, there is evidence that employers are becoming more engaged in the operations of Project GROW. BSRs have recruited employers as work experience or clinical placement/internship hosts. They have also enlisted employers as guest speakers in classrooms, providers of worksite visits, and job placement prospects, as more participants are approaching the end of their training pipeline. Researchers will continue to monitor the expanding role of:

- Employer subject matter experts in training or academic bridge classes
- Employer-based advocacy and incumbent worker referrals to the program
- Support for career progression through access to additional training
- Employer willingness to interview and hire program graduates
- Growth and expansion in the number of career pathways

Industry Sector Development. Given the challenges of engaging employers in each board area, efforts to build out an industry sector approach to date have been sparse. Nonetheless, though differences in board areas exist there are fertile prospects for developing industry sector groups within the Health Care industry and within the Oil and Gas industry in WIB areas across the border regions. Experience has indicated that it is easier to enlist cooperation of large industry entities with steady flows of workforce needs, dedicated community relations staff, and established human resource offices in the advancement of industry cluster organizations than it is to recruit and retain the steady

interest of smaller scale employers with occasional workforce needs. Major public and private hospital groups, long-term and assistive living providers, and allied health care providers are found in every major urban community. The Eagle Ford Shale Consortium, which primarily impacts the Middle Rio and South Texas board areas, has consistently self-marketed its own long-term value to the local labor market as part of what it views as sustained economic growth in the region and throughout large swaths of the state. The industry might also serve as a catalyst for Health Care industry sector engagement, since population growth and emergency services increases induced by extractive expansion are likely to require increases in the availability of health services. Both industries exhibit strong potential for support of career pathways that help them meet their human capital needs while enhancing livelihood prospects for the resident population of the communities in which they operate. Project GROW partners might put forth greater effort to harvest this potential as a starting point for building industry sector groups. Smaller businesses will be attracted by the information and participatory benefits but are less inclined and able to launch such an initiative.

Stronger alignment across employer engagement efforts is also necessary. In addition to the efforts of Business Service Representatives in Career Centers, smaller, more diffused industry interests and motivated employers might more directly be recruited from among program advisory committee members at the technical and community colleges. Although these meet only occasionally and their membership commitments vary, these committees can serve as an additional gateway for BSRs to engage employers and other training stakeholders. In addition to building direct links with stakeholders, the process serves to build bridges of learning exchange between the academic and workforce institutions.

Job Development and Placement. Relatedly, it is worth noting that community and technical colleges are tending towards strengthening their own in-house career development and placement offices and that colleges are generally increasing efforts to improve and track student placements as they are becoming more accountable for student

outcomes. WIBs and Career Center staff could begin coordinating employment engagement strategies with college placement efforts in order to reduce duplication of efforts and redundant contacts with the same or similar employers. Both institutional groups are increasingly serving the same individuals and share interests in positive employment outcomes based on strong training outputs. Project GROW is well-positioned to strengthen institutional alignment in this functional area.

At this stage in implementation, technical assistance, and guidance to BSRs and WIBS regarding employer engagement has focused on the elements of best practices in employer engagement in successful career pathway programs. The operational response, to the extent that it has occurred, has been to build relationships or engage existing employers in Project GROW through actions such as employer contacts, curriculum review, site visits, and other activities noted above. These efforts will need to be expanded and deepened as Project GROW implementation proceeds.

The curriculum and the level of occupational training in the workforce and continuing education departments convey basic skills as a starting point. Employers will hire individuals with these credentials, as long as their skill and competency requirements are met. One business liaison noted the difficulty of getting employers interested in programs to develop skills that do not meet their minimum hiring threshold, indicating that further alignment with employer needs is necessary in some instances. Local areas are encouraged to continue expanding knowledge and practices of Project GROW as a career pathway program that aligns stackable postsecondary credentials that meet the human capital needs of employers, advance the livelihood prospects of workers, and contribute to regional economic growth. The demonstration is challenged to implement practices that well exceed those associated with the less comprehensive practices associated with rapid credentialing and employment entry programs with which they have prior experience.

Administrative System for Program Participation (ASPP)

ASPP is a major feature of Project GROW that supports real time exchanges between program partners at local and regional levels and serves as the database for unique data elements that are essential to the demonstration's program management and evaluation purposes. ASPP, however, has not been universally or consistently used across the BWA area. Partners in only one WIB area have fully adopted and begun harvesting new operating efficiencies from the ASPP. Its cross-partner use is limited in the other areas.

The common information technology platform has proven effective for administrative management purposes, particularly for preparing the Monthly Performance Report. Complete and accurate data entry, as well as clarity regarding data field definitions, continue to be areas of concern that Business Access and Project GROW partners are addressing.

The use of ASPP sustained a major setback when the Texas Workforce Commission withheld permission to allow client intake and management data in TWIST to migrate to ASPP. The BWA and Business Access had incorrectly assumed at start-up that TWC would support the data system exchange. This disallowance has resulted in dual data entry for frontline workers, a very unwelcome development.

The Project Coordinator at Lower Rio Grande retains centralized responsibility for data accuracy and ensures that every eligible registrant in ASPP is also opened as a WIA eligible in TWIST prior to reporting an individual as a Project GROW participant. Although the Project Coordinator frequently provides technical assistance and reminds WIB area partners of incorrect and missing data entries, responsibility for data entry and quality assurance at the WIB level is often weak or diffused.

The Monthly Performance Reports based on the ASPP data provides a quick snapshot of the demonstration's status. The accuracy of the report is dependent upon accurate data entry at the local level. Including Project GROW data in Center Metrics Reports that profile status in all workforce programs might lever WIBs and partners towards more accurate and reliable data entry. The act of doing so might also symbolize their intent to sustain a form of career pathway program after the expiration of current Project GROW

funding. Dual data entry and unassigned or weak accountability for omissions in the ASPP at the local level may contribute to gaps and inaccuracies that will undermine the capacity to conduct plausible quantitative outcome and impact analyses of Project GROW for its evaluation.

POLICY CONTEXT: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Project GROW operates within state and national policy context that frame options and opportunities for the demonstration's potential success, especially those policies set by U.S. Department of Labor and the Texas Workforce Commission. While WIBs can set or change local policies to improve efficiencies throughout the region to an extent, and the BWA is working to facilitate this, some of these efforts would be enhanced with more support in key program policies set by higher level authorities. State and federal regulatory policies might be improved, eased, or suspended to help the demonstration achieve its objectives. The purpose of the demonstration is to further refine and evaluate promising and proven practices. There are several areas of policy and practice in which Project GROW could better achieve its objectives with added flexibility and increased support from state and federal agencies that reduces constraints and increases prospects for the demonstration's success. These should be opened for consideration at this early point in Project GROW implementation.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) portends positive developments in the national policy arena that will stimulate favorable opportunities for BWA and Project GROW to strengthen workforce services and outcomes. These include targeting services to disadvantaged populations, particularly youth; support for career pathways and industry sector approaches; extending WIA youth eligibility to age 24; expanding work experience opportunities, including on-the job-training; and strengthening alignment between adult education, postsecondary, and workforce services. Prior to adoption and regulatory clarification, there are immediate steps USDOL and TWC may support. Innovations, such as those in the Project GROW demonstration, by their very

nature merit a few degrees of leeway regarding policy, regulatory, and institutional compliance standards to fully test their effectiveness.

USDOL and Career Pathways Policy. The results of WIF grantee efforts will inform prospects of career pathway policy in the national workforce development arena. Successful implementation in the present depends on flexibility to improve practices and remove barriers in the short term, as well as receive supportive signaling that the strategy and practices will be allowed and backed in the future. Project GROW is a demonstration project to test innovative strategies operating in the mainstream context and compliance with workforce performance expectations. Concern for the latter may be inhibiting the accomplishments of the former. Any policy or regulatory adjustments that USDOL might introduce to hold harmless and further encourage innovation could be helpful to Project GROW.

USDOL might immediately support the demonstration by:

- Allowing TWC to remove or suspend Project GROW participants from WIA performance requirements, since many of these individuals would not commonly access training services.
- Committing to a continuation of support for successful policy and practices generated in the demonstration, especially those tenets common to Project GROW and WIOA.

USDOL might also continue or initiate open discussion of innovative methods to:

- Support and fund progress beyond initial certification toward additional credentialing in a career pathway.
- Develop measures applicable to career pathway progressions that go beyond entry and retention.
- Provide mechanisms for incumbent worker training which will allow advance training of current entry level employees for career advancement; create

openings for new hires; help close the skills gap for employers; and strengthen employer services and engagement with the workforce system.

Strengthening Support and Cooperation with the Texas Workforce Commission. To date, Project GROW appears to have garnered limited support and recognition for its challenging, comprehensive efforts at the state level. Although the USDOL awarded the WIF Grant to BWA as a consortium of workforce boards, led by a workforce board, Project GROW would do well to cultivate stronger support from the Commissioners, Executive Director, and Program Administrators at the Texas Workforce Commission. TWC might exhibit support for the demonstration in at least three immediate ways that could be a catalyst for systemic integration at the WIB-level, point of service delivery that the Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC) is pursuing across agencies and stakeholders at the state level. These are:

- Strengthening the availability of and access to consistent TABE testing and reporting throughout the workforce system. Currently, written or computer tests are used, and the use of different versions (Locator, Battery, Survey)—at times inappropriately—limit statewide and BWA comparability.
- Determining a method to remove or suspend the inclusion of Project GROW's harder to serve participants from WIA and state performance measures.
- Allowing the migration of TWIST data to ASPP to remove duplicate data entry, which undermines its use and effectiveness.

Administrative authority for adult education programs has moved from the Texas Education Agency to the newly established Adult Education and Literacy Program at the Texas Workforce Commission, opening new prospects for closer links between basic education and workforce services.[49] Although adult education programs are currently in

[49] In order to better align educational and employer needs, 83rd Texas Legislature in 2013 passed Senate Bill 307, transferring ABE responsibilities from the TEA to the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), and establishing Texas Workforce Solutions (TWC and the 28 WIBs) as the lead in establishing local consortia.

transition, a statewide TABE policy at TWC administered through the WIBs could establish *consistent* standardized assessment as a priority service provision option throughout the Texas workforce system (thus making the test available to all potential participants), provide technical guidance on implementation, and authorize funding for testing. Texas could harvest more reliable data to assess academic deficiencies as part of its effort to close the "skills gap" in the workforce. WIBs could have a more solid basis for effectively developing service plans for subgroups of persons on the margin of workforce viability, similar to the triaging that Project GROW has introduced.[50] The demonstration would benefit from consistent policy framework for statewide adult education assessment for implementation, while conceivably producing better outcomes based on targeted services. Standard operating procedures would also support stronger evaluation data across the border region.

Current performance measures do not adequately encourage career pathway programs. Rather, they tend to support training certification, immediate employment entry, placement wages, and retention. They do not reflect the additional case management, counseling and instructional efforts, supplemental resources, and longer time frames associated with a career pathway program. Moreover, Project GROW primarily serves individuals who are less likely to be enrolled, based on their qualifications and barriers, than those individuals who might more regularly be enrolled in WIA training and included in the performance formula denominator. There may be a performance disincentive to co-enroll Project GROW participants in WIA programs. This credible risk can be reduced by suspending the Project GROW participants from the measures, possibly by demarcating them as a separate client category, such as "Career Pathway Participant," while USDOL develops measures for such a client group in the future.

Policy concepts and proposed changes support TWC objectives of increasing collaboration among providers, reducing duplicated services at the local level, and adding accountability to grant recipients.

[50] In the early to mid 1990's—the pre-PRWORA era—the Texas JOBS Program (predecessor to the TANF Choices Program), triaged participants by education levels based on TABE assessments and work history as the basis for service planning. While not advocating a return to a "one-size fits all" approach, the point is that TABE was a standard practice. The increased availability and more consistent use across the State could produce a baseline measure useful for workforce planning.

Dual data entry in TWIST and ASPP impedes adoption and use of the system by negating one of the fundamental efficiencies that ASPP is trying to develop. TWC could find a means to allow the migration of specific client data to ASPP to enable Project GROW to fully test a potentially effective means of real-time case management and information sharing functions across partners at the WIB level. This could be a catalyst for systemic integration at the WIB-level point of service delivery that the Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC) is pursuing across agencies and stakeholders at the state level. ASPP is a potentially valuable tool to enhance program efficiencies and improve outcomes in an era of increasingly scarce resources. BWA members and potentially every other WIB in the state could benefit from this or a similar integrating database/management tool. Almost every major funding stream that flows through the Texas Workforce System (WIA Formula Funds, Employment Services, SNAP E&T, and TANF Choices) is subjected to cuts in the near term due in part to the low unemployment of the state compared to others. Eliminating the dual entry constraint will clear the way to measure the cost-effectiveness and to assess the efficiencies of such a potential enhancement to the local workforce systems across the state.

Career Pathways and Systemic Integration. The Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC), which provides oversight and policy guidance to the Texas workforce system, is responsible for the *Workforce System Strategic Plan*. Its ex officio members include the directors of the Texas Workforce Commission and the Higher Education Coordinating Board, among the five key agency directors on the Council. TWIC acknowledges the importance of accelerated learning options, the value of postsecondary certifications, expanding opportunities to populations at the margins, addressing the skills gap, industry sector strategies, and other program and policy issue areas central to Project GROW. The demonstration's efforts at institutional alignment between the adult education networks, community and technical college systems, and the Workforce Solutions system reflect the type of systemic integration that TWIC strives to achieve. *Strong support for a career pathway model could be the capstone that ties these issue areas together in a single*

structure. Project GROW has the potential in its design and initial implementation experiences to be that structure.

BWA and stakeholders might consider a mechanism to increase knowledge and awareness of Project GROW at TWIC and becoming involved in planning discussions. The demonstration efforts could help to inform the workforce system strategic planning process presently being conducted for the next six-year state plan. TWIC support, even conceptually, could send a positive signal to continue building and sustaining an accelerated career pathway model in the BWA region.

Moreover, the institutional alignment between the community and technical college systems and the workforce system that Project GROW represents, reflects the type of systemic integration that TWIC strives to achieve. Community and technical colleges braid and leverage college and workforce services. Project GROW's college training providers are all recipients of Accelerate Texas grants awarded by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. These grants support the development of integrated pathways that align contextualized basic skills/GED preparation concurrently with occupational training, building on the nationally renowned efforts of *Breaking Through* and the I-BEST Model developed in Washington State.

There are similarities and differences between the program intervention services offered under Project GROW and those under Accelerate Texas. Both focus on using evidence-based practices to support under-prepared adult learners in occupational training programs aligned with strong regional demand. In addition, the strong emphasis on career navigation, supportive services, internal and external partnerships, and placement for employment success pervades both programs.

One primary difference is that Accelerate Texas funding flows through community colleges (and are fairly flexible in use for students who meet the skill level eligibility requirements), whereas Project GROW funds flow through the WIBs (with all the accompanying WIA eligibility requirements). Under the Accelerate Texas, community colleges are primarily responsible for education outcomes and placements; though active partnerships with WIBs and employers are a strong design feature to support the work, the

reality of these connections varies widely. In Project GROW, collaboration across partnerships is inherent, resources are aligned and leveraged, and performance accountability is shared across institutional lines. Along the border, there has been significant alignment across Project GROW and Accelerate Texas through several of the training providers to braid funding; leverage collective capacity; maximize engagement of students and resources available to support them; and achieve results that are mutually beneficial to both programs.

WIB partners have been aligning institutional outlooks and practices under contract specifications and program expectations throughout this initial implementation phase. The current and future results of these efforts at the local level and across a broad region would likely be of significant interest to TWIC, TWC, THECB, and other key state stakeholders.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Project GROW aims to strengthen institutional alignment and services efficiencies to produce stronger employment effects and economic growth in the border region. There are two undercurrents that differentially "irrigate" the field of operations. The first flow contains the dichotomous program identity; the second nurtures its roots, resiliency, and sustainability, that is, its viability and vitality as an agent of systemic change in the border region.

Project GROW has a dual identity regarding the "adapted" model upon which it is based. Depending on the perspective of the partner, the demonstration is one, the other, or somewhat of both an *accelerated credentialing and rapid occupational placement* program and an *accelerated career pathways* program. WIBs and Career Center operators are knowledgeable and responsive to the concept of career pathways, but are more geared in practice to support accelerated certification and employment entries. The means and method for advancing clients along the career pathway have yet to be resolved. The common immediate result is to finish training and enter employment, but Project GROW must elevate the outcomes to the next level.

Postsecondary providers are remarkably well-versed and immersed in the language and practice of career pathways across the region but have, for the most part, not enrolled adequate numbers of participants to meet the expected level of services under the terms of their contracts. VIDA and Project ARRIBA both operate with a high level of success preparing individuals for well-paying jobs in a career path, but their experience has brought little benefit to the demonstration yet, again based largely on low referral numbers.

The most fundamental and challenging aspect of Project GROW rests with BWA and local partners in the development, adoption, or adaption of systemic service practices and capacity to implement those practices in support of accelerated credentialing along a promising career pathway. The attainment of this central proposition of Project GROW requires enduring regional systems change. Project GROW implementation to date has been based on self-selected approach in each WIB area within the design parameters that allow them to implement the program or to develop capacity to do so by building on their own chosen practices and operational context.

Given the somewhat incremental and uneven progress observed across the region, BWA might strongly consider more closely adopting the practices that are producing results, many of which are found in the Lower Rio Grande area. The partnership configuration and collaborative services model from which Project GROW was adapted are based on the successful experiences of Lower Rio Grande, South Texas College, and VIDA implementing "Breaking Through." Naturally, having started with more experience and capacity, this WIB area is exhibiting more consistent progress regarding timely enrollments of cohorts, reducing duplicative assessments between the college and the Career Center, and efficiently sharing client information through the ASPP. Progress in these areas can be attributed to the single point of contact model with clear responsibility to channel interest, guide eligibility, and monitor initial progress. Implementation is reinforced by regular weekly and as needed contacts between college, Career Center staff, and VIDA staff to review client status and service delivery issues. Involved staff at each partner entity use the ASPP and appreciate its contribution to joint case management effectiveness. WIBs should not avoid emulating these successful practices.

Project GROW seeks to move beyond “pockets of innovation” for effectively growing the workforce, while meeting the needs of local employers and supporting economic expansion through workforce development. Continuing along the current more disparate packages of approach undermines these potential benefits. Closer adhesion to successful practices across WIB areas will promote systemic development that might be more continuously improved and sustained locally, as well as replicated in other regions of the nation.

NEXT STEPS IN THE EVALUATION

The Interim Report is descriptive and formative, intended to provide a basic understanding of program design and initial implementation experiences as a basis for subsequent analysis and ongoing discussion of Project GROW. Researchers will continue to monitor operational status and improvements in the extensive strategic and operational features of the Project GROW demonstration through fieldwork, document review, and data analysis, including financial data. Comprehensive, multi-method research and analysis related to outcomes, net impacts, and cost-effectiveness will be presented in subsequent reports, as Project GROW further ramps up enrollments; significant numbers of participants attain their initial credential in a career pathway prepared to enter the workforce; and participants enter and retain employment in their chosen occupational field for durations long enough to assess the earnings effects of the demonstration.

As ASPP matures and RMC obtains postsecondary, as well as other administrative data sets, researchers will prepare ongoing sub-analyses of client demographics, cohort formation, services, and outcomes. Combined with TWIST, TWIT, and UI wage records and other administrative data sets, these sub-analyses will be produced as a series of scheduled Progress Reports throughout the duration of the demonstration. Researchers will prepare a full Implementation Report in December 2015, and a comprehensive Final Report in October 2016.

REFERENCES

TIP Strategies. 2011. *An Economic Strategy for the Lower Rio Grande Valley.* Austin, TX. http://www.wfsolutions.org/~wforce/images/workforce/GeneralWebsite/Content/WhoWeAre/Resources/TIPReports/Regional_Collaboration_Project_Exec_Summary_and_Recommendations_Report_June_2011.pdf

TIP Strategies. 2012. *Future of the Workforce: Regional Context*. Austin, TX. http://www.wfsolutions.org/~wforce/images/workforce/GeneralWebsite/Content/WhoWeAre/Resources/TIPReports/2012-08-22_TIP_Future_of_the_Workforce_EXPANDED_VERSION.pdf

APPENDIX A: FIELD RESEARCH PROTOCOL

Research for the process analysis is based on a topic-centered Field Research Protocol. The Protocol guides site-based formal interviews and informal contacts, serves as a vehicle for additional documentation collection, and supports the objectives and data needs of other research components, specifically the outcomes/impact and cost-effectiveness analyses.

Basically, the process analysis starts with the conceptual design presented in the proposal, identifies refinements to that model for operational start-up, and tracks ongoing progress throughout the evaluation period. This research component analyzes the structure and function of Project GROW to identify how it is designed to meet its purpose and objectives, effective and ineffective policies and practices, operational constraints and opportunities, program adjustments, and short-term observable outcomes.

As part of its broader research support, the process analysis observes the time, effort, and resources associated with distinct program functions to support the program benefits and costs assessments, and the program management and performance data reporting functions to support the quantitative outcomes and net impacts analyses.

After mutual introductions, a brief reminder of evaluation purposes, and a pledge of informant confidentiality, researchers will begin the guided conversation along the following topical areas with appropriately informed individuals variously positioned in the service delivery configuration within and across partners in each workforce region. In other words, parts of the Research Protocol will be adapted to guide the discussion within the area of responsibility and knowledge of the specific individual with whom we are having the discussion.

Project Planning and Design

What factors shaped the conceptual basis and initial design of Project GROW? Consider factors such as interest or concerns about:

- Employment placement, retention, and advancement, including career paths
- Employer engagement: Industry sector approaches
- Skills gaps/economic development constraint
- Earnings limitations of resident population
- Promising education and training approaches: College readiness/contextualized learning/accelerated pathways/ self-paced modules and IHLS

- Economic growth and sustainable/stable communities
- Other

Key Collaborators

How were key partners identified and recruited across the border region? What were relations/connections like before GROW? Did the Project initiate or strengthen connections?

- Border area WIBS
- Career Center operators
- Community Colleges
- Training providers
- Community-based organizations, including service providers and advocates
- Public sector support
- Private sector support

How does Project GROW fit within the overall institutional framework of the collaborating partners?

Consider factors such as:

- Agency mission/purpose
- Organizational structure
- Staffing configuration
- Scale and scope of regular services
- PROJECT GROW Resource commitment
- PROJECT GROW staff/administrative assignment
- PROJECT GROW services
- Budget allocation/expenditures
- Leveraged resources
- Outcomes/performance expectations

Operating Context

Are there noteworthy contextual factors in the border or WIB region that support or constrain successful implementation of the PROJECT GROW? To what extent does PROJECT GROW address or optimize these factors?

Consider factors such as:

- Labor market patterns: Skills gap, employment practices, wages, employment rates, informal economies
- Demographic trends: youth, aging workforce, education levels, migration/immigration
- Health and environmental conditions
- Crime
- Language barriers: LEP
- Settlement patterns: gap/distance between training locations/residence/jobs
- Other factors or conditions

Purpose and Goals

What are the purpose and the goals of PROJECT GROW? From your perspective, which of these goals is most important? Which will be the most challenging to attain?

Strategic Approach

Throughout discussions, researchers will be attuned to how well the various strategic elements of Project GROW have been understood and adopted/adapted in service model within and across partners.

From your perspective, what are the key strategic approaches implemented by Project GROW? These elements may include:

- Accelerated career pathways
- Contextualized learning
- Self-paced In Home Learning System (IHLS)

- College readiness efforts
- Employer engagement/industry cluster approach
- WIB area systemic effort
- Borderlands/ (BWA) regional collaboration/ systemic effort
- Target Groups: Appropriate services regime for Groups A, B, and C determined by academic proficiency and literacy
- Common program database for program and performance management (ASPP)
- Evaluation services

Client Flow

Researchers will document typical client flow, noting variation within and across partners, as well as strengths and constraints, including attrition points.

What are the typical steps in PROJECT GROW client flow and what occurs at each step? Which staff are responsible for tasks? Is there a single point of contact for these functions or are tasks performed by multiple or variously "positioned" individuals? Are there notable consistencies and/or variations across WIB areas? Describe the content and procedures for each operation. Collect forms and observe data entry procedures.

Principal steps in client flow include:

- Outreach, Information, and Referral: Marketing features and entry gateways to GROW in each WIB area
- Service Planning: Determinant point and procedure for individual service planning, noting relation between WIA or other programs with GROW
- Participation Patterns: Standard service patterns for Groups A, B, and C.
- Program Exit: Determinant factors, point of determination and procedure for individual exit from GROW services

Services and Activities

Researchers will review content, participation, and value of specific activities, as well as gather suggestions for adjustments and additions to current services menu for each services cluster, i.e., those provided to Groups A, B, and C, within and across WIB areas.

What education, training, and employment services and activities are provided to PROJECT GROW participants? Who provides each service? Which generate the most response and engagement from participants? Are there key stress points in service delivery? When do you sense that you have a client who is very likely to be successful?

Are participants provided standardized supportive services or do providers determine supportive service's needs? Which services are more/most essential to persistence? Which supportive services have more prominent demand/meet almost universal client need?

Participant services may include:

- Occupational/vocational and aptitude assessments
- Skills assessments and certification test preparation
- Career counseling: LMI information, wages, demand, and career advancement potential
- Career pathway counseling:
- Academic assessments and testing
- Academic counseling
- Contextualized ABE/GED/ESL coursework
- College readiness preparation/College readiness academy
- Academic retention/persistence services
- Peer learning workshops
- Postsecondary education enrollment leading to academic of skills credential
- Occupational/Career Pathway Training
- Job readiness workshops
- Job search services
- Job placement services

- Job retention services
- Work experience services
- Other services and activities

Supportive services may include:

- Two most common: Transportation and child care; Work-related expense assistance under WIA. Other services: clothing
- Tuition payment/reimbursement
- Emergency needs payments

Outreach to local housing authorities HUD Family Self-Sufficiency Program

- Temporary housing assistance
- Incentives; at times with GED

Case Management

Who provides case management services to PROJECT GROW participants and what type and intensity of case management do they receive?

Case management may include:

- All Project GROW participants receive Individual Case Management services under WIA. However, the intensity of this case management style may vary between Career Center contractors and their service delivery model. For example, WIA may require at least one, in-person client contact per month for clients in training. In some instances, this may be limited to a brief meeting to provide transportation assistance. In other areas, case manager practice may promote more and deeper involvement in client progress. Normal WIA caseload size per worker also varies between and within BWA WIBS, suggesting that available time per case in some WIBs is more restrictive than others. This may vary to some degree to the level of commitment to Project GROW's objectives and the prevailing concern for

WIA performance targets and successful State Common Measures. WIA budgets dwarf Project GROW allocations.

- VIDA and Project ARRIBA by design provide Intensive Individual Case Management to assigned clients. Through December, only Lower Rio Grande has enrolled and referred Project GROW Cohort C customers to VIDA for these services.
- In practice, all Project GROW participants are deemed to receive a limited functional amount of Dual / Parallel Case Management, since class instructors, WIA case managers, and other college and Career Center staff share information concerning progress and problems related to participation and service delivery.
- Elements of Joint Case Management/Case Staffing are found in the Lower Rio Grande WIB area, where Career Center and Training Provider staff meet regularly to discuss enrollments and client progress. Middle Rio Grande early in implementation conducted case staffing as part of the one-day eligibility and enrollment workshops held to populate training cohorts.

Data Reporting: Program Management, Performance Management, and Evaluation Data

Researches will describe data management systems, their use, and sharing arrangements that facilitate program and performance measurement and management, as well as meet evaluation requirements.

How PROJECT GROW client data is recorded, utilized by partners, and accessible to PROJECT GROW collaborators? Does data management capacity support regional systemic advancement?

Researchers will determine which variables of interest/data elements:

- Reside in TWIST
- Reside in TWIT
- Reside in ASPP
- Reside in both ASPP and TWIST

Researchers will probe the reliability of the data by noting data entry practices that support quality, accuracy, accessibility, and consistency.

Career Pathways

Researchers will assess the selection and development of articulated career pathways demand occupations/growth industry sectors in each of the five WIB areas.

Career pathway elements include:

Education and training characteristics. Researchers will probe features such as:

- Flexible and/or alternative scheduling
- Contextualization and acceleration of curricula
- Supplemental tutoring and peer learning exchanges
- Articulation of online and classroom ABE/GED or college readiness with postsecondary academic and technical programs (i.e., two or more educational pathways)
- Other distinctive features of accelerated career pathways introduced by Project GROW

Strong local pathway demand. Researchers will determine minimally that the selected pathway is linked to the WIB demand occupation lists and offers robust opportunity for career advancement in the local economy or elsewhere.

"Wrap around" services. These will include bit are not limited to:

- Career and financial aid counseling
- Drop-out prevention
- Employment retention activities
- Additional post-placement services such as child care, transportation, and work-related or other income supports that have been introduced, intensified or expanded under Project GROW.

Credentialing. Researchers will assess the extent to which the targeted credential is and has been vetted by the Project GROW partners as:

- Marketable
- Industry recognized
- Employer validate
- Stackable or progressively leading to career advancing certificates or degrees.

Employer Engagement

Researchers will identify consistencies and variance regarding responsibility for employer engagement across the five WIBs, including Career Center operators and training contractors, as well as Project VIDA and Project ARRIBE regarding:

- Employer services structures,
- Strategic approaches
- Responsible staff

Researchers will monitor and review employer /industry sector engagement including:

- Recruitment/outreach
- Involvement in curricula development
- Subject matter expertise/instruction
- Tuition supports/career friendly policies
- Program expansion
- Employment/expanded work experience opportunities

Concluding Observations

Researchers will elicit informed insights from the multiple providers and perspectives regarding their experiences with PROJECT GROW and recommendations, as well as concerns, for continuing operational improvements.

What are the strengths, limitations, and opportunities for stable, sustainable operation of PROJECT GROW throughout your WIB area and the border region?

What are the key lessons your experience with Project GROW has yielded to date?

Thank you for your time and considerable insights. We will be sharing the preliminary results of this phase of our research in July 2013.

APPENDIX B: GUIDE TO THE TABE: ASSESSMENTS, ADMINISTRATION, AND TWC POLICY

TABE Forms and Test Length

Designed by McGraw-Hill, the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) are the de facto national standards for assessing adult basic and ESL skills. Test makers release editions of the exam in pairs to allow for pre and post-instruction assessment, with TABE 9&10 as the most recent version. As education programs vary greatly by focus and resources, providers can choose from three assessment forms. The *TABE Locator* is a short, standardized diagnostic that determines which subsequent assessment students should take. The *TABE Survey* provides placement and diagnostics for students entering intensive coursework. The significantly longer *TABE Complete Battery* offers a more precise assessment of a student's individual strengths and skill gaps.

	Locator		**Survey**		**Complete Battery**	
	#Items	Testing Time	#Items	Testing Time	#Items	Testing Time
Reading	12	:12	25	:25	50	:50
Math Computation	8	:05	25	:15	40	:24
Applied Math	8	:08	25	:25	50	:50
Language	12	:12	25	:25	55	:55
Total	40	:37	100	1:30	195	2:59

Scoring, Proficiency, and Testing Levels

Both the TABE Survey and Complete Battery account for students' varied education by offering the exam at five levels. Performance on the Locator sorts students into low literacy, easy, medium, difficult, and advanced testing groups (labeled L, E, M, D, and A, respectively).

TABE Locator Proficiency Scores (by# Correct)

TABE Level to Issue	Reading	Math (Combined)	Language
E	<6	<6	<6
M	7-8	7-8	7-8
D	9-10	9-11	9-10
A	11-12	12-16	11-12

Students unable to complete the Locator are referred to the TABE Complete Language Assessment System-English (TABE CLAS-E) subtest. Testing reading, writing, and listening, the CLAS-E subtest lasts approximately 90 minutes and is intended to diagnose a student's LEP instructional needs.

With the locator complete, students take either the TABE Survey or Complete Battery at their designated testing level. On both the Complete Battery and Survey, the number correct on each section is converted to a scaled score and corresponding grade level equivalency. Level E corresponds to roughly 2nd-3rd grade, Level M to 4th-5th, Level D to 6th-8th, and Level A to 9th-12th. Test-takers who score abnormally high or low are re-tested until their scaled scores match expected grade level equivalency for their testing level. Attached is a sample conversion chart, for the TABE 10 Survey's Reading section:

Reading 10 Survey

Level E			Level M			Level D			Level A		
NC	SS	GE	NC	SS	GE	NC	SS	GE	NC	SS	GE
25	630	6.9	25	702	9.9	25	778	12.9	25	812	12.9
24	568	6.9	24	607	9.9	24	680	12.9	24	696	12.9
23	538	6.9	23	573	9.3	23	634	12.9	23	653	12.9
22	519	6.0	22	553	8.0	22	608	12.2	22	628	12.9
21	504	5.4	21	537	7.0	21	590	10.6	21	609	12.9
20	490	5.1	20	524	6.2	20	574	9.4	20	593	11.1
19	477	4.5	19	512	5.8	19	561	8.6	19	579	10.0
18	465	4.1	18	501	5.3	18	549	7.8	18	567	9.1
17	452	3.7	17	491	5.1	17	537	7.0	17	555	8.3
16	440	3.3	16	481	4.7	16	526	6.3	16	543	7.6
15	428	2.9	15	471	4.4	15	514	5.8	15	531	6.6
14	417	2.6	14	461	4.0	14	503	5.4	14	518	6.0
13	405	2.4	13	451	3.7	13	491	5.1	13	504	5.6
12	392	2.2	12	441	3.3	12	479	4.6	12	489	5.2
11	379	2.1	11	430	3.0	11	465	4.1	11	473	4.6
10	363	1.9	10	418	2.6	10	450	3.6	10	454	4.0
9	345	1.7	9	405	2.4	9	432	3.1	9	432	3.4
8	322	1.5	8	388	2.2	8	407	2.4	8	404	2.7
7	290	0.8	7	366	1.9	7	372	2.0	7	364	2.2
6	220	0.0	6	327	1.6	6	302	1.2	6	300	1.6
5	175	0.0	5	255	0.0	5	285	0.7	5	300	1.1
4	175	0.0	4	255	0.0	4	285	0.7	4	300	1.1
3	175	0.0	3	255	0.0	3	285	0.7	3	300	1.1
2	175	0.0	2	255	0.0	2	285	0.7	2	300	1.1
1	175	0.0	1	255	0.0	1	285	0.7	1	300	1.1
0	175	0.0	0	255	0.0	0	285	0.7	0	300	1.1

Beginning Literacy=367 and below SS
Beginning ABE=368-460 SS
Low Intermediate ABE=461-517 SS
High Intermediate ABE=518-566 SS
Low Adult Secondary=567-595 SS
High Adult Secondary=596 and above SS

valid range
content range
re-test now!

TABE Policy in Texas

States vary on whether to require a specific TABE protocol. As of 7/1/2013, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) has issued its own TABE guidelines:

1. English-proficient students enrolling in adult basic or secondary education should take the TABE Locator to determine the appropriate full-length test.

2. Those who complete the Locator and reach Level E proficiency may take the Survey

3. Those unable to complete the Locator and reach Level E proficiency should take the TABE Complete Battery or an appropriate LEP substitute (TABE CLAS-E).[51]

This process is not always followed in practice. With community colleges, Career Centers, and other workforce development groups enrolling clients, providers may abandon guidelines. After all, it is counterintuitive to administer a longer, more comprehensive exam to less-prepared students. Program evaluators should be aware of how and why this conflict arises. As of November 2013, the TWC's proposed changes to the *Texas Register* do not include more refined guidelines for TABE administration.

Resources

TABE 9 & 10 Complete Battery and Survey Conversion Charts:

Available from Minnesota Adult Basic Education Assessment Training
http://www.mnabeassessment.com/TABE_resources.html

[51] "State Assessment and Goal Setting/Attainment Policy for Adult Education," *TWC Adult Education Transition*,

http://www-tcall.tamu.edu/texaslearns/docs/assmtpol/guidelines.html

APPENDIX C:
FIELD CONTACT LIST

LOWER RIO GRANDE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT AREA

Local Workforce Investment Board

Yvonne Gonzalez, Chief Executive Officer
Francisco Almaraz , Interim, Chief Executive Officer (former Deputy Director/Fiscal Manager)
Arcelia Sanchez, Director of Workforce Systems
Mel Escamilla, Workforce Operations Manager
David Gutierrez, Project GROW Coordinator
Rachel Garcia, Director of Corporate Systems Policy
Daniel Uribe, Business Intelligence Manager
Mike Willis, Director of Business Partnerships, (Executive Director, South Texas Manufacturers Association)
John Hershey, Planning & Community Partnerships Manager

Workforce Solutions Career Center Contractor
C2 Global Professional Services

Omar Treviño, Deputy Director, Workforce Operations & Partnerships
Andrea Navarro, Special Projects Coordinator
Martha Lopez, Case Manager
Elya Tijerina, Case Manager
Idalia Aleman Felci, Manager, Career Center West Hidalgo (Mission, Round 1)
Terry Santana, Manager, Career Center East Hidalgo (Weslaco, Round 1), West Hidalgo (Mission, Round 2)
Geri Escoba, Manager, Career Center West Hidalgo (Weslaco, Round 2)
Andrea Benavides, Skill Supervisor (Weslaco)
Juan Gazca, Skill Supervisor (Mission)
Rolando X. Perez, Lead Business Solution Representative
Louis Wilhelmsson, Business Solution Representative

Project GROW Training Contractor
South Texas College

Juan Carlos Aguirre, Director of Continuing and Professional Education
Olivia De la Rosa, Continuing Education Coordinator
"Jennifer," Instructor, Adult Basic Education, Health Care Bridge Class

CBO Contractor
Project VIDA: Valley Initiative for Development & Advancement

Myra Garcia, Executive Director
Priscilla Alvarez, Director of Program Services
Irma Garcia, Compliance Officer
Priscilla Rubio, VIDA Case Manager

CAMERON WORKFORCE INVESTMENT AREA

Local Workforce Investment Board

Pat Hobbs, Executive Director
Juan Garcia, Deputy Director
Laura Longoria, Chief Financial Officer
Maria Sosa, Program Manager
Sally Perez, Lead Monitor

Workforce Solutions Career Center Contractor
Southwest Keys

Henry B. Castillo, Regional Director
Terry Avalos, Quality Assurance Specialist
Belinda Olivares, Director of Workforce Center, Harlingen
Lori Villarreal, Director of Workforce Center, Brownsville
Carlos Guerrero, WIA Supervisor, Brownsville
Maggie Salinas, WIA Supervisor, Harlingen
Yvonne Vela, Client Specialist
Dee Saenz, Business Services Supervisor

Project GROW Training Contractor
Texas State Technical College/TSTC:

Javier De Leon, Vice-President of Student Learning for College Readiness and Advancement & Corporate Education
Cledia Hernandez, Associate Vice President, Corporate & Community Education
Juan Garza, Director of Resource Development
Judith Ibarra, Resource Development Specialist
Juan Leal, Director of Continuing Education,

CBO Contractor
Project VIDA: Valley Initiative for Development & Advancement

Priscilla Alvarez, Director of Program Services
Irma Garcia, Compliance Officer

MIDDLE RIO GRANDE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT AREA

Local Workforce Investment Board
Middle Rio Grande Development Council (MRGDC)

Betty Sifuentes, Director of Workforce System
Ronnie Rivera, Director of Operations
Barbara Lopez, Program Analyst / Data and Funds Specialist

Workforce Solutions Career Center Contractor
Middle Rio Grande Development Council (MRGDC)
Oralia Saldua, Director of Workforce Center (Del Rio)
Karina Salas, Quality Assurance
Maria "Curra" Pena, GROW Career Specialist

Project GROW Training Contractor
South West Texas Junior College (SWTJC)
Romelia Aranda, Dean of Workforce Development and Adult Basic Education
Lorena Ruiz, Workforce Training and Development Coordinator
Kristel Sanchez, Workforce Training and Development Coordinator
Diana Perez, Curriculum and Instruction Specialist, ABE
Ms. Stoddard, Instructor, Health Care Bridge College Readiness
Gloria McGuire, ABE Site Manager
Armando De Leon, ABE/ESL & Citizenship (Del Rio)
Maria de Hoyos, EOC grant, FAFSA/College Transition, Education Specialist (TRIO)
Celia Ramon & Melissa, TABE Assessment for GROW and VAST

Employer
Doena Faz, Administrator, Frontera Pediatrics
Marisa Sylva, Office Manager, Frontera Pediatrics
Sylvia Ramos, Head Nurse, Frontera Pediatrics

SOUTH TEXAS WORKFORCE INVESTMENT AREA

Local Workforce Investment Board
Rogelio Trevino, Executive Director
Elizabeth Mondragon, Workforce Development Supervisor
Kelly Elizondo, WSST Contract Manager

Workforce Solutions Career Center Contractor
ResCare Inc. (through September 2013) and then C2 Global Positioning Services (C2GPS)
Alda "Rosa" Rendon, Project Director/Workforce Center (Round 1)
Andrea De La Garza, Project Director/ Workforce Center (Round 2)
Anna Rocha, Expanded Services Supervisor
Diana Sanchez, Business Services Supervisor
Claudia "Cristi" Mitchell, Career Specialist

Project GROW Training Contractor
Laredo Community College (LCC)
Sandra Cortez, Director, Continuing Education
Armando Fonseca, Workforce Coordinator
Dr. Laura Cruz-Garza, Director of Adult Basic Education

Employers

Julie Bazan, Executive Director, Area Health Education Center (AHEC)
Mario Ojeda, Con-Way Trucking
Jose A. Guerra, Human Resources Director, Laredo Nursing & Rehabilitation Center
Joshua Orr, Human Resources, Gateway Community Health Clinics
Carolina Thurkettle, Human Resources Officer, City of Laredo Human Resources Department, Recruitment, Training, and Employee Relations Division

UPPER RIO GRANDE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT AREA

Local Workforce Investment Board

Lorenzo Reyes, Jr., Chief Executive Officer
Dr. Teofilo Ugalde, Chief Operating Officer
Ernesto Hernandez, Workforce Resource Manager
Lizet Soltero, Program Coordinator
Lorena Ruis, Program Coordinator
Jenelle Kelly, Program Coordinator
Jorge Montes, Program Monitor
Karina Castillo, Research Analyst/Performance Management Specialist
Rosalba Ortiz, Budget Analysts
Muriel Borders, Contracts Manager

Workforce Solutions Career Center Contractor
Serco, Inc.

Rosa Flores, Project Director/Workforce Center
Jonathan Williams, Workforce Center Manager
Armando Garcia, Workforce Center Manager
Oscar Lincon, Business Services Supervisor
Vielka Atkins, Program Supervisor
Ana Arias, Lead Case Manager
Veronica Perea, Case Manager
Jennifer Martinez, Case Manager
Hugo Carillo, Case Manager
Izhela La Strada, Case Manager
Lupita Hines, Case Manager
Drew Rosas, Case Manager

Project GROW Training Contractor
El Paso Community College (EPCC)

Luz Taboada, Director, Workforce Development
Sara Martinez, Director of Workplace Literacy Programs,
Workforce Development and Continuing Education
Maricarmen Casavantes, Workplace Literacy Programs Manager
Ann Savino, Career Pathways Coordinator (ABE-IG)

Patsy Saenz, Counselor/Navigator
Nelee Powell, Program Assistant
Doug Sherrer, Information Technology
David Olivas, Workforce Development Compliance Coordinator

CBO Contractor
Project ARRIBA: Advanced Retraining & Redevelopment Initiative in Border Areas
Roman S. Ortiz, Chief Executive Officer
Jeremy Hensley, Director of Accounting
Vikki Rey, Case Manager

Employer
Estrella Reyes Lopez, Media Relations Administrator, Centro de Salud Familiar La Fe, Inc.

APPENDIX D:
PROJECT GROW 56-MONTH TOTAL BUDGET

Budget by Year 9/1/2012 to 12/31/2016

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total	Leverage
Board Personnel	48,000	48,000	48,000	12,800	3,200	160,000	
Board Fringe	11,520	11,520	11,520	3,072	768	38,400	
Board Travel	19,547	12,729	12,729			45,005	
Board Supplies	1,200	1,200	1,200	320	80	4,000	
Board Other	67,823	67,823	67,822	18,006	4,502	225,976	
	148,090	141,272	141,271	34,198	8,550	473,381	
Contractual							
Upper Rio	171,981	257,971	257,971	85,991		773,915	224,285
South Texas	131,539	197,308	197,308	65,770		591,924	171,543
Cameron	157,648	236,472	236,471	78,825		709,415	205,593
Middle Rios	131,539	197,308	197,308	65,770		591,924	171,543
Lower Rio	174,090	261,135	261,135	87,046		783,405	227,036
Business Assess-Admin sys	120,000	180,000	180,000	60,000		540,000	
Business Assess-In Home	81,668	122,500	122,500	40,833		367,500	
Jobs for the Future-TA	41,331	88,373	72,649	72,649	24,998	300,000	
Jobs for the Future-Eval	25,283	25,283	25,283	25,283	67,420	168,550	
Ray Marshall Center	104,997	104,997	104,997	104,997	279,993	699,984	
	1,140,073	1,671,347	1,655,622	687,164	372,411	5,526,617	1,000,000
	1,288,163	**1,812,619**	**1,796,893**	**721,361**	**380,961**	**5,999,998**	