# Regional Plan Template

## SECTION A: REGIONAL VISION, GOALS AND STRATEGIES

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

Regional Workforce Development Area #3 has embraced the state's vision of building a thriving economy where all Minnesotans have equitable access to an effective workforce development system. The Region 3 Leadership and Planning Board is committed to implementing innovative, collaborative, and responsive strategies that address the needs of the communities within the 13-county region.

Region 3 aims to foster a thriving economy and enhance the quality of life for central Minnesotans by emphasizing collaboration, equity, and responsiveness to employer needs. To achieve its goals, Region 3 is implementing several initiatives, including:

- Investing in employer-driven regional workforce education and training systems.
- Producing and distributing clear, accessible information for job seekers.
- Engaging with businesses to address challenges in recruiting and developing a skilled workforce.
- Assisting businesses with upskilling and retaining employees.
- Making career pathways visible to everyone.
- Providing seamless access to program resources.
- Creating skilled workers who earn family-sustaining incomes.

Through these efforts, Region 3 aims to establish a more equitable and user-friendly workforce system that effectively meets the needs of individuals and employers, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for the region's workforce and economy.

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

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

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

Strategies for achieving this goal:

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

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

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

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

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

- Establish seamless referral processes and warm handoffs
- Resource sharing across the workforce system.

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

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

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

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

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

**Goal 2:** Establish or engage existing employer-led industry-sector partnerships throughout Region 3 to develop and enhance workforce development programs and career pathways. These initiatives will prioritize responsiveness to industry needs and promote equity by addressing gaps in participation and representation across various demographic groups, including race, ethnicity, disability, gender, veteran status, and age.

Strategies include:

**Employer Engagement** – Actively involving employees from board-identified industries in designing and implementing workforce development programs to ensure alignment with industry needs and priorities.

- Sector initiatives, such as the Drive for Five grants and Industry career exploration events
- Ongoing promotion of Future Forward – a free database for employers to share their willingness and availability to engage with education and job seekers/youth
- Board members leverage their employer relationships to share information
- We are committed to responding to employer needs in in-demand occupations that provide on-ramps, laddering, and latticing opportunities leading to family-sustaining wages.
- Provide effective training and support to help businesses attract and retain a skilled workforce for the present and future.

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

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

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

- Promote opportunities to regional employers as a viable pathway for engaging new hires.
- Provide employers with the High Quality Jobs Framework information.
- Act as a central hub for Minnesota by sharing information about Registered Apprenticeship programs.

The Region aims to address skill gaps, promote economic opportunity, and foster growth across central Minnesota communities and industries by building employer-led industry-sector partnerships and implementing responsive workforce development programs.

**Goal 3:** Transform central Minnesota's workforce system to meet the needs of all central Minnesota residents. This initiative aims to prepare employers and the current and emerging workforce for the evolving work landscape of new technologies, shifting labor market demands, and demographic changes.

**Programs and Services**: Ensuring that workforce services and programs are accessible to all Minnesotans, regardless of background or circumstances, addressing barriers to participation and promoting equitable outcomes.

- Targeted outreach, recruitment, and support services to ensure access and opportunities for all individuals
- A focus on skills as the cornerstone of the work with job seekers
- Implementing measures to enhance the accessibility of workforce services and facilities for individuals with disabilities, ensuring that accommodation is available as needed to support full participation
- Engaging with immigrant and refugee communities, as well as other populations of new Minnesotans, to understand their unique needs, experiences, and contributions to the workforce and to develop targeted strategies for integration and economic empowerment
- Sharing information about untapped populations (i.e., BIPOC, individuals with disabilities, second-chance individuals, Veterans) with employers and assisting with engagement and outreach to these individuals for potential employment

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

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

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

Region 3 aims to build a resilient and adaptive workforce system that effectively supports its residents' needs and aspirations amid ongoing economic and demographic changes.

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

Central Minnesota excels at partnerships and Collaboration within the two LWDAs that comprise Region 3 and across the state. Resources and programming developed are shared with all partners at state-level meetings (e.g., MAWB job seeker and business services meetings).

**Best practices of the Region:**

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

**HR Networking Groups:** Career Solutions and CMJTS offer monthly HR Networking Groups. The purpose of the HR Groups is for local human resources professionals to collaborate and brainstorm new ideas that work, share best practices, validate ideas, meet peers, conduct comparative analysis, and learn new skills. This group is also a way to network and partner with HR staff to share upcoming local workforce development events, connect businesses to federal, state, and local resources, and provide employers with access to employee training.

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

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

**Job Seeker Open House Events:** These events have been successful and have brought in many job seekers. Many job search activities are offered, and the staff makes the atmosphere fun,

upbeat, and inviting. Job seekers become more aware of the employment and training services provided and can obtain assistance to better prepare for their next career.

**Social Media Marketing:** Social media marketing has successfully recruited training grant program participants and employer participation.

**Youth-Specific Programming:** Hands-on career exploration events, such as EPIC Student Day - Exploring Potential Interests and Careers, IGNITE - Ignite Your Future, Construct Tomorrow, CareerOne, and Operation Exploration, are exciting opportunities for youth and young adults to identify their interests and start mapping out a career pathway. All of these opportunities leverage partnerships with education, employers, community partners, and lessons learned to accelerate progress.

**SNAP 50/50 Programming:** We replace a transactional, compliance-driven model with an integrated, whole-person approach, addressing food insecurity, housing, transportation, and language barriers alongside employment goals; strengthening the service ecosystem through program co-enrollments and sustaining an employer pipeline from a talent pool too often overlooked.

**Employment Network:** As an employment network, it provides safeguards and benefits analysis for individuals receiving Social Security disability insurance and Social Security income to return to work and eventually work off their Social Security benefits.

**Registered Apprenticeship Hub:** As an apprenticeship hub, we have staff members trained to assist job seekers and career changers in exploring and accessing registered apprenticeship opportunities. Our team also helps employers understand work-based learning options and connects them with the Department of Labor and Industry if they are ready to develop a registered apprenticeship program.

**Employer Action Guide**: Our Employer Action Guide toolkit is available to assist employers with increasing and strengthening recruitment, hiring, onboarding, retention, and employee career advancement.

**Job Club**: A weekly Job Club networking group connects job seekers with others in the community and teaches job search skills. This is open to anyone who is job searching.

**Incumbent Worker Training:** Region 3 continues to excel in assisting local employers with upskilling their workforce.

The state can create a more robust and effective workforce system by replicating these best practices and leveraging Central Minnesota's strengths.

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

To effectively carry out the core programs and align resources in Central Minnesota, a strategic approach involves Collaboration with various entities. Here's how the region will work together: Starting with a thorough, comprehensive assessment of local workforce needs sets the foundation for strategic goals. Collaborating with key stakeholders, including WIOA core programs, Regional Development Commissions, colleges, and service cooperatives, is essential. This Collaboration ensures a coordinated approach to training, services, and outreach to address unmet needs. Strategies already in place include a seamless referral process between programs/partners and ongoing partner meetings that include updates and information on programs and services to ensure all staff are knowledgeable. Using data to make informed decisions and measure impact is crucial for tracking progress and adjusting strategies. Data provides insights into what's working and what needs improvement. The one-stop-operator partners review LMI, employer, and customer surveys to identify service gaps and opportunities for improvement. Maintaining open communication through regular meetings and feedback sessions keeps the work moving forward smoothly. It also provides opportunities for continuous improvement by gathering input from stakeholders (i.e., one-stop-operator meetings and regional business service meetings).

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

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

By working collaboratively, Central Minnesota can optimize resources, enhance program effectiveness, and achieve the region's shared vision and goals.

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

The following were goals identified by the Region 3 Leadership and Planning Board during the SWOT analysis.

1. Address some community needs that impact employment by convening stakeholders to discuss the issue, brainstorm solutions, and share best practices from other regions/areas that have positively impacted the issue. (i.e., childcare – can employers open a childcare center)
2. Sharing information about programs and services available, creating an elevator speech for board members to share with their networks.
3. Cross-regional knowledge sharing benefits everyone by accelerating progress, avoiding duplication of efforts, and promoting a sense of shared purpose; this will be accomplished through the following:
    - Increase the number of job seekers served
    - Increase the number of work-based learning opportunities, creating a talent pipeline
    - Increase interest in Drive for Five: Technology, the Trades, Caring Professions, Manufacturing, and Education.

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

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

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

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

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

Central Minnesota ensures every American has equitable access to high-quality training, education, and services. One strategy is to promote the North Star Promise so that MN residents can access free tuition. Efforts focus on providing pathways to promising careers without leaving local communities.

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

Central Minnesota collaborates with other regions to share best practices and lessons learned.

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

Central Minnesota is strategically positioning itself to maximize the impact of state and federal investments, enhance infrastructure, and promote economic growth
by working together.
Several infrastructure projects are planned in Central Minnesota to enhance transportation, water systems, public safety, and housing. Local projects in central Minnesota include apartments in **Little Falls** (The Views on 7th) and **Waite Park** (Vue Pointe Apartments) and funding for **Habitat for Humanity** projects in **St. Cloud**, **Cold Spring**, and surrounding counties. Manufactured home parks in **Alexandria**, **Little Falls**, and **Sauk Rapids** are also receiving support[2].

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

**SECTION B: REGIONAL OPERATIONS**

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

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

| **Strengths**: | **Weaknesses**: |
|---|---|
| • Skilled Workforce: Central Minnesota has a pool of qualified workers across various industries.<br>• Collaboration: Strong partnerships between employers, educational institutions, and workforce development agencies. | • Labor Shortages: Some sectors need more due to demographic shifts and an aging workforce.<br>• Skills Mismatch: Gaps between available skills and industry requirements.<br>• Limited Access: Rural areas may have limited training and employment services access. |

| | |
|---|---|
| • Responsive Programs: Existing programs address employer needs and provide relevant training.<br>• Adaptability: Ability to adapt when local opportunities arise: layoffs, closures, new grant projects, etc.<br>• Successful HR Networking Groups<br>• Strong ROI for the programs<br>• Communication within the Region<br>• Expertise in workforce development programming<br>• Nimble and Innovative | • Lack of Funding that can be used flexibly: Budgets are limited as more funding is allotted to the metro area. |
| **Opportunities**:<br>• Technology Adoption: Embrace digital tools for training, job matching, and remote work.<br>• Sector-Specific Programs: Develop targeted programs for high-demand industries.<br>• Workforce growth: Tap into underrepresented groups for talent acquisition.<br>• Innovate: Take risks, try something new, and accept failure as "ok."<br>• Customer Surveys: Encourage customers to complete / new ways of collecting feedback from ALL customers who visit.<br>• Outside the box Outreach Efforts<br>• Northstar Promise for Recruitment<br>• Alleviating Barriers to Employment | **Threats**:<br>• Economic Downturns: Recessions can impact job availability and funding.<br>• Changing Industries: Automation and industry shifts may render specific skills obsolete.<br>• Competition: Nearby regions may attract businesses and workers with better incentives.<br>• Reduction of Budgets: Federal dollars continue to decline<br>• Private Vendor Grant Competition<br>• Industry-Specific Age Barriers<br>• Delays in Funding Disbursements<br>• Siloed Partners making duplicate efforts: Not parallel or collaborative |

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

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

Leadership for our region consists of a Regional Board made up of board members from each of the local Workforce Development Boards. This board, along with our local Workforce

Development Boards, oversees the development and coordination of the regional plan and its implementation. The Regional Board members are selected by their respective local Workforce Development Boards.

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

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

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

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

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

Our local workforce areas are governed and operated differently, with varying funding streams and fiscal oversight; however, at an implementation level, we strive to have seamless service delivery. Many participants who are served aren't fully aware of the actual programs or funding streams, and this is intentional to ensure the ‘no wrong door’ approach. Each local area will use best practices and approved policies to ensure that our operations align with State and Federal laws, rules, and regulations. Both local boards share policies and often utilize similar language or identical policies for both local areas (i.e., incumbent worker policies and forms).

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

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

| **PROJECT GOAL: To develop and implement strategies in support of WIOA Regional Planning.** | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **STRATEGIES** *(activities, steps to achieve goal):* | **EXPECTED MEASURABLE OUTCOMES** | | **START DATE** | **END DATE** |
| **On-going** | Job Quality information will be shared as part of employer consultation. (Jobs for the Future (JFF - a **Job Quality Framework**:<br>• https://archive.jff.org/resources/quality-jobs-framework/<br>• https://jfforg-new-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/Quality_Jobs_Framework_-_JFF.pdf<br>• Corporate tool-kit – **Your Guide to Becoming an Impact Employer** - https://corporate.jff.org/impact-employer-model<br>• Colorado's Good Jobs Now information) | | 10/1/2024 | 9/30/27 |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Provide training opportunities to Region 3 employers** | Employers in the region benefit from the training provided and embrace some of the tools and information shared with their companies (an estimated 60 employers will attend each event)<br><br>Surveys were sent out after the event to gauge the value – Over 75% would refer others to events | | 10/1/2024 | 9/30/27 |
| **First Aid and Resilience training (mental health) for staff** | Staff will be better equipped to work with individuals experiencing mental health concerns. | | 10/1/2024 | 9/30/27 |
| **Creation and/or increased completion of several surveys: General Business, OJT, Incumbent Worker, HR group, internal organizational surveys** | Data received from surveys will be shared with boards, committees, and partners. It will direct programming and goals/activities in the regional plan. | | 10/1/2024 | 9/30/27 |
| **Customer focus groups** | Focus groups will provide valuable information on programming and services, their accessibility, and their effectiveness. Information will be shared and used in the Regional Plan development. | | 10/1/2024 | 9/30/27 |
| **Use of Colorado job quality checklist and other tools during employer consultations.** | The Good Jobs Now tools will be shared with employers during consultations and at the Regional Human Resource groups led by CMJTS and CS staff. Employers will access the tools to improve recruitment and retention efforts. Surveys will demonstrate if the tools shared have an impact on recruitment or retention. | | 10/1/2024 | 9/30/27 |
| **Completion of the Regional Plan** | The Regional Plan will be completed, updated, and submitted as required. | | 10/1/2024 | 9/30/27 |

**SECTION C: PROGRAM AND SERVICE DELIVERY**

C.1. Describe the condition of the regional economy (cite the sources of data and analysis);

Region 3 has selected the following industry sectors; manufacturing, healthcare, construction/transportation, natural resources/agriculture, and professional business/information technology, based on the LMI data provided in the Central Minnesota Planning Region report prepared by Like Greiner and available at CENTRAL MINNESOTA PLANNING REGION (data below directly from report).

ECONOMY INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT According to DEED's Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages (QCEW) program, Central Minnesota was home to 20,329 employer establishments providing an average of 282,951 covered jobs through 2024, with a total payroll of over $16.1 billion. That was 9.7% of total employment and 7.4% of total payroll in the state of Minnesota. Average annual wages were $56,976 in the region, which was about $17,250 lower than the state's average annual wage. Central Minnesota had led Greater Minnesota in job growth during the recovery since the pandemic recession, and in the past year, exceeded the state growth rate (Table 13). With 181,415 jobs at 12,251 establishments, EDR 7W accounts for about 64% of total employment in the Central planning region. EDR 7W also accounted for 74% of the region's job gain since the pandemic recession in 2020, adding 14,417 jobs, an 8.6% increase. In contrast, EDR 7E had the fewest jobs, with 49,145 jobs at 4,254 establishments, an increase of 3,452 jobs since 2020. EDR 6E had 3,825 establishments providing 52,390 jobs, after adding 1,654 jobs from 2020 to 2024, a 3.3% increase.

Central Minnesota reached a peak of 278,478 jobs in 2019, then hit a low of 263,427 jobs in 2020 as the pandemic recession spread throughout the state. Since then, the region has steadily recovered jobs each year, adding more than 5,000 jobs through 2022, then nearly 6,000 jobs in 2023, and almost 8,700 net new jobs in 2024 as the economy expanded (Figure 16). Over time, the region's economic fluctuations have closely matched the state overall.

With 47,389 jobs at 2,480 firms, Health Care & Social Assistance is the largest employing With 50,999 jobs at 2,773 firms, Health Care & Social Assistance is the largest employing industry in Central Minnesota, accounting for 18% of total jobs in the region. At $58,070 in 2024, average annual wages were slightly higher in Health Care than in the total of all industries. The industry saw strong job growth in the past year, adding 2,100 jobs, and was up more than 2,500 jobs compared to 2020. The next largest industry in Central was Manufacturing, with 41,266 jobs at 1,202 firms, after losing 500 jobs from 2023 to 2024. However, the industry did add about 1,750 jobs from 2020 to 2024. Central Minnesota has large concentrations of Food Manufacturing and Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing, as well as significant amounts of Machinery and Transportation Equipment Manufacturing. Retail Trade is the third largest industry, with 36,654 jobs at 2,220 establishments, and the related Accommodation & Food Services industry also provides 24,164 jobs in the region. The Accommodation & Food Services sector suffered greatly from the pandemic recession, but regained more than 4,700 jobs in the region from 2020 to 2024. Likewise, the Arts, Entertainment & Recreation industry saw the fastest job growth since 2020, recovering over 1,000 jobs since 2020, a 40% increase. The 5th largest industry is

Educational Services, which provides more than 24,250 jobs at just over 400 institutions, primarily at Elementary & Secondary Schools, but also at Junior Colleges and Universities.

The Construction industry is the 6th largest industry in the region, with 21,725 jobs at 3,050 firms, and was one of the fastest-growing industries in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic recession. Sixteen of the 20 industries added jobs from 2020 to 2024. Administrative Support & Waste Management Services, which includes temporary staffing services, saw the biggest decline in jobs since 2020, cutting more than 1,000 jobs. In addition, Information, Finance & Insurance, and Mining all saw very small job declines.

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

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

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

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

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

In Central Minnesota, we recognize the importance of using labor market information (LMI) to inform workforce development strategies. Here's how we plan to leverage LMI and conduct

outreach to select targeted sectors for developing sector partnerships that provide family-sustaining wages:

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

- Skills Gap: Focus on areas where skills shortages exist.
- Alignment with Regional Priorities: Ensure alignment with economic development goals.
- Based on our analysis, the following sectors have been identified as priorities for sector partnerships:
    - **Manufacturing -** The Second largest industry in Central Minnesota was Manufacturing, with 41,384 jobs at 1,201 firms, after losing 594 jobs from 2019 to 2022. Central Minnesota has large concentrations of food manufacturing, fabricated metal product manufacturing, and significant amounts of machinery and transportation equipment manufacturing.
    - **Professional Business Services/Information Technology –** Accounting for 2.3% of employment, Professional Business Services provides nearly 6,423 regional jobs at almost 1,200 employers. The average annual wage is much higher overall than the region's average at $76,083. Information Technology is not a defined industry; it includes various technical occupations that are mostly related to computers, software, and mathematics. This family of occupations also has higher than typical wages in the region and typically requires higher education.
    - **Natural Resources/Agriculture-** This sector provides about 5,000 jobs at 509 establishments. The average annual wage is a bit lower than typical in the region at $46,123. The largest component was animal production, which had more than 3,000 jobs and an average annual wage of $50k annually. Crop Production also accounts for more than 1,200 jobs, with wages hovering under $46k.
    - **Construction/Transportation-** The Construction industry is the 6th largest industry in the region. It provides less than 21k jobs with an average annual wage of $75,867, more than $20k more than the average for the region. Construction has been a bright spot leading into the pandemic recession and remained steadfast in employment gains during the past few years, adding more jobs than any sector and growing payroll employment by 6% despite its relatively small size compared to manufacturing.

- **Healthcare and Social Assistance-** The largest growing industry is expected to be Health Care and Social Assistance, which may account for one quarter of total projected growth in the region by 2032.

- We will collaborate with employers, training providers, community organizations, and other stakeholders.
- Sector partnerships will address workforce needs, training, and career advancement for workers.
- Our goal is to ensure that jobs within these sectors provide wages that support families.
- We will advocate for policies and practices that lead to family-sustaining incomes.

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

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

**Table 12. Central Minnesota Occupations in Demand, 2024**

| High School or Less | Vocational Training | Associate Degree | Bachelor's Degree or Higher |
|---|---|---|---|
| Home Health & Personal Care Aides $37,520/yr | Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers $61,513/yr | Registered Nurses $101,788/yr | General & Operations Managers $86,311/yr |
| Retail Salespersons $35,294/yr | Nursing Assistants $45,077/yr | Police & Sheriff's Patrol Officers $80,894/yr | Elementary School Teachers $63,707/yr |
| Fast Food & Counter Workers $31,729/yr | Licensed Practical & Licensed Vocational Nurses $60,654/yr | Radiologic Technologists & Technicians $84,540/yr | Secondary School Teachers $64,803/yr |
| Cashiers $32,454/yr | Bookkeeping, Accounting, & Auditing Clerks $51,037/yr | Veterinary Technologists & Technicians $49,370/yr | Medical & Health Services Managers $109,085/yr |
| Stockers & Order Fillers $37,670/yr | Psychiatric Technicians $46,781/yr | Architectural & Civil Drafters $63,877/yr | Accountants & Auditors $76,798/yr |
| First-Line Supervisors of Food Preparation & Serving Workers $45,691/yr | Machinists $60,200/yr | Dental Hygienists $99,124/yr | Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education $38,622/yr |
| Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary $38,072/yr | Bus & Truck Mechanics & Diesel Engine Specialists $64,200/yr | Detectives & Criminal Investigators $81,545/yr | Substitute Teachers, Short-Term $44,131/yr |
| First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers $47,056/yr | Automotive Service Technicians & Mechanics $52,077/yr | Industrial Engineering Technologists & Technicians $64,951/yr | Project Management Specialists $94,626/yr |
| Customer Service Representatives $45,804/yr | Substance abuse, behavioral disorder, & mental health counselors $56,854/yr | Surgical Technologists $70,461/yr | Middle School Teachers $64,293/yr |
| Janitors & Cleaners $37,935/yr | Medical Assistants $48,651/yr | Diagnostic Medical Sonographers $97,765/yr | Child, Family, & School Social Workers $69,904/yr |

Source: DEED Occupations in Demand

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

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

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

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

Identifying in-demand occupations and employment projections through the use of data about employment by location, labor supply and demand, earnings, unemployment, and demographics of the labor force helps employment specialists/career navigators and their jobseekers find relevant training opportunities to fill skills gaps, address skills shortages in the current economy, and anticipate employer need for trained workers in the listed fields.

**Business Services programming for all in-demand sectors:** The incumbent worker programming policy gives preference to projects submitted by high-demand industries.

**The WorkWright radio program is a collaboration** between CMJTS and KRWC to highlight CareerForce partners and programs, as well as a local employer, every Monday morning. This has been a successful model for promoting sector initiatives and supporting employer recruitment efforts. The goal is to replicate this program throughout Central Minnesota.

**Human Resource Networking groups** are held throughout the region and provide a platform for sharing industry challenges with peers. Rule number one of these groups: leave competition at the door.

**Educational Initiatives:** These initiatives occur throughout the region and encourage youth and young adults to focus on a career or industry sector early in high school. Tiger Pathway in Hutchinson is a great model. Local employers provide equipment and input on curriculum to help youth identify and attain career skills before high school graduation. This allows youth to explore careers before paying for a college education that might not align with their skills and interests. CareerONE, offered by CS, and Operation Exploration, offered by CMJTS, are summer programs that provide eligible youth with career exploration in specific sectors. Central

Minnesota high schools promote sector knowledge by hosting the DEED LMI expert at high school registration events and conferences, ensuring parents and students know about in-demand careers to help guide their planning.

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

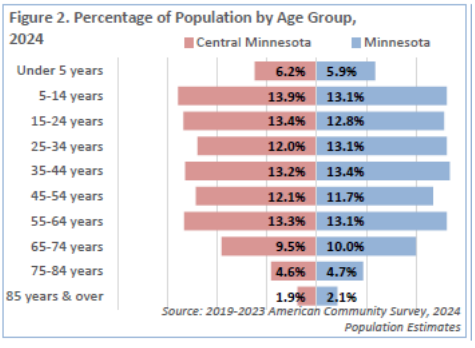
C.3. The demographic makeup of the labor force in those sectors compared to the regional labor force and how the region will work to close any identified gaps.

Below are charts from the DEED Central Planning Region report on the demographics of all industries and those based on age and population change.

Table 1. Population Change 2020-2024

| | 2020 Population | 2024 Estimates | 2020-2024 Change Number | 2020-2024 Change Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Central Minnesota** | **725,940** | **760,224** | ***+34,284*** | ***+4.7%*** |
| **Region 6E** | **118,626** | **119,398** | ***+772*** | ***+0.7%*** |
| Kandiyohi Co. | 43,732 | 44,674 | *+942* | *+2.2%* |
| McLeod Co. | 36,771 | 36,780 | *+9* | *0.0%* |
| Meeker Co. | 23,400 | 23,491 | *+91* | *+0.4%* |
| Renville Co. | 14,723 | 14,453 | *-270* | *-1.8%* |
| **Region 7E** | **169,123** | **177,296** | ***+8,173*** | ***+4.8%*** |
| Chisago Co. | 56,621 | 59,105 | *+2,484* | *+4.4%* |
| Isanti Co. | 41,135 | 43,687 | *+2,552* | *+6.2%* |
| Kanabec Co. | 16,032 | 16,608 | *+576* | *+3.6%* |
| Mille Lacs Co. | 26,459 | 27,577 | *+1,118* | *+4.2%* |
| Pine Co. | 28,876 | 30,319 | *+1,443* | *+5.0%* |
| **Region 7W** | **438,191** | **463,530** | ***+25,339*** | ***+5.8%*** |
| Benton Co. | 41,379 | 41,881 | *+502* | *+1.2%* |
| Sherburne Co. | 97,183 | 103,059 | *+5,876* | *+6.0%* |
| Stearns Co. | 158,292 | 163,997 | *+5,705* | *+3.6%* |
| Wright Co. | 141,337 | 154,593 | *+13,256* | *+9.4%* |
| **Minnesota** | **5,706,494** | **5,793,151** | ***+86,657*** | ***+1.5%*** |

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates*




**DEMOGRAPHICS and POPULATION CHANGE**
The Central Minnesota planning region includes 13 counties, spanning three Economic Development Regions (EDRs) and two Workforce Development Boards (WDBs). Central Minnesota was home to just over 760,000 people in 2024, comprising 13.1% of the state's total population.
The region experienced a 4.7% population increase over the past four years, primarily due to rapid growth in EDR 7W and 7E. Central Minnesota was the fastest-growing region of the state, accounting for 39.6% of the state's total population growth from 2020 to 2024. In comparison,

Minnesota saw a 1.5% gain statewide (Table 1). Nine of the 13 counties grew faster than the state growth rate.
Twelve of the 13 counties in the region gained population from 2020 to 2024; only Renville County decreased. Wright, Isanti, and Sherburne were the 1st, 2nd, and 4th fastest-growing counties in the state, respectively.

**EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT**

With 37.5% of adults aged 18 years and over having a college degree, Central Minnesota has lower educational attainment than the state, where 47% of adults have an associate, bachelor's, or advanced degree. However, 13.3% of adults in Central Minnesota hold an associate degree, outpacing the state average. Another 24.2% have some college experience, but no degree, compared to 21.4% statewide. The industry mix in Central Minnesota provides ample employment opportunities for workers of every education level.

The strategies below focus on efforts with employers and job seekers to close the identified gaps during consultations and provide resources available to both on the LWDA websites.
<u>Strategies promoted with employers:</u>

- Promote the implementation of blind recruitment: Remove identifying information (such as names or gender) from resumes during the initial screening process.
- Encourage setting hiring goals: Establish targets for hiring underrepresented groups and track progress regularly.
- Expand recruitment channels: Reach out to diverse networks, colleges, and community organizations to attract a broader pool of candidates.
- Encourage the creation of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs): ERGs can foster connections, provide mentorship, and share resources.
- Offer advancement opportunities from within: Create pathways for internal advancement and recognize potential in all employees.
- Regularly review compensation: Ensure that pay is fair and transparent across all demographics.
- Offer family-friendly policies: Support work-life balance through parental leave, flexible schedules, and remote work options.
- Collect demographic data: Regularly gather information on workforce demographics, promotions, and turnover.
- Collaborate with community organizations: Partner with local groups to recruit, train, and support untapped talent.
- Invest in education and skill-building: Support programs that prepare underrepresented individuals for careers in high-demand fields.
- Create pre-apprenticeship programs.
- Connect employers to the Department of Labor to develop registered apprenticeship programs
- Promote work-based learning opportunities

Strategies for working with the job seeker:

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

By implementing these strategies, Central Minnesota can create a more responsive workforce system meeting the needs of the region.

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

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

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

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

- Provide transportation assistance for job seekers to access training and employment opportunities.
- Offer childcare services during training sessions to support working parents and those preparing for work.
- Collect feedback from program participants and employers.
- Regularly evaluate program outcomes and adjust as needed.

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

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

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

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

- Be agile in adjusting strategies based on changing economic conditions and workforce dynamics.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Communicating roles and responsibilities to all participating entities is crucial for effective Collaboration. Here's how we plan to ensure clear communication:

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

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

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

Determining outcomes for employment and training services involves assessing their effectiveness and impact. Here's how we plan to measure outcomes:

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

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

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