

Regional Plan Template

SECTION A: REGIONAL VISION, GOALS AND STRATEGIES

A.1. Describe the regional workforce development area's vision for a skilled workforce.

Regional Workforce Development Area # 3 has adopted the state's vision as our own. The strategic vision for our regions is a healthy economy where all Minnesotans have equitable access to a workforce development system in which partners across the region are working toward a collective goal of providing workforce development programs that are responsive to employer needs in in-demand occupations and lead to good jobs with family-sustaining wages.

The Region 3 Leadership & Planning Board is committed to the establishment of regional strategies that are progressive, innovative, collaborative, and responsive to the needs of its communities within the 13-county region.

This vision emphasizes collaboration, equity, and responsiveness to employer demands, ultimately contributing to a thriving economy and improved quality of life for all Minnesotans. Region 3 will:

- Invest in employer driven regional workforce education and training systems that lead to quality jobs.
- Produce and distribute timely, easy to read information that job seekers can use to discover opportunities for skills development and advancement.
- Engage with businesses to help address challenges in recruiting and developing a diverse skilled workforce.
- Assist business with upskilling and retention of employees.
- Make career paths visible to all.
- Provide seamless program resources.
- Create skilled workers with family sustaining incomes.

A.2. Describe the region's strategic alignment with the State's Vision, Goals and Strategies.

2024 -2027 Region 3 strategic vision and plan aligns with the state's vision, goals, and strategies. All three of the state goals are embedded into the work being done with a focus on the local needs and priorities in the strategies developed.

Goal 1: Enhancement of interagency and local area coordination, with a focus on optimizing efficiency, coordination of workforce funding and programs, and improving system integration. This initiative aims to establish a seamless experience for individuals or employers interacting with the workforce system, ensuring they encounter no barriers ("no wrong door" approach).

Strategies for achieving this goal:

Interagency and Local Area Coordination: Facilitating collaboration among various agencies and stakeholders operating within Region 3 to align efforts and resources towards common workforce goals.

- Specifically, on-going one-stop operator meetings and stakeholder engagement interactions.

Efficiency and Coordination of Workforce Funding and Programs: Streamlining the allocation and use of workforce funding across agencies and programs to maximize impact and minimize duplication of efforts.

- Increased partnerships and collaboration in grant opportunities
- Increased communication across agencies
- Share best practices, identify those from other regions for replication

"No Wrong Door" Approach: Implementing strategies to ensure that individuals or employers seeking assistance from the workforce system can easily access the services they need through any entry point, without encountering unnecessary hurdles or confusion.

- Establish seamless referral processes warm hand offs
- Resource sharing across the workforce system.

Stakeholder Engagement: Engaging with stakeholders, including government agencies, local organizations, education entities, employers, and community groups, to gather input, foster buy-in, and drive collective action towards achieving shared workforce development goals.

- Community forums
- Targeted outreach to underrepresented populations
- Participation in community/partner/education advisory groups and boards

Data Sharing and Analysis: Enhancing data sharing mechanisms and analytical capabilities to facilitate informed decision-making, monitor progress, and identify areas for improvement within the workforce system.

- Surveys of those accessing services are reviewed at one-stop-operator meetings and improvements to services are made.

By pursuing these strategies, Region 3 aims to create a more coordinated, responsive, and user-friendly workforce system that effectively meets the needs of both individuals and employers, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for the region's workforce and economy.

Goal 2: The establishment or engagement of existing employer-led industry-sector partnerships throughout Region 3 to develop and enhance workforce development programs and career pathways. These initiatives will prioritize responsiveness to industry needs and promote equity

by addressing gaps in participation and representation across various demographic groups, including race, ethnicity, disability, gender, veteran status, and age.

Strategies include:

Employer Engagement – Actively involving employees from board identified industries in the design and implementation of workforce development programs to ensure alignment with industry needs and priorities.

- Sector initiatives, such as the Drive for Five grants and Industry career exploration events
- On-going promotion of the K-12 navigator tool and EpiConnect– free databases for employers to share their willingness and availability to engage with education, and job seekers/youth ([K12Navigator](#), [EPIC – Exploring Potential Interests & Careers \(epiconnect-mn.com\)](#))
- Board members leverage their employer relationships to share information
- Our commitment and responsiveness to employer needs in in-demand occupations that provide onramps, laddering, and latticing opportunities that lead to family sustaining wages
- Provide training and assistance to help businesses retain and attract the diverse workforce they need now and into the future

Industry-Sector Partnerships: Facilitating collaboration among employers, industry associations, educational institutions, government agencies, and community organizations to identify workforce development needs, share best practices, and collectively address skill gaps within specific sectors. Ensuring employers have a voice in career pathway training development that meets their needs.

- Participation with Central Minnesota Manufacturing Association
- Assistance and promotion of tour of manufacturing
- Provide information and access to programs available for incumbent worker training
- Partnership and engagement with employers for several career exploration events

Work-Based Learning, On-the-Job Training and Registered Apprenticeships: Integrating work-based learning opportunities, such as internships, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training, into workforce development programs to provide hands-on experience and facilitate smoother transitions into the workforce.

- Promote opportunities to employers in the region as a viable pathway for engaging new hires
- Provide employers with the Good Jobs Now information

By building employer-led industry-sector partnerships and implementing responsive and equitable workforce development programs, the Region aims to address skill gaps, promote economic opportunity, and foster inclusive growth across diverse communities and industries.

Goal 3: Transform central Minnesota's workforce system to be more inclusive, equitable, accessible, and proactive, effectively serving the needs of all residents, including both established and new Minnesotans. This initiative aims to prepare both employers and the current and emerging workforce for the evolving landscape of work, characterized by new and emerging technologies, shifting labor market demands, and demographic changes.

Inclusive and Equitable Services: Ensuring that workforce services and programs are accessible to all Minnesotans, regardless of background or circumstances, with a focus on addressing barriers to participation and promoting equitable outcomes.

- Prioritizing equity and inclusion in program design and implementation, with a focus on closing participation and representation gaps among underrepresented demographic groups
- Targeted outreach, recruitment, and support services to ensure equitable access and opportunities for all individuals
- Ongoing promotion of the Inclusive Workforce Employer Designation
- A focus on equity as the cornerstone of the work with job seekers
- Implementing measures to enhance the accessibility of workforce services and facilities for individuals with disabilities, ensuring that accommodations are available as needed to support full participation and inclusion
- Engaging with immigrant and refugee communities, as well as other populations of new Minnesotans, to understand their unique needs, experiences, and contributions to the workforce, and to develop targeted strategies for integration and economic empowerment
- Sharing information about untapped populations (i.e., BIPOC, individuals with disabilities, second chance individuals, Veterans) with employers and assist with engagement and outreach to these individuals for potential employment

Cultural Competency and Diversity Training: Providing training and resources to workforce practitioners and service providers to enhance cultural competency and effectively serve the diverse needs of Minnesota's population, including new Minnesotans from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

- Bi-annual training offered through the regions Inclusive Workforce Employer Designation (I-WE) committee
- Regional DEI guide updated on an annual basis with local resources

Proactive Skills Development: Anticipating and responding to the changing nature of work by proactively developing the skills and competencies needed for success in emerging industries and occupations, including those driven by advancements in technology.

- Artificial Intelligence workshop for employers
- Collaborating with educational institutions and industry partners to align workforce training and education programs with evolving labor market demands, ensuring that individuals are equipped with relevant skills and qualifications (i.e., customized training, incumbent worker training)
- Promoting a culture of lifelong learning and continuous upskilling among workers, providing opportunities for ongoing education and training to adapt to changing job requirements and career pathways

Data-Driven Decision-Making: Leveraging data and analytics to inform strategic planning, resource allocation, and program development within the workforce system, with a focus on addressing emerging trends and disparities.

By embracing inclusivity, equity, accessibility, and proactivity, Region 3 aims to build a resilient and adaptive workforce system that effectively supports the diverse needs and aspirations of its residents in the face of ongoing economic and demographic changes.

A.3. Describe best practices or area of strength of the region as it relates to the State’s Vision, Goals and Strategies that should be considered for replication or scale across the state.

Central Minnesota excels at partnerships and collaboration not only within the two LWDAs that comprise Region 3 but across the state. Resources and programming developed is shared with all partners at state level meetings (i.e., MAWB job seeker and business services meetings).

Best practices of the Region:

Partnerships and Collaboration: with colleges, Adult Basic Education, school districts, community-based organizations, and employers. Partners are adept at making cross-referrals, creating a “no wrong door” approach, and helping job seekers access the resources they need to succeed. We also partner on numerous regional events targeting youth, new Americans, service providers, and/or employers.

HR Networking Groups: Career Solutions and CMJTS offer monthly HR Networking Groups. The purpose of the HR Groups is for local professional human resources professionals to collaborate and brainstorm new ideas that work, share best practices, validate ideas, meet peers, conduct comparative analysis and learn new skills. This group is also a way to network and partner with

HR staff to share upcoming local workforce development events, connect businesses to federal, state, and local resources as well as provide the employers with access to employee training.

Discovery Day Events: These are 3-hour, bi-monthly Discovery Day workshops for job seekers. Job Seekers can “try a career” for the day and get all their questions answered about their career of interest. These Discovery Day workshops are basically comprised of two parts to include local labor market information from the employers and hands-on career activities with the college. There is an employer panel so the job seekers can get all their questions answered from those who work in these positions as well as hands on activities with a semi-truck/ bus and welding equipment depending on the workshop. In these Discovery Day workshops, job seekers can learn about:

- Requirements for the positions
- The abundant job openings, great wages, company perks from these local employers
- Insight and advice from the local workers in these positions
- Tools, equipment and safety gear
- And get all their questions answered to see if the career is right for them!

Job Seeker Open House Events: These events have been successful and have brought in many job seekers. There are many job search activities offered and staff make the atmosphere fun, upbeat and inviting. Job seekers become more aware of the employment and training services offered and can obtain assistance so they are better prepared for their next career.

Social Media Marketing: Social media marketing has proven to be successful in recruiting training grant program participants as well as employer participation.

Youth Specific Programming: Hands-on career exploration events; Exploring Potential Interests and Careers, Igniting Your Future, Construct Tomorrow, Career One, and Operation Exploration are some of the exciting opportunities for youth and young adults to identify their interests and start to map out a career pathway. All of these opportunities leverage partnerships with education, employers, community partners and lessons learned to accelerate progress.

By replicating these best practices and leveraging Central Minnesota’s strengths, the state can create a more robust, inclusive, and effective workforce system.

A.4. Describe the strategy to work with the entities within your region to carry out the core programs to align resources available in the region to achieve the strategic vision and goals of the local area boards and the state.

To effectively carry out the core programs and align resources in Central Minnesota, a strategic approach involves collaboration with various entities. Here’s how the region will work together: Starting with a thorough comprehensive assessment of local workforce needs sets the foundation for strategic goals. Collaborating with key stakeholders, including WIOA core programs, Regional Development Commissions, colleges, and service cooperatives, is essential.

This collaboration ensures a coordinated approach to providing training, services, and outreach to address unmet needs. Strategies already in place include a seamless referral process between programs/partners and on-going partner meetings that include updates and information on programs and services to ensure all staff are knowledgeable. Using data to make informed decisions and measure impact is crucial for tracking progress and adjusting strategies as needed. Data provides insights into what's working and what needs improvement. The one-stop-operator partners review LMI, employer and customer surveys to identify gaps in services and opportunities for improvement. Maintaining open communication through regular meetings and feedback sessions keeps the work moving forward smoothly. It also provides opportunities for continuous improvement by gathering input from stakeholders (i.e., one-stop-operator meetings, regional business service meetings).

Aligning the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy with the Regional Workforce Development Plan ensures synergy between economic development efforts and workforce development initiatives. Region 3 is unique in that business service coordinators are on staff and work directly with employers as the main customer. Often this includes connecting employers with economic developers.

Partnering with colleges and service cooperatives to align plans such as the Perkins Plan with the WIOA Youth Plan fosters coordination and joint initiatives. This alignment facilitates innovation in addressing local needs effectively. An example of these partnerships are the leveraged resources and collaborations of youth focused hands-on events. Perkins funds are used to help support these initiatives as well.

By working collaboratively, Central Minnesota can optimize resources, enhance program effectiveness, and achieve the shared vision and goals of the Region.

A.5. Describe any additional goals being set by the regional leadership or individual local area boards.

The following were goals identified by the region 3 Leadership and Planning Board during the SWAT analysis

1. Address some community needs that impact employment by convening stakeholders together to discuss the issue, brainstorm solutions, share best practices from other regions/areas that have had a positive impact on the issue. (i.e., childcare – can employers open a childcare center)
2. Sharing information about programs and services available, creating an elevator speech for board members to share with their networks.
3. Cross-regional knowledge sharing benefits everyone by accelerating progress, avoiding duplication of efforts, and promoting a sense of shared purpose, this will be accomplished through the following:

- Continue to promote the Inclusive Workforce Employer (I-WE) Program and assist employers in gaining designation.
- CMJTS and Career Solutions obtain I-WE designation
- Increase number of job seekers served
- Increase interest in Drive for Five: Technology, the Trades, Caring Professions, Manufacturing, and Education

A.6. Describe how the region is working together to prepare the workforce for state and federal investments in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), the Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors (CHIPS) and Science Act, and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) (collectively referred to as Investing in America (IIA)).

The **Investing in America (IIA)** initiatives encompass a series of state and federal investments aimed at bolstering the nation’s infrastructure, technology, and economic growth. These investments include the **Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL)**, the **Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors (CHIPS) and Science Act**, and the **Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)**. To prepare the workforce for these transformative investments, Central Minnesota is implementing several strategies:

Central Minnesota is partnering with state and local officials, employers, unions, community colleges, and high schools to ensure a diverse and skilled workforce can meet the demand for labor driven by these investments.

Region 3 will pursue Investing in America grant opportunities that align with the vision and mission of the LWDA’s. This may involve growing partnerships beyond the region and encompassing more statewide or rural initiatives.

Central Minnesota is promoting the expansion and diversification of pathways into good jobs and careers in advanced manufacturing that don’t require a four-year college degree.

Central Minnesota is committed to ensuring every American has equitable access to high-quality training, education, and services. Promotion of the North Star Promise for MN residents to access free tuition is one strategy. Efforts focus on providing pathways to good careers without leaving local communities.

Private companies have announced significant investments in manufacturing and clean energy, complementing the federal investments. Central Minnesota is aligning workforce development efforts with these private-sector initiatives.

Efforts are on-going to prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion in all programs and services. Central Minnesota is reaching out to underrepresented groups, providing targeted training, and promoting inclusive hiring practices.

Central Minnesota is actively collaborating with other regions to share best practices and lessons learned.

By aligning workforce development with the IIA investments, Central Minnesota aims to create a skilled, adaptable, and resilient workforce that can thrive in the changing economic landscape.

By working together, central Minnesota is strategically positioning itself to maximize the impact of state and federal investments, enhance infrastructure, and promote economic growth. In Central Minnesota, several infrastructure projects are planned to enhance transportation, water systems, public safety, and housing. Local projects in central Minnesota include apartments in **Little Falls** (The Views on 7th) and **Waite Park** (Vue Pointe Apartments), as well as funding for **Habitat for Humanity** projects in **St. Cloud**, **Cold Spring**, and surrounding counties. [Manufactured home parks in Alexandria, Little Falls, and Sauk Rapids are also receiving support².](#)

These infrastructure projects contribute to the well-being, economic growth, and quality of life in central Minnesota.

SECTION B: REGIONAL OPERATIONS

B.1. Provide a Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats (SWOT) analysis of the regional workforce system.

SWOT analysis of the regional workforce system in Central Minnesota completed by the Board members, One-Stop-Operator Committee, and staff:

<u>Strengths:</u>	<u>Weaknesses:</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Skilled Workforce: Central Minnesota has a pool of skilled workers across various industries.• Collaboration: Strong partnerships between employers, educational institutions, and workforce development agencies.• Responsive Programs: Existing programs address employer needs and provide relevant training.• Adaptability: Ability to adapt when local opportunities arise: layoffs, closures, new grant projects, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Labor Shortages: Some sectors face shortages due to demographic shifts and aging workforce.• Skills Mismatch: Gaps between available skills and industry requirements.• Limited Access: Rural areas may have limited access to training and employment services.• Lack of Funding that can be used flexibly: Budgets are limited as more funding is allotted to the metro area.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful HR Networking Groups • Commitment to DEI concepts and approaches • Strong ROI for the programs • Communication within the Region • Expertise in workforce development programming • Nimble and Innovative 	
<p><u>Opportunities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology Adoption: Embrace digital tools for training, job matching, and remote work. • Sector-Specific Programs: Develop targeted programs for high-demand industries. • Inclusive Workforce: Tap into underrepresented groups for talent acquisition. • Innovate: Take risks, try something new, accept failure as “ok” • Customer Surveys: Encourage customers to complete / new ways of collecting feedback from ALL customers who visit. • Outside the box Outreach Efforts • Northstar Promise for Recruitment • Alleviating Barriers to Employment 	<p><u>Threats:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Downturns: Recessions can impact job availability and funding. • Changing Industries: Automation and industry shifts may render certain skills obsolete. • Competition: Nearby regions may attract businesses and workers with better incentives. • Reduction of Budgets: Federal dollars continue to decline • Private Vendor Grant Competition • Industry Specific Age Barriers • Delays in Funding Disbursements • Siloed Partners doing duplicate efforts: Not parallel or collaborative

By leveraging strengths, addressing weaknesses, seizing opportunities, and mitigating threats, Central Minnesota can build a more resilient and effective workforce system.

B.2. Describe the selection process for the membership who will provide the leadership to oversee the development and coordination of the regional plan.

Leadership for our region consists of a Regional Board, made up of board members from each of the local Workforce Development Boards. This, along with our local Workforce Development Boards, oversee the development and coordination of the regional plan and its implementation. The Regional Board members are selected by their respective local Workforce Development Boards.

B.3. Describe how the selected organizations from the region will provide oversight to development and implementation of the regional plan. Complete Attachment A - Regional Oversight Committee

Regional oversight will be provided through both the Regional Board, the local Workforce Development Boards, which is made up of our workforce partnering organizations (on-site and off-site), One-Stop partners, and educational institutions. Each group will receive an update on the plan's progress and conduct discussions on progress, innovations, and outcomes.

B.4. Describe how the approach used will ensure that partner engagement includes diverse representation, specifically among populations experiencing barriers to employment.

Each local Workforce Development Board partners with a variety of community-based organizations and employers, each representing various subsets of the population. We are intentional in our outreach efforts to ensure that all worker and employer voices are heard, and we work particularly hard at ensuring those voices from targeted populations are included in our planning and implementation of services. Each board also reaches out to employers that are owned, managed, or employ diverse individuals and helps create opportunities for those finding employment challenging.

Our Region has implemented the Inclusive Workforce Employer (I-WE) Designation. It was established by the Regional Workforce Alliance of Northwest Minnesota. This designation also has the support of our state organization, DEED. The designation serves to support and recognize employers who:

- Express a commitment to an inclusive workplace in their stated values, mission, or policies.
- Assess how diversity, equity and inclusion influence their work and culture.
- Provide diversity, equity and inclusion education for staff and leadership.
- Allocate resources to support and sustain an inclusive and equitable workplace.

The I-WE Designation process is designed to help employers no matter where they are at in this journey, and it may take several months to earn designation. They have support throughout this process via our Community Inclusion Council.

B.5. Describe how the local area boards will direct system alignment within the region through shared policies and practices.

Our local workforce areas are governed and operated differently with varying funding streams and fiscal oversight, however at an implementation level we strive to have seamless service delivery. In fact, many participants that are served aren't fully aware of the actual programs or

funding streams, and this is intentional to ensure the ‘no wrong door’ approach. Each local area will use best practices and approved policies to ensure that our operations are in alignment with State and Federal laws, rules and regulations. Both local boards share policies with one another and often utilize similar language or even identical policies for both local areas (i.e., incumbent worker policies and forms).

B.6. Describe any cooperative service arrangements being planned for the region and how they will promote consistency within the regional workforce development area and with state policy. MOU – cooperative agreements.

We currently have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in place that guides our region on our collaborative work. We also receive regional planning dollars from DEED to implement regional efforts in alignment with our state and regional plans. With these funds, we are required to develop a regional work plan and report on progress with how we’ve utilized this support in our region.

PROJECT GOAL: To develop and implement strategies in support of WIOA Regional Planning.				
STRATEGIES <i>(activities, steps to achieve goal):</i>	EXPECTED MEASURABLE OUTCOMES		START DATE	END DATE

<p>On-going Implementation of the I-WE Designation</p>	<p>An additional 10 employers will be engaged and work through the process of designation</p> <p>Staff provide outreach presentations, and one-on-one consultations, and facilitate the Community Inclusion Council meetings (application review)</p> <p>The employers will share the impact the designation has had on their business with other employers.</p> <p>Job seekers will know the I-WE logo and apply to those businesses.</p> <p>Job Quality information will be shared as part of the I-WE consultation. (Jobs for the Future (JFF - a Job Quality Framework):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://archive.jff.org/resources/quality-jobs-framework/ • https://jfforg-new-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/Quality_Jobs_Framework_-_JFF.pdf • Corporate tool-kit – Your Guide to Becoming an Impact Employer - https://corporate.jff.org/impact-employer-model • Colorado’s Good Jobs Now information) 		10/1/2023	9/30/24
<p>Provide 2 Diversity and Equity training opportunities to Region 3 employers (diverse population highlighted at each event)</p>	<p>Employers in the region benefit from the training provided and embrace some of the tools and information shared into their companies (estimated 60 employers will attend each event)</p> <p>Surveys were sent out after the event to gauge the value – Over 75% would refer others to events</p>		10/1/2023	9/30/24
<p>Create a survey to determine redesignation for I-WE (work with U of M Extension)</p>	<p>A survey is created and put into use for redesignation – redesignation will occur every 3 years</p>		10/1/2023	9/30/24

First Aid and Resilience training (mental health) for staff	Staff will be better equipped to work with individuals experiencing mental health concerns.		10/1/2023	9/30/24
Complete Safe Zone Training, and once complete – obtain signage highlighting Inclusive Space (All are Welcome) window clings	<p>Attending a Safe Zone training, and having a deeper familiarity and comfort with vocabulary, inclusive practices, and privilege can help you identify ways that your organization can continue to be a safer and inclusive space for your LGBTQ+ coworkers and customers. (https://thesafezoneproject.com/about/what-is-safe-zone/)</p> <p>Window clings in a rainbow pattern noting that All are Welcome will demonstrate to the public – that we have a welcoming environment.</p>		10/1/2023	9/30/24
Creation and/or increased completion of several surveys: General Business, OJT, Incumbent Worker, HR group, DEI internal organizational surveys	Data received from surveys will be shared with boards, committees, and partners. It will direct programming and goals/activities in the regional plan.		10/1/2023	9/30/24
Customer focus groups	Focus groups will provide valuable information on programming and services, their accessibility, and effectiveness. Information will be shared and used in the Regional Plan development.		10/1/2023	9/30/24

<p>Use of Colorado job quality checklist and other tools during employer consultations.</p> <p>Creation of Central MN good jobs tools based on the Colorado initiative. (by March of 2024)</p>	<p>The Good Jobs Now tools will be shared with employers during consultations and at the Regional Human Resource groups led by CMJTS and CS staff. Employers will access the tools to improve recruitment and retention efforts. Surveys will demonstrate if the tools shared have an impact on recruitment or retention.</p>		10/1/2023	9/30/24
<p>Completion of the Regional Plan</p>	<p>The Regional Plan will be completed and submitted as required.</p>		10/1/2023	9/30/24

SECTION C: PROGRAM AND SERVICE DELIVERY

C.1. Describe the condition of the regional economy (cite the sources of data and analysis); Region 3 has selected the following industry sectors; manufacturing, healthcare, construction/transportation, natural resources/agriculture, professional business/information technology, based on the LMI data provided in the Central Minnesota Planning Region report prepared by Like Greiner and available at https://mn.gov/deed/assets/031124_CENTRAL_tcm1045-133244.pdf (data below directly from report).

ECONOMY INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT According to DEED’s Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages (QCEW) program, Central Minnesota was home to 19,538 business establishments providing an average of 274,181 covered jobs through 2022, with a total payroll of over \$14.6 billion. That was 9.6% of total employment and 7.4% of total payroll in the state of Minnesota. Average annual wages were \$53,301 in the region, which was about \$16,000 lower than the state’s average annual wage. Central Minnesota had led Greater Minnesota in job growth during the recovery since the recession, but in the past year has seen slower than average growth.

With 174,819 jobs at 11,777 establishments, EDR 7W accounts for about two-thirds of total employment in the Central region. EDR 7W also accounted for 58% of the region’s job decline during the pandemic recession in 2020, losing 5,730 jobs, a 3.2% decrease. In contrast, EDR 7E had the fewest jobs and smallest percent decline, with 48,016 jobs at 4,077 establishments.

EDR 6E had 3,685 establishments providing 51,345 jobs, after losing 2,000 jobs from 2019 to 2022, a 3.8% decrease, the largest job loss rate in the region.

Like other areas of the state, Central Minnesota still had not recovered jobs lost during the two-month pandemic recession by the end of 2022. With roughly 4,300 fewer jobs than it had in 2019, the region's employment was cut back to 2016 levels. Despite fewer workers in the labor force and record low unemployment, employers in Central Minnesota managed to create 5,584 net new jobs in 2022, a 2.1% increase. Central Minnesota reached a prerecession peak of 278,478 jobs in 2019, then hit a low of 263,427 jobs in 2020.

With 47,389 jobs at 2,480 firms, Health Care & Social Assistance is the largest employing industry in Central Minnesota, accounting for 17.3% of total jobs in the region. However, Central Minnesota lost 3.6% of its Health Care & Social Assistance jobs, losing 1,776 jobs from 2019 to 2022. At \$55,302 in 2022, average annual wages were about the same in Health Care as in the total of all industries.

The next largest industry in Central was Manufacturing, with 41,384 jobs at 1,201 firms, after losing 594 jobs from 2019 to 2022. Central Minnesota has large concentrations of Food Manufacturing and Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing, as well as significant amounts of Machinery and Transportation Equipment Manufacturing. Retail Trade is the third largest industry, with 35,875 jobs at 2,155 establishments, and the related Accommodation and Food Services industry also provides 22,976 jobs in the region. The Accommodation & Food Services sector suffered greatly from the pandemic and pandemic-related policies, still down 1,014 jobs from 2019 to 2022, a loss of 4.2% from 2019 employment levels. Those losses are substantially muted from job gains in 2021 and 2022 when employers added back thousands of jobs that were lost in 2020.

Nearly every sector lost jobs during the pandemic recession and only six (Agriculture, Mining, Construction, Wholesale trade, Finance & Insurance, and Administrative Support & Waste Management) of the 20 main industry sectors have since recovered and had more jobs in 2022 compared to 2019. Construction had been a bright spot leading into the pandemic recession and remained steadfast in employment gains during the tumultuous past few years, adding more jobs than any sector and growing payroll employment by 6%. The Construction industry is the 6th largest industry in the region and provides roughly half as many jobs as Manufacturing (the second largest sector). The Real Estate, Rental and Leasing industry has suffered the largest job loss rate, at -8.6%, the sector had 163 fewer jobs in 2022 than in 2019. Meanwhile the healthcare and Social Assistance sector has the largest job deficit from 2019- to- 2022 with 1,776 fewer jobs. The substantial losses recorded in the Management of Companies and Enterprises is largely due to a change in a business classification.

The **regional economy** in Central Minnesota is a dynamic and evolving landscape influenced by various factors. Here are some key points about its current condition:

- Central Minnesota boasts a mix of industries, including manufacturing, healthcare, agriculture, and technology.

- These sectors contribute to the region’s economic vitality and provide employment opportunities.
- The labor market faces challenges such as workforce shortages, skills gaps, and demographic shifts.
- Employers seek skilled workers, especially in fields like healthcare, construction, and information technology.
- The construction sector is active due to infrastructure projects, housing developments, and commercial buildings.
- Investments in roads, bridges, and utilities drive economic growth.
- Central Minnesota’s natural beauty, lakes, and recreational activities attract tourists.
- Tourism-related businesses contribute to the local economy.
- **Challenges:** Aging workforce, rural-urban disparities, and economic disparities.
- **Opportunities:** Clean energy, technology, and diversification of industries.
- The regional economy has shown resilience during economic downturns.
- Adaptability to changing market conditions is crucial for sustained growth.

In summary, Central Minnesota’s economy is multifaceted, with both strengths and challenges. Strategic investments, workforce development, and collaboration will shape its future trajectory.

C.2. Describe the sectors or occupations of focus for region, including:

- a. How the region will use the labor market information and conduct outreach to business and industry to select the targeted sectors for developing sector partnerships for occupations in demand that provide family sustaining wages. If sectors and occupations have been already selected, describe them within this response. **(include the region selected sectors)**

In Central Minnesota, we recognize the importance of using labor market information (LMI) to inform our workforce development strategies. Here’s how we plan to leverage LMI and conduct outreach to select targeted sectors for developing sector partnerships that provide family-sustaining wages:

- We will regularly analyze LMI to identify high-demand sectors and occupations.
- LMI will guide our decisions on which industries are growing, which jobs are in demand, and where workforce gaps exist.
- We will actively engage with local businesses and industry associations.
- Outreach efforts will involve surveys, focus groups, and direct communication to understand their workforce needs.
- We will consider the following criteria when selecting sectors for sector partnerships:
 - Demand: Industries with high job growth and unfilled positions.
 - Wages: Prioritize sectors that offer family-sustaining wages.

- Skills Gap: Focus on areas where skills shortages exist.
- Alignment with Regional Priorities: Ensure alignment with economic development goals.
- Based on our analysis, the following sectors have been identified as priorities for sector partnerships:
 - **Healthcare** - The sector accounted for 17.9 percent of total employment in the region, making it easily the largest in the region
 - **Manufacturing** - Manufacturing accounted for 15.1 percent of total employment in the region, making it the second largest industry
 - **Professional Business Services/Information Technology** -
 - **Natural Resources/Agriculture**
 - **Construction/Transportation**
- We will collaborate with employers, training providers, community organizations, and other stakeholders.
- Sector partnerships will address workforce needs, training, and career advancement for workers.
- Our goal is to ensure that jobs within these sectors provide wages that support families.
- We will advocate for policies and practices that lead to family-sustaining incomes.

By using LMI, engaging with businesses, and strategically selecting sectors, Central Minnesota aims to create effective sector partnerships that benefit both employers and workers. Programs focus on promoting occupations in demand as well as those that offer family-sustaining wages.

OCCUPATIONS IN DEMAND According to DEED's Occupations in Demand tool, there are roughly 300 occupations showing relatively high demand in the region, with training and education requirements ranging from short-term on-the-job training to postsecondary education to advanced degrees. These occupations are spread across different sectors but are also concentrated in the region's major industries. For example, Nursing Assistants, Personal Care Aides, Home Health Aides, Licensed Practical and Registered Nurses, Electricians, Industrial Engineers, Machinists, Truck Drivers, and Teachers are all in high demand (Table 12).

Table 12. Central Minnesota Occupations in Demand by Education Level, 2023

High School or Less	Vocational Training	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Fast Food Workers (\$30,214)	Nursing Assistants (\$39,353)	Registered Nurses (\$86,694)	Elementary School Teachers (\$64,300)
Home Health & Personal Care Aides (\$32,476)	Agricultural Technicians (\$50,734)	Police and Sheriff Officers (\$74,178)	Secondary School Teachers (\$64,602)
Retail Salespersons (\$31,947)	LPN (\$52,954)	Clinical Lab Technologists & Technicians (\$62,998)	General & Operations Managers (\$79,121)
Cashiers (\$29,935)	Automotive Service Technicians (\$50,038)	Dental Hygienists (\$84,542)	Accountants & Auditors (\$69,793)
First Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers (\$45,819)	Machinists (\$57,338)	Radiologic Techs/Technologists (\$76,318)	Financial Managers (\$120,404)
Laborers and Freight, Stock Movers (\$39,815)	Medical Assistants (\$46,901)	Architectural and Civil Drafters (\$60,894)	Medical and Health Services Managers (\$100,201)
Janitors and Cleaners (\$36,758)	Hairdressers, Hairstylists, and Cosmetologists (\$35,910)	Computer Network Support Specialists (\$75,592)	Substance Abuse, Behavioral & Mental Health Counselors (\$51,463)
First-Line Supervisors of Food Prep and Serving Workers (\$39,562)	Electricians (\$63,794)	Surgical Technologists (\$64,849)	Middle School Teachers (\$65,007)
CDL Truck Drivers (\$57,479)	HVAC Mechanics (\$64,161)	Computer Network Support Specialists (\$72,592)	Substitute Teachers (\$43,575)
Teaching Assistants (\$38,154)	Industrial Machinery Mechanics (\$63,521)	Paralegals and Legal Assistants (\$53,999)	Preschool Teachers (\$36,959)

Source: DEED Occupations in Demand

- b. Alignment to the five sectors of focus in Drive for 5, including which local area in the region is focused on each or any of the Drive for 5 sectors. Complete Attachment G – Local Workforce Development Area Key Industries in Regional Economy.

Region 3s key industry sectors: agriculture/natural resources, construction/transportation, professional services/information technology, health care, and manufacturing align with the Drive for 5 industry sectors. LWDA 17 received a Drive for Five grant to expand employment and training services to advance manufacturing, a Drive for Five sector. The Drive for 5 sectors are a focus across all Region 3 and these high-growth, high-demand careers are promoted with youth and job seekers.

- c. The make-up of the sector partnerships will be determined and the expertise and resources they bring to the partnership.

Della: CMMA connections with manufacturers, health care connections

The composition of sector partnerships in Central Minnesota will be carefully determined to ensure effective collaboration and successful outcomes. By assembling diverse stakeholders and leveraging their expertise and resources, Central Minnesota aims to create robust sector partnerships that drive economic growth, address workforce needs, and provide family-sustaining wages.


Identifying in-demand occupations and employment projections through use of data about employment by location, labor supply and demand, earnings, unemployment, and

demographics of the labor force helps employment specialists/career navigators and their jobseekers find relevant training opportunities to fill skills gaps, address skills shortages in the current economy, and anticipate employer need for trained workers in the listed fields.

Business Services programming for all in-demand sectors: Incumbent worker programming policy gives preference for projects submitted from high-demand industries.

The WorkWright radio program is a collaboration between CMJTS and KRWC to highlight CareerForce partners and programs and a local employer every Monday morning. This has been a successful model to promote sector initiatives and help with employer recruitment efforts. The goal is to replicate this program throughout Central Minnesota.

Human Resource Networking groups are facilitated throughout the region and provide a platform to share industry challenges with peers. Rule number one of these groups – leave competition at the door.

Educational Initiatives: Occurring throughout the region, these initiatives promote youth and young adults to focus on a career or industry sector early in their high school career. Tiger Pathway in Hutchinson is a great model. Local employers provide equipment and input on curriculum to help youth identify and attain career skills prior to high school graduation. This allows youth to explore careers prior to paying for a college education that might not align with their skills and interests. CareerONE offered by CS and Operation Exploration offered by CMJTS is summer programming that provides eligible youth with career exploration in specific sectors. Central Minnesota high schools are promoting sector knowledge by hosting the DEED LMI expert at high school registrations and conferences to ensure that parents and students know the in-demand careers to help guide their planning. 

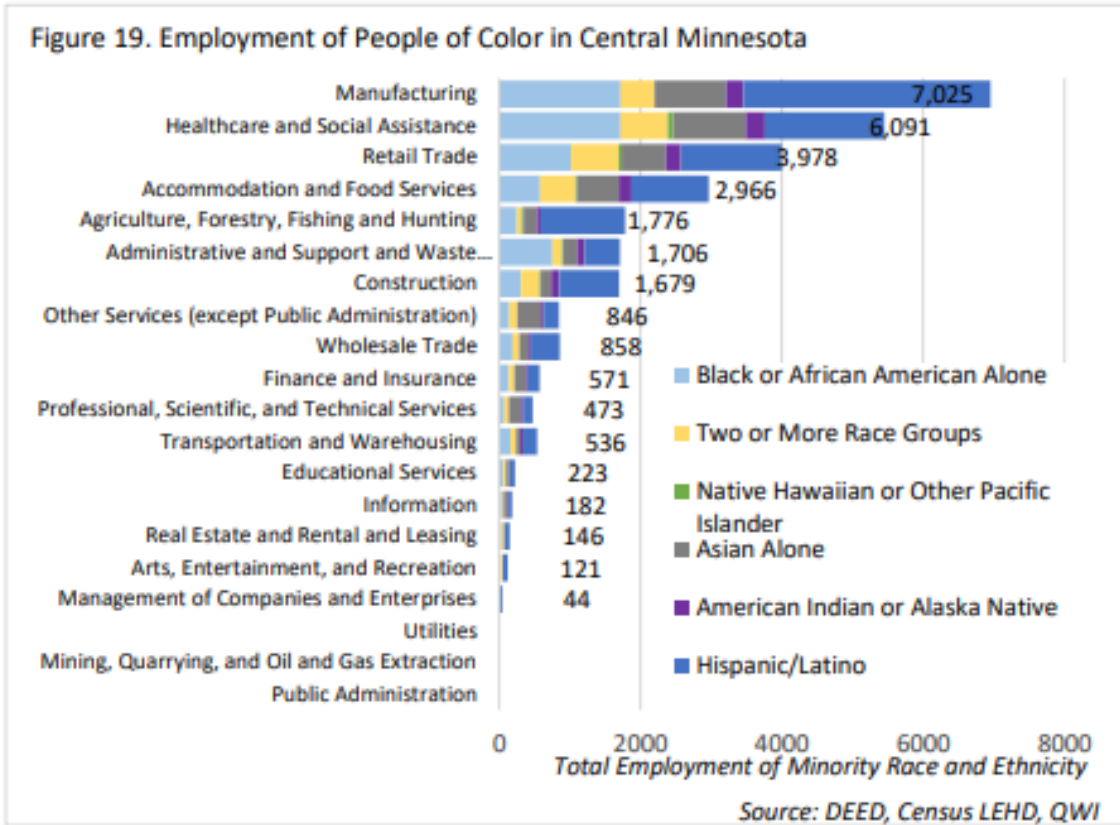
Collaboration Initiatives: Region 3 works directly with employers, private and public training providers, and union labor organizations to provide work-based training opportunities that meet the needs of business. The regional goal is to continue work-based training initiatives through activities like on-the-job training (OJT), registered apprenticeship, work experience, workforce protégé, and incumbent worker training program. Work-based training methods are a proven and effective strategy that meet employers' workforce needs. Wagner-Peyser works closely with representatives from the R3LPB to assist with regional sector workforce needs. Coordinated efforts with our On-Site Hiring events culminated in hosting hiring events for the untapped workforce populations with disabilities, criminal backgrounds, and new immigrants. The On-Site Hiring events are held monthly and are focused on industry sector needs and demands.

C.3. The demographic makeup of the labor force in those sectors as compared to the regional labor force, and how the region will work to close any identified gaps.

Below are charts from DEED central planning region report on demographics of all industries and those based on race.

Central Minnesota	Percentage of Workers		Percent of Workers, Minnesota		Median Hourly Wage		Median Hours Worked Per Qtr.	
	2022	2012	2022	2012	2022	2012	2022	2012
Total, all ages	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	\$21.99	\$14.65	402	400
19 years & under	9.0%	8.6%	6.6%	6.3%	\$14.73	\$7.97	127	124
20 to 24 years	9.9%	12.3%	9.2%	11.3%	\$18.79	\$10.42	304	259
25 to 44 years	40.6%	39.5%	43.6%	42.3%	\$25.03	\$16.66	458	455
45 to 54 years	17.8%	21.4%	18.4%	21.9%	\$26.74	\$18.13	481	480
55 to 64 years	17.0%	14.2%	16.7%	14.7%	\$24.51	\$17.56	472	460
65 years & over	5.8%	3.9%	5.4%	3.5%	\$18.56	\$12.74	230	206
Male	49.1%	47.5%	49.1%	49.1%	\$24.76	\$16.47	474	470
Female	50.9%	52.5%	50.9%	50.9%	\$20.72	\$13.46	349	347

Source: DEED Quarterly Employment Demographics



The region will do the following to help address disparities in workforce representation and close identified gaps, thereby creating an equitable and inclusive environment. The strategies below focus on efforts with employers and job seekers to close the identified gaps during consultations as well as business resources available on the LWDA websites.

Strategies promoted with employers:

- Promote the implementation of blind recruitment: Remove identifying information (such as names, gender, and ethnicity) from resumes during the initial screening process.
- Encourage setting diversity goals: Establish targets for hiring underrepresented groups and track progress regularly.
- Expand recruitment channels: Reach out to diverse networks, colleges, and community organizations to attract a broader pool of candidates.
- Promote cultural competence: Provide training to employees on understanding and respecting different cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives. Including promotion of the I-WE designation.
- Encourage the creation of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs): ERGs can foster connections, provide mentorship, and advocate for inclusion.
- Offer training on unconscious bias: Raise awareness about biases and encourage fair decision-making.
- Offer advancement opportunities from within: Create pathways for internal advancement and recognize potential in all employees.
- Regularly review compensation: Ensure that pay is fair and transparent across all demographics.
- Offer family-friendly policies: Support work-life balance through parental leave, flexible schedules, and remote work options.
- Collect demographic data: Regularly gather information on workforce demographics, promotions, and turnover.
- Analyze disparities: Identify areas where representation gaps exist and develop targeted interventions.
- Collaborate with community organizations: Partner with local groups to recruit, train, and support diverse talent.
- Invest in education and skill-building: Support programs that prepare underrepresented individuals for careers in high-demand fields.
- Create apprenticeship programs.
- Hire interns from diverse backgrounds.

Strategies in working with the job seeker:

- Collaboration with community organizations and cultural centers to reach underrepresented groups.
- Conduct targeted outreach through job fairs, workshops, and community events.
- Develop training courses that address specific skill gaps identified in the demographic analysis.
- Offer language and cultural competency training to enhance workforce readiness.
- Partner with schools and colleges to promote STEM education among underrepresented groups.
- Offer scholarships and grants to encourage diverse students to pursue relevant fields.
- Highlight success stories of individuals from diverse backgrounds.
- Showcase the value of diversity in the workforce.

Addressing disparities requires a multifaceted approach, commitment from leadership, and ongoing evaluation of progress. By implementing these strategies, Central Minnesota can create a more inclusive and responsive workforce system.

C.4. How the local board will make opportunities in these areas known to customers, including employers and job seekers, and how the local board will create, modify, or expand responsive workforce development programs and initiatives.

One of the goals identified by the Regional Board is to create an elevator speech for them to speak knowledgeably about programs and services and easily share information with their networks.

Additional strategies to inform opportunities available and to create, modify, or expand responsive workforce development programs and initiatives:

- Conduct regular employer surveys to identify skill gaps, hiring needs, and training requirements.
- Promote job fairs, networking events, and industry-specific forums to connect employers with potential candidates.
- Analyze labor market data to identify high-demand occupations and emerging industries.
- Develop and promote clear career pathways that guide individuals from entry-level jobs to higher-skilled positions.
- Foster sector partnerships that bring together employers, education providers, and other stakeholders to address industry-specific workforce challenges.
- Modify existing programs based on industry trends and local job market demands.
- Develop short-term training courses aligned with employer feedback.
- Expand apprenticeship programs in collaboration with local businesses.
- Utilize social media, local newspapers, Open Houses, Discovery Days, and community events to promote workforce programs.
- Create targeted marketing campaigns to raise awareness about available workforce programs.
- Create a user-friendly website with program information and success stories – ensure a ‘no wrong door’ approach.
- Partner with community colleges, vocational schools, and training institutions.
- Establish pathways for students to transition from education to employment.
- Provide transportation assistance for job seekers to access training and employment opportunities.
- Offer childcare services during training sessions to support working parents and those preparing for work.
- Collect feedback from program participants and employers.
- Regularly evaluate program outcomes and adjust as needed.

Responsive workforce development programs require agility, collaboration, and a commitment to meeting the needs of both employers and job seekers. By implementing these strategies, local boards can create a more effective and impactful workforce system.

C.5. Based on the regional/local assessment of workforce development system services, describe how strategies will be created to pursue a more responsive alignment of employment and training services.

In response to the regional/local assessment of workforce development system services, strategies will be thoughtfully crafted to enhance the alignment of employment and training services. Here are some key steps to achieve this:

- Engage with local employers, educational institutions, community organizations, and jobseekers. Understand their needs, challenges, and aspirations.
- Establish regular feedback mechanisms to gather insights from stakeholders. Use surveys, focus groups, and town hall meetings.
- Leverage labor market data to identify emerging industries, skill gaps, and employment opportunities.
- Review key performance indicators to measure the effectiveness of employment and training programs.
- Ensure seamless coordination between employment services (job placement, resume building) and training programs (skills development, certifications).
- Create personalized career pathways for jobseekers based on their skills, interests, and local job market demands.
- Upskilling and Reskilling: Offer targeted training programs to bridge skill gaps and enhance employability through incumbent worker training.
- Develop partnerships with local industries (e.g., healthcare, technology, manufacturing). Tailor training programs to meet their workforce needs.
- Promote apprenticeship programs that combine on-the-job training with classroom instruction.
- Reach underserved populations, including minorities, veterans, and individuals with disabilities.
- Address transportation, childcare, and language barriers to ensure equal access to services.
- Enhance digital platforms for job postings, virtual workshops, and e-learning.
- Organize virtual events to connect jobseekers with employers.
- Regularly assess program effectiveness through participant feedback and outcome data.
- Be agile in adjusting strategies based on changing economic conditions and workforce dynamics.

A responsive alignment of employment and training services requires ongoing collaboration, adaptability, and a commitment to empowering individuals for sustainable careers.

C.6. Describe how the entities responsible for participating in this process will be selected, including their expected roles and responsibilities.

The selection of entities participating in this process will be deliberate and strategic. However, all entities providing workforce development activities are invited to the table to participate. Here's how we plan to choose these entities, along with their expected roles and responsibilities:

1. Local Area Workforce Development Boards (LWDAs):
 - Selection Criteria:
 - LWDAs will be composed of representatives from local businesses, educational institutions, labor organizations, and community-based organizations (as outlined in the WIOA law).
 - Diversity in sectors, industries, and demographics will be considered.
 - Roles and Responsibilities:
 - LWDAs will provide insights into local workforce needs, industry trends, and skill requirements.
 - They will collaborate on program design, resource allocation, and outreach efforts.
2. Educational Institutions:
 - Selection Criteria:
 - Community colleges, vocational schools, and universities with expertise in workforce training and education will be invited.
 - Institutions and other training providers with strong ties to local employers and a commitment to skill development will be prioritized.
 - Roles and Responsibilities:
 - Educational institutions will design and deliver training programs aligned with industry demands.
 - They will assess skill gaps, offer certifications, and provide career pathways.
3. Labor Organizations:
 - Selection Criteria:
 - Labor unions and worker advocacy groups will be part of the partnership.
 - Organizations representing diverse workers and advocating for fair wages will be engaged.
 - Roles and Responsibilities:
 - Labor organizations will ensure worker representation, advocate for family-sustaining wages, and promote worker rights.
 - They will collaborate on apprenticeship programs and worker training.
4. Community-Based Organizations:
 - Selection Criteria:

- Nonprofits, chambers of commerce, and community organizations with local knowledge and outreach capabilities will participate.
- Entities serving underserved populations will be actively involved.
- Roles and Responsibilities:
 - Community organizations will facilitate inclusive outreach, address barriers, and connect resources to diverse populations.
 - They will ensure that workforce programs reach all segments of the community.

By carefully selecting these entities and defining their roles, Central Minnesota aims to create a collaborative ecosystem that effectively addresses workforce needs, promotes economic growth, and supports family-sustaining wages.

The communication of roles and responsibilities to all participating entities is crucial for effective collaboration. Here’s how we plan to ensure clear communication:

Draft written agreements or MOUs that detail each entity’s responsibilities. These documents serve as reference points and provide clarity on expectations. Establish regular communication channels (e.g., email, newsletters, shared platforms). Provide updates on progress, changes, and upcoming activities. Equip participants with the necessary knowledge and skills. Create a feedback loop for continuous improvement. Encourage open dialogue and address any issues promptly. Schedule regular meetings to review progress and discuss challenges. Foster a culture of transparency and hold entities accountable for their commitments. Be flexible and recognize that roles may evolve over time and adjust responsibilities based on changing needs.

By implementing these communication strategies, Central Minnesota aims to ensure that all participating entities understand their roles and work collaboratively toward shared goals.

C.7. Describe how outcomes will be determined in terms of employment and training services.

Determining outcomes in terms of employment and training services involves assessing the effectiveness and impact of these services. Here’s how we plan to measure outcomes:

1. Employment Outcomes:
 - Job Placement Rate: Measure the percentage of program participants who secure employment within a specified period after completing training.
 - Retention Rate: Evaluate how long individuals remain employed after placement.
 - Wage Growth: Assess whether participants experience wage increases over time.
2. Training Outcomes:
 - Completion Rate: Track the percentage of participants who successfully complete training programs.
 - Skill Attainment: Evaluate whether participants acquire the skills and competencies targeted by the training.

- Certification and Credential Attainment: Measure the number of certifications or credentials earned.
- 3. Participant Satisfaction:
 - Surveys and Feedback: Collect feedback from program participants regarding their satisfaction with services, instructors, and resources.
 - Quality of Training: Assess the relevance, quality, and delivery of training programs.
- 4. Employer Engagement:
 - Employer Satisfaction: Survey employers to gauge their satisfaction with the quality of workers hired and/or upskilled through training programs.
 - Partnerships: Evaluate the number and strength of partnerships with local businesses and industry associations.
- 5. Equity and Inclusion:
 - Demographic Representation: Monitor whether services reach diverse populations.
 - Closing Equity Gaps: Assess whether underrepresented groups benefit equally from employment and training services.
- 6. Long-Term Impact:
 - Career Advancement: Track participants' career progression over time.
 - Economic Mobility: Evaluate whether individuals move into higher-paying jobs and improve their economic status.
- 7. Data Collection and Reporting:
 - Regular Data Updates: Continuously collect and update data on employment outcomes, training completion, and participant demographics.
 - Transparent Reporting: Share outcomes with stakeholders, policymakers, and the public.
- 8. Continuous Improvement:
 - Program Evaluation: Regularly assess program effectiveness using quantitative and qualitative methods.
 - Adaptability: Adjust strategies based on changing labor market conditions and participant needs.

By rigorously measuring these outcomes, Central Minnesota aims to enhance the impact of employment and training services, support workforce development, and improve economic well-being for all.