

MIDDLE TENNESSEE REGIONAL WORKFORCE PLAN

Program Years 2020-2022

**Northern Middle, Southern Middle and Upper Cumberland
Local Workforce Development Areas**



Signature Page

SUBJECT: Southern Middle Tennessee Local Workforce Development Board, Regional Plan

FROM: Honorable
Chief Local Elected Official, SMTLWDB

, Chairman
Southern Middle TN Local Workforce Development Board

The attached WIOA Regional Plan represents the Southern Middle Tennessee Local Workforce Development Board's concurrence as part of the Middle Tennessee Workforce Region to maximize resources available under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and to coordinate these resources within the region.

We certify that we will operate regionally in accordance with this plan and applicable federal and state laws, as well as regulations.



TR Williams County Mayor
Chief Local Elected Official, SMTLWDB



Keith Durham , Chairman
Southern Middle TN Local Workforce Development Board

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is a federally funded program by the U.S. Department of Labor and through the State of Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development. WIOA is the primary source of federal funds for workforce development activities throughout the nation, with legislation requiring an infrastructure of multiple partners to contribute to operations and services. WIOA funds are awarded to the Consortium of Local Elected Officials (LEOs) of a Local Workforce Development Area (LWDA) to serve two primary customers- job seekers and businesses through a One-Stop Operations system branded as the American Job Center (AJC) system. The intent of WIOA is to strengthen the workforce system through innovation and alignment of services to promote individual and economic growth while meeting the needs of businesses and industries within the area. WIOA puts a primary focus on assisting individuals with barriers to employment by increasing their access to employment, education, training and support so that they may be successful in the labor market.

WIOA provides for the establishment of a Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB) in each LWDA to carry out the provisions of the act within their own area. Each Local Board strives to meet the workforce needs of their communities, answering to county mayors and governing Boards. These Boards represent industry, higher education, community organizations and program partners to administer workforce strategies according to the unique needs of their individual LWDA. Additionally, each LWDB is also part of a larger workforce region in order to work with bordering LWDAs to provide consistent services and maximize return on investments of workforce agendas. There are three workforce regions within the State of Tennessee- East, Middle and West.

The Middle Tennessee Region is comprised of three Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDAs) covering 40 Middle Tennessee counties. Northern Middle, Southern Middle and Upper Cumberland LWDAs cover Middle Tennessee from the state's north and south borders, and east to west from the Tennessee River to the Cumberland Plateau. The Middle Tennessee Region consists of a mixture of metropolitan, urban, suburban and rural areas which comprise diverse economic conditions across the service areas. The three workforce areas of Northern Middle, Southern Middle, and Upper Cumberland deliver workforce services through 9 Comprehensive, 16 Affiliate, 9 Specialized American Job Centers, 6 AJC Access Points, and 2 Mobile AJC's. These centers, with the comprehensives as their hub, provide a complete array of workforce activities and programs for employers and job seekers alike.

The Middle Tennessee Region is objectively represented by the Middle Tennessee Regional Planning Council (RPC) consisting of representatives from each LWDA Board staff, core partner programs, representatives from secondary and post-secondary educational institutions, economic development, and additional partner stakeholders. The Regional Planning Council meets regularly to gather partner feedback, analyze workforce data, and ensure consistent service and program improvement throughout the region. As part of this effort towards shared advancement, the RPC engages all representatives to create a Regional Plan for upcoming program years. Plan development includes the collection and analysis of labor market information, establishment of regional service strategies, and development of a regional vision. The following Middle Tennessee Regional Plan for Program Years 2020-2022 represents the concerted efforts of Northern Middle, Southern Middle, and the Upper Cumberland to maximize our collaboration to achieve vision, goals and keys objectives of the Combined Tennessee Plan. This plan addresses a key element to the success of workforce programs in the region- collaboration and coordination of services and resources between each LWDA, our partners, and resources.

ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE ANALYSIS

SECTION A: Analysis

A1. *Economic conditions including existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations.*

Middle Tennessee economic conditions are assessed through a cross-reference of multiple data sources. In addition to gathering partner feedback through Planning Council meetings, the Middle Tennessee Planning Council has utilized available data through Economic Modeling Systems Incorporated (EMSI), and the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD) WIRED Unit. Data and projections from the Combined State Plan were also used to create workforce development strategies that will build on state and national labor market information and projections. The data gathered from these sources provide an accurate and well-rounded assessment of current economic conditions.

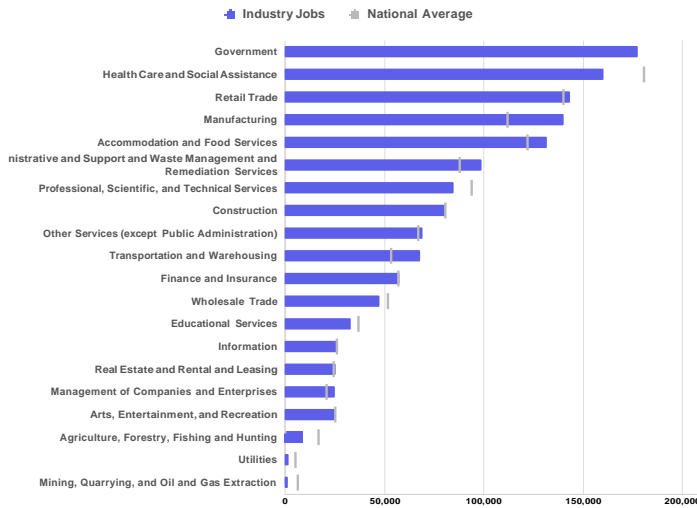
The Middle Tennessee region continues to experience rapid population and employment growth, particularly within the Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) of Clarksville and Nashville. When additional counties were absorbed into the Nashville MSA in 2018, this area grew almost twice as rapidly (3.1 percent) as the state as a whole (1.6 percent) and since that time, has continued to keep a rapid pace. In fact, a 2020 US Census study ranked Murfreesboro and Franklin, two cities within the Northern Middle service area, as among the top fifteen fastest growing large cities in the nation. This data was based upon percentage of population change between 2010 and 2019. The following EMSI data chart shows overall population and employment growth for the region as a whole.

POPULATION (2019)	TOTAL REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT	AVERAGE EARNINGS PER JOB (2019)
2,844,852	1,411,599	\$61,600.00
Population grew by 215,835 over the last 5 years and is projected to grow by 157,243 over the next 5 years.	Jobs grew by 171,504 over the last 5 years and are projected to grow by 131,991 over the next 5 years.	Regional average earnings per job are \$6,900 below the national average of \$68,500 per job.

EMSI Middle Tennessee Economy Overview, 2020

As the population continues to grow, so do employment opportunities for our residents. According to EMSI Economic Modeling, between 2014 and 2019 jobs increased by 13.8% in the Middle Tennessee region from 1,240,095 to 1,411,599. This change outpaced the national growth rate of 7.6% by 6.2%. As the number of jobs increased, the labor force participation rate increased from 59.0% to 64.6% between 2014 and 2019. Middle Tennessee regional pathways priorities of Healthcare, Education, Advanced Manufacturing and IT Technical Services had strong showings throughout the region as largest industries. The Regional Planning Council has worked with Pathways Coordinators and Career and Technical Education (CTE) instructors to develop and train a skilled available workforce within these pathways based upon past demand. Their continued steady presence on top industry data confirms the regional return on investment and proves continued focus on those pathways should remain a priority. Construction and Transportation also ranked high amount largest industries, establishing themselves as strong existing sectors of employment. Entry level construction positions, construction management, transportation drivers and logistics specialists offer various levels of pipeline positions to develop within these fields. Based upon this analysis and consensus of large industry data gathered, the Regional Planning Council will concentrate efforts that support the top existing in-demand industries:

- Construction
- Information Technology
- Advanced Manufacturing
- Healthcare
- Transportation/Logistics
- Educational Services



Middle Tennessee Region LARGEST INDUSTRIES

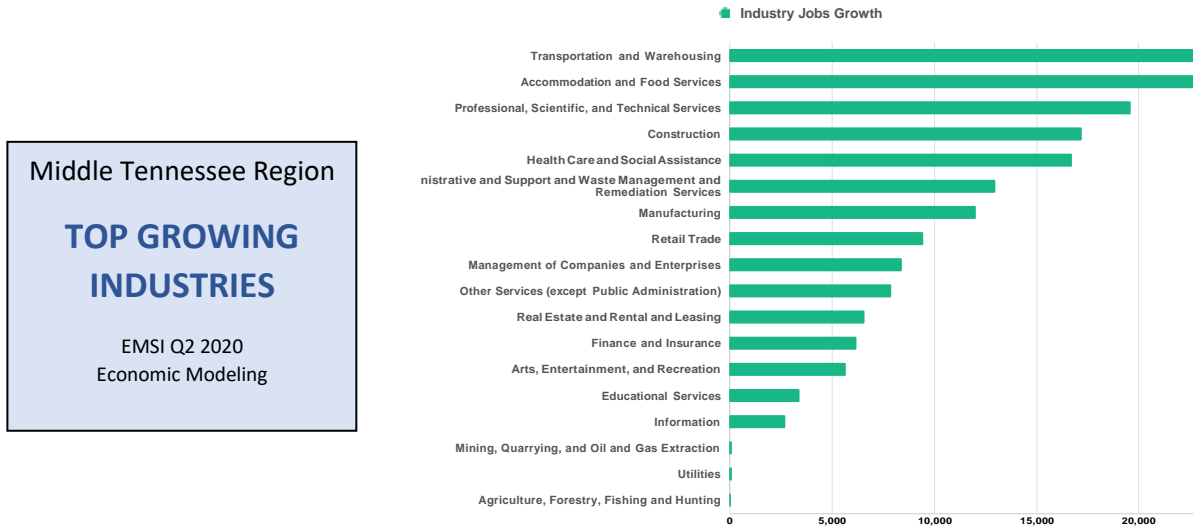
EMSI Q2 2020 Economic Modeling

The 2020-2023 Combined State Plan provides a breakdown of the Top 10 industries based upon employment across the three LWDA's within Middle Tennessee. Educational Services was the largest employer in both Upper Cumberland and Southern Middle. Ambulatory health care, nursing and residential care employment rounded the top ten for both areas. However, in the Northern Middle LWDA, hospital employment exceeded ambulatory care due to its local trauma and children's hospitals. And unlike Upper Cumberland and Southern Middle, employment in nursing and residential care facilities were not among the top 10 industries. These contrasts are likely due to differences in population demographics of urban versus rural areas. Also unique to Northern Middle top 10 industries was merchant wholesalers of durable goods and specialty trade contractors. This industry provides support to the construction boom within Metro Nashville and is fueled by low interest rates and population growth. While distinctions exist among top industries between our three LWDA's, commonalities are present. Transportation equipment manufacturing was among the top 10 industries in all three LWDA's. Food services and drinking places were consistently high among the top three industries in all LWDA's, resulting in the highest average sum of regional opportunities. Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development WIRED data shown below provides additional support of these rankings.

Middle Tennessee LWDA's Top Industries based on Employment		
Industry Title and (3 Digit Industry Code)	Sum of Establishments	Sum of Average Employment
Food Services and Drinking Places (722)	5468	111483
Educational Services (611)	958	93940
Administrative and Support Services (561)	4091	86264
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (541)	8236	67358
Ambulatory Health Care Services (621)	4557	62408
Hospitals (622)	93	60760
Transportation Equipment Manufacturing (336)	199	42031
Executive, Legislative, and Other General Gov (921)	218	40491
Specialty Trade Contractors (238)	2807	30588
Merchant Wholesalers, Durable Goods (423)	2473	23418
General Merchandise Stores (452)	286	8113
Nursing and Residential Care Facilities (623)	191	7944
Social Assistance (624)	144	2612

TDLWD WIRED Data, 2020

When looking at projected growth by industry between 2019 and 2024, the top five industries become Transportation, Food Services, IT Technical Services, Construction, and Health Care. With Food Services ranking among both the top industries based upon employment and top growing jobs, this should be a particular focus for the Middle Tennessee Region. This has not traditionally been a training spotlight. However, given its current and expected concentration with the market we must take note to avoid a potential gap in the workforce.



Beyond existing occupations, the Middle Tennessee region is also focused on emerging occupations showing in-demand potential. Our Regional Planning Council will support the in-demand occupations outlined within the State Combined Plan, many which have a particular focus on middle-skill employment. “Middle skill” jobs are those that require more than a high-school diploma but less than a bachelor’s degree. The Regional Planning Council has noted occupational projections shown in WIRED Data below display an emphasis on growth within middle-skill careers. The Middle Tennessee region will incorporate this data into ongoing strategy meetings to further define our region’s demand occupation and associated skill demands.

Middle Tennessee Occupational Titles in Demand	Expected Growth (10 year)
Reservation and Transportation Ticket Agents and Travel Clerks	75.3%
Advertising Sales Agents	56.0%
Brokerage Clerks	54.3%
Operations Research Analysts	51.1%
Medical Transcriptionists	49.8%
Home Health Aides	49.4%
Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Technical and Scientific Products	48.7%
Physical Therapist Aides	48.3%
Statisticians	45.7%
Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers	44.4%
Physical Therapist Assistants	44.1%
Computer Hardware Engineers	43.2%
Information Security Analysts	42.3%
Tax Preparers	42.2%
Personal Care Aides	41.5%
Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	40.9%

Farmworkers, Farm, Ranch, and Aquacultural Animals	40.0%
Medical Appliance Technicians	39.9%
Customer Service Representatives	36.0%
Audio and Video Equipment Technicians	35.6%
Film and Video Editors	34.9%
Farmworkers and Laborers, Crop, Nursery, and Greenhouse	32.4%
Engineering Teachers, Postsecondary	26.0%
First-Line Supervisors of Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Workers	25.4%
Stock Clerks and Order Fillers	23.1%
General and Operations Managers	22.5%
Education Teachers, Postsecondary	21.8%
Combined Food Preparation and Serving Workers, Including Fast Food	21.4%
First-Line Supervisors of Office and Administrative Support Workers	19.2%
Multimedia Artists and Animators	18.6%
Registered Nurses	16.5%
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	16.2%
Insurance Claims and Policy Processing Clerks	16.2%
Food Preparation and Serving Related Workers, All Other	14.5%
Waiters and Waitresses	12.9%
First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	10.9%
Travel Agents	10.3%
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	10.3%
Team Assemblers	10.2%
Retail Salespersons	9.6%
Special Education Teachers, All Other	8.9%
Office Clerks, General	6.8%
Cashiers	6.1%
Parking Lot Attendants	3.6%
Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive	1.8%

TDLWD Wired Data, 2020

The middle-skill positions listed within this WIRED data align well with information released by our partners at Tennessee Economic and Community Development (ECD). The Regional Planning Council will seek to enhance middle-skill growth of industry clusters and targeted business development to support ECD identified clusters of potential growth. In looking at potential growth clusters from an occupational perspective, the Center for Economic Research in Tennessee (CERT) highlights the following high employer demand occupational groups.

- Information Technology occupations
- Healthcare occupations
- Production occupations
- Business and Financial occupations
- Engineering and related occupations
- Transportation/Logistics

Finally, a survey of current economic conditions must also include mention of the recent COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic swept across the nation-at least temporarily changing the economy and workforce overnight. Stay at home orders and social distancing restrictions brought a swift halt to industries throughout the United States, and Middle Tennessee was no exception. Historically low Unemployment numbers quickly spiked to numbers not seen in a generation. According to the Tennessee Initial Unemployment Claims Report by the TN Department of Labor, the largest immediate impact was on industry sectors of manufacturing, public administration, information systems, healthcare and social assistance, accommodation, and food services. The least impacted sectors were mining, utilities, agriculture, retail trade, real estate, rental and leasing. While unemployment

numbers are expected to decrease as restrictions lift, the Regional Planning Council acknowledges the industry effect will be felt for some time. Adjustments to fit changing needs will be made as identified. But staying the course to continue sector growth for existing and emerging in-demand occupations will continue to be the main objective to workforce recovery.

A.2 Employment needs of employers in existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations.

As identified through previously discussed data, existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors will focus on occupational sectors of Healthcare, Advanced Manufacturing, Information Technology, Transportation/Logistics, Construction and Educational Services. Each sector has a variety of position fields available, ranging from those requiring a high school diploma for entry to more advanced positions requiring a bachelor's degree or above and minimum years of experience. ESMI Economy Overview 2020 data shows regional educational attainment near the national average. 18.7% of Middle Tennessee residents possess a Bachelor's Degree (0.1% below the national average), and 6.8% hold an Associate's Degree (1.3% below the national average). Supplying workers ready to fill all levels of positions requires active engagement between the Regional Planning Council and regional industry. To better understand and meet needs of employers, Business Services Team members, across LWDA's and partner programs, are utilized to connect with area employers by participating in regional economic development groups. These include training providers, Chambers of Commerce, human resource managers, plant managers, and economic developers to determine high growth jobs and industries that are adding jobs to the local economy. The Business Service Teams and other AJC partner staff work with LWDA Board Staff to utilize labor market information to identify and meet employer needs, especially those identified as in-demand occupations. Information gathered through these connections are reported back to the Regional Planning Council at each quarterly meeting so as to provide responsive adjustments to industry needs. Areas of adjustments can be made through Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) additions or eliminations, Pathways development, and work-based learning initiatives to cultivate fulfillment of employer needs.

In addition to meeting employer need through sufficient training and education, we must also ensure there are enough workers physically available to fill open positions. Since January 2020, the Middle Tennessee region has maintained a 63% labor force participation rate. This is just slightly higher than the national average of 62% for the same time period. However, recent unemployment rates brought about by COVID-19 have increased this number greatly. It remains to be seen how many workers will be permanently displaced. However, the Regional Planning Council plans to respond by utilizing the situations of these suddenly displaced workers as opportunities for re-training and occupational betterment to fill in-demand industry needs. Workforce supply is of particular concern with middle-skill workforce within the Middle Tennessee Region. Many of the middle skilled occupations are in short supply of workers as jobs are chronically difficult to fill in manufacturing, logistics, and healthcare. Technical roles in manufacturing, such as computer-controlled machinery operation, commercial and industrial machinery repair, and advanced assembling will be vital to the region's manufacturing backbone. Removing the stigma of "dirty" hands-on type technical positions is a focus of the Regional Planning Council. By partnering with Career and Technical Education (CTE) instructors to provide work-based experiences and hands-on learning opportunities we can expose future workers to the modern reality of middle-skill careers.

A.3 Knowledge and skills needed to meet the employment needs of employers in the region, including employment needs in in-demand industry sectors and occupations.

The Middle Tennessee Region recognizes a need to match educational and skills training to in-demand occupations. Based upon the EMSI data, meeting the knowledge and skill needs of in-demand industry sectors will require an intentional fostering of STEM programs. Positions requiring Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) skills are prevalent through identified in-demand sectors of healthcare, information technology and manufacturing/engineering. Developing STEM workforce agendas will be critical to the region's continued growth of advanced industries. It remains a significant challenge for the Middle Tennessee Region to fill the *supply* side of STEM trained workforce supply and demand. The regional task ahead is to align human capacity with employment opportunities. Demand for STEM related fields is currently being addressed within the Middle Tennessee Region through early Pathways development. The Upper Cumberland LWDA has advanced a unique approach to STEM

advantage through adopting a “Kindergarten through Job” mentality in their Pathways approach. This program prepares students at an early age to not only make workforce decisions, but also begins early development of STEM related skills. Building a foundation of STEM minded individuals for the next workforce generation is critical to sustaining regional employer needs. The success experienced in Upper Cumberland schools has encouraged the Northern and Southern Middle LWDAs to develop similar programs and invest as a regional approach. By focusing on broader development of STEM skills through Pathways to Prosperity, the region will meet supply head on by graduating individuals trained within demand sectors.

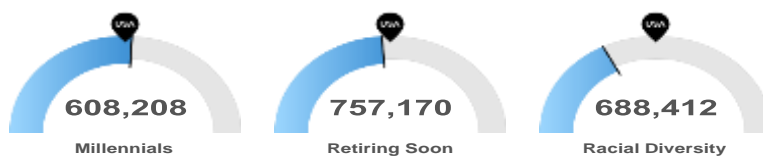
Meeting industry skill needs will include the progression of soft skills training. Each of our LWDAs has created “Work Ethic Distinction” programs providing certified work ethics training courses prior to high school graduation. Once completed, students are guaranteed a job interview with participating companies. This distinction makes the student more marketable as they graduate and search for a job. It also gives an employer confidence in hiring, knowing the individual has been trained in the soft skills needed. These soft skills initiatives were developed in direct response to employers reporting a gap in soft skills within the available workforce.

A.4 An analysis of the regional workforce, including current labor force employment and unemployment data, information on labor market trends, and educational and skill levels of the workforce, including individuals with barriers to employment, including individuals with disabilities.

Between 2019-2020, the Middle Tennessee labor force supply has grown at a rate of two times the other Tennessee workforce regions. The Nashville MSA leads this unprecedented growth, approaching 2 million in population. Growing by almost 90 people per day, the Nashville MSA has added 32,500 people per year over the last ten years according to the US Census Bureau and Nashville Regions 2018 Vital Signs. The speed of this growth has challenged the Regional Planning Council and its three workforce Boards to keep pace with the demands of business and industry. In addition to growing pains, the Middle Tennessee region faces a new and very recent challenge of an increasing unemployed workforce. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Tennessee enjoyed its lowest unemployment rates since 1976. February 2020 documented an unemployment rate of 3.4% for Tennessee. However, that rate dramatically rose to 14.7% by April 2020 due to forced business closures.

A survey of EMSI, WIRED, and US Census demographics reports show our 40-county region has a slightly higher population of millennials, and thus has a younger workforce than the national average. This also trends to less people over 55, thus retirements are below the national average. We do boast a slightly higher amount of veterans within the area due to the proximity of the Fort Campbell military base near Montgomery, Robertson and Stewart Counties. Overall, our region is slightly less diverse than the national average with approximately 80% white, 15% African American, 2% Asian and 4% Hispanic or Latino.

Population Characteristics



EMSI, 2020

A 2019 Labor Force Breakdown provided by EMSI Economic Modeling for the Middle Tennessee Region, 2020, shows a population of 2,844,852. Total working age population consisted of 2,299,506 individuals, with those eighteen and up not participating in the labor force at 813,505. Of the 1,486,001 individuals in the available workforce, 1,445,870 are employed while 40,131 were unemployed. (Unemployment numbers were modeled prior to COVID-19). Youth under the age of fifteen make up 545,346 individuals ready to supply pipeline workforce.

Individuals with substantial barriers to employment make up a significant portion of the population, and therefore, available workforce. Data included within the Combined State Plan is shown below, breaking down population numbers by LWDA and barriers existing.

LWDA	Number Of American Indians or Alaskan Natives alone	Population Ages 15-19	Population Ages 20-24	Population Ages 55+	Number Below Poverty	Number With Disability	Number of Single Parent Families	Probationers and Parolees
NM	5,863	121,482	137,344	446,987	215,424	127,623	64,553	1,439
SM	1,191	26,669	26,375	132,847	61,964	40,834	14,910	5,373
UC	1,035	21,366	22,884	115,897	61,223	34,073	11,249	4,830

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

LWDA	Community Correction	Mental Health Court Statistics (FY 2018)	Limited English Speaking	*Foster Care Services - Youth Aged Out	Clients In Recovery Courts (2018)	In School Youth Experiencing Homelessness in 2018	TANF 18 Months From Ending Eligibility Total 2017	Number of Veterans in 2018	Number of Veterans in 2019
NM	1439	38	18,016	203	586	7,340	506	43,870	43,072
SM	540	28	1,492	93	148	334	134	91,070	89,848
UC	362	n/a	1,354	80	234	1,487	86	40,016	39,483

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Concerning educational attainment, 18.7% of residents possess a Bachelor's degree and 6.8% hold an Associate's Degree. Again, these are just slightly below national average. Programs like TN Reconnect and TN Promise are working to bring these number up. Our educational pipeline has remained stable over the last 5 years with the highest share of graduates coming from Liberal Arts and Sciences, Registered Nursing, and Business Administration. A distribution of educational attainment across the Middle Tennessee Region is shown on the chart below.

	% of Population	Population
Less than 9 th Grade	5.7%	110,267
9 th grade to 12 th Grade	7.4%	142,709
High School Diploma	31.1%	601,146
Some College	20.5%	396,009
Associate degree	6.8%	132,031
Bachelor's Degree	18.7%	362,260
Graduate Degree and Higher	9.8%	188,707

EMSI, 2020

Section A- Q1. How were all partners involved in providing, analyzing and agreeing on supply and demand data and the targeted sectors/industries/occupations/skills?

The Regional Planning Council includes representatives from WIOA core partner programs and additional partner representatives including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Employment and Training programs under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP E&T), Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Trade Adjustment

Assistance (TAA), Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program, Unemployment Insurance, Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), Career and Technical Education (CTE), employment and training activities carried out by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Community Services Block Grant, and correction/re-entry programs.

Representatives bring the knowledge of their respective programs to the Regional Planning table to continuously provided input on targeted sectors and skills. The Regional Planning Council meets monthly throughout the planning process and quarterly at all other times to ensure partner involvement. In addition to gathering partner feedback through meetings, the Regional Planning Council also relies on their Data Committee sub-group to provide input. The Data Committee consists of staff and partners from each LWDA in the region and is tasked with analyzing accepted data by the TDLWD WIRED Unit and Economic Modeling Systems (EMSI). The Data Committee and Regional Planning Council as a whole also utilize data and strategies from the Combined State Plan, which was developed in conjunction with state core partners.

Section A-Q2. How is the region changing in terms of demographics, labor supply, and occupational demand?

As of 2019, population of the Middle Tennessee region increased by 8.2% since 2014, growing by 215,835 individuals. Population is expected to continue increasing by 5.5% between 2019 and 2024, adding 157,243 individuals. From 2014 to 2019, available jobs increased by 13.8% from 1,240,095 to 1,411,599 positions. This change outpaced the national growth rate of 7.6% by 6.2%. Labor Supply has recently changed though unemployment spikes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the region's top industry sectors, which are also the most in-demand, were hit hardest such as manufacturing, healthcare, and IT. The full impact Covid-19 has had upon our region's economy and workforce are yet to unfold. However, uncertainties are inherent in any business model. The Regional Planning Council believes proceeding with planned workforce objectives to meet occupational demands, while remaining sensitive and responsive to changing needs, remains the best course of action.

Section A-Q3. What are the policy and service implications of the current and projected Labor Market Information? And Section A-Q4. What special populations exist in the region, what is their magnitude, and what are the policy and service implications to meet the needs of these individuals?

The Middle Tennessee Region uses Labor Market Information (LMI) and other available data sources to drive decision making and provide in-demand training opportunities to meet employer needs. Based upon labor market information, training investments, and program initiatives, the Middle Tennessee Planning Council will focus on identified in-demand target sectors and occupations, as well as the special populations identified, which include:

- Individuals not in the labor force: as of 2019, 813,505 individuals (aged 15+) of the 2,299,506 working age population are not in the labor force, equaling 35.4%. (EMSI Economy Overview Report).
- Individuals with disabilities: Of the 384,827 individuals not in the labor force, 31.7% or 122,002 of those not in the labor force have a disability. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates).
- Individuals with less than a high school diploma: 13.1% of the population have less than a high school diploma.
- Individuals with some college but no credential: 20.5% of the population has some college experience but not a credential.
- Youth Ages 16-24: A total of 199,958 individuals in the labor force, with 24,398 or 12.2% being unemployed.

Regional initiatives and strategies focusing on the above listed special populations will enhance the Middle Tennessee workforce by bringing more individuals into the workforce with skills needed by employers. Initiatives underway include:

- Offering regional job fairs for target populations, such as Youth, individuals with disabilities, justice-involved individuals, etc.
- Utilizing the Mobile American Job Center to bring services to special populations at locations where they are already being served- such as community events like the Remote Area Medical Clinic (RAM).

- Partnering with TN Reconnect to identify individuals with some college but no credential and co-enrolling them in AJC partner programs when appropriate.
- Assisting employers in enhancing skills of their current workforce through customized training, incumbent worker training, or registered apprenticeships.
- Enhancing services to Adult Education participants through Title I Youth incentives, such as incentives for attending and progressing through classes, and earning a HiSet.

Further initiatives to be considered by the Regional Planning Council include:

- Increasing On-the-Job Training reimbursements for special populations.
- Expansion of Apprenticeship opportunities.
- Enhancing outreach and services to Vocational Rehabilitation participants through Title I Youth Work Experience and / or Adult and Dislocated Worker Transitional Jobs.

Added policy and service implications come through partner programs specifically designed to serve special populations. The Northern and Southern Middle LWDA's both have Ticket to Work programs through the Social Security Administration. Ticket to Work is free and voluntary, supporting career development for Social Security disability beneficiaries age 18 through 64 who want to work. The program is a good fit for recipients who want to improve their earning potential and are committed to preparing for long-term success in the workforce. Ticket to Work offers beneficiaries with disabilities access to meaningful employment with the assistance of Ticket to Work employment service providers called Employment Networks and progresses them to financial independence.

Additionally, Upper Cumberland, Northern Middle and Southern Middle all have Vocational Rehabilitation representatives co-located within their Comprehensive AJCs. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is responsible for providing vocational rehabilitation services to eligible individuals with disabilities in Tennessee in accordance with applicable federal and state guidelines. Some services, because of their unique nature, are best provided by VR through Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP). CRPs provide services such as Vocational Evaluations, Vocational Adjustment, Work Hardening and Job Readiness. Across the State of Tennessee there are a total of seventeen CRPs, with nine being in Middle Tennessee. Those nine county locations are Bedford, Coffee, Franklin, Maury, Montgomery, Putnam, Rutherford, Sumner, and Williamson. In addition to having nine CRP offices, our region houses three Regional Vocational Rehabilitation offices in Columbia, Cookeville, and Smyrna. All three Middle Tennessee LWDA's have Special Targeted Populations/Disabilities committees within their local boards, and a collective Special Targeted Populations Committee exists for the Regional Planning Council. Those committees meet to analyze and discuss local board policies pertaining to special targeted groups and how regional alignment of those policies will better serve our participants. At the regional level, VR staff participates in Local Workforce Development Area partner meetings in planning for local activities, partner collaboration on referrals, services and shared funding, cross informational training, local area plans and AJC funding, employer services and state and local initiatives.

Another special population the Middle Tennessee region serves are Veterans and their spouses. In the Middle Region there are 173,320 veterans, which is above the national average of 159,580 for an area of similar size. All Comprehensive AJCs house staff assigned to specifically serve this special group of participants. In the Northern Middle LWDA, there is a special partnership between Northern Middle Workforce Board and West Kentucky Workforce Board called Campbell Strong Workforce Partnership. Both areas straddle the KY-TN state line and service transitioning soldiers from the Fort Campbell military base. From that partnership came a Specialized American Job Center called Campbell Strong American Job Center in March of 2019. With its \$7.8 million in funding, the opportunities presented under this grant and the establishment of this transition center serve approximately 400 exiting military and eligible spouses each month. The facility co-locates Kentucky and Tennessee career advisers who provide customers with employment resources, training assistance and career counseling. The Fort Campbell Strong Workforce Partnership (CSWP) is a one-of-a-kind program to create a multi-pronged recruitment and training strategy across state lines to increase the skilled assets of the transitioning soldiers and spouses. CSWP staff offer training programs to help service members navigate online networking and job searching to include a professional photograph and the development of a LinkedIn profile.

Section A-Q5. What sectors/industries/occupations/skills are in demand and targets of opportunity?

As described in the Workforce Analysis section, the Middle Tennessee region has analyzed data from multiple sources to interpret in-demand industries for the region as: Healthcare, Information Technology, Advanced Manufacturing, Transportation/Logistics, and Education. Based upon further interpretation and discussion between partners at Regional Planning Committee meetings, the following occupations will be targets of opportunity within those industries during Program Years 2020-2022.

Targeted Occupations In-Demand Include:

Title	Education Level	License Title	Certifications
Computer User Support Specialist	Some college, no degree	N/A	CompTIA IT Fundamentals
Web Developers	Associates Degree	N/A	CIW Web Foundation; CIW Web Design Specialist
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	Postsecondary non-degree award	Commercial Driver License	N/A
Transportation, Storage, and Distribution Managers	High school diploma or equivalent	N/A	N/A
Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	Postsecondary non-degree award	Licensed Practical Nurse	N/A
Registered Nurse	Associates/Bachelor's Degree	Registered Nurse, Advanced Practice Nurse	N/A
Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	Bachelor's Degree	Teacher	N/A
Elementary School Teachers	Bachelor's Degree	Teacher	N/A
First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers	High school diploma or equivalent	N/A	N/A
Maintenance Workers, Machinery	High school diploma or equivalent	Maintenance Mechanic	N/A
Carpenters High school diploma or equivalent	High school diploma or equivalent	Carpenter	NCCER Carpentry Level One
Electricians	High school diploma or equivalent	Electrician	NCCER Electrical Level One

State Plan p. 18-22 Sources: *Jobs4tn.gov* (licenses); U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Apprenticeship; Tennessee Department of Education, Division of College, Career and Technical Education (Tennessee Promoted Industry Certifications)

Also included in the chart above are the requisite skills needed to obtain these positions. It is the task of the Middle Tennessee Planning Council to prepare our workforce for in-demand occupations by ensuring they are trained to fill the pipeline. Educational needs will be ensured through ETPL development, Individual Training Accounts (ITAs), CTE programs, and work-based learning experiences geared towards these occupations. Additionally, the Planning Council will work with our educational partners to provide future workers with the critical skills necessary for projected employment opportunities. The K-Job Pathways approach is taking steam throughout the region as an innovative way to ensure students are provided STEM and critical thinking skills throughout their educational career.

Critical Skills for Projected Employment to 2026:

Skills	2016 Employment	2026 Employment	Employment Increase 2016-2026
Active Listening	666,233	763,733	97,500
Speaking	645,135	744,521	99,386
Reading Comprehension	314,389	361,032	46,643
Social Perceptiveness	284,539	329,929	45,390
Critical Thinking	211,114	250,389	39,275
Monitoring	174,090	200,904	26,814
Service Orientation	158,088	184,808	26,720
Writing	166,790	183,041	16,251
Coordination	139,573	160,605	21,032
Instructing	128,090	143,489	15,399

Source: *Tennessee Long Term Projections, Report Manager August 2019*

The assignment of skills to occupations is based on scientifically designed employer surveys by occupational analysts in the Employment and Training Administration at the U.S. Department of Labor. When occupations are growing, the skills in those occupations will be ranked more highly. According to Tennessee Long Term Projections, the five most critical skills that will be required for Middle Tennessee workers through 2026 are active listening, speaking, reading comprehension, social perceptiveness and critical thinking. And while not among the top five, the Regional Planning Council has assessed skills of service orientation must be a forward focus within the region. The rapid growth of service industry jobs such as leisure and hospitality, food service, and customer service occupations will rely on these skills. With Food and Drinking Places earning the number one spot as Middle Tennessee's top industry employer, regional businesses will continue to experience great need for service trained individuals. Increased decentralization of production and service processes require workers to take on more decision-making roles. As processes become more complex and specialized, the need for teamwork and coordination is increasing. The Regional Planning Council will consider possible work-based training initiatives within the service industry to assist employers in meeting entry level needs, as well as training management positions.

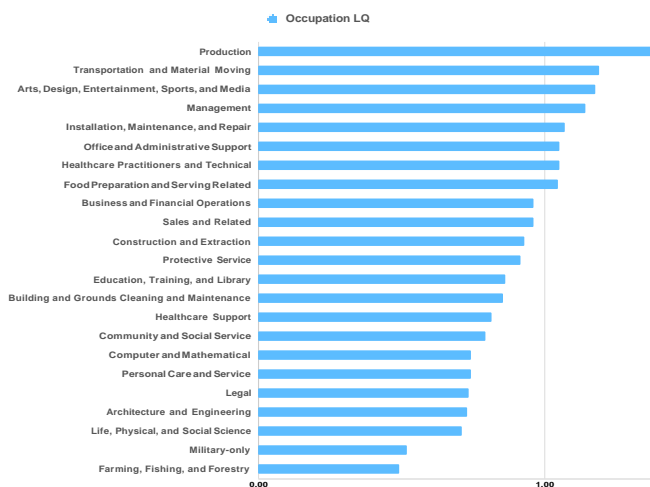
Section A-Q5 (a). What sectors/industries/occupations have favorable location quotients?

After reviewing the Middle Tennessee Economy Overview Report provided by EMSI, it was determined that favorable location quotients in the region currently align with top industry sectors listed within the Workforce Analysis section. The favorable location quotients include Production (1.40), Transportation and Material Moving (1.19), Art, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media (1.18), Management (1.15), Installation, Maintenance and Repair (1.07), Office and Administration Support (1.05), Healthcare Practitioners and Technical (1.05), Construction and Extraction (0.93) and Education, Training and Library (0.87). Occupations with favorable location quotients include production workers and supervisors, construction laborers, electricians, registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, transportation managers, logistic coordinators, tractor-trailer truck driver, elementary and secondary teachers, computer support specialists, cybersecurity analyst, and web developer.

Section A-Q5 (b). What sectors/industries/occupations have favorable demand projections based on growth?

The location quotient graph below shows Middle Tennessee's concentration of in-demand occupations. This quantifies our industrial specializations and is in line with industry growth projections discussed in the Workforce Analysis section of this plan. Projected growth by industry between 2019 and 2024 show the top five industries become Transportation, Food Services, IT Technical Services, Construction, and Health Care.

Top Occupation LQ



Middle Tennessee Region

**TOP OCCUPATION
LOCATION
QUOTIENTS**

EMSI Q2 2020 Economic Modeling

Advanced Manufacturing and Construction have also been determined to be top in-demand industry sectors for the Middle Tennessee region. Both have existing in-demand occupations as well as emerging in-demand occupations based upon industry development and technology advancement.

Section A-Q5 (c). What sectors/industries/occupations have favorable demand projections based on replacements?

While Middle Tennessee's retirement age population is slightly below the national average, replacement risk is a concern. The regional emerging workforce age 15 and under totals only 545,346 individuals, according to the 2020 Economy Overview Report by EMSI. Replacing retiring workers with skilled laborers trained for in-demand industries is at the heart of Middle Tennessee CTE, Pathways to Prosperity and youth work-based learning initiatives. Additionally, our LWDAs will continue to provide work-based training programs to businesses seeking to upskill current employees. These trainings will equip workers with the knowledge and training necessary to move into management positions, which are among the occupations most affected by retiring employees. Feedback received from Advanced Manufacturing representatives also reflect a need for upskilling incumbent workers. Many report sufficient workers to fill entry and middle level positions but difficulty replacing advanced equipment technicians who are retiring. This need will continue to increase as Advanced Manufacturing remains an in-demand and growing sector.

The Middle Tennessee Region will also seek to find replacements outside of our workforce region. Outreach beyond our borders will require an ongoing recruiting and marketing plan. The Regional Planning Council Data Committee analyzes regional workforce needs based upon current data on a quarterly basis. During Program Years 2020-2022, the Planning Council plans to be intentional with communicating this data to regional economic partners in order to collaborate on recruitment strategies to fill in-demand needs. We will partner with Tennessee and local area Chambers of Commerce as well as Economic and Community Development (ECD) to tactically market the Middle Tennessee region. One area we plan to capitalize on is our region's success with transitioning Veterans into the workforce. The Fort Campbell Strong Project has received national attention and brought a spotlight upon our region as a Veteran-friendly employment area. Marketing this success to other military communities outside Middle Tennessee will assist in recruiting transitioning Veterans and their spouses to fill our replacement needs.

Section A-Q5 (d). What sectors/industries/occupations are considered mature but still important to the economy?

Healthcare and medical facilities, automotive suppliers, plumbing and electrical services, transportation and logistics services, and construction services are all businesses that have grown and matured over the years but are still a viable part of the Middle Tennessee economy. Each of our LWDAs receive planning input from corporations that have been in existence for generations and established stakeholders of the local economy. For Northern Middle, it would include companies such as Vanderbilt Medical Center, Trane Company, Nissan North America, Inc., Tennessee Valley Authority, and the Lee Company. The Upper Cumberland would include Cookeville Regional Medical Center, Averitt Express, Cummins Filtration, Honest Abe Log Homes, and Epion Technologies. Mature companies in Southern Middle include Maury Regional Medical Center, General Motors, and Nissan North America Inc.

Section A-Q5 (e). What sectors/industries/occupations are considered emerging in the regional economy?

The Middle Tennessee region continues to see the emerging and ever-evolving sector of Information Technology as vital to regional economics. While specific needs vary slightly between LWDAs and demographics, technology sector needs are constant throughout the region. Northern Middle has seen a recent emergence of Biotechnology occupations, likely due to large-scale research hospital Vanderbilt University. Biotechnology is used for the purpose of medical research, creation and design and has an obvious need for STEM-skilled workers. Southern Middle and Upper Cumberland share similar emerging industries and occupations that include Programmable Logic Controllers (PLCs), and Robotics and Automation. Both LWDAs are within the Motlow State Community College service area and funnel students to the Motlow State Automation and Robotics Training Center in McMinnville, TN. The training center itself is housed in Warren County (Upper Cumberland), but the main campus of Motlow State is in Coffee County (Southern Middle). Utilizing this center within both LWDAs increases the number of technology-trained workers available across the region and contributes to the success of the regional economy. Other emerging industry needs being met:

- Southern Middle, through a partnership with the Tennessee College of Applied Technology, has started an Emergency Medical Technician Training program available to rural counties within the area. Funding received from a State 3-Star Grant will be applied to expand this resource.

- Upper Cumberland has responded to emerging Cyber Security needs through training development. In acknowledging feedback from local up-and-coming technology employer SAIC, the Upper Cumberland partnered with the Overton County TCAT to re-write the Cyber program curriculum to better fit current needs. Students are certification ready upon graduation and ready to be employed with SAIC at an entry level salary of \$50,000.
- Northern Middle has recently partnered with Nashville State Community College on Industrial Readiness Training (IRT). Powered through a GIVE Grant, this program is designed to teach skills necessary for Advanced Manufacturing careers. Atlas BX, an automotive battery manufacturer new to the Northern Middle area, has already relied on this IRT program to build their skilled workforce.

The Regional Planning Council will continue to encourage each local workforce board to ensure available training and education support emerging sectors. When emerging industries cite skills gaps within the workforce, the region's training provider partners will be engaged to develop trainings to meet those industry sector needs.

SECTION B: Development and implementation of sector initiatives for in-demand industry sectors or occupations for the planning region.

B1. What sectors/industries/occupations/skills are the regional priorities, in order of priority, and how was this determined? Explain how the status of growing, maturing and emerging was factored into the ranking.

For Program Years 2020-2022, the Middle Tennessee region will focus resources into these six priority sectors: Information Technology (IT), Construction, Healthcare, Advanced Manufacturing, Transportation/Logistics, and Education. In terms of priority, it is important to note that a hallmark of WIOA is customer choice. Therefore, while the region will set priority of goals, it is ultimately up to our customers which occupations emerge as top preferences. We can, however, use workforce and economic data to make educated plans for the future based upon predicted sector needs and emerging interests. Feedback from industry representatives and assessments from Business Services Team observations also play into regional decision making. Ultimately, the Regional Planning Council uses this collection of information to determine where the greatest potential for Return on Investment (ROI) lies. Based upon all decision-making factors, the Regional Planning Council ranks priority sectors in the following order:

- (1) Healthcare
- (2) Advanced Manufacturing
- (3) Information Technology
- (4) Construction
- (5) Transportation/Logistics
- (6) Education

Population variations and demographic differences also necessitate that these rankings may shift order between LWDAs within the region. For example, construction is a growing sector and will be a higher priority for Northern Middle due to its urban status and rapid expansion. Southern Middle and Upper Cumberland are predominately rural and experience a slower community growth rate. Manufacturing facilities are often main employers within their small towns, making Advanced Manufacturing a higher priority in their LWDAs. Healthcare is a shared priority for all three LWDAs, making it the number one ranked regional priority. Healthcare occupations are in-demand across the region and healthcare industries, while mature, are still main employers for all three LWDAs. Information Technology ranked at the third priority based up its emerging status. Promising ROI exists due to technology advancements and increasing virtual needs.

B2. Which employers were engaged and what data was used to determine the development of sector strategy?

In conjunction with Ernst & Young, the Regional Planning Council created a workforce survey to capture information across the region from employers, Chambers of Commerce, and local board members. Northern Middle has also worked with the Nashville Chamber to conduct a 5-year Plan and distribute workforce survey assessments. Along with those surveys, other forms of previously discussed regional data were gathered from the WIRED Unit, ECD, EMSI, and CERT to determine and develop sector strategies for the Middle Tennessee Region. Additionally, each Local Board is made up of private sector representatives from a variety of groups who give continual feedback on strategy development. Business Services Team representatives stay active in our communities by participating in

Chamber events, SHRM meetings, speaking at workforce community meetings, making in-person visits, and connecting via email. Board staff pursue constant cooperation with economic groups who keep an up-to-date pulse of economic status and needs. All of this engagement has produced regular feedback from employers that was used in creating this Regional Plan. Continual methods of engagement have not only provided rolling feedback, but built strong partnership with our local employers that proved invaluable as the COVID-19 pandemic struck during regional plan development. Gathering employer feedback during this time would have been difficult without these existing partnerships.

B3. What other public-private partnerships exist in the region that could support sector strategies and what is their role in planning? This includes community and non-profit partnerships.

The Middle Tennessee region enjoys several public-private partnerships that help support sector strategies and shape workforce planning.

- Goodwill Industries of Middle TN- Goodwill is a valued partner throughout the Middle Tennessee region. Goodwill Industries Career Solutions Job Placement and Training Services centers provide job placement services for individuals who are unemployed and/or who may need assistance with the job search process. These centers are staffed with counselors providing access to career planning, occupational skills, and in-demand soft skills training to enhance skills and prepare individuals for jobs in their communities. Of the eight Career Solutions offices across the State of Tennessee, seven are located within Middle Tennessee: Clarksville, Cookeville, Columbia, Hendersonville, Mt. Juliet, Murfreesboro, and Nashville. Goodwill and Title I staff across the region participate in referral exchanges that benefit both programs.
- New Horizons- New Horizons Computer Learning Center provides IT training for Middle Tennessee participants who are referred through the Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth programs. New Horizons lends support to the regional sector priority of Information Technology through trainings in Cybersecurity, Applications, Cloud Computing, Networking, Project & IT Service Management.
- Highlands Economic Partnership- The Highlands Economic Partnership is a collaborative, public/private sector program designed to boost economic and community development in the Upper Cumberland. While based in the Upper Cumberland LWDA, the Highlands has been instrumental in Pathways to Prosperity development throughout the entire Middle Tennessee region. A major player in the K-Job unique approach to Pathways development, the Highlands has worked with Harvard University and remains involved with the Regional Planning Council to advance STEM workforce preparedness in Middle Tennessee.
- UT Extension Offices- UT Extension offices throughout the region conduct Leadership Development preparation classes to enhance employer-desired soft skills for workforce. Individuals are given the opportunity to serve as entrepreneurs and leaders within their own communities, and then trained to translate those skills into the workforce. Representatives from the county extension offices hold classes at local AJCs for participants to better develop their skills.

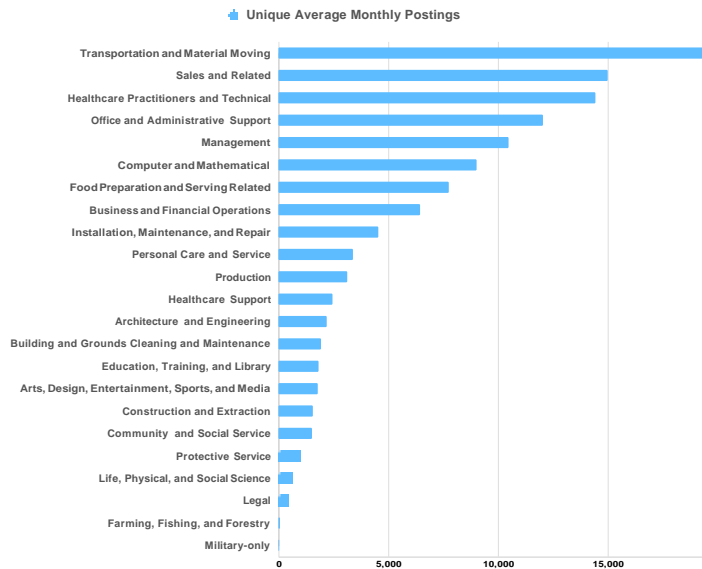
These partners remain active in regional development and have given beneficial feedback to regional planning. The Middle Tennessee Planning Council will remain committed to maintaining and creating new public/private non-profit and for-profit partnerships in coming program years.

B4. How well do the existing skills of job seekers match the demands of local businesses?

The Middle Tennessee Regional Planning Council compares frequency of job postings against skills present in current available workforce to gauge supply and demand of relevant skills. Job posting information is regularly received from the Jobs4TN website as well as EMSI Economic Modeling, as shown below. Alignments are positive when cross-referenced with top in-demand skills for the Middle Tennessee region. A top-posted occupation of sales and related industries shows well supplied with workers skilled in selling techniques and merchandising. In viewing weaknesses as well as strengths, a potential skills gap appears to exist in transportation and material moving. Flatbed operation is listed as an in-demand skill but present on 0% of Jobs4TN profiles. This presents an area for Middle Tennessee to spotlight in the future so as to match the skills of job seekers to demands of regional businesses. Conversely, top-

posted occupations in healthcare match well to the third highest in-demand skill of nursing. This confirms the regional investment in healthcare sectors and proves it should remain a priority.

Top Posted Occupations

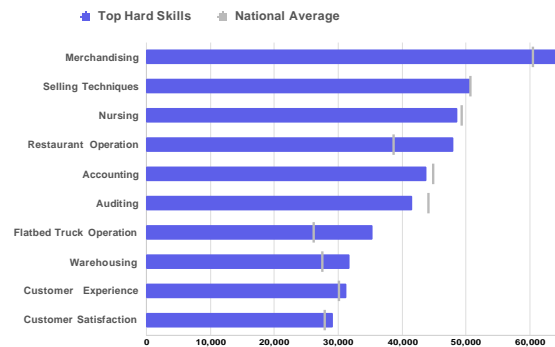


Middle Tennessee Region

TOP POSTED OCCUPATIONS

EMSI Q2 2020 Economic Modeling

In-Demand Skills



B5. Describe the plans for future strategy development for future sectors. If applicable, discuss the next sectors to be targeted.

Future strategy development will continue to be employer-driven and promote systemic growth to benefit workers of all wage and skill levels, the industry as a whole, and the community at large. The impact of technological, demographic and socio-economic changes will impact the employment landscape and skills requirements of the future. Based upon these factors, existing sector strategies may need to be adjusted as we progress into Program Years 2020-2022. Any need for adjustments or development of new strategies for future sectors will be reviewed by the Regional Planning Council at quarterly meetings. Local boards, One-Stop Operators, and Service Providers in each LWDA will also monitor and report local labor market trends when:

- Approving new providers or programs to the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL).
- Issuing Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) to fund programs on the ETPL.
- Developing On-the-Job Training (OJT) and Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) contracts.

The Regional Planning Council will also regularly monitor labor market information regarding the identified emerging sector and occupations. Additionally, engagement with employers, partners, and training providers will supply valuable information to identify and develop sector strategies for emerging sectors. Being responsive to industry needs as effected by the COVID-19 pandemic may necessitate future strategy development. The Regional Planning Council plans to be particularly watchful towards potential sector strategies within the field of virtual training, as they are posed to become in-demand if social distancing restrictions remain in place.

B6. Describe how the areas will work together to ensure regional businesses are served across LWDAs.

Ensuring the needs of regional businesses are served requires a collective effort across all three LWDAs. Combining resources and accessing talent pools beyond LWDA borders is especially important when assisting large-scale employers. The Nissan Company is a prime example of regional coordination to serve employers. Nissan has invested over \$7.1 billion into the Middle Tennessee economy and has hired a workforce of over 7,000 jobs. Employees commute to their manufacturing plant in Rutherford County from all three local workforce areas. While the Rutherford AJC is the starting point for all Nissan hires, it is truly the regional AJC system that is the hub for all of hires. Business Service Teams from the three LWDAs recruit and direct prospective employees, referring them to the Rutherford AJC for hiring.

Another method of regional coordination to meet business needs is shown through Northern Middle's Fort Campbell Strong Project. This specialized AJC provides workforce training and assistance to military Veterans and eligible spouses. As Veterans transition from military duty to civilian workforce, they are aided in skill development and job placement. The Fort Campbell Project thrives though placement assistance from both Southern Middle and Upper Cumberland. Placing Veterans and their spouses into jobs throughout the Middle Tennessee Region expands employment opportunities and boosts participation for all LWDAs.

The Regional Planning Council will also access partnerships with education, ECD, non-profits and community organizations to identify and collaboratively meet the workforce needs of businesses within the regional labor market. We will focus on building regional talent pipelines, addressing skill gaps, and creating meaningful career pathways for a range of workers in regional industries. Regional sector approaches serve the dual purpose of aligning education, training, and support services to the needs of employers in an industry sector- while ensuring that those services are accessible to a range of workers. Sector strategies will complement and strengthen the service strategies of the region.

STRATEGIES FOR SERVICE INTEGRATION

QA1. How well do existing training programs in the region and the LWDAs prepare job seekers to enter and retain employment with regional businesses?

Workforce development educational and training activities are plentiful with the Middle Tennessee Region. Each LWDA has originated unique programs to engage education and training in their respective areas. Southern Middle administers educational training though a strong re-entry emphasis. Upper Cumberland LWDA boasts a well-built Pathways to Prosperity and Dual Enrollment program. Northern Middle operates the Fort Campbell Strong project, an exemplar program targeting Veterans transitioning to work. Though each has originated in its own LWDA, they have not remained programmatic silos. The Middle Tennessee Regional Planning Council has worked to translate each into regional results through offering referrals, sharing best practices, and upstart assistance. Moving into PY 20-22, the further alignment of education and workforce initiatives will be crucial in serving regional job seekers and employers. Governor Bill Lee has set his focus on ensuring education and workforce are the priority for developing and expanding Tennessee businesses. In support of this focus, the State of Tennessee has made available several funding sources to support the alignment of labor, economic development and education. The Middle Tennessee Region will work together and as individual LWDAs to administer the following programs:

GIVE Grants- GIVE grants focus on expanding learning opportunities within rural counties. Regional partnerships are encouraged to develop work-based learning and apprenticeship opportunities for secondary and post-secondary learners. GIVE grants were awarded in November 2019 to the following Middle Tennessee educational institutions:

Institution	Amount of Funding	Intent of Grant
Motlow State Community College	\$949,410.00	Teaching Innovative Learning Technologies (TILT)
TCAT Dickson	\$987,699.00	Industrial Readiness Training
TCAT Livingston	\$1,000,000.00	Fabricating a new workforce in Clay County through welding technology.
TCAT Livingston	\$1,000,000.00	Diesel Maintenance
TCAT McMinnville	\$1,000,000.00	Shaping careers through machining
Volunteer State Community College	\$1,000,000.00	Go Tech: Growing opportunities with technology
TCAT Pulaski	\$310,146.00	Welding Program Expansion-Giles County
Columbia State Community College	\$841,320.00	Cyber Defense Mobile
TCAT Hohenwald	\$1,000,000.00	Technical skills to rise above "Distressed to Best"

Apprenticeship Grants- Designed to increase the use of apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs as a dependable workforce strategy for Middle Tennessee companies. The PY 20-22 years expect ample funding for apprenticeships within our region. Regional planning, coordination and cooperation of apprenticeships will be a forward focus of the Middle Tennessee Region in these coming years.

LWDA	Amount of Funding
Northern Middle	\$55,000.00
Southern Middle	\$55,555.00
Upper Cumberland	\$55,000.00

Apprenticeship funds are already being actively engaged throughout our region. For example, Southern Middle has partnered with Columbia State to develop a pre-apprenticeship Lineman program as well as with TCAT-Shelbyville on their Industrial Electrician Apprenticeship. Moreover, the Northern Middle LWDA has appropriated an additional \$300,000.00 of board funds to be used towards CBG apprenticeships.

Consolidated Business Grants- Work based training programs are an effective strategy to provide high-quality employment opportunities to participants, as well as providing skilled workers to meet the needs of area employers. Each LWDA within the Middle Tennessee Region has received the following funds to develop work-based learning and support regional training opportunities:

LWDA	Amount of Funding
Northern Middle	\$200,000.00
Southern Middle	\$210,000.00
Upper Cumberland	\$246,300.00

Rural Initiative Grants- RI Grants bring much needed funding to workforce development in Tennessee's At-Risk and Distressed Counties. The administration of these funds was tailored to the particular needs of individual areas. While each particular strategy is different, all will support and work together to strengthen rural areas within the region. The Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development Commissioner has set Distressed and At-Risk counties as a focus, recognizing they have the greatest number of barriers to enter the workforce system. In

collaboration with Governor Lee, the Commissioner has created a vision to address this special population. In support of their agenda, Middle Tennessee Rural Initiative monies will assist individuals within these areas in the following ways:

LWDA	Funding Amount	Focus
Northern Middle	\$50,000.00	Bridge to Work, Certified Production Technician program benefiting Houston County
Southern Middle	\$298,000.00	Provide WEX for youth and justice-involved individuals, and On-the-Job training opportunities for Out-of-School Youth and Adults in Perry, Wayne and Lewis Counties
Upper Cumberland	\$504,356.40	For the Distressed Counties of Clay, Jackson and Fentress, the focus will be on bridging the training gap for out-of-school youth who have experienced broken educational pathways. For the At-Risk Counties of Warren, Overton and Van Buren, funding will support re-entry initiatives bringing TCAT welding training into the county jails.

Dislocated Worker Grants/National Emergency Grants (NEG)- The Middle Tennessee Region will seek funds to support disaster recovery through 2020 Federal Dislocated Worker Grants funding opportunities. These funds will be applied for and disbursed by the State of Tennessee to areas of greatest need. Awarded funds will support COVID-19 disaster relief, humanitarian efforts and employment recovery. The Middle Tennessee Regional Planning Council is hopeful funds will be awarded to assist in purchasing required personal protective equipment as well as utilizing dislocated workers to clean and sanitize local government offices.

Administration of these grant dollars increases the Middle Tennessee Region's capacity to facilitate work readiness and boost the regional supply of skilled workers available to our employers. Beyond special grant funded opportunities, local boards focus on workforce development through work experience, work-based learning programs, and barrier removal.

Removing barriers to provide universal access throughout the region is essential to the WIOA program. With this in mind, the Middle Tennessee Region systematically reviews ways to remove barriers at each quarterly meeting through in-depth policy review and alignment discussions. Our objective is to ensure any policy variations do not create barriers for eligible programs or potentially eligible participants. The Middle Tennessee Region will also work to provide American Job Center (AJC) classifications that meet the needs of employers and participants. This will be unique to the local area and can include metropolitan, micropolitan, suburban, and rural communities- all of which are served within the Middle Tennessee Region. Obviously, this is based upon availability of infrastructure funding and center numbers. However, the Regional Planning Council recognizes this as a potential way to address barrier removal. All area AJCs, regardless of classification, must meet ADA compliance standards.

Removing barriers increases access to education, training, and employment universally. The Middle Tennessee Region will focus on innovating and creating programs to respond to populations with unique barriers. The regional planning council has identified justice involved individuals as a special population with substantial barriers to remove and will continue to cultivate sustainable re-entry programs throughout Middle Tennessee Region. This is an example of the region identifying a barrier and creating regional action to address the barrier.

Ensuring Middle Tennessee job seekers are prepared to enter and retain employment not only requires funded training programs and barrier removal plans, but also the ability to adapt with a changing workforce environment. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought some of the most drastic effects to workforce in modern history. The long-term effects of pandemic business adjustments and economic impact are still unknown. However, one thing is certain: our workforce must be adaptable. The labor market has been swept by technology needs as employees are sent to alternate work stations and work teams meet and train virtually. It is now more vital than ever that our job

seekers are trained in computer skills and virtual efficiency. As economic changes occur, Middle Tennessee businesses are already reporting the need to adapt business models to survive. One large-market plant based within the Upper Cumberland area has become an early example of successful adjustments. Traditionally a synthetic auto parts supplier, they have now converted their lines to produce synthetics used for N-95 masks. Representatives from this plant have already reached out to workforce representatives for assistance in training for these new skills. The assistance workforce can provide will be invaluable in sustaining this business and keeping their people retained in employment.

Fostering an adaptable workforce will also require assisting the many dislocated workers COVID-19 has produced. Programs for skills upgrade and job search assistance will be supplemented with creative methods for income production. The Middle Tennessee Regional Planning Council will be working towards enhancing strategies to promote entrepreneurial skills training and microenterprise services. As Albert Shapero writes in his book *The Dislocated Worker*, “Entrepreneurs are not born, rather they *become* through the experiences in their lives.” Many individuals within the growing group of dislocated workers will find themselves forced to become their own income. Entering the workforce through entrepreneurship will require individuals to use their skills to create products or services that customers need. Providing a regional framework for innovation and entrepreneurship will guide their efforts to become self-employed, using their business skills to create personal self-sufficiency as well as generate employment for others. This will be accomplished through crucial community partnerships accessed to serve innovation and business development in various stages. Pipeline entrepreneurial skills training will be encouraged through Career and Technical Education instructors as well as secondary school STEM programs. On-the-Job Trainings will be asked to expand and evolve individual interests and inclinations. Once ready to utilize these skills, partnerships with non-profit entrepreneurial offices throughout the region (such as the Biz Foundry in the Upper Cumberland) will aid in business plan development. We will also partner with local Small Business Administrations and area Chambers of Commerce to facilitate successful acquisition of capital to fuel businesses of all sizes.

In assessing the region’s strengths and weakness to carry out all aspects of workforce preparedness, several areas of best practices and challenges emerge. Our internal evaluations have identified strong regional alignment in shared training, apprenticeship modeling and increased collaboration. The Regional Planning Council will continue to work through identified weaknesses such as regional communication and varying demographics to be served.

QA2. What existing service delivery strategies will be expanded based upon promising ROI?

Promising Return on Investment (ROI) has been shown regionally within the medically related and manufacturing fields. Due to strong ROI, existing service strategies within those areas will be expanded. The Middle Tennessee region plans to expand its efforts towards the medical field through dual enrollment LPN courses as well as a Kindergarten through Job STEM focus. The keystone of STEM and dual enrollment training initiatives is ensuring training foci correlates with current and future business demands. The Middle Tennessee Region recognizes a need to match educational and skills training to high demand occupations. Based upon labor market analysis, intentional fostering of STEM programs is necessary to meet the future needs of regional businesses. As the region moves forward with greater Pathways to Prosperity development, there will be a heavy emphasis on STEM activities. The regional movement of “Kindergarten through Job” mentality prepares students at an early age to not only make workforce decisions, but also begins early development of STEM related skills. Building a foundation of STEM minded individuals for the next workforce generation is critical to sustaining regional employer needs. Our region is also focusing on more instant gratification of STEM related skills development. Workforce data shows a heavy employer need in Health Sciences, particularly for certified LPNs. The region is responding by working with area TCATs to expand LPN programs. In our rural counties, access to LPN programs has been expanded to IN-School Youth through bussing students to TCATs during the school day in order to earn dual enrollment credits. Many of our TCATS are seeing exponential growth through these dual enrollments in health-related certifications. Similar programs for computer specialist certifications are also thriving as a result of the region working to meet the manufacturing skill needs of employers. Economic modeling has identified two of the top three regional industries as Education and Hospitals (local government), and General Medical and Surgical Hospitals. Each will have a specific need for LPN and other medically trained individuals. Again, this shows a strong need for regional education and training spotlight on medically related fields.

Consolidated Business Grants Coordinators and Business Services Teams will anchor manufacturing training programs. ROI within manufacturing industries shows continued growth based upon economic modeling data. Particularly for the Southern Middle and Upper Cumberland areas, manufacturing initiatives are required to meet industry need. CBG representatives and Business Services Teams for those areas are working to develop a regional strategy to expand upon current CBG service models.

While Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship programs are long existing service strategies, they have had new life breathed into them by Governor Bill Lee. This fresh push on an existing service strategy sets the stage for promising ROI. The Middle Tennessee Planning Council is working to share apprenticeship strategies and gain industry interest. The on-boarding of Regional Apprenticeship Directors will assist in coordination of these swelling efforts within the region. Northern Middle has already begun leading the way for apprenticeships within the Middle Tennessee Region. In September 2019, the Northern Middle LWDA launched a partnership between Empower Electric Company and the Tennessee College of Applied Technology at Nashville to provide an exciting training and apprenticeship opportunity. A total of 27 men and women enrolled in the program in its first year. Up to \$136,346.00 of Northern Middle Board funds will be poured into this endeavor to provide the tuition component, at approximately \$5,000.00 per apprentice. Additionally, Northern Middle has explored another apprenticeship model through creating a partnership incorporating employees from two area businesses, Merryman Farr and Interstate AC. These employers will receive tuition reimbursement for twenty employees to enroll in a HVAC apprenticeship training program. The Northern Middle Board will provide up to \$60,000.00 for the first year of the four-year program, at a rate of \$3,000.00 per apprentice. Northern Middle has identified best practices in apprenticeship birth through working with flexible training providers to create efficient models and simplifying the process for employers-while meeting their specific needs in addressing workforce skills gap and the employee pipeline. Both Southern Middle and Upper Cumberland Boards will look to pattern apprenticeship programs after their regional partner and are excited to provide similar endeavors in their local areas. Southern Middle has already begun partnering with TCAT-Shelbyville to create a USDOL Electrical Apprenticeship Program. As well, the Upper Cumberland is working with TCAT-Livingston and Motlow State Community College on some exciting apprenticeship opportunities.



Apprenticeship Program Ribbon Cuttings at Empower Electric and Merryman Farr, 2019

Additionally, the Middle Tennessee Region will seek to expand and enhance co-enrollments of partner programs. Co-enrollments have proven ROI and better the workforce system as a whole. In 2019, our region planned efforts to strengthen co-enrollments with Tennessee Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). TANF has displayed active participation in regional planning meetings and has moved to co-locate many offices within our area American Job Centers. We have seen promising ROI through these measures and plan to grow and strengthen this partnership. Working with TANF to provide wrap-around services allows participants to put their full focus into preparing to enter and retain employment.

The cornerstone of expansion of each of these service strategies will be cooperative efforts from each LWDA within the region. Working together to lift each other up will, in turn, result in an even greater rise in regional impact.

QA3. What new strategies will be used to align regional education and training needs based upon promising ROI?

The Regional Planning Council will partner with the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development, as well as other key stakeholders, to work towards establishing a Virtual American Job Center. A virtual center will allow customers to access staff members and workforce services through technology, rather than scheduling an in-person meeting. Many areas within the region have benefited from state and economic development broadband expansion initiatives- making access to a virtual site possible for the vast majority of residents. The Regional Planning Council envisions the Virtual American Job Center as an innovative and modern strategy to service delivery throughout the region.

Many virtual services are already being provided as workforce and provider staff have been forced to work in Alternate Work Stations (AWS) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Creativity have been key in developing strategies to continue services during this time. Each LWDA has been responsive through providing laptop computers for staff, developing a process for virtual enrollments, monitoring work flow, creating virtual check-ins, and a host of other problem-solving methods. While challenging, this time has proven that a virtual process is not only needed, but possible. Workforce partners have learned to communicate and refer virtually and are creating makeshift integrations to keep services flowing. The Middle Tennessee Region will seek to capitalize on this movement by evaluating where virtual models could benefit AJC processes. One opportunity to be explored is the use of technology to implement an integrated intake system. Creating a combined and unified intake system would not only streamline processes, but would also boost co-enrollments and braiding of services. Additionally, it would facilitate a more uniform experience for participants. At the forefront of any virtual process development will be ensuring that all participants have a simple and effective engagement experience.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, we must not only offer virtual services within ourselves. Ailing industries need a workforce response that will push forward and assist in building virtual services to answer regional education and training needs. Higher education institutions have moved all current classes to online models only, with the future of upcoming semesters uncertain. With all in-person meetings cancelled, technical colleges have struggled to provide the “hands-on” learning required for in-demand sectors such as nursing, welding and manufacturing. Work-Based Learning programs have come to a halt as only essential employees are allowed in buildings. Additionally, manufacturers report difficulty training incumbent workers with gathering restrictions in place. The only answer to these dilemmas is to develop virtual training tools to be used at each level. Keeping our educational and training programs moving- whether through traditional models or new virtual ones- it is crucial in producing skilled workers for our economy. The Middle Tennessee Regional Planning Council will focus on evolving training methods throughout the region beginning fall 2020. Our educational partners already have plans in place to virtually adapt. Regional workforce will seek to come alongside and provide support to current and pipeline virtual adaptations.

**Virtual Environments as
New Strategies**

One promising new strategy may involve workforce Board support in developing virtual reality training for educators and employers. Virtual reality training has been in the pipeline for some time. Given current social distancing restrictions from the pandemic, the environment is prime to launch into fruition throughout the Middle Tennessee Region. The Upper Cumberland LWDA recently engaged in conversations with representatives from Advanced Manufacturing within their local area and the consensus was clear- virtual training is a future sector to watch. In response, Upper Cumberland stakeholders are working with this integral group to discover next steps in activation. Virtual reality trainings are already being developed by our larger industry partners. Regional workforce will provide support through Incumbent Worker Training funds to upskill workers using virtual reality. TCAT representatives also report interest in seeking grant funds to provide the hands-on portion of classroom trainings via virtual reality. Workforce will work with our educational partners to ensure this curriculum aligns with industry needs.

An additional new strategy the Middle Tennessee Region will seek to expand is the linkage between One-Stop operations and Unemployment Insurance (UI) programs. Again, the COVID-19 pandemic has created an environment that is ripe for capitalizing on this linkage. When businesses and industries were hit hard by pandemic effects in March 2020, the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD) was thrust into the front lines of this attack. TDLWD's response was swift to include a mass inclusion of training all able bodies to respond to Unemployment needs. Within Middle Tennessee American Job Centers, Title III staff were trained to provide Tier I and some Tier II assistance. Title I staff were immediately trained to give UI technical support and One-Stop Operators became de-facto UI resources for their communities. One-Stop system members of all levels have risen to the occasion to meet UI and workforce needs during this crisis. As the crisis begins to resolve into a sustainable "normal," the Middle Tennessee Regional Planning Council will pursue ways to not only sustain this linkage but to further strengthen this collaboration. We now have cross-trained staff ready to continue the alliance and move forward into the future of one-stop design.

QA3(a). What existing service delivery strategies will be curtailed or eliminated based on minimal ROI?

The Middle Tennessee region has spent considerable time recently evaluating provider practices and service delivery strategies. After careful review, the LWDA's have collectively requested that excessive paperwork and administrative red tape be cut from provider practices. These strategies not only produce minimal return on investment, but even slow down workforce progress. In many cases, these practices have been shown to actually create barriers for individuals rather than remove them. Follow-up will continue to ensure such strategies are curtailed or eliminated. Assessing the efficiency of services will also necessitate a look at how we deliver services. Entertaining virtual models and implementing an integrated intake system will seek to replace delivery strategies that show lesser return. The return on investment of service delivery strategies will be measured through the creation of LWDA and regional dashboards to measure the effectiveness of the integrated workforce strategy. These dashboards will be created by the Data Sub-Group of the Middle Tennessee Regional Planning Council and will determine future ROI efforts.

As the region progresses in the years 2020-2022, any services and programs that do not show a promising practice for employment skills or lack of self-sufficient wages will be evaluated for the option of discontinuing. However, some entry training is needed for individuals who are basic skills deficient. Currently, trainings provided are limited to those that have the best ROI based on the initial assessment of the participant's skills.

QA3(b). What steps will be taken to support the state strategies and goals to align and integrate education, workforce, and economic development?

The Middle Tennessee Regional Planning Council will take steps to support the state strategies through the following regional sector strategies:

1. Clear connections to current industry/employers: The Middle Tennessee Region recognizes a need to match educational and skills training to high demand occupations. Based upon labor market analysis, intentional fostering of STEM programs is necessary to meet the future needs of regional businesses. Developing STEM workforce agendas will be critical to the region's continued growth of advanced industries. The regional task ahead is to align human capacity with employment opportunities. By focusing on broader development of Pathways to Prosperity with a K-Job approach the region will meet supply head on by graduating individuals trained within demand sectors.

While working to meet pipeline industry needs, the Middle Tennessee Region will also prioritize current employer needs. The Middle Tennessee Region recognizes the need to plan for responsiveness. Communication with regional employers along with regular analyzation of workforce data will shape the dynamic direction of regional workforce. Keeping a current knowledge of regional business and employer needs is critical. Even more critical, is what we do with that knowledge. Putting ourselves in a position to be responsive is the goal of the Middle Tennessee Region. The Upper Cumberland area proved responsiveness recently by working with SAIC, a local large area employer heavy in cyber security and web development. The Upper Cumberland workforce team partnered with the Livingston Vocational School to conduct an area survey of local businesses to better understand their needs. By putting themselves in a position to communicate they were able to identify SAIC's need for more credentialed workers in networking and cyber security. Upper Cumberland then worked with educational partners to re-write TCAT cyber programs to better fit SAIC's demands. This program is now open to all students, including those dually enrolled. Students are certification ready upon graduation and ready to be employed with SAIC at an entry level salary of

\$50,000. The Southern Middle area also has show responsiveness through similar work with large area employer VIAM. Both areas have shared their experiences with the region so as to express regional employer needs across areas. The Regional Planning Council will provide direction and enlightenment for quarterly meetings of the Council as a whole and will be an invaluable tool for developing regional strategy.

All LWDAs within the Middle Tennessee Region will continue to keep clear connections to current employer needs through hosting employment events. Each quarter, there are hundreds of job fairs happening across our region within local American Job Centers. Individual areas have worked to provide in-house hosting to produce strong relationships with industry partners. The Comprehensive center in Montgomery provided office and interviewing space for the Atlas BX company for over five months while their plant was beginning construction. Their business services team worked directly with Atlas BX, and guided this foreign owned company through the cultural challenges on a daily basis resulting in a successful startup. The Comprehensive center in Putnam County has utilized their space to host robust hiring events each month since their recent move. These have been highly successful and continue to foster strong relationships with area employers. The comprehensive center in Rutherford County actually has an in-house paying partner, Yates Nissan. Nissan employs over 7,000 people in their main assembly plant and surrounding operations. All new hires come through the regional network of AJCs where local business teams refer to Yates. The business teams in surrounding commuter counties assess and refer job seekers to the Rutherford AJC for final screening. This is truly a regional approach and a regional solution to providing solid connections to employers for all three local boards. The Middle Tennessee Region plans to continue collaboration on employment events moving forward. Hosting more regional hiring events such as the recent Fort Campbell Job Fair, spearheaded by Northern and Southern Middle LWDAs, will be a focus.

2. Clear pipelines Development Infrastructure: Labor market data has identified jobs within healthcare and manufacturing as regional in-demand occupations. Programs to develop STEM skills will be at the forefront of infrastructure development for these occupations. Many of the middle-skill occupations identified as in-demand for Middle Tennessee also rely on STEM skills. Again, Middle Tennessee has identified Pathways to Prosperity as an avenue to effectuate Governor Lee's focus on STEM skills through vocational and industry recognized credentials. This program seeks to engage educators and employers in building a system of career pathways ensuring more youth complete high school and attain a post-secondary credential with currency in the labor market. Key pathways sectors are information technology, health care and advanced manufacturing. The Region will work towards this focus through "Pathways" development and apprenticeships. The Upper Cumberland has shared dual enrollment as a best practice for developing the K-Job approach. The Putnam County school system has over 900 students dually enrolled in high school and post-secondary courses. Through dual enrollment students are able to complete the same curriculum towards industry certifications as full-time TCAT students. The Upper Cumberland has been able to massively increase dual enrollment participation by actually bussing students into the TCATs. Again, this is a best practice that will be explored by other areas within the region.

Internships and Apprenticeships will be a Pathways main priority for the Middle Tennessee Region. The Upper Cumberland area has worked with the Highland Economic Partnership to recently seek an apprenticeship in Tool & Die. The Highlands Economic Partnership is a collaborative public/private sector program designed to boost economic and community development within the Upper Cumberland. Through a partnership with the local TCAT, Upper Cumberland Workforce and The Highlands have filed a Notice of Intent to Apply in 3 new Pathway areas. The Upper Cumberland has also received work-based learning grants for Putnam County schools. Keeping the K-Job approach, school-based enterprises have been introduced into middle schools as well as high schools. Students learn to create business plans and run businesses as self-sufficient. Again, this practice has been shared with regional partners to be included as a regional approach.

3. Clear integrations with economic development: The Middle Tennessee Region continues to strategize for better regional economic development coordination. Economic and Community Development (ECD) will be at the forefront of these strategies as an integral economic development partner. Over the last year, the Upper Cumberland LWDA has forged a partnership with ECD in Fentress County. There, the local workforce team works with ECD to go into Fentress County high schools to meet with all students who have self-identified as "ready to work." Through this program, workforce team members are actually seeking out this previously underserved group and in essence,

bringing the AJC to them. Southern Middle is also developing a similar system in their area. The end result of these endeavors is for workforce staff to leave with prospective enrollees' individual information. This can ensure a follow up will occur since staff will not be dependent on the individual initiating contact. As these projects reoccur and grow, best practices are shared among all regional partners.

Most recently, partnerships with economic development agencies have been utilized to address natural disaster recovery within the region. When March 2019 brought devastating E-4 and E-3 tornadoes upon Putnam, Davidson and Wilson Counties, economic development agencies from across the region partnered to help. These agencies were able to provide assistance to local Boards by partnering with TEMA and FEMA to aid in the recovery. Mobile AJC units were gathered from across the state and placed in strategic locations to be most utilized by those that had lost their jobs. While Wagner-Peyser staff and the TDLWD were key to making this happen quickly, our partnerships with economic development agencies broadened the effect we were able to provide.

Economic development will forge ahead to be coordinated and strategized as a region through bringing all economic partners to the table. By including and requesting participation from all partners at quarterly regional planning meetings, continued growth plans are encouraged. Strategic planning for economic development will include our valued partners from Chambers of Commerce, TN Pathways, educational institutions, employer organizations, Business Services teams and local area economic development groups such as The Highlands Economic Partnership. The Regional Planning Council will also explore collaboration of grant projects through economic development organizations such as the Appalachian Rural Commission.

4. Outcome visibilities-clear data/reporting and predictive analysis: The Middle Tennessee Region is working to create regional measures of overall economic growth and advancement. The Northern Middle LWDA has been instrumental in a current workforce study led by TIPS strategies. This study focuses on the Fort Campbell area through the Office of Economic Adjustment and the Department of Defense. The Northern Middle Board has also sponsored a workforce study for Clarksville, Montgomery County led by nationally known EMSI. These studies will provide valuable data for the entire region, as Fort Campbell supplies exiting soldiers to the workforce throughout our area. The Northern Middle Board is also in the process of finalizing a six-month workforce study with the Nashville Chamber of Commerce to be released July 2020. This latest venture covers over 10 counties in Middle Tennessee and touches all three workforce areas within the region.

The Middle Tennessee Regional Planning Council will also utilize Tennessee Department of Labor & Workforce Development industry and occupational projections to be used by all core program partners to identify higher growth projections. The Labor Market Information provides key indicators of business growth and location, labor force and unemployment rates that are utilized to support regional planning. This data will assist the Council in implementing an integrated planning process that aligns leading practices and tools with economic and workforce development and education planning. Integration of economic clusters, industry sectors and career cluster analyses will support employer-driven regional sector partnerships. This process will address in-demand industries and occupations to align and integrate existing education and workforce resources through career pathway solutions.

QA3(c). What formal and informal cooperative procedures will the core partners and other required partners establish to align services and coordinate delivery?

The Partners' Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), along with the Infrastructure Agreement (IFA), are the foundational documents linking mandatory and additional partners together to ensure workforce services are delivered seamlessly throughout the 37 American Job Centers within the Middle Tennessee region. These documents are signed by the organization's authority, are reviewed on a quarterly basis, and amended as necessary. They are living documents that pledge how often and to what levels workforce services will be delivered to business customers and job seekers by the three AJC teams- Welcome Function, Business Function and Career Service Function. Each partner's MOU seeks to ensure services are delivered in similar manners across the workforce areas as well as throughout the Middle Tennessee Region.

Special MOUs are also created to outline unique partnerships and specialized initiatives. The Campbell Strong Workforce Partnership is a thriving example of a specialized MOU within the Middle Tennessee Region. The seven million dollar "Trade and Economic Transition" grant between the Northern Middle TN Workforce Board and the

Western Kentucky Workforce Board serves transitioning soldiers and spouses who qualify as dislocated workers as they move in and out of Fort Campbell. Each Board provides case management services through a Specialized Center delivering targeted WIOA Title I services both on and off the military base. A service agreement between the two Boards allows Northern Middle to be the lead agent for employment and policies while both Boards share control of service delivery. An additional specialized MOU was signed with the Fort Campbell military base and the United Service Organization (USO) to define services delivered on base as well as sharing office space with the federal Department of Defense (DOD). This project has received national attention and is a current focus of Senator Blackburn and Alexander's offices. As well, the Fort Campbell Strong project has been touted as a best public/private practice across the Department of Defense. The MOU agreements between two state Boards and the MOU with the DOD are unique of their kind within the nation.

The Middle Tennessee Region will also explore avenues to establish specialized MOUs with other service providers as the region progresses into established regional goals. Advancement of regional re-entry programs is one particular area where MOUs will be explored. The Regional Planning Council has discussed a model similar to the MOU that Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) currently has with the Department of Corrections. VR uses this MOU to gain earlier access to individuals and work towards removing barriers prior to the point of release into the workforce. Establishing MOUs with other service providers will be looked at across all regional goals and sector strategies as a tool in workforce development.

QB. Describe how transportation and other supportive services are coordinated in the region.

Regional transportation is primarily coordinated through policy alignment. The Southern Middle and Upper Cumberland LWDAs consist of largely rural areas where urbanized transportation methods are not available. Many communities do not have access to bus or van routes and therefore rely on their own personal vehicles for transportation. Additionally, many individuals living in rural areas must drive long distances to participate in WIOA activities. This creates a financial barrier as the individual must provide for gasoline and car maintenance. Local areas can address and help alleviate this barrier through supportive service payments towards transportation costs. For our many rural areas, one-way travel to a training institution can be over an hour drive. In contrast, the Northern Middle LWDA consists of primarily compact urban areas where participants accumulate less travel mileage. Additionally, public transportation is available through methods such as organized bus lines, commuter trains and taxis. Therefore, supportive service payments for transportation are generally lower in these urban areas as readily available options are more affordable. The key to regional coordination between these distinct LWDA transportation issues has been policy evaluation. The Regional Planning Council has devoted substantial focus to policy alignment during the past year. Ensuring local area policies within the region promote consistency in service and do not create barriers between areas is important to regional alignment. Each of the three LWDA's supportive services policies were compared and contrasted against each other to assess transportation and all other types of supportive service payments. The Regional Planning Council was able to identify areas where the region was similar, some areas that were different yet equitable, and some that needed work to better align. Moving forward for the years 2020-2022, the region will focus on continuing these policy alignment efforts to further strengthen coordination of services.

QB1. What regional organizations currently provide or could provide supportive services?

WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth, TANF, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), and Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) programs are authorized by their governing policies to expend funding for supportive services as needed. In addition to core partner support services, staff within Middle Tennessee American Job Centers are trained to be informed of other specific organizations that may provide supportive services such as the Department of Human Services, SNAP, Human Services Agencies, Community Based Organizations (CBO), and Outreach Programs. AJC staff are cross-trained to ensure funding is leveraged and not duplicated while assuring individuals receive authorized and effective services to eliminate barriers and/or skill upgrades.

QB2. What policies and procedures will be established to promote coordination of supportive services delivery?

Co-Enrollment is a procedural focus of each LWDA to promote coordination of service delivery. Customers are co-enrolled in a variety of programs in order to leverage multiple resources. For instance, a participant could receive WIOA funding for travel, TANF assistance for child care, and VR supplied workplace equipment due to a disability. After the initial intake and assessment process, AJC staff have a referral network which allows eligible customers

who have remaining needs to receive support in eliminating barriers. Additionally, natural service integration strategies exist as opportunities to coordinate supportive service delivery. First, the Title II Adult Education and WIOA Title I Youth programs align well and provide an organic fit for co-enrollments. RESEA and Dislocated Worker enjoy a similar fit to complement one another. An exemplar use of regional alignment in this category is our regional partnership with TANF. The Middle Tennessee Region shares one TANF provider and that program integrates naturally with WIOA Title I Adults for co-enrollments.

To further coordinate delivery of supportive services, the Middle Tennessee Regional Planning Council will continue to work towards policy alignment. Recent meeting agendas have included thorough evaluations of each LWDA's Supportive Services Policy, along with discussion on how they can be better aligned. Specifically, travel and childcare payments have been identified as two areas that can be more regulated across county borders.

QC1. What economic development organizations or businesses are actively engaged in regional planning?

Beyond representation on their local boards, each LWDA actively engages area businesses and economic development organizations in regional advancement. The Upper Cumberland LWDA boasts a unique partnership with the economic development group Highlands Partnership. The Highlands Partnership has been an instrumental partner in creating the successful "K-Job" Pathways to Prosperity and dual enrollment ventures. The Highlands Partnership also serves as a negotiating arm of business representation and plays an active role in regional planning council meetings. Their evolving role in regional planning aims to move beyond area limits and towards a regional partnership. It is also a best practice for modeling economic organizations in other areas.

Along with the Highlands Partnership, the following institutions are actively engaged in regional planning: Motlow State Community College, Tennessee Technological University Center for Rural Development, Montgomery County Economic Development Council, Nashville Chamber of Commerce, Forward Sumner, Rutherford Chamber of Commerce, Wilson Chamber of Commerce, Nashville State Community College, Volunteer State Community College, TCATs, TNECD Jobs Based Camps, Austin Peay State University Workforce Summits, and all TCATs within the regional service area.

Further input by regional economic development organizations will be gained through regional employer surveys with results shared, discussed and brainstormed with regional partners. These surveys will address future employer needs so that the region can be prepared for responsiveness. The Middle Tennessee Regional Planning Council has established a Data Analysis sub-group to be tasked with gathering and interpreting data collected from regional employers. The goal is for the data to be used to make informed and responsive decisions in regional planning.

QC2. What economic development organizations or businesses were invited to participate but declined?

No business or economic development organization declined to participate in planning. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, engagement was limited to Zoom conferences, mailed surveys and prior on-going engagement.

QC3. What input was provided by regional economic development organizations and businesses?

Regional economic and local businesses are currently responding to a national pandemic emergency and are adjusting their business models daily depending on Government guidance and CDC suggestions. Surveys and questionnaires are ongoing with local Industrial Boards and Chambers of Commerce within each LWDA through Business Service teams and Executive Directors. Further input by regional economic development organizations will be gained through regional employer surveys with the results shared, discussed and brainstormed with regional partners. These surveys will address future employer needs so that the region can be prepared for responsiveness. Moreover, all three local areas within the region have strong business representation on their local boards. Added workforce studies such as Nashville Vital Signs have given the Regional Planning Council a baseline of projected economic growth within the 2020-2022 planning years. This study also identifies sectors of growth that will affect economic conditions through all three LWDAs within the Middle Tennessee Region.

Ongoing dialogue from economic development groups such as the Tennessee Economic Development Council (TEDC), Economic and Community Development (ECD), The Highlands Partnership and local Chambers of Commerce

will continue to add input to regional direction as workforce and economic partners work to recover from COVID-19 effects.

QC4. What input provided by economic development and businesses was incorporated into the regional plan?

Input was received from large area businesses, such as Nissan, VIAM and SAIC, and incorporated into the regional plan. Dialogue was also received from small area businesses through CBG Coordinators, Business Services Teams, and Executive Directors who have conducted regular meetings with large and small businesses to foster their economic development input. Representatives and committee members from the Highlands Economic Partnership, Nashville Chamber of Commerce, and other area economic development groups were engaged at the recent Regional Planning Council meeting to discuss regional goals and planning. The primary input received through current economic development and business feedback is an overwhelming uncertainty of the future. Industry leaders report drastic modifications to business as usual during the COVID-19 pandemic. At this time, it is unknown how long these modifications will last or what immediate future and long-term effects will be. In response to this input, the Middle Tennessee Regional Planning Council has agreed to host an Economic Summit in late 2020 with business and industry representing our six primary industry sectors to better understand the economic state of the region. Realizations from this Summit will help shape further incorporations into the regional plan.

QD. Describe the coordination of administrative arrangements, including the pooling of funds for administrative costs, as appropriate.

The Regional Planning Council met on April 7, 2020 to formally discuss administrative cost pooling arrangements. Executive Directors discussed various options for administrative alignment and it was agreed regional procurement of a provider for One-Stop Operator services would be explored. Each agreed to present the concept to their respective Chief Local Elected Officials, Board Chairs, Mayors and Executive Committees. However, at follow-up meetings in May, 2020, it was reported that key representatives from both Southern Middle and Upper Cumberland areas had declined to move forward with regional procurement. Concerns sighted were lack of individual area contract management and inability to address issues specific to rural areas. Subsequent discussion of regional procurement will be entertained throughout the 2020-2022 program years as modified management models are conceived.

Future meeting agendas of the Regional Planning Council will continue to evaluate and present other administrative cost pooling options. Forthcoming discussions must address the disparity between the three local areas represented. The Northern Middle LWDA is predominately urban and is appropriately awarded a large budget to serve the larger populations. In contrast, the Southern Middle and Upper Cumberland LWDAs are entirely rural with much smaller budgets. Just as the Electoral College ensures fair representation in the national election, any regional arrangement would need to include measures to effectively represent the needs and statutory local governing authority of each LWDA.

While challenging, we do not believe administrative arrangements are impossible. Southern Middle, Upper Cumberland and Northern Middle are vehemently committed to regional alignment and advancement of the regional agenda. The Middle Tennessee Region is excited to pursue many other creative options for pooling of funds. Administrative arrangements such as reciprocated training and employee sharing are two such creative ideas being entertained for future regional alignment. In the immediate, Southern Middle and Upper Cumberland are already exploring these administrative cost sharing options for their similar LWDAs. Memorandums of Understandings are being developed to provide staff training beyond what their individual budgets would allow. Upper Cumberland has demonstrated best practices in its Monitoring program and has agreed to allocate time towards training Southern Middle staff in this area. To reciprocate, Southern Middle will train the Upper Cumberland staff in their state-recognized youth program practices. As both LWDAs operate on tight budgets, discussions have also turned to sharing an administrative employee position. This individual would provide much-needed administrative support to each area with the salary burden being shared.

Finally, co-writing of grant opportunities seems to be a natural progression of the regional agenda. Rather than work as silos of applicants, our desire is to combine resources and partner connections to submit more competitive grant applications. Organic spaces exist between shared training institution service areas and regional LWDA

collaboration. For instance, a representative from Motlow recently approached the Upper Cumberland about partnering together to apply for an Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) grant. As Motlow State Community College serves areas within both the Southern Middle and Upper Cumberland local areas, the Upper Cumberland has requested to include the Southern Middle area in this grant opportunity. Together we are stronger and can shape a more ambitious and wide-reaching grant proposal. The Regional Planning Council will actively search for shared co-writing grant opportunities such as these in the future.

VISION, GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

SECTION A: Strategic vision to support state, and regional economic growth.

The Middle Tennessee region has a strategic vision to increase the competitive position of businesses through the development of a highly skilled workforce. Our vision is demand driven and focused on effective engagement of employers. The road map to reach this vision encompasses WIOA partners, community organizations and educational institutions to match employer skill needs.

Based upon a review of the Combined State Plan, data analyzation and input from local and regional stakeholders within business, education, workforce, and economic community groups, the Regional Planning Council sets the following strategies for developing economic growth within Program Years 2020-2022:

- (1) Develop career opportunities within high-demand industry sectors.
- (2) Build apprenticeships and Incumbent Worker Trainings catered to industry needs.
- (3) Provide early exposure to in-demand industry pathways.
- (4) Prepare economically disadvantaged residents for self-sustaining careers.
- (5) Increase workforce participation through priority populations and individuals with barriers.

SECTION B. Describe the goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce (including youth and individuals with barriers to employment).

In order to carry out the above listed strategies to support economic growth, the Middle Tennessee Planning Council has made plans to move vision into reality. Our economic growth cannot be achieved without a prepared, educated and skilled workforce. By setting the following goals within each strategy the Middle Tennessee region will foster a workforce area where skilled workers contribute to thriving businesses, in turn filling in-demand jobs and earning a family sustaining wage.

(1) Develop career opportunities within high-demand industry sectors.

- STEM development geared towards in-demand sectors of Healthcare, IT, and Advanced Manufacturing- Utilize educational partners at all levels to strengthen STEM training. The K-Job Pathways focus will continue building STEM introduction at primary and middle school levels throughout the region. We will work with secondary education partners to increase STEM engagement with CTE programs and work-based learning initiatives focusing on in-demand sectors. Business Services team will especially target Healthcare, IT, and Advanced Manufacturing businesses for work-based learning opportunities.
- Responsiveness to business needs in creating training pathways- Ensure responsiveness by remaining constantly engaged with industry groups through committee meetings, economic forums, and local Chambers. The Regional Planning Council Data Committee will also quarterly review industry data and projects, as well as feedback from the Business Services Teams. Clear data reporting and predictive analysis will be the basis for any Regional Plan adjustments.
- Middle skill focus- Partner with local TCATs to increase in-demand middle-skill career training opportunities. Focus on increasing middle skill programs on ETPL with input from the Regional Data Committee.

(2) Build apprenticeships and Incumbent Worker Trainings catered to industry needs.

- Build apprenticeships within in-demand STEM sectors- Recreate Merryman Farr/Interstate AC model (as discussed in Sector Strategies section) as a creative method to increase employer buy-in to apprenticeships. Each LWDA in the region should set STEM sectors as their priority for new apprenticeships.
- Use BST resources to advocate/simplify employer process- The Business Services Teams will be tasked with increased industry engagement and awareness of apprenticeship programs. Board Staff will be asked to host Apprenticeship Workshops to provide open dialogue and address program questions.
- Use apprenticeships to address potential skill gaps: Look to create apprenticeships within Transportation/Logistics to preempt pipeline skills gap for occupations such as Flat Bed Truck Driver and Logistics mover.
- Use Incumbent Worker Trainings (IWT) to upgrade virtual resources- Assist businesses with COVID-19 adaptations though IWTs of virtual trainings where in-person trainings are no longer feasible. Also use IWTs to assist in upskilling workers in virtual skills needs to carry out adaptations.

(3) Provide early exposure in-demand industry pathways.

- Utilize Regional Pathways Coordinators- Focus on strengthening partnerships with Regional Pathways Coordinator as a means of access to and immediate buy-in with high-school CTE instructors.
- Full integration with CTE instructors – Work with CTE instructors to better integrate classroom portion of work-based trainings with in-demand skills, soft-skills, and reinforcement of hands-on experience portion.
- GIVE and RI funds- Capitalize on grant funds awarded to introduce youth to in-demand occupations. Both Southern Middle and Upper Cumberland’s Rural Initiative grants involve a youth training aspect. All nine GIVE grants awarded within Middle Tennessee focus on middle-skill in-demand skills. Provide training to Career Specialists to instruct on grant purposes, qualifying procedures and program requirements to maximize enrollments.
- Youth summer WBL- Summer work-based opportunities for In-School Youth should be a focus of the partnership between Regional Pathways Coordinators and Board Staff. Preparation should begin early so the classroom portion can begin soon after Spring Break. Consider a virtual back-up plan in the event of another pandemic wave.
- K-Job Approach- Continue support with K-Job Pathways development. Utilize representatives from the Putnam County School System and Highlands Economic Partnership to grow the K-12 model through the entire region.

(4) Prepare economically disadvantaged residents for self-sustaining careers.

- Rural Initiative Funds- Maximize investment in Distressed and At-Risk counties by ensuring funds are utilized on as many participants as possible. Assist Career Specialists with identifying enrollments and track return on investment for future rural planning.
- Supportive Services Review- Each LWDA should review their individual Supportive Services Policy to ensure sufficient barriers are removed for economically disadvantaged residents. A collective review should also continue to ensure regional alignment and consistent services between workforce borders.
- Early identification of students ready to work- Attend assemblies in rural high-schools to introduce graduating seniors to WIOA programs. Ask students who self-identify as “ready to work” to fill out an informational card. Board Staff will periodically follow-up with students to monitor work status changes or needs.
- Economic groups: Continue to invest heavily in relationships with ECD and other community economic groups such as the Nashville Chamber of Commerce and Highlands Economic Partnership.

(5) Increase workforce participation through priority populations and individuals with barriers.

- Programs for Justice-Involved Individuals- Utilize Re-Entry Task Forces within each LWDA to bring training programs into county jails for incarcerated individuals. Work to include partners within mental health, drug rehabilitation centers, and housing to provide a wrap-around approach as inmates transition back into the workforce.
- Veterans – Provide referral support to JVSG staff and Veterans Drug Courts. Partner with Northern Middle Fort Campbell Strong Project to give regional assistance through job placements.

- *Individuals with Disabilities*- Continually ensure universal access throughout all AJCs. Work with Vocational Rehabilitation to actively engage students with disabilities while in secondary school and partner through transition into work. Explore apprenticeship opportunities for VR clients.

SECTION C. Describe the strategies relating to the performance accountability measures based on performance indicators to include State and Local Measures (KPI).

C1. How the region will work with each LWDA to achieve negotiated targets based on established procedures. AND C2. How the measures will be monitored and progress tracked towards meeting regional measures.

Based upon historical data and analysis through VOS reporting, the Regional Planning Council will work individually with each LWDA to establish challenging yet attainable Key Performance Indicator (KPI) metrics. This will be done in coordination with Board and State Staff under specific guidance from Executive Directors and Regional Directors. Input from the One-Stop Operator and Career Service Provider will be key to not only setting manageable goals, but also in creating quarterly and annual plans to achieve performance. Each local Board monitors their individual KPIs on a monthly and quarterly basis. Resources are adjusted through partners and contractors as needed based upon this monitoring. The Regional Planning Council has already set up the framework necessary for quarterly monitoring of regional performance measures through VOS reporting. Our Data Committee meets quarterly to review regional KPI status and provides assessment. Areas of success will be acknowledged, areas of concern will be discussed, and advice on adjustments will be provided as needed. Current metric marks are shared at each Regional Planning Meeting and strategies for reform are discussed. In the event that a particular LWDA is lacking in an area of KPI attainment, our other LWDAs will provide best practices and program mentoring for improvement. Together we succeed.

C3. How will the Regional Planning Council will focus efforts on serving priority populations to meet negotiated measures.

Priority of service begins at the point of entry of all Middle Tennessee American Job Centers. The same priority of service is also provided via any web portal for those applying for services. It is the responsibility of the One-Stop Operator to ensure that all staff of the AJC are trained to assist those eligible for priority of service. All three LWDAs have Priority of Service Policies in place, as well as provider monitoring to ensure priority services are delivered to customers who qualify. Priority of service falls into two main areas: priority of service to veterans and priority of service for the WIOA Title I Adult program. All Middle Tennessee LWDAs have aligned their veteran programs under the Jobs for Veterans Act where employment and training programs are funded in whole or part by the Department of Labor. Additionally, our LWDAs have banners and signage up at the entrance of all comprehensive and affiliate centers notifying Veterans and eligible persons of priority of service. All provider staff and partners have received priority training. Providers have contractual measures in place to demand high quality customer service to those who take precedence. Our success with these measures is monitored through customer feedback surveys and follow-up monitoring. Key Performance Indicators also provide a way of measuring effectiveness of Veterans programs.

SECTION D. Regional Strategies to achieve vision and goals.

D1. To facilitate engagement of employers in workforce development programs including small employers and employers in in-demand industry sectors and occupations. AND D2. To support how the local workforce development system meets the needs of businesses in the local areas.

All three Middle Tennessee workforce Boards are business led and demand driven. The region focuses on the six career pathways of Healthcare, Information Technology, Transportation and Logistics, Education, Construction and Advanced Manufacturing. These sectors were selected as a result of LMI analysis, Board guidance, AJC Business Services Team input and employer surveys. The Business Service Teams, led by Title III staff and representing the AJC partners, is the main arm of employer engagement with the AJC by consulting employers, conducting on-site meetings, hosting job fairs, and providing information on up-skilling future employees. Business engagement is led by the Business Services Team and coordinated through the One-Stop Operator. Believing our talent pool is regional by nature, the Regional Planning Council gives guidance to each One-Stop Operator within the region to ensure that

duplication is minimized and unity of effort is maximized. Business Services Teams work closely with local and regional economic development through Chamber events and economic group summits. Over the past two years, our Business Services Teams have participated in Economic Workforce 360 roundtable meetings coordinated with Economic Development to earn a better understanding to the needs of employers on a regional basis. Business Services Teams job-fairs have been a proven method of engaging employers and will continue to be grown, with a focus on regional job hiring events. Another successful method of engagement has been advertising employer job opportunities on AJC social media sites. Employers enjoy free advertising and access to additional audiences, reporting fruitful results.

An array of in-demand business representation is achieved through Board membership as well. Northern Middle Board business representatives come from Trucking and Healthcare, Upper Cumberland has strong Education and Manufacturing representation and Southern Middle members come from the Information Technology and Advanced Manufacturing sectors. This brings direct knowledge of required current and pipeline skill sets to the Board. The presence of TCATs, Community College, and business led advisory members leverage resources and capacity to align training and skills to exceed industry expectations. Small Business Administration and Chamber of Commerce representative also serve as members, providing valuable economic input. Small businesses are represented on each local Board and assist with outreach to coordinate business and entrepreneurial training. All three LWDA's have in place similar Eligible Training Provider Lists that align demand training opportunities directly to local and regional employers. Additionally, the Regional Planning Committees analyzes Return on Investment each quarter to evaluate if providers are aligning career pathway models within service provision to serve the needs of all businesses, both large and small.

D3. To better coordinate workforce development and economic development.

Clear integrations with economic development are a service strategy goal for Middle Tennessee during Program Years 2020-2022. Our partners at Economic and Community Development (ECD) will be at the forefront of this goal as an economic development leader. The Regional Planning Council will join with ECD to bring all economic partners to the workforce planning table. By including and requesting participation from all partners at quarterly regional meetings, continued growth plans are encouraged. Strategic planning for economic development will include our valued partners from Chambers of Commerce, TN Pathways, educational institutions, employer organizations, Business Services teams and local area economic development groups such as The Highlands Economic Partnership. The Regional Planning Council will also explore collaboration of grant projects through economic development organizations. Strategies used will be to invest time into Chamber events, present WIOA programs at economic group meetings, and serve on committees. But our best strategy for accomplishing better integration will be to move beyond planning – and actually see partner projects, large and small, realized. We believe small integrations will lead to larger ones and partnerships evolve.

D4. Strengthen linkages between the one stop delivery system and the unemployment insurance programs.

Middle Tennessee AJC Welcome and Resource Center staff have traditionally been trained to guide unemployment insurance customers to the UI web site and 1-800 number. In the past, AJCs have been linkages to Unemployment through informational brochures and computer short cuts to bring claimants quickly to the correct UI site. However, the emergency UI support given by Title I, Title III, and One-Stop Operator staff during the COVID-19 pandemic has created an environment that is ripe for strengthening this linkage. As described in the Strategies for Services Integration section, the Middle Tennessee region will pursue ways to not only sustain this linkage but to further strengthen this collaboration. We now have cross-trained staff ready to continue the alliance and move forward into the future of one-stop design.

Additional One-Stop partners will also play a role in strengthening the linkage with Unemployment Insurance. LVERs and Rapid Response staff assist businesses, within limits, on answering questions concerning mass claims. During the COVID emergency FAQ brochures were distributed to local Chambers of Commerce and Small Business Administration staff to assist their constituents. Jobs4TN website links and the 1-844 number were prominently

displayed on doors and marquees of the AJCs throughout the region. When needed, the Regional Planning Council has coordinated the Career Coach to assist those with unemployment insurance issues to areas without internet capability - such as during the tornado outbreak in Middle Tennessee in early March 2020. This coordination not only provides UI support during a time of need, but also offers opportunities for co-enrollments into WIOA programs.

D5. Promote entrepreneurial skills training and microenterprise services.

The Regional Planning Council will be working towards developing strategies to promote entrepreneurial skills training and microenterprise services on the regional level. This will be accomplished through crucial community partnerships accessed to serve innovation and business development in various stages. Pipeline entrepreneurial skills training will be encouraged through Career and Technical Education instructors as well as secondary school STEM programs. The following data highlights the importance of entrepreneurial skills by showing the large percentage of small businesses contributing to the Middle Tennessee Economy. According to the Small Business Administration, the definition of business sizes can vary depending upon industry. But in general, a business of less than 50 employees is considered small, while a microenterprise would be businesses with fewer than ten employees. Under this definition, 95% of Middle Tennessee businesses are small, and 61% are considered microenterprises.

Number of Employees	Percentage of Overall Industry	Business Count
1-4	32.7%	32,169
5-9	28.9%	28,487
10-19	21.6%	21,236
20-49	12.7%	12,461
50-99	2.6%	2,584
100-249	1.1%	1,115
250-499	0.2%	238
500 and up	0.1%	143

EMSI Economy Overview, 2020

The overwhelming contribution of small and micro businesses to our Middle Tennessee economy mandates a strong workforce focus in these areas. Each LWDA has partnered with their local Small Business Administrations as well as Chambers of Commerce, to access their entrepreneurial and small business expertise. Local business connections and support networks are also used to boost microenterprise success. The Nashville Chamber hosts the Nashville Entrepreneur Center as well as www.nashpreneurs.com that provide a myriad of resources to those starting businesses within the metro area. The Regional Planning Council will encourage LWDA's to refer customers interested in microenterprise or entrepreneurial into appropriate career pathways. Providing a regional framework for innovation and entrepreneurship will guide their efforts to become self-employed, using their business skills to create personal self-sufficiency as well as generate employment for others. Educational institutions such as Austin Peay University and Nashville State Community College bring support assets to bear for microenterprises and business startups. Tennessee Technological University provides a Small Business Center and Rural Development Center that regional customers can be referred to as well.

D6. To implement initiatives such as apprenticeships, incumbent worker training programs, on-the-job training programs, industry and sector strategies, and career pathway initiatives, utilization of effective business intermediaries, and other business services and strategies designed to meet the needs of regional employers.

The Middle Tennessee Region will implement these initiatives as previously discussed throughout this Plan and by the specific strategies enumerated in Section B.

SECTION E. Supporting state key objectives to align and integrate education, workforce and economic development.

E1. Create an integrated intake system to efficiently deliver services.

Middle Tennessee AJCs engage the Welcome Function to efficiently deliver an integrated intake system for both businesses and job seekers. Upon entry, all visitors sign in to the center through the VOS greeter. VOS Greeter then triages the individual to the appropriate program, career advisor or case manager based upon expressed needs. This sign-in data is regularly reviewed by local One-Stop Operators and local Board Staff, as well as by the Regional Planning Council. Each monitor VOS greeter reports to ensure that services are delivered in a timely manner throughout Middle Tennessee workforce networks. The Regional Planning Council is also working to create new dashboards to further analyze and progress from this intake data. All Middle Tennessee AJCs have received certification from the TDLWD, of which the integrated intake system is a requirement for certification. A standardized intake form located within the Jobs4TN system (VOS) allows all applicants seeking service to transfer from one partner to another without duplication of effort. Services can also be transferred between workforce areas and tracked through VOS.

Within the 2020-2022 program years, the Middle Tennessee Region will seek to partner with the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development, as well as other key stakeholders, to work towards establishing a Virtual American Job Center. A virtual center will allow customers to access staff members and workforce services through technology, rather than scheduling an in-person meeting. Many areas within the Upper Cumberland service area have benefited from state and economic development broadband expansion initiatives- making access to a virtual site possible for the vast majority of residents. Middle Tennessee envisions the Virtual American Job Center as an innovative and modern strategy to service delivery throughout the area. The need for this virtual system has become even greater in recent months during the COVID-19 pandemic as our AJCs seek ways to continue services amongst forced closures.

E2. Create a shared vision for supporting Tennesseans with the greatest number of barriers to enter the workforce.

The Middle Tennessee region supports and is charged with eliminating barriers to employment. This is one of the strategic goals of the state, our region and our local areas. The Regional Planning Council will implement these initiatives as previously discussed throughout this Plan and by the specific strategies enumerated in Section B. Methods include:

Rural Initiatives-

- Increase access to education and training opportunities through RI Grants.
- Provide early identification of students “ready to work” by Rural Graduation Initiative programs.
- Encourage STEM and middle-skill development through TCAT partnerships.
- Offer supportive services specific to rural needs- i.e., transportation, internet.

Justice-Involved Individuals-

- Bring TCAT trainings into county jails to train while incarcerated.
- Partner Business Services Teams and Re-entry Task Forces in each LWDA to promote felon-friendly employment opportunities. Work in conjunction to host felon-friendly job fairs.
- Include mental health, drug recovery programs, and housing authorities to provide wrap-around service.

Individuals with Disabilities-

- Maintain universal access.
- Increase VR co-enrollments through early identification in secondary schools.
- Create VR apprenticeships.

E3. Create a trained workforce to meet current industry needs.

The Middle Tennessee region improves access to activities leading to a post-secondary credential through the use of Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) and supportive services in partnership with other AJC programs- such as Vocational Rehabilitation, SNAP Employment and Training, TN Promise, and TN Reconnect. Our region creates a trained workforce to meet current industry needs through On-the-Job Training, Incumbent Worker Training,

Apprenticeships and Pre-Apprenticeships, Career Pathways development, and Occupational Skills Training. The Middle Tennessee Region recognizes a need to match educational and skills training to high demand occupations. Tailoring these programs to the needs of industry will require a clear connection to current industry/employers, which is a regional goal discussed in Section A3(b) of this Plan. Through responsiveness to employers, continued communication, and regular analyzation of workforce data we will be able to supply a trained workforce to meet industry needs.

E4. Create dashboards that measure the effectiveness of the integrated workforce strategy.

As a region, Middle Tennessee utilizes Jobs4TN data to track the overall progress of most services within our AJCs. Performance and partner dashboards are used to measure effectiveness within each LWDA. When combined, these tools present a current picture of the workforce ecosystem across the region. The recent implementation of shared goals and performance measures drives the need for a centralized space to view all data. At its next meeting, the Data Committee of the Regional Planning Council will be tasked with creating a shared dashboard that can be updated monthly. This will be used as a checkpoint of progress towards regional performance metrics and will highlight successes while spotlighting areas of weakness.

E5. Create a simple and effective engagement experience for all candidates.

Middle Tennessee strives to streamline processes to improve the experience of employers and jobs-seeking customers. Customer surveys are offered to customers as they exit our AJCs to provide a measure of their experience. Survey feedback is also sought from employers participating in hiring events so as to best serve them in the future. In an attempt to ensure high quality services are provided to all customers, our LWDAs share best practices amongst each other. One result of these best practices discussion was the implementation of a single intake form used by each LWDA to all partners that simplified the initial customer screening. The Regional Planning Council regularly discusses ways to make the experience more unified across the region. Methods currently being explored for this purpose are:

- Unified Orientation Process- A consistent orientation for new enrollments developed by the Regional Planning Council and implemented by One-Stop Operators within all LWDAs. Currently, not all of our LWDAs use an orientation system. Consistent orientations would provide streamlined services across the region. They would also provide opportunity for efficient and effective communication of WIOA programs and availabilities to all regional customers.
- Reduced paperwork- Ensuring customers are not repeatedly asked for the same information or subjected to repeated processes will promote a simplified experience. The Regional Planning Council is currently in the process of evaluating One-Stop Operator and Career Services provider practices throughout the region to see where duplicates lie.
- Streamline supportive services- Continued regional analyzation of Supportive Services Policies will promote a better engagement experience across the region. Providing similar services and consistent payments across LWDA borders uncomplimates regional experiences and eliminates barriers between LWDA borders.
- Virtual Services- Virtual services offer ease of use and simply the customer experience. Since the COVID-19 pandemic forced AJC closures, our workforce system has begun to realize not only the need for virtual services- but also our capabilities. Our LWDAs have found ways to provide all services through virtual measures, even the processing of virtual enrollments. As our AJCs begin to re-open and stabilize, the Regional Planning Committee will evaluate the performance level of these temporary virtual operations for consideration of continuation.

REGIONAL PLAN ATTACHMENT

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT:

The Regional Planning Council began preparation to formulate the Regional Plan via requirements of State Workforce Policy on April 7, 2020. This meeting was conducted virtually through Zoom conference due to COVID-19 gathering restrictions. At that time, and up to the point of Plan submittal, our American Job Centers have experienced closures to the public and most AJC staff, Board staff and partner employees are restricted to working from Alternate Work Stations (AWS). In addition, social gathering restrictions of ten individuals or less did not allow for in-person planning meetings. However, the Middle Tennessee Region found success by engaging partners through virtual gatherings instead. Email invitations to participate in the initial Zoom conference planning session were sent to each LWDA Board Staff, representatives from all partner agencies, economic partners, State Regional Directors, and Ernst & Young. Regional Plan guidance from the TDLWD was attached to the invitation. At this initial meeting plan development duties and tasks were assigned among members from each LWDA. A timeline was also set for additional meetings to extend planning outreach and brain storming sessions. Lengthy discussion was entertained on how to best gather additional partner, industry and economic group input while social distancing, AWS and self-quarantine were in effect.

The Regional Planning Council agreed to a scheduled series of calls to drive consistent plan development within the given timeline. Electronic meetings with all partners were held every two weeks in April and every week in May via conference call and Google Meet. An initial draft was collated and sent for review at the State Department of Labor and Workforce Development on May 8, 2020 for constructive feedback. Review and suggestions for improvement were annotated by State staff and sent back to the Planning Council on May 15, 2020. Revisions were made to adjust any deficiencies notated through this early revision. The Regional Planning Council met via conference call on June 4, 2020 to ensure plan alignment was on track for completion and finalize revisions.

EXAMPLE OF SCHEDULED MEETING INVITATIONS:

Topic: Middle TN WIOA Regional Planning Meeting

Time: Apr 7, 2020 10:00 AM Central Time (US and Canada)

Join **Zoom** Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/979590932?pwd=YkRCUlpDVTFUQ0JkbXloQkI4NGliQT09>

Meeting ID: 979 590 932

Password: 210390

One tap mobile

+13126266799,,979590932# US (Chicago)

+16465588656,,979590932# US (New York)

Dial by your location

+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)

EXAMPLE OF WEBSITE POSTING:

The Regional Planning Council for the three Middle Tennessee Workforce Areas will meet on **May 5, 2020** via Google Meet. If you are interested in attending the meeting, please call Erin Lilly at 931.905.3504 or email elilly@workforceessentials.com for details.

TIMELINE OF REGIONAL PLAN PROGRESSION:

Date	Meeting Description
4/2/2020	Regional Planning Guidance shared with Regional Planning Council (RPC) via email
4/7/2020	Regional Planning Council and stakeholder meeting - review of regional planning guidance and draft plan information via Zoom
5/5/2020	Regional Planning Council and stakeholder meeting - review of regional plan draft via Zoom
5/7/2020	RPC Executive Committee meet in Franklin for a regional plan work session
5/13/2020	RPC Executive Committee meeting via Google Meet
5/18/2020	Submitted a draft regional plan to the state Central Office for review and comments
5/20/2020	RPC Executive Committee meeting via Google Meet
5/22/2020	Received feedback and needed revisions from Central Office regarding draft regional plan
5/27/2020	RPC Executive Committee meeting via Google Meet
6/3/2020	RPC Executive Committee meeting via Google Meet for final revisions
6/10/2020	Local and Regional Plans posted for public comment (publicized and stakeholders notified)
By 6/19/2020	Each LWDB and CLEO approves regional and local plans
6/24/2020	UC public after hours listening session (publicized and stakeholders notified)
By 6/24/2020	SM and NM after hours listening session (publicized and stakeholders notified)
6/25/2020	End of 15 Day Public Comment Period
6/30/2020	Local and Regional Plans submitted to the state

OUTREACH EFFORTS:

Each Middle Tennessee LWDB is made up of private sector representatives from a variety of groups who give continual feedback on strategy development. Business Services Team representatives stay active in our communities by participating in Chamber events, SHRM meetings, speaking at workforce community meetings, making in-person visits, and connecting via email. Board staff pursue constant cooperation with economic groups who keep an up-to-date pulse of economic status and needs. All of this engagement has produced regular feedback from employers that was used in creating this Regional Plan. Continual methods of engagement have not only provided rolling feedback, but built strong partnership with our local employers that proved invaluable as the COVID-19 pandemic struck during regional plan development. Gathering employer feedback during this time would have been difficult without these existing partnerships.

Southern Middle staff are participating with USDA Rural Development, Middle Tennessee Industrial Development Association, and local economic development organizations in the 40-county Wage and Benefit survey conducted by MTSU's Business and Economic Research Center. This survey will help local community leaders plan and prepare for the changes in employment opportunities and align Board resources to support the Middle TN Region.

The Northern Middle Board Executive Director, Board staff and State Executive Staff have been meeting with the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce and participating in numerous round table discussions and weekly and monthly meetings on the Chambers five-year plan since October of 2019. In November, the Northern Middle Board contracted with the Nashville Chamber Data Unit to conduct a 10-county regional workforce study (encompassing all three workforce areas). The Board and its members were briefed on its status in February, and the Director received an update in early April as to its status. The study includes input and survey from hundreds of businesses within the region. Due to COVID 19, as well as a tornado in the first week of March, that Labor Market study fell behind schedule and should be completed in July. This will give the Regional Planning Council valuable economic information for the future and will now include early impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Upper Cumberland Board is an active member of the Highlands Economic Partnership. The Regional Director, Executive Director and Board staff met with the Advanced Manufacturing committee on May 13, 2020 to assess their employment needs due to COVID 19. The Board also sent out a survey to the Partnership concerning the effects of COVID-19 on the workforce and are awaiting this feedback. Once delivered this will give the Board and the Region additional direction to support economic development.

Regional Directors and Executive Directors representing each LWDA across the Middle Tennessee Region also conducted outreach to partners and stakeholders for their input into the Plan. This input, along with data supplied by the TDLWD WIRED Unit, EMSI, and the Combined State Plan resulted in the formulation of the six key industry sectors identified in the Plan.