**WIF Grantee Summary**

**Lower Rio Workforce Solutions**

**Project Name: Growing Regional Opportunity for the Workforce (GROW)**

**Mission:**
The Border Workforce Alliance, which consists of five Workforce Investment Boards in South Texas, seeks to accelerate credential attainment and career entry by lower-skilled adults and out-of-school youth through a mixture of program alignment, new technology platforms, tailored services and programs, coordinated case management and supportive services, career pathways aligned with employer demand, and increased systems capacity. The project will implement and test innovative approaches that are data-driven and evidenced based, to serving lower-skilled and limited English proficient jobseekers. The project will document and share the outcomes for the benefit of the public workforce system.

**Location:**
McAllen, Texas

**Grant Award Amount:**
$5,999,998

**Areas Served:**

**Innovation Focus Area:**
Data Systems/MIS
Lower-Skilled Adults
Career Pathways

**Target Population Served:**
All Workforce System Customers

**Target Industries Engaged:**
TBD; likely:
Healthcare
Construction
Manufacturing
Transportation
Distribution and Logistics

**Partners:**
Workforce Investment Boards, contracted service providers, community colleges,

**Initiative Goals:**
- Better serve the needs of job seekers by aligning workforce system programs and services with Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language to obtain operating efficiencies and accelerate time to completion of credentials for lower-skilled adult learners.
- Increase the efficiency of service delivery by strengthening coordination of case management and supportive services across multiple workforce investment areas to increase persistence, retention, and completion of training programs.
- Facilitate stronger cooperation across programs and funding streams by linking education and training programs to employer labor market needs using a sector-based approach.

**Approach:**
Workforce Solutions’ Growing Regional Opportunity for the Workforce (GROW) initiative will bring together five local workforce investment areas with partners from Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language, and Career and Technical Education to support accelerated credential attainment and career entry for lower-skilled adults along the Texas-Mexico border. GROW will increase education attainment and employment outcomes through: new operating efficiencies gained through program alignment and a common technology platform; designing programs and services to address the specific needs of sub-populations; improved coordination of case management and support services; and career pathways aligned with identified employer needs.

To support the evaluation of each aspect of the project, GROW will segment the lower-skilled adult population along the border into three sub-populations and will offer each sub-group services that are designed to meet their particular needs. Specifically, Group A will consist of adults with a GED or high school diploma with high school-
level skills (between 9th and 12th grade) but not college-ready, and they will be referred to Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA) for assessment and potential participation in the Innovative Strategies for Increasing Self-Sufficiency (ISIS) study project. The Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Open Society Foundations funded this project. Group A participants who are randomly assigned into the treatment group will engage in VIDA’s intensive semester-long College Prep Academy before entering their occupational pathways; those who are randomly assigned to a control group will be referred to organizations that are not participating in ISIS. Group B, comprised of out-of-school youth and older adults without a GED or high school diploma but with high school skill levels, will participate in contextualized GED preparation in an accelerated format, allowing participants to earn their GED in one to two semesters. Group C, comprised of adults who do not have a GED or high school diploma and who have low English literacy and proficiency, will be engaged in contextualized bridge programs in healthcare, construction, transportation, distribution and logistics, and manufacturing sectors. This project is unique because it will develop a comprehensive career pathway starting with low-skilled adults without a GED and getting them to the point that they are college ready; participants in Group C will increase their skill levels to enter Group B, obtain their GED, and enter Group A. This project design is leveraging the work of the ISIS career pathways study to test the efficacy of services provided along the career pathway (i.e. bridge, contextualized GED, and college preparation.)

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