



MERCED COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD

LOCAL PLAN 2025 – 2028

DRAFT

Contact: Erick Serrato
Phone: (209) 724-2041
Email: erick.serrato@countyofmerced.com

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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

In alignment with both the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 and resulting Directives from the California Workforce Development Board (CWDB) and Employment Development Department (EDD), the Merced County Workforce Development Board (MCWDB) has developed this four-year Local Plan covering program years 2025-28. This plan includes programs, strategies and services for the Program Year beginning July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2029.

Merced County is one of forty-five (45) local workforce areas in California, and the Merced County Workforce Development Board is the federally-recognized workforce agency of the County. WIOA Title I Adult Program, Dislocated Worker Program, and Youth Program funds are provided annually by EDD to serve Merced County residents and businesses. The local workforce development system is operated by the Merced County Workforce Development Board and administered by the Merced County Department of Workforce Investment (DWI); the Department Director serves as the Executive Director of the Workforce Development Board.

The Merced County Workforce Development Board (MCWDB) benefits from a strong network of partners that support residents, the business community and development of the local workforce. Community-based organizations, public institutions, education and training providers and subject-matter experts work collaboratively to meet the needs of County job-seeking residents and businesses. As the population and industries continue to grow, there is ample opportunity to address emergent workforce needs. Workers' education levels, skills development, and language barriers are priority issues for Merced County.

a. What is the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act?

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is a U.S. federal law that was signed into effect on July 22, 2014. It aims to improve the American workforce system by providing more effective and efficient workforce development programs. WIOA is designed to help job seekers access the services and skills training they need to secure good jobs and achieve career success. It also seeks to meet the needs of employers by enhancing the skills of the workforce. Some key aspects of WIOA include:

- Youth Services: WIOA supports programs aimed at helping young people (ages 14-24) gain skills and experience through education, training, and work opportunities to ensure they are prepared for the workforce.
- Adult Services: It provides funding for adult education and training programs, particularly for those who face barriers to employment (such as low-income individuals or those with disabilities), to increase their employability.
- Dislocated Workers: It offers assistance to individuals who have lost their jobs due to economic factors, such as plant closures, outsourcing, or industry changes, helping them to transition to new careers.
- One-Stop Career Centers: WIOA emphasizes the creation of "One-Stop" centers where individuals can access a variety of workforce-related services in a single location, such as job search assistance, career counseling, training programs, and job referrals.
- Workforce Development Boards: These boards are local or regional entities that oversee the planning and implementation of workforce development programs. WIOA stresses the importance of collaboration between business, education, and government stakeholders to address regional workforce needs.
- Focus on Business and Employers: WIOA encourages partnerships with businesses to better align workforce development programs with the needs of employers. It also allows for more targeted training and workforce preparation based on employer demand.

b. What is the Merced County Workforce Development Board?

The Merced County Workforce Development Board is the federally-recognized agency responsible for the administration of WIOA funds in Merced County, largely through the operation of job centers, known as America's Job Centers of California (AJCCs). In Merced County, the AJCCs go by the name "Worknet" and currently include a

Worknet Center in Los Banos and Merced. The role of the workforce board is to oversee the investment of WIOA funds through program delivered via Worknet centers, as well as through specific programs for businesses, job seekers, and partners. The workforce board is comprised of approximately 24 members of the community representing specific stakeholders in the workforce system, including business owners, educational and training organizations, local offices of State workforce agencies, and other individuals with an important role in the County's economic development. A majority of workforce board members must be business owners or representatives. Members are recruited regularly and presented to the Board of Supervisors for approval. The Chief Local Elected Official (CLEO) of Merced County sets the direction and agenda for the workforce board, in partnership with the County Executive Officer or their designee. In Merced County, the CLEO is the Merced County Board of Supervisors, and the Chair of the Board. The workforce board meets quarterly.

c. What function does the Local Plan play in the workforce system?

The Local Plan is part of a series of strategic documents that guide workforce investments and services, and ensure they are aligned with the economic needs and opportunities of the County, the wider region, and the State. At each level – Local, Regional, and State – workforce stakeholders contribute to the development of these guiding documents.

The State Plan: Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), state plans outline the vision for the statewide workforce development system. The planning requirements set forth by WIOA are designed to ensure effective coordination of federal investments across job training and education programs. This coordination helps streamline service delivery for shared customers, enhances efficiency, and ensures that the workforce system connects individuals to high-quality job opportunities and employers. California's Unified Strategic Workforce Development Plan for Program Years 2024-2027 reflects a collaborative agreement among WIOA core programs and other partners, providing the framework for the creation of public policy, fiscal investments, and the operation of the state's workforce and education systems.

The Regional Plan: In states like California, where Governors have designated workforce planning regions that include one or more Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDAs), regional plans are mandatory. Local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) within these regions take part in a planning process that covers various aspects, such as: analyzing regional labor market data, developing and executing sector initiatives for key industries and in-demand occupations, coordinating workforce services with regional economic development services and providers, and establishing regional service strategies, including cooperative service delivery agreements. Merced County, along with seven other local areas, participates in this process.

The Local Plan: The local plan is designed as a four-year action plan to develop, align, and integrate the local area's workforce development systems, with the goal of achieving the area's vision and strategic and operational objectives. Key elements of the local plan include: collaboration among economic, education, and workforce partners to build a skilled workforce by fostering innovation and alignment across employment, training, and education programs; implementing job-driven strategies and services through the local career center system; and providing education and training to ensure that individuals, including youth and those facing employment barriers, acquire the skills needed to succeed in the job market, while ensuring that employers have access to a skilled workforce. WIOA mandates that local plans be included as part of the regional plan.

d. How the Local Plan was developed

MCWDB invited stakeholders and customers to share their input at two community forums. Staff utilized several methods to inform targeted communities about the forums. The methods included direct email to partners and a broad array of stakeholders, including organizations listed on the State Regional and Local Planning Partners List (WSD24-19, Attachment 3), posting of meeting notices in the AJCCs, and posting of meeting announcements on WorkNet

social media platforms. Forums were designed and promoted with a focus on program design and finding good jobs. The community forums were held on January 23rd (Los Banos) and January 29th (Merced) at 4:00 p.m.

In 2023, MCWDB established a planning group to facilitate the relocation and redesign of WorkNet / AJCC customer service centers, working to ensure that customer experiences are of the highest quality at each new service location and various virtual platforms. Key stakeholders aligned County departments and WIOA service providers are consulted and provide feedback directly to MCWDB management staff. The MCWDB Local Plan illustrates the commitment of its board members and staff to continuously improve customer service delivery and partner coordination. MCWDB Management Staff have also secured funding from the Irvine Foundation to assist with transitions and customer service redesigns.

Meaningful and creative engagement with service providers is an ongoing commitment for the workforce board. In a departure from traditional community forums, MCWDB hosted two human-centered design ideation workshops. These sessions were facilitated around the identification of system painpoints and solutions. In the first, participants focused on the sequence of career services activities and identified ways to reimagine them from the perspective of a job seeker. In the second, in Merced, participants developed jobseeker personas and then identified painpoints those personas might experience and program solutions to relieve those barriers. In a third, related forum, the workforce board contracted with JPW Communications to host a SWOT Analysis Session with select board members and community leaders, as well as two focus groups (community and government; business owners) to better understand the workforce board's role and reach in the community.

In 2023 and 2024, the Adult Career Services Unit launched a series of three partner-focused convenings centered on the guiding service question the workforce board adopted ("How Might We so that ..). The last session occurred in December 2024 and included 18 organization representatives; the session was focused on developing opportunities for co-enrollment, referral, and joint service strategies among social service, community-based, and workforce agencies. Other sessions gathered partners from local county departments, educational institutions, service providers for the Adult and Youth programs, various community based organizations, Second Chance partners, local EDD staff, staff from the Department of Rehabilitation, and community leaders to participate in a planning session designed to reconnect, and create new partnerships following the Covid pandemic. This meeting was designed to introduce partners to systems thinking and to identify current pain points in the system. MCWDB staff is working to ensure that customer experiences are of the highest quality by alleviating the pain points identified and creating a better system for the Merced Community. The MCWDB Local Plan illustrates the commitment of its board members and staff to continuously improve customer service delivery and partner coordination.

e. Vision for the Northern San Joaquin Valley (NSJV) Region

California Jobs First organized the state into 13 economic regions. Merced County is one of three counties that comprise the NSJV Region, along with Stanislaus and San Joaquin Counties. MCWDB is the Regional Convener, the only California Jobs First Region led by a workforce board. The NSJV Region is comprised of three counties with a combined population of 1.6 million people and covering 4,919 square miles. Merced County population is 18% of total but 40% of the region's land. The coalition issued the two key planning documents: 1) Baseline Assessment (Part One) and 2) North San Joaquin Valley Strategic Plan. Each has information supporting the focus areas and related workforce development strategies described in MCWDB's Local Plan. The coalition's work will continue to inform regional initiatives for Merced County and its partners throughout the region. The North Valley THRIVE California Jobs First Strategic Plan (August 2024) identified three industry sectors and cross-cutting enabling strategies that together hold unique promise in advancing the regional economy and workforce.

The three industry sectors are:

1. Bioeconomy

2. Clean Energy (including Carbon Management)
3. Advanced Manufacturing

The seven cross-cutting enabling strategies are:

1. Regional Innovation Ecosystem
2. Small Business and Entrepreneurship
3. Catalytic Skills & Talent Development
4. Placemaking and Amenities
5. Generational Well-Being
6. Regional Coordination & Alignment

Within Catalytic Skills and Talent Development, the Strategic Plan identified three occupations that are in high-demand, offer quality employment and advancement and are critical for the growth of the economy. These are: nurses; electricians; machine mechanics.

The NSJV constitutes about one third of the San Joaquin Valley Regional Planning Unit (RPU). The Local Plan aligns with the San Joaquin Valley Regional Plan and the State Unified Workforce Development Plan. The State's Plan describes the state's priorities for the public workforce system. Under the leadership of the Governor and the Secretary of the Labor and Workforce Development Agency, California's vision for the future of workforce development is centered on the establishment and growth of a workforce system that promotes opportunity, job quality, and environmental sustainability for all Californians.

The parties to the Regional Plan are the eight local workforce development boards within the RPU, which include seven boards representing single counties (Fresno, Kings, Madera, Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Tulare) and one consortium board representing three counties (Kern, Inyo and Mono). In addition to the RPU, these workforce boards meet as the Central California Workforce Collaborative (CCWC) with the addition of the Motherlode Region which represents the Sierra region all along the eastern edge of the Central Valley.

The Region Planning partners identified two of the State's high-performance indicators for local performance reporting:

- *Implementation of policies supporting equity and quality jobs*
- *shared/pooled resources to provide services, training and education that meet the target population's needs*

f. Merced County Economic Conditions

Merced County has a population of 295,086 and a Labor Force of 121,860 workers. The unemployment rate in the Merced County was 9.5 percent in December 2024, up from a revised 8.5 percent in November 2024, and below the year-ago estimate of 9.7 percent. This compares with an unadjusted unemployment rate of 5.2 percent for California and 3.8 percent for the nation during the same period. Highlights follow.

- **Increasing Population.** As of 2023 the region's population increased by 6.6% since 2018, growing by 18,187. An increase of 6.6% is projected between 2023 and 2028, adding 19,159.
- **Increase Number of Jobs (2018 – 2023).** Merced County jobs grew by 3.7% and did not match the 4.5% national rate growth rate.
- **Workforce Education Levels.** Merced County, CA residents that possess a bachelor's degree is 11% below the national average.
- **Largest Industries in Merced County (Q4 2024).** The industries with the most jobs are Education and Hospitals (Local Government), Agriculture Related, and Manufacturing. Agriculture remains one of the county's main sources of revenue
- **Merced Household Income Level.** The median income level for Merced County households remains over 10% below the national level.

Healthcare, Government/Education, Manufacturing, and Logistics are among the top growing industries in Merced, and an immediate need exists for targeted job skills training as baby boomers are retiring from Agriculture, Education, and Government industries. Specific occupations for additional training efforts include Medical Technicians/Home Health Aides (Healthcare Occupations) and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers. Basic skills such as the ability to use computer-operated processing controls and instruments, supervisory and management skills, and related English competency. In 2020, the State opened its newest University of California campus, UC Merced; the emergence of the UC has spurred economic opportunity but also presented challenges in the housing and labor markets.

Based on trends in the demographic data provided by the US Census Bureau and ADE reports, the region will continue with a focus on new strategies to mobilize underrepresented groups such as veterans, workers with disabilities, and highly skilled minorities to fill immediate industry needs and prevent employment gaps. Merced county's median household income is \$65,044 and has a poverty rate of 18.6 percent. The two highest ratios between top/bottom income inequality for the SJV region are in Merced County.

Salary levels remain below the state average and are not expected to increase dramatically over the next five years. Concerns about the U.S. economy continue to drive conversations with local industry leaders and public policy makers about the region's ability meet demand for well-prepared workers.

SECTION A**WIOA Core and Required Partner Coordination**

The relocation of the Merced and Los Banos AJCCs began in late 2023, as with most center moves, reexamination of leveraged service delivery of WIOA core and required partners was appropriate. A service redesign has been included in the *process*. Fortunately, MCWDB utilizes an integrated service delivery model that has built the foundation for an evolved experience with a customer focus and outcome focused approach to our partnerships.

MCWDB and One-Stop Operator develop, nurture and evolve partnerships throughout each program year. These partnerships serve as the foundation for quality service delivery for employment and training seekers.

MCWDB's workforce development professionals and career services program managers convene on a regular basis with community partners to ensure the system continues to benefit from the formal MOU as well as the connections among the various team members serving the same communities and groups of customers.

WorkNet's core partners participated in the community engagement forums focused on the Local Plan *and* service delivery design for both the comprehensive and affiliate service centers. The forums were designed to gain feedback about the community's needs, hopes and concerns when seeking services. The facilitated conversations directly impacted the designated focus areas identified for workforce development system and their partners throughout this plan. Additional information about the community engagement forums is in the Appendices section (Attachment A)

MCWDB's service delivery benefits from frequent event collaboration with core community partners throughout each program year. Those partners include EDD, Merced County Office of Education (MCOE), UC Merced, Merced Community College, Human Services Agency (TANF), Merced High School District, and the Adult Education Block Grant Consortium. MCWDB coordinates regular information sharing meetings with labor, education, and private industry representatives to discuss apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships, On-the-Job Training (OJT), and other services that will support the development of qualified workers to meet the needs of local employers.

MCWDB Staff Business Services staff work with businesses, education, economic development, and other industry-servicing partners to expand and improve career pathway programs that address employment opportunities linked to local and regional priority sectors and entrepreneurship and microenterprise training programs.

Core Partners / Partnership Descriptors

To communicate local service priorities and the prioritization of core partnership development activities, descriptors have been assigned to each partner. All required partners have a formal MOU in place that facilitates connections to the Board and AJCC system. Priorities will be reviewed/evaluated and/or modified on an annual basis, at a minimum.

Partner	Status
WIOA Title II - Adult Education and Literacy	Leveraged / High Priority
WIOA Title III - Wagner Peyser	Improving High Priority
WIOA Title V - Vocational Rehabilitation	Leveraged / High Priority
Carl Perkins Career Technical Education	Leveraged / High Priority
Title V Older American Act	Leveraged
Job Corps	Standard
Native American Program (WIOA Section 166)	Leveraged
Migrant Seasonal Farmworker (WIOA Section 167)	Leveraged / High Priority
Veterans	Leveraged / High Priority

Youth Build	<i>Standard</i>
Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA)	<i>Standard</i>
Community Services Block Grant	<i>Leveraged</i>
Housing and Urban Development	<i>Leveraged</i>
Unemployment Insurance	<i>Improving / High Priority</i>
Second Chance	<i>Leveraged / High Priority</i>
Temporary Assistance for Needy Family / CalWORKs	<i>Leveraged / High Priority</i>

1. WIOA Title II – Adult Education and Literacy

MCWDB is aligned with Merced Adult School (MAS) to ensure shared target populations can access employment related programs such as short-term career technical education programs with employment as an intended outcome. MCWDB and MAS collaborations include an innovative Early Childhood Program recently featured at a Title II Adult Education conference. The current collaboration addresses a critical need in Merced County for Associate Teacher positions in Early Education. This project affords applicants interested in working in Early Education as an Associate Teacher the required 150 hours to apply for the state permit. MCWDB has created a transitional job that will pay the applicants for their 150 training hours. The complete description of the partnership can be found below.

MCWDB participates in meetings alongside adult education partners and attends industry-focused forums together. MCWDB and Adult Education ensure quality peer review of strategic plans occurs to ensure compatibility and consistency. The strong linkage between Title I and Title II programs create opportunities for education and employment opportunities for adults at all levels. The leverage activities include: Coordinated Service Delivery; Data Sharing; Established / Functional Referral System. The WIOA Memorandum of Understanding with the local Title II administrative entity outlines roles and responsibilities and has proven to benefit the customers/students served, as intended.

2. WIOA Title III – Wagner Peyser

The Employment Development Department (EDD) serves as a core partner in the AJCC. It provides Basic Career Services that fall under Labor Exchange services available to all eligible customers, including WIOA Title I (Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth formula) programs, Title II Adult Education and Literacy Act programs Wagner-Peyser (WP) Act employment services. Career Services involve activities such as outreach, intake, and orientation to the AJCC system. Other services are provided by WP staff, such as job preparation, referral to programs and services, provision of labor market information, referral to supportive services, assistance in establishing financial aid for training purposes, and assistance in providing information on unemployment insurance programs.

EDD remains the lease holder for the America’s Job Center of California (AJCC) in Merced and subleases space that Title I funded programs and services. The site is designated as the *WorkNet* Comprehensive One-Stop Center for the local area. EDD Management has committed to co-locate at both new service locations if State requirements are met.

The MCWDB facilitates convening quarterly partner meetings with all partners (collocated or not), coordinated in part by the One-Stop Operator. These meetings address and formulate further plans, assurances, and strategies to maximize coordination, improve service delivery, and avoid duplication of services through the One-Stop System. These scheduled meetings are opportunities for cross training sessions to occur as needed.

MCWDB/AJCC staff work closely with WP partners to offer seamless delivery of programs and services such as job search workshops, assistance in identifying jobs and training opportunities, interview preparation, and resume writing. The most frequent customer referral from WP individuals that have completed the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) process. WP staff collaborate with AJCC staff to make available additional jobseeker resources such as tools to assist in job identification, including LMI, O*NET Online, and other career exploration tools.

Services are regularly adapted to meet special populations' needs, including veterans and jobseekers that are 55 years old and above

The relocation of the One-Stop Center / AJCC will require both MCWDB and WP Managers to consider how services can better align in the new space. MOU modifications will be discussed as part of co-located partner space negotiations.

3. WIOA Title V - Vocational Rehabilitation

MCWDB's partnership with WIOA Title IV- Vocational Rehabilitation (DOR) allows for braided services for shared customers. Frequently, the service delivery costs are split by category—WIOA for training and DOR for transportation costs. MCWDB's MOU includes activities to support and maintain physical and programmatic accessibility of the AJCC. The physical checklist of tools ensures disability accommodation, while the program accommodation component focuses on participants' rights and assurances.

DOR and MCWDB's Youth Services alignment activities such as Work Experience site development and job fairs and seasonal / part-time employment for shared target populations. DOR remains committed to co-location (non-financial) service delivery at the comprehensive center / AJCC new location.

4. Carl Perkins Career Technical Education

MCWDB coordinates with relevant secondary and post-secondary education programs as a method to enhance services and avoid duplication of efforts. MCWDB recognizes the value of coordination among partners as essential to the growth and prosperity of its residents. Meaningful examples include:

Multi-Core Curriculum Pre-Apprenticeship Training (Merced College). Alignment with Industry standards to prepare customers for success in apprenticeship program and a long-term career in the trades. Supportive service leverage opportunity for eligible co-enrolled participants.

Job Fairs and Career Pathways (Merced County Office of Education and UC Merced). Healthcare / Allied Health related positions and related career pathways remain the focus for MCWDB and CTE partners. The MCWDB approach is evolving as priorities aligned with NSJV strategic plan are implemented. Access to the information, facilities (for in-person support) and bilingual staff capacity are all priority considerations for one-time events and long-term partnerships with CTE program providers. MCWDB and Merced College are working together to design and implement new tools to help our customers identify the right career path and connection to the programs offered at the college. Together the MCWDB and Merced College plan to improve how both credit *and non-credit* opportunities are promoted to customers / students. MCWDB is committed to address the workforce shortage for Healthcare in Merced County.

Early Childhood Education Partnership (UC Merced, Merced Adult School (MAS), Merced County Office of Education (MCOE). This multi-institutional partnership addresses an identified gap in the workforce system of early childhood education. UC Merced and MAS partnered to provide training to community members with the goal of completing and earning 12 units of college credit in early childhood education. MCWDB and MCOE partnered to provide transitional jobs to students who completed the UC Merced/MAS training. MCOE provides the sites and supervision for the students to obtain the required minimum of 50 days (150 hours) of experience in a childcare program. The Adult service provider is working with the participants, providing supportive services and developing resumes. As students complete the requirements to apply for the Associate Teacher permit, they will apply for positions with MCOE.

RERP Grant (Merced College). In addition to the aforementioned projects, MCWDB and Merced college have partnered in serving students and program participants that are English Language Learners with training, supportive services and tutoring and mentorship.

Affiliate One-Stop Center / AJCC Move. MCWDB announced the new location of MCWDB's affiliate one-stop (AJCC) at Merced College will be at 22240 Highway 152, Room A120 in Los Banos. Career services staff will be increasing on-site hours at the Breaking Barriers office in Los Banos. Breaking Barriers offers services to the community members of Los Banos. The transition is scheduled to be completed June 2025.

5. Title V Older American Act

The Title V Older American Act is overseen by the Merced County Human Services Agency (HSA), Adult and Aging Program. When WIOA programs are administered by another Merced County Department, MCWDB takes full advantage of the opportunity for full alignment of programs and service coordination. Title V eligible participants are referred to the AJCC where they are connected to unsubsidized opportunities that build on the skills gained through program activities.

6. Job Corps

Currently, there is no local Job Corps site within Merced County, the nearest location is in Fresno County. County's WIOA Youth Provider and Job Corps. Job Corps conducts regular outreach sessions at the AJCC. MCWDB Youth Service provider is prepared to receive referrals of interested youth / potential program participants that may be identified in the sessions.

7. Native American Program (WIOA Section 166)

MCWDB recognizes the unique employment barriers that Native Americans face and the potential benefits that come partnership and service alignment. MCWDB partner activities have focused on the following areas:

- Sharing of labor market information and analysis
- Targeted outreach to Native American community
- Cultural sensitivity training for MCWDB and AJCC staff

MCWDB meets on a regular basis with California Indian Manpower Consortium, Inc (CIMC) as AJCC Partner-- CIMC participates in the standing quarterly partner meetings.

8. Migrant Seasonal Farmworker (WIOA Section 167)

MCWDB's commitment to serve priority populations has created an environment for innovation and enhanced capacity building. CVOC is a grant partner / service delivery provider for the RERP and Fresno HRCC projects that serve English Language Learners

WIOA section 167 is led by Central Valley Opportunity Center (CVOC), a three-county community organization whose director sits on the WDB. Partner activities have included the following:

- Aligned outreach activities
- Pursuit of funding via competitive grant application
- Labor Market Information / Analysis
- MCWDB/AJCC Staff cultural sensitivity training
- Customized tools and services for English Learners
- Facilitation of partnerships among agencies serving Migrant Seasonal Worker and other immigrant populations

MCWDB continues to evolve service delivery for target populations. MCWDB and CVOC continue to develop multi-generational approaches could serve both MSFW/immigrants and their children with appropriate support in an environment with multiple partners. The CVOC Executive Director is an active member of MCWDB.

9. Veterans

In partnership with EDD, MCWDB works with the local veteran representative to ensure that basic / intensive career services and training services are available to all veterans and their eligible spouses. Merced County is home to 8,692 Veterans. The EDD veterans' representatives specialize in assisting veterans in their efforts to find employment and access training.

Services provided include a veteran 24-hour priority hold on all job listings, customized job search assistance, job fairs, employer recruitment, and other events and resources. Priority of services is also given to all veterans and their eligible spouses. Through this partnership, training is funded through WIOA, and the EDD Veteran Program funds support services, such as transportation, childcare, and housing needs. EDD staff representatives are strategically positioned within the Comprehensive AJCC in Merced.

10. Youth Build

Currently, there is no local Youth Build office or services in Merced County. Information about services offered by Youth Build in Fresno County is made available to youth via the local WIOA Youth provider. MCWDB Staff or other appropriate staff ensure that interested youth receive detailed information about program requirements (including eligibility criteria) prior to *any* referral outside Merced County.

11. Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA)

In partnership with EDD, MCWDB has been working with TAA individuals for many years. When a TAA is announced with the number of workers affected is announced, MCWDB staff will coordinate the eligibility process with the EDD TAA Representative to ensure that the impacted individuals meet the WIOA services requirement. MCWDB can provide TAA-affected individuals with basic career, intensive, and training services. In the partnership, the EDD TAA Program funds training and WIOA funds supportive services. Per WSD14-15, a co-enrollment/Referral Form has been developed to help both WIOA and TAA Program track and report the TAA individuals. As of December 2024, TAA funding was not allocated to EDD.

12. Community Services Block Grant

MCWDB works with the Merced County Community Agency (MCCAA) and Central Valley Opportunity Center (CVOC) and has an established referral process. The partnerships with MCCAA and CVOC provide a variety of services to disadvantaged populations. MCCAA is located across the street from the AJCC. MCWDB staff can provide a soft handoff when participants are referred. Staff often walk the participants across the street to inquire about services. In addition, MCWDB collaborates with the County's Community and Economic Development Department on CDBG-funded services offered through the Department.

13. Housing and Urban Development

MCWDB has a long history of working with the Housing Authority of Merced County, and every effort is made to ensure that individuals receive information regarding public housing needs. MCWDB will continue to provide information regarding Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher (HCV), public housing, Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing, and Section 8 Projected-Based Voucher at its WIOA orientation. MCWDB is also exploring the support of city-based applications and projects within the County to expand the affordable workforce housing and business support.

MCWDB is collaborating with County and Merced City partners on serving those experiencing homelessness, a key fulfillment of HUD's mission.

MCWDB successfully administered HUD's Equity and Special Populations program. The program focused on helping to house insecure individuals' placement into vocational training or work-based learning opportunities.

14. Unemployment Insurance

Recipients of Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits are encouraged to get involved in labor market research, attend the orientation about AJCC services, take advantage of the assessments to provide insight into areas of strength, and attend workshops on completing applications, interviewing, resumes, cover letters, and employer expectations when hired. If individuals have not earned their high school diploma or GED, referrals to Merced Adult School in Merced are available to help them accomplish their goals. MCWDB also provides step-by-step instructions on how to e-mail EDD to request interest in California Training Benefits to be noted.

The AJCCs are partners with EDD in providing information to participants regarding UI eligibility and the claims filing process. Any individual may file an Unemployment Insurance claim (UI) either by phone or online. UI applicants have access to a dedicated telephone line and the internet in the resource room to complete the claims process and required follow-up. The dedicated phone line provides instant access to the UI Call Center and serves customers better, reducing wait time and providing individual service.

MCWDB's goal is to ensure that all job seekers relate to the services to which they are eligible such as employment, training, and education available through the AJCC, as well as access to information on Unemployment Insurance. UI recipients are encouraged to enroll in the AJCC so that they may benefit from re-employment programs and services available to them, including job search orientation and workshops, development of an individual work search and employment plan, access to LMI, education and training services, individual counseling, and case management. In our development and negotiation of the MOU process, the partnership between MCWDB and Wagner- Peysner and UI programs will continue to be solidified and strengthened.

16. Second Chance

In 2023, approximately 388,000 individuals were under supervision at the state or county level. MCWDB has been working with several Second Chance organizations in recent years. These organizations include the Merced County Probation Department, the Merced County Homeless Court Program, and the Merced County Rescue Mission. Each organization is serving different populations, with the overall goal of the MCWDB being the same.

Merced County Probation Department. Since 2018, MCWDB and Merced County Probation have a joint MOU to provide WIOA vocational services to probation clients. The services included comprehensive objective assessment; on-going case management; supportive services as needed; on-the-job training (OJT), pre-vocational training, and vocational training. MCWDB actively participates in the state program serving ex-offenders. MCWDB has developed a continuum of services and specialized training cohorts. MCWDB continues to build and strengthen our probation partnership, with increased funding to serve additional participants

MCWDB staff worked with the County Probation Department to secure service delivery space at the Los Banos facility in partnership with the Breaking Barrier program. MCWDB's Adult service provider is on-site Monday, Wednesday and Fridays. However, in March 2025, staff hours at the location will increase to five days per week. Program recruitment, orientation comprehensive objective assessment, on-going case management, workshops, supportive services as needed, on-the-job training (OJT), pre-vocational training, and vocational training services are provided at this location. The Breaking Barriers office is also a collaborative partnership between County Probation, Behavioral Health, and

community based partners that specialize in supporting justice involved individuals. Workshops and support groups are hosted at this location. The Breaking Barriers office is also open to all members of the Los Banos community.

Merced County Rescue Mission (Navigator Center). Merced County Rescue Mission serves the same clientele that MCWDB and many other second chance organizations are serving – justice-involved homeless populations. MCWDB has a joint MOU with the Merced County Rescue Mission to provide WIOA services to this population. The WIOA services include job search, resume writing, interview readiness training, job environment etiquette training, and referral to on-the-job training (OJT), pre-vocational training, and vocational training.

State of California Prison to Employment Program (P2E). Merced County Probation and the Merced County Workforce Development Board (MCWDB) continue to receive dedicated funding to serve second-chance populations. This funding ensures that individuals who have experienced incarceration, are currently on parole or probation, or have recently been released from custody have access to resources that promote successful reentry into society. The Merced County P2E program offers a range of tailored services, including:

- Direct Case Management: Personalized guidance to help individuals create actionable employment plans, set goals, and access necessary resources.
- Supportive Services: Assistance with transportation, work attire, tools, and other essential items to remove barriers to employment.
- Vocational Skills Training: Opportunities for individuals to gain industry-relevant skills through educational programs, certification courses, or On-the-Job Training (OJT) placements.
- Job Placement Activities: Collaboration with local employers to facilitate job opportunities, including resume development, interview preparation, and connection to available positions.

The P2E program also engages with community partners, local organizations, and employers to foster inclusive hiring practices and provide additional support services such as mentorship, counseling, and access to social services. These partnerships are crucial in ensuring justice-involved individuals have the tools and opportunities necessary to achieve long-term career success.

17. Temporary Assistance for Needy Family/CalWORKs

Merced County Human Services Agency (HSA) oversees the Temporary Assistance for Needy Family/CalWORKs Program. HSA is a One-Stop partner and has attended the One-Stop partner quarterly meetings convened by the MCWDB and One-Stop Operator. Information regarding TANF/CalWORKs is disseminated at the quarterly meeting.

The Expanded Subsidized Employment (ESE) is one of the programs where MCWDB staff works with HSA TANF/CalWORKs individuals to be placed in an “earn and learn” model, have a chance to earn wages while learning new skills. MCWDB is able to leverage service delivery with the County’s HSA TANF/CalWORKs Programs for many years and will continue to do so.

MCWDB is dedicated to supporting individuals on welfare by helping them transition into full-time employment through the Expanded Subsidized Employment (ESE) program. We collaborate closely with participants from the Human Services Agency’s Workforce Readiness Class, where individuals receive essential skills training and job preparation guidance. Upon successful completion of the class, participants are referred to our agency, where we connect them with suitable job opportunities that provide full-time work. This seamless process ensures participants are equipped with the necessary skills and support to succeed in their new roles, fostering long-term employment stability and self-sufficiency. MCWDB can leverage WIOA funds training and supportive services for TANF eligible/participants that connect with the AJCC / One-Stop Center.

State Strategic Partner Coordination

18. How Local Boards and AJCC partners will coordinate the services and resources identified in their MOU, as outlined in WIOA Memorandums of Understanding (WSD18-12).

MCWDB and AJCC partners meet quarterly to discuss the services and resources identified in the MOU, convened by the One-Stop Operator. At the quarterly meeting, AJCC partners discuss opportunities for improvement, exchange ideas, develop, modify, or enhance the One-Stop strategy.

A common intake referral form was developed and disseminated to all AJCC partners to use. An Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA) was implemented that ensures designated AJCC partners can share the cost of maintaining the operation of the AJCC. MOUs are reviewed on a regular basis and enhanced to include new service opportunities. As new partners are added to the system, the WDB's Executive Committee is updated. The direct engagement of the WDB Director with MOU partners also ensures the partnerships are relevant and fresh.

19. How the Local Board and AJCC partners will work towards co-enrollment and common case management as a service delivery strategy, as outlined in Strategic Co-Enrollment – Unified Plan Partners (WSD19-09).

Co-enrollment strategies are specifically included in the MOU between AJCC partners and the Local Board as outlined in WSD19-09.

The MOU also acknowledges that participants may be co-enrolled into workforce development, training, and support programs offered by WIOA and other funding administered by the Local Board, identifying processes to address co-case management opportunities. MCWDB centers offer services in English, and Spanish and staff (Local Board and AJCC partners) attend training to work with a diverse population, including immigrants, farmworkers, people with disabilities, ex-offenders (re-entry), youth, dislocated workers, and others from communities surrounding the centers.

An electronic referral system is available for all AJCC partners.

- AJCC partners complete a needs assessment form and to the Los Banos or Merced center
- Referral is reviewed, forwards the customer information to the appropriate partners and enters the information into a tracking system

In 2024, MCWDB Staff plan to expand the referral system so partners and other local community-based organizations to refer for AJCC services. This system would allow both partners to enter case notes to follow up on the referral.

New internet-based access points / portals to facilitate MCWDB alignments with strategic partners are in the development phase.

20. How the Local Board and AJCC partners will facilitate access to services provided through the one-stop delivery system, including in remote areas, through technology and other means.

The relocation / redesign of both Comprehensive and Affiliate Center will provide an opportunity to update all service delivery technology including the availability of virtual/online services—both live and on-demand. THRVE / Jobs First baseline assessment describes the challenges that communities face when accessing services online. Basic awareness of service availability, technical skills to fully utilize, WiFi quality – broadband connections were issues for non-English communities to address.

Libraries are identified for potential new and enhanced access points MCWBD / AJCC services. A modified operational agreement with the County Library system will place staff (part-time) at library branches, cross train and support library staff on workforce services and CalJobs, and portals at half of the Library's twelve branches so that residents can meet and work with AJCC staff.

MCWDB facilitates access to services provided through the AJCC delivery system throughout Merced County, including remote areas. Strategies include:

- Comprehensive AJCCs located at the Eastern and Western sides of the County (Merced and Los Banos) provide access to the highest number of possible participants. Each is located at the center of rural areas.
- Regional coordination of services helps a broad spectrum of participants through community partners located in smaller communities.
- Meetings between Merced WDB and rural CBOs regularly assess access and enhance connection when needed.
- Job Fairs in remote areas, including virtual jobs and drive-thru job fairs.
- Virtual forums in rural community areas provide information on services provided.
- Development and implementation of a plan to incorporate technology into the delivery of services, increasing the access to service beyond the two comprehensive AJCCs.

21. How the Local Board and AJCC partners will coordinate workforce and education activities with the provision of appropriate supportive services.

MCWDB provides supportive services in coordination with its co-sponsored training in order to help participants succeed in whatever program they attend. This includes but is not limited to providing the following: Personal Protective Equipment (PPE); Testing fees; Work gear and uniforms; Certifications and exams; Tools; GED; Transportation vouchers and reimbursements; Child Care Fees, as well as others.

The AJCCs work with community partners to identify and locate non-WIOA funded child and or

dependent care, transportation, cash assistance for auto repair and other automobile-related costs, uniforms, tools, or other items required for employment, and emergency services such as utilities food, and health and medical services. Customers in need are regularly referred to local community partners to address supportive service needs beyond what is available via WIOA to ensure those needs do not become a future barrier to training or work. The following supportive services are those most often offered to participants in accordance with state and federal regulations, and in partnership with Local organizations.

- Transportation: The AJCCs work to provide individual bus tickets or gas vouchers to clients requiring transportation to attend training or job interviews.
- Childcare: Customers are screened for eligibility for CalWORKs-funded supportive services. These services include transitional childcare. If the participant is not qualified, MCWDB assists with childcare.
- Housing: MCWDB works to support participants in securing permanent housing and other supportive housing services through rental assistance programs, security deposit assistance, and utility assistance.

MCWDB aims to provide helpful and reliable Information and referral of services to community organizations to avoid duplication of resources. Staff assess participant supportive service needs, record those needs in the case file, and assist in meeting those needs to ensure full participation in job search and training activities. The State's investment via the COVID-19 SS grant (MCWDB received \$300,000) has accelerated its provision and coordination of supportive services. It quickly introduced the need to accommodate atypical supportive services and overcome barriers to access. In response, MCWDB and its subcontractors have developed new streamlined, paperless processing to benefit customers. Local policies have been expanded to facilitate faster and broader approval, and new ways of leveraging the resources with partners have flourished.

MCWDB convenes the core and local partners quarterly to continue conversations regarding the strategies to carry out the workforce system's core programs. Additional topics covered include supportive services, common customer service efficiencies, collaborative business engagement activities, labor market responses, career pathway development, and implementation, among others. These quarterly meetings allow the mandated partners to continuously monitor and improve the workforce system to respond quickly to economic and employer shifts in the region. In addition to the quarterly meetings, MCWDB convenes bi-weekly meetings with members of the education field to ensure sector strategies and career pathways' relevance.

22. How the Local Board and AJCC partners will comply with WIOA Section 188 and applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 regarding the physical accessibility of facilities, programs and services, assistive technology, and materials for individuals with disabilities, as outlined in Nondiscrimination and Equal Opportunity Procedures (WSD17-01)

AJCCs within Merced County have been regularly monitored by the State of California to ensure compliance with EEO requirements. These assessments specifically address the availability of services for individuals with disabilities. MCWDB has previously held a Disability Employment Initiative Grant. Staff received training from DOR, Eric Glunt, the Department of Behavioral Health and Rehabilitation Services, which were involved in quarterly statewide meetings on DEI to provide training and best practices.

Outside of formalized guidance, MCWDB is making strides to improve and expand services to individuals with disabilities and other special populations. AJCC partners agree not to discriminate, harass or allow harassment against any person because of age, race, culture, religious or political affiliation, gender, national origin, ancestry, physical or mental disability, medical condition, veteran status, marital status, or sexual orientation. Therefore, all partners in the AJCC system agree to comply with section 188 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and receive training on the specifics of the act related to the provision of services and accessibility. Given new WIOA requirements, AJCC partners agree to plan towards innovative ways to increase customer access through center locations, referrals, and the use of modern technology. Creative access planning will include exploration of co-location, direct linkages, cross-training, and referrals as outlined in a forthcoming planning guide.

Engagement of Employers for Individuals with Disabilities

To engage employers for individuals with disabilities, MCWDB ensures that staff participate on a Disability Task Force to facilitate rapport with disability advocates and stakeholders and position MCWDB for better partnership; develops opportunities to collaborate with the Adult Schools as they transition adults with disabilities from training and education courses to employment; involves a Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) representative on the WDB; and guarantees DOR's involvement in the Partner MOU process for services coordination.

MCWDB and its partners utilize Metrix Learning (online/self-paced) and regional trainings to ensure staff can continuously update service delivery strategies for disabled individuals. MCWDB will regularly facilitate sessions that are designed to improve and/or innovate service delivery to targeted communities. In 2024, MCWDB conducted Empathy Interviewing training for all County and Partner Staff, including individuals serving disabled individuals in remote areas. The Adult Service provider is required to provide training on a regular basis focused on service to individuals with multiple barriers, including physical, developmental, and mental disabilities.

The Department of Rehabilitation, Behavioral Health, and others have provided staff training to increase knowledge on legal issues to become more informed and better serve individuals with disabilities.

MCWDB also continues to contract with consultants like California Employers Association (CEA), which provides the HR Hotline for small businesses to utilize their expertise for human resource issues and concerns. CEA offers

educational workshops to familiarize employers with the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities and clarify any questions they may have regarding risks or liabilities. MCWDB will implement a pilot program designed to place individuals with disabilities in employment while providing support to employers. MCWDB will aim to alleviate concerns with hiring individuals with disabilities and position key employers as leaders for accessibility in the business community.

Engagement of Relevant Stakeholders

MCWDB has identified multiple stakeholders to be engaged in these efforts, including the Merced County Department of Behavioral Health and Rehabilitation Services, the Department of Rehabilitation, local businesses, and other nonprofits serving the differently abled community.

23. How the Local Board will coordinate with County Health and Human Services Agencies and other local partners who serve individuals who access CalFresh Employment and Training services.

The Merced County Human Services Agency (HSA) is responsible for CalWORKS and other public welfare programs. HSA is a one-stop partner and is part of the network of agencies that comprise the local workforce development delivery system. CalFresh participants are diverse. They include families, some led by single parents, and individuals. Many are unemployed, while others are low-wage earners. Because the group consists of individuals with many distinct needs, participants are served by all types of education, social services, and support organizations in the county, including the AJCC.

As evidenced by the following statistics, most participants must surmount significant challenges to succeed: 100% of families have incomes below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level; 24% of heads of household have not earned high school diplomas or GEDs; 18% have criminal records; 8% are single mothers; 2% are veterans, and 25% begin the program with no employment history.

MCWDB receives an allocation of TANF funds for the Enhanced Subsidized Employment (ESE) program. The ESE has a work experience (WEX) component at its core. The program creates significant funding leverage opportunities and service enhancements for participants. Although most ESE program participants obtain jobs long before the end of the 18-month program, they remain in the program because the objective is to ensure that positive outcomes are sustained. The program design is flexible and provides basic education, supportive services, and training in-demand occupations with the goal of the participant moving into a job, then a better job and career. In addition, these CalFresh E&T programs have all established links with their local workforce systems and AJCCs.

Additional information about MCWDB's history of alignment and service delivery coordination is provided in Section A #17 TANF/CalWORKS.

24. How the Local Board will coordinate with Local Child Support Agencies and other local partners who serve individuals who are non-custodial parents.

The workforce system's partnership with the Merced County Department of Child Support Services (DCSS) represents the enhancement of an existing relationship among the WDB, the AJCCs, and Child Support. Referrals are made from Child Support to the AJCCs during a "payment delinquent" non-custodial parent's early stage of arrears. While this approach is yielding some success, because of the WDB's recent stakeholder engagement process, DCSS and the WDB have developed an MOU that outlines a structured relationship for cross-referrals. The WDB, DCSS, and the entire network of one-stop and community partners that comprise the workforce system are all fully committed to building a strong partnership to improve employment outcomes for Non-Custodial Parents (NCP) with child support orders.

25. How the Local Board will coordinate with local Partnership Agreement partners, established in alignment with the Competitive Integrated Employment Blueprint, and other local, regional, and statewide partners who serve individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

MCWDB and its partners within the local workforce system have developed a clear understanding of the goals set at the state level by the State Department of Rehabilitation (DOR), the Department of Developmental Services (DDS), and the State Department of Education (DOE) in connection with their agreement to increase competitive integrated employment (CIE) opportunities for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities. We became familiar with the CIE Blueprint and with the guidance, the state agencies have provided to their local counterparts regarding the development of Local Partnership Agreements (LPAs) to support the expanded use of CIE throughout California. An LPA for Merced County has been completed. *An LPA has been executed for Merced County.*

Merced's CIE LPA seeks to improve service levels for individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) and developmental disabilities (DD) through focusing on person-centered planning, streamlining the provision of services for the target population and building creative collaborations among the core LPA partners (signature parties to the agreement), community partners (such as the WDB, CVOC and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce) and businesses.

The local LPA was built on a strong foundation. More than 30 years ago, the Merced County Transition Council (MCTC) was established as a platform for communication among agencies in the disability services network, including all the current LPA core partners and many of the LPA's community partners. The group meets eight times per year to share information and identify resources and solutions that will achieve better labor market results for individuals with disabilities. The LPA defines the roles and responsibilities of all partners, including community partners. Referral processes among partners and stakeholders are described in detail, including the process by which referrals can be made to the AJCC.

In addition, the LPA specifies the services that WorkNet of Merced County offers to individuals with disabilities, ages 18 and older (e.g., career guidance; skills training; job readiness skills; job placement assistance).

26. How the Local Board will coordinate with community-based organizations and other local partners who serve individuals who are English language learners, foreign-born, and/or refugees.

MCWDB understands that ELLs are a diverse population with a wide range of needs. Some individuals are just learning English, while others have developed a level of fluency that enables them to take advantage of training and upskilling opportunities that will make them candidates for jobs in the region's priority sectors, which often provide better wages and career advancement potential than jobs in other industries

In Merced County, nearly sixty percent of the approximately 277,680 residents are Hispanic or Latino. Additionally, one in every four individuals is foreign-born, with immigrants originating from regions such as Mexico, Central America, and Southeast Asia, including the Hmong community.

English language learners (ELLs), foreign-born individuals, refugees, and immigrants constitute a significant portion of the county's population as well as its current and future workforce. These groups are vital to all aspects of the local economy, being employed across key industries and forming the backbone of the agriculture sector, which is essential for local and regional prosperity.

The MCWDB acts in various ways to support ELLs and engage stakeholders in Merced County. MCWDB works in collaboration and partnership to address the workforce needs of immigrants, refugees, and English Language Learners. This work is of critical importance to the Local Area, and to MCWDB leadership, as so much of the County's economic activity has been developed and, in no small part, dependent on these workers. This coordination includes collaborating closely with community organizations and a new commitment to provide more resources for Spanish and Hmong speakers / English Language Learners.

New and Improved Resources (from community forums)

Customers indicated the need for information resources that non-English speakers and English language Learners can easily access and use in the following areas:

- How to access the center services at the centers (service / programs map)
- Eligibility process / criteria for all programs (including partner services)

27. How the Local Board will coordinate with Local Veteran Affairs, community-based organizations, and other local partners who serve veterans.

MCWDB continues to partner with community-based organizations, and various local agencies focused on service to veterans. Veteran Service partners include the following:

- Merced County Veterans Service Office (referrals)
- Merced College – Veterans Resource Center at Merced Campus (referrals)
- Merced County Rescue Mission (housing)

Veterans are given priority of service in WIOA at all MCWDB service centers. The eligibility criteria are described in the related policy bulletin MCWDB PB #15-21.

Representatives from EDD Veterans Programs participate in WordNet partner meetings and are provided with information about WIOA eligibility. EDD Staff can refer veterans and facilitate co-enrollment with WorkNet staff when appropriate. This co-enrollment (coordinated service delivery) opportunity is offered to all local partner agencies serving veterans.

28. How the Local Board will collaborate with the Strategic Planning partners to address environmental sustainability

UC Merced Water Systems Management Lab Project

The project examines the impacts of the drought on California agriculture. Rapidly changing conditions affect the water supply for agriculture and the state’s growing population. Incremental water management and institutional learning at all levels has provided building blocks to better manage water shortages. A project team made up of UC and CSU academics, in partnership with the Public Policy Institute of California Water Policy Center, will develop various milestone products including related economic impact assessments. As with many UC Merced research efforts, MCWDB will utilize the information to enhance quality of services provided to local job seekers and sector related businesses. MCWDB and its workforce partners will assess workforce needs that can be projected or arise from water management strategies identified in the assessment process and project related publications.

SECTION B. WIOA Title I Coordination

MCWDB strategically prepares grant proposals for projects supported with non-WIOA discretionary funding. MCWDB is able to leverage the existing WorkNet / Title I partnerships and infrastructures to deliver the special grant projects. The PY 2024-2025 grants are listed below:

Grant	Funding Source	Target Population
Prison to Employment (P2E)	California Workforce Development Board	Justice Involved Individuals / Probationers
Merced Youth Jobs	City of Merced	Youth

Probation Earn & Learn	Merced County Probation Office	Justice Involved / Probationers
Quest Grant 2022	National Dislocated Worker Grant	Dislocated Workers Dislocated Workers impacted by Covid
Quest Grant 2023	National Dislocated Worker Grant	Dislocated Workers Migrant Farmworkers and their families
RERP	California Workforce Development Board	Dislocated Worker English Language Learners, Low-income, Disinfested communities
Fresno HRCC	Fresno Regional Workforce Development Board	Adult/Dislocated Worker Women, English Language Learners, Immigrants, Refugees, Justice Involved, Youth, under resourced individuals
Breaking Barriers	Merced County Probation Office	Adult/Dislocated Worker Probationers that reside in Los Banos and Los Banos Community Members
Expanded Subsidized Employment	Merced County Human Service Agency	HSA Referrals CalWorks participants
Community Care Expansion	Horne LLP, Ca Dept of Social Services	Elderly Home Care Facilities
Workforce Outcomes Support	Irvine Foundation	AJCC / One-Stop Customers including young adults and aged out foster youth (18-24)

1. Training and/or professional development that will be provided to frontline staff to Gain and expand proficiency in digital fluency and distance learning.

MCDWB and Merced County Library System – 2025-2026

Resources for professional skills development will be part of a new partnership with the County Library system. The initial training resources available would focus on services to customers with limited digital literacy and new technologies to streamline case management / job search activities.

All MCWDB and Adult Career Services Staff are encouraged to take advantage of the resources available for workforce development case management training and industry-related professional certifications. In addition, MCWDB Management Staff are planning to hold training sessions focused on new customer system management (CSM) software implementation.

2. Training and/or professional development that will be provided to frontline staff to ensure cultural competencies and an understanding of the experiences of trauma- exposed populations.

The Regional Organizer will arrange training sessions covering topics such as trauma-related training and cultural competencies. The Workforce Development Board (WDB) may enhance these through various professional development opportunities rooted in trauma-informed care and human-centered design principles.

MCWDB and AJCC staff will participate in sessions that focus on “customer dignity.” Participants conduct an informal review of all customer touch points and environments to ensure all customers are supported.

Other Training and Professional Development Opportunities planned for 2025-2028 include:

- Trauma-Informed System Change for Management
- Customer Centered Services
- Brown Act training session
- Security Awareness Training
- Purchasing, Ordinance, and Policies
- Anti-Harassment / Hostile Work Environment
- Contract Monitoring
- Budget Development

MCWDB and Merced County coordinate efforts and leverage resources to impact the largest number of individuals possible. As needed and/or requested, professional development activities occur through referral to resources available online, in-person training sessions, and self-paced skills development, such as Metrix Learning.

The recent community engagement forums identified service delivery staff's ability to speak customers' native language determined the quality of visit / interactions. A Staff person's ability to be empathic and express it to job seekers was also noted as critical. MCWDB plans to address all information and service requests identified in the forums as part of the redesign process.

3. How the Local Board will coordinate workforce investment activities in the Local Area with statewide rapid response activities, as outlined in Rapid Response and Layoff Aversion Activities (WSD16-04).

In joint partnership both regionally and locally, the Merced Business Resource Team (BRT) and other staff coordinate with the EDD, HSA (Merced Human Services Agency), and community based organizations on surveying businesses to identify training and skills gaps, barriers, and solutions to growth, business satisfaction on partner services, continuous improvement to existing systems, unique and timely targeted training, layoff aversion and rapid response efforts.

MCWDB and its partners' goals are to prevent the need for Rapid Response activities by investing in solid layoff aversion activities. The Rapid Response team assists both employers and affected workers in downsizing and mass layoff events, ensuring access to system services.

Layoff aversion activities include economic development linkages and Incumbent Worker Training in small and medium-sized businesses. MCWDB attempts to avert layoffs through early intervention by referring troubled companies to local city and county economic development departments and business associations for assistance and providing skills training to employees through classroom or on-the-job training to prepare them for other jobs within the employer's business.

MCWDB continues to utilize the EconoVue system based upon data from Dunn & Bradstreet to identify stress levels of businesses and provide appropriate outreach before the business reaches the WARN notice stage. EconoVue also allows staff to track WARN notices that are not accounted for in CalJOBS.

Rapid Response Early Warning signs such as those observed by the EDD and MCWDB staff based on traffic patterns in the AJCC and receiving a Worker Adjustment Retraining and Notification Act (WARN) letter from the employer and the state. When the letter is received, the BRT and its partners will work closely with the employer and employees to deliver as many services as possible before their layoff occurs.

MCWDB's BRT is a proactive intermediary for priority industry sectors to educate and plan with business in the community in the event rapid response becomes necessary. Additionally, MCWDB collaborates with EDD/LMID to

research business activity to determine if the local employment market can absorb recent dislocated workers or determine if skill upgrades are needed. BRT’s goal is to avoid any time in between employment opportunities for the employees affected by the WARN.

Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) – IWT is an effective layoff aversion component of MCWDB's local rapid response effort. Small and medium-sized businesses need frequent workforce skills upgrades to stay competitive. Without IWT, the workforce in these industries can be at risk of displacement. A layoff is averted when (1) A worker's job is saved with an existing employer that is at risk of downsizing or closing or (2) A worker at risk of dislocation transitions to a different job with the same employer or a new job with a different employer and experiences a minimal unemployment period.

4. A description and assessment of the type and availability of adult and dislocated worker employment and training activities in the Local Area.

Note – This includes how the Local Board will ensure that priority for adult career and training services will be given to recipients of public assistance, other income low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient, as outlined in WIOA Adult Program Priority of Service (WSD24-06). Additional priority groups may need to be considered to serve the local area better. The Economic and Workforce Analysis section of the State Plan identifies workforce targets such as low-wage or high-unemployment industries that could be relevant to the local area’s needs.

WIOA provides states and Local Areas (LWIA) an opportunity to develop employment and training systems explicitly tailored to the state and local area's needs. MCWDB contracts with service providers in Merced County to offer employment and training services to support job seekers through all phases of their employment and re-employment process.

Service Site	City	Current Description	New Location Description
Comprehensive AJCC (One-Stop Center)	Merced	State/EDD Owned Building (Subleased Space to County)	Private Building – Office Space in Merced (County Held Lease with Partner Subleases)
Local Affiliate AJCC (One-Stop Center)	Los Banos	Private Building – Office in Los Banos (County Held Lease with Partner/Contractor Subleases)	Community College Campus – Office Space at Los Banos (Sublease with County)

Priority of service status is established at the time of the eligibility determination and does not change during the period of participation. Through its Adult and Dislocated worker provider, Veterans and eligible spouses continue to receive priority of service for all DOL-funded job training programs, including WIOA programs per Training and Employment Guidance Letter TEGL 10-09. Further, representatives funded through Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG), a required partner program under WIOA, are located in our AJCC. Priority of service provided to veterans per TEGL 10-09 are listed in order below:

First, veterans and eligible spouses (who also are included in the groups given statutory priority for WIOA adult formula funds). This means that veterans and eligible spouses who also are recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals*, or individuals who are basic skills deficient would receive priority for services provided with WIOA adult formula funds.

Second, non-covered participants (individuals who are not veterans or eligible spouses) who are included in the groups are given priority for services provided with WIOA adult formula funds.

Third involves veterans and eligible spouses who are not included in WIOA's priority groups.

Fourth, to any other populations identified by the Governor or Local Workforce Development Board for priority.

Last, non-covered persons outside the groups given priority under WIOA.

After Veteran Priority of Service, priority is then given to public assistance recipients, other low-income individuals, or individuals who are basic skills deficient. MCWDB has established strong pipelines of high-need customers by collaborating with community-based organizations, such as The Rescue Mission, Public institutions, and the Merced County Department of Child Support Services. The Adult and Dislocated Worker service provider recently met with MCWDB staff to establish a proactive, community-based outreach plan that will be seen regularly as part of community events and services advertised in community papers and social media.

Individuals from the service priority group(s) can be certified and enrolled on the same day

America's Job Center of California (AJCC) On-Site Resources

AJCCs provide onsite and virtual resources, including the following:

- Career services resource room;
- Access to computers and the internet;
- Office equipment (e.g., copiers, fax, and telephones);
- Access to business resources and interview rooms;
- Individualized career assistance and career counseling;
- Referrals to career training and GED and ESL programs;
- Access to Labor Market information; and,
- Assistance with job placement.

AJCC Career and Training Services

WIOA is designed to help job seekers access employment, training, education, and supportive services to succeed in the labor market. Basic Career Services, Individualized Services, Training Services, and Follow-Up Services are made available to all participants in an effort to meet a variety of needs of both Adult and Dislocated Workers. The MCWDB service delivery approach allows for maximum flexibility to meet participant needs.

MCWDB addresses employers' skills needs for their current and future workforce by working with training providers as they design and implement training programs. Training providers involve employers to provide input into the design of relevant training and offer feedback on the effectiveness of the training. This coordinated approach to addressing training providers' needs will ensure that they are providing "just in time" relevant training. MCWDB and training providers will utilize industry cluster studies and labor market data on growth occupations, as well as the State's online Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL), to align curriculum with in-demand skills needs.

All training development and targeted outreach activities will be modified to include occupations (as appropriate) that support the sectors identified in the reports issued by the coalition (THRIVE / Jobs First Program)

An increased number of enrollments and completion of pre-apprenticeship training and apprenticeships has helped prepare job seekers for careers in the construction trades. Merced

College programs introduce job seekers to opportunities in the trades. By continuing to develop our relationship with the Building Trades Council and the local Laborer's Union, our efforts to support Valley construction projects that continue to generate new apprenticeship opportunities.

Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP): Career Services

MCWDB continues to address existing performance indicator issues identified in the 2023 Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP). Progress has been made in the following areas: partner coordination / alignment, customer satisfaction survey (business), and facility specific issues. The CIP will be updated after the relocations are completed.

Relocation – Redesigned Environments for Career Services

MCWDB Staff (Impact Architects) are facilitating a comprehensive review and modification service design. The Redesign process includes purposeful design sessions with multiple customer groups.

The intent is for redesigned centers to provide “an experience” for customers that they consider customized, one they connect with and consider as “their space”. As a result, the traditional One-Stop Center / AJCC space will be transformed. Some of the new design features being considered include a focus on motivating and upbeat audio features, open spaces for remote workers to be alongside job seekers, and tactile experiences that are a catalyst for interactive career mapping and training plan tracking. The potential space is built to serve its users (people) as opposed to program requirements.

5. A description and assessment of the type and availability of youth workforce investment activities in the Local Area, as outlined in WIOA Youth Program Requirements (WSD17-07). Note – This includes any strategies for increasing the digital literacy and fluency of youth participants, including those with disabilities.

MCWDB Youth Program provides 18-24-year-old youth with comprehensive services to ensure education completion and access to skills training when appropriate. Youth Program staff must ensure a countywide distribution of services, enrollment of out-of-school youth under 18 and outreach/program promotion in rural communities. MCWDB's youth service provider is the Merced County Department of Education (MCOE) through PY 2025-2026.

MCOE offers access to all required components of WIOA Youth, including but not limited to career exploration, mentorships, work readiness and remediation, On-the-Job Training, vocational training, and WEX. All program youth complete comprehensive work readiness activities and then have access to training, WEX, and employment. MCWDB also participates in a countywide career day involving approximately 1,000 high school students. As part of the career day, MCWDB assists with the facilitation and coordination of the annual youth conference that exposes high school students to careers in targeted industry sectors. MCWDB uses these annual activities to recruit potential participants for the Youth program and provide career planning / pathway information.

Like the WIOA Adult Career services, MCWDB seeks out grant funding that can leverage the WIOA Youth program funds. Aligned youth programs include a City of Merced funded WEX program for resident youth—*Merced Youth Jobs*.

MCWDB regularly monitors Youth programs, including quarterly monitoring by MCWDB staff and annually by an external monitor. Monthly data in CalJOBS is assessed to track youth activities and progress, as well as demographic representation. The WIOA program enrolls approximately 200-250 youth each year.

6. The entity responsible for the disbursement of grant funds as determined by the Chief Elected Official (CEO) or the Governor and the competitive process that will be used to award the sub-grants and contracts for WIOA Title I activities.

The designated recipient for the disbursement of grant funds under WIOA is the Merced County Workforce Development Board and the Merced County Department of Workforce Investment, which is staff to the LWDB, as designated by the Chief Elected Official under WIOA Section 107(d)(12) (B)(i).

The County's Department of Workforce Investment staff administer procurement activities to support the delivery of WIOA programs and services. All procurement policies and practices comply with local, State and Federal requirements.

7. A description of how the Local Board fulfills the duties of the AJCC Operator and/or the Career Services Provider as outlined in Selection of AJCC Operators and Career Services Providers (WSD22-13). This should include the name(s) and role(s) of all entities with whom the Local Board contracts.

Merced County / MCWDB is planning to release a Request for Proposal in April 2025 for One-Stop Operator services. The scope of services will include duties identified in WSD22-13 as well as activities to support the MCWDB local and region's strategic initiatives. The AJCC operator's role includes coordinating the service delivery of required AJCC partners and service providers and ensuring the implementation of partner responsibilities and contributions agreed upon in the Memorandum of Understanding.

Beaudette Consulting is the local One-Stop Operator for MCWDB through June 30, 2025. Merced County executed the agreement with Beaudette Consulting and the Department of Workforce Investment staff perform all required oversight / administrative functions.

The Adult and Dislocated Worker Career Services Provider's role includes providing basic career services, including but not limited to participant intake, orientations, initial assessments, employment services, and referrals to other partners and services.

America's Job Center of California (AJCC) On-Site Resources:

AJCCs provide onsite and virtual resources, including the following: career services resource room; access to computers and the internet; office equipment (e.g., copiers, fax, and telephones); access to business resources and interview rooms; individualized career assistance and career counseling; referrals to career training and GED and ESL programs; access to Labor Market information; and assistance with job placement. While most of these in-person services have been available virtually and by limited availability via in-person appointment, MCWDB began to re-open its centers on March 8, 2021. Currently the AJCCs are open to the public with no restrictions in place.

AJCC Career and Training Services:

WIOA is designed to help job seekers access employment, training, education, and supportive services to succeed in the labor market. Basic Career Services, Individualized Services, Training Services, and Follow-Up Services are made available to all participants in an effort to meet a variety of needs of both Adult and Dislocated Workers. The service delivery approach allows for maximum flexibility to meet participant needs. MCWDB addresses employers' skills needs for their current and future workforce by working with training providers as they design and implement training programs. Training providers involve employers to provide input into the design of relevant training and offer feedback on the effectiveness of the training. This coordinated approach to addressing training providers' needs will ensure that they are providing "just in time" relevant training. MCWDB and training providers will utilize industry cluster studies and labor market data on growth occupations, as well as the State's online Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL), to align curriculum with in-demand skills needs.

CareerTeam is the Adult and Dislocated Worker Career Services Provider through June 30, 2027.

In partnership with Career Team, MCWDB offers access to [CareerEdge Merced](#). This website is made available to all MCWDB and AJCC service partners.

Career Edge Merced website includes user friendly access to the following tools and training programs:

Tools:

Resume Builder

Mock Job Application

Cover and Thank You Letter Templates

Business Plan Builder

Modules:
 Self-Assessments
 Managing Change & Your Attitude
 Goal Setting
 Learning / Study Skills
 Stress and Time Management
 Budgeting
 Online Learning Skills for Students
 Cultural Diversity & Conflict Resolution
 Professional Branding
 Networking
 Interview Preparation and Skill Building
 On Job Success
 Planning for Future

Merced County executed the agreement with CareerTeam and the Department of Workforce Investment staff perform all required oversight / administrative functions.

The County's Department of Workforce Investment staff administer procurement activities to support the delivery of all WIOA programs and services. The procurement policies and practices related to WIOA, Adult Career Services, and the AJCC/One-Stop Operator comply with local, State and Federal requirements

SECTION C.		APPENDICES	
1. Summary of Stakeholder and Community Engagement			
Mode of Outreach	Target of Outreach	Summary of Attendance	Comments
Event Flyer: Website Posting and Email Distribution	Included Individuals from Priority Populations / Community Members, Organizations Serving Priority Groups AJCC Stakeholders, Businesses/Sector Representatives and Entities Supporting Underserved Communities	Los Banos January 23, 2025 Approximately 40 attendees/participants from targeted communities and organizations throughout the county	<p>The Los Banos session focused on service delivery in two categories: products and experiences</p> <p>Products Identified Include: Basic Computer Skill Training, Easy to Use Program & Service Maps, App to Navigate Services, Transportation Assistance, and an expedited eligibility tool</p> <p>Experiences described as / with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well trained counselors with diverse backgrounds • Quality customized career counseling • In-Person and Virtual (using the latest technologies) • Equity in Service Access for individuals with disabilities and English Learners

Event Flyer: Website Posting and Email Distribution	Included Individuals from Priority Populations / Community Members, Organizations Serving Priority Groups AJCC Stakeholders, Businesses/Sector Representatives and Entities Supporting Underserved Communities	Merced January 29, 2025 Approximately 40 attendees/participants from targeted communities and organizations throughout the county	The Merced session focused on customers' priorities (customer centered) services and potential for opportunities that emerge as problems are reframed/redesigned or innovative solutions are considered + implemented by staff
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The community and stakeholders provided specific feedback around three specific service areas:

- Vocational Skills Training + Certificate and License Resulting in Employment
- Information / Resources focused on local labor market (requirements, demand and pay)
- Customized Career Counseling based on experience, skills, and interests

In addition, Community members identified specific customer personas + goals and the related barriers as part of the Merced session. The motivations behind actions to overcome obstacles were documented for over twenty-five customer profiles. Small group discussions and notes + “report outs” provided information that will drive new program development, service modifications, and support ongoing efforts in Merced’s continuous improvement activities.

PUBLIC COMMENTS THAT DISAGREE WITH THE PROGRAM YEAR 2025-28 LOCAL PLAN	
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1	From:	Date:
	Comment:	

2	From:	Date:
	Comment:	

3	From:	Date:
	Comment:	

4	From:	Date:
	Comment:	

5	From:	Date:
	Comment:	

Public Review Period / Comments

The MCWDB 2025-2028 WIOA Local Plan and subsequent updates were posted on the MCWDB website for a 30-day public comment period beginning on March 21, 2025. Hard copies were available at the MCWDB office, and at both AJCCs and accommodations were made for any party need a copy translated to another language. Notice of this publication and comment period will be announced through the following outlets:

- Posting to the MCWDB website at <https://worknetmerced.com/public-notice>
- Public Service Announcement provided to the County clerks in Merced County to be posted at all courthouses.
- Email notices distributed to the Chairperson of all County Board supervisors within Merced County and all MCWDB board members; and
- AJCC partners and local community-based organizations will be notified of the publication end 30-day comment period via email

The posting period commenced on March 21, 2025, and terminated on April 21, 2025.

The published attachments, comments, MCWDB response(s) to comments, and a copy of the notice will be forwarded to the California Department of Workforce Development in the manner required in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Final Local Plan Guidelines.

After the conclusion of the 30-day public comment period, members of leadership meet to review any comments received and to determine which comments were to be incorporated into the plan.

PUBLIC NOTICE

2025-2028 Local Workforce Development Plan for Title I of the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act for the Merced County Workforce Development Board

The Merced County Workforce Development Board is inviting the public to provide comments on the draft of the Local Workforce Development Plan for 2025-2028. Funding for the services outlined in this plan comes from Title I of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

You can review the local plan at the following locations:

- Merced AJCC, 1205 W. 18th Street, Merced, CA 95340
- Merced County Workforce Development Board office, 1900 Airdrome Entry, Atwater, CA 95301
- Breaking Barriers, 445 I Street Building A, Los Banos, CA 93635

These locations are open Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Additionally, the local plan is available on the Workforce Development Board's webpage at <https://worknetmerced.com/public-notice>

Public comments on the local plan will be accepted until April 21, 2025. You can submit your comments via email to: yang.her@countyofmerced.com.

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION DESIGNEE AND PLAN SIGNATURES

This local plan represents the Merced County Workforce Development Board's efforts to maximize and coordinate resources available under Title I of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

This local plan is submitted for the period of July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2029, in accordance with the provision of WIOA.

County of Merced

Local Board Authorized Representative

Leslie Abasta – Cummings Chairperson

APPROVED AS TO LEGAL FROM
MERCED COUNTY

DEPARTMENT OF WORKFORCE
INVESTMENT

Erick Serrato, Director

DRAFT