

STEM Opportunities in the Workforce System Initiative

Operation Workforce

Grantee: WorkFORCE Solutions of the Lower Rio Grande Valley

Industry Focus: STEM with an emphasis on manufacturing and construction/skilled trades

Key Partners: Workforce Investment Boards including Workforce Solutions of South Texas, Cameron Works, Middle Rio Grande Workforce Board, and Upper Rio Grande Work System; Texas A&M International University; Sul Ross State University; University of Texas at El Paso; South Texas College; Laredo Community College; Southwest Texas Junior College; El Paso Community College; Tech Prep of the Rio Grande Valley; Good Samaritan Community Services; McAllen Economic Development Corporation; City of El Paso Office of Economic Development; a number of regional professional associations, school districts, and businesses.

Grant Amount: \$1,999,180

Leveraged Amount: \$1,791,800

Location of Grant Activities: 23 counties along the Texas-Mexico border

Challenge: One of the fastest growing regions in the United States, the percentage of families living below the poverty level was 27 percent in 2006, compared with 12 percent statewide. Further, the region had a 9.1 percent unemployment rate throughout 2006, and 38 percent of adult residents possess less than a ninth-grade education. Career opportunities exist in the growing manufacturing and construction industries, but there is a need among employers for skilled workers.

Addressing the Challenge: Operation Workforce will establish six One-Stop-based STEM Centers of Excellence to provide dislocated workers and disadvantaged youth with the skills needed to enter careers in high-growth industries. Focusing on construction and manufacturing, the centers will offer participants customized career training and preparation services designed to meet employer demands. Articulation agreements among K-12 schools, community colleges, and universities will create seamless transitions for students pursuing STEM credentials. STEM coaches will take a multifaceted approach linking participants to educational opportunities and forging ties with regional employers as mentors.

Projected Outcomes:

- More than 1,500 dislocated workers and disadvantaged youth will enter STEM-related employment following training
- 800 dislocated workers will earn a STEM-related degree
- 500 youth will earn a STEM-related degree
- 350 high school teachers will participate in professional development training

