A. As a Planning Region, complete the following questions:

1. Provide an analysis of the regional economic conditions, including:

a. Existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations; and

In the Eastern region, changing economic conditions have created new areas of growth and opportunity in a variety of sectors and occupations. A small number of jobs can have a large impact on this region. For example, a recent hiring at Goodwill added 32 jobs to the Eastern region, which is equivalent to 5,340 jobs in Denver when factoring the population size different. The Colorado Workforce Development Council identified three exploring or emerging industries in the Eastern region for Sector Partnerships - Energy & Natural Resources, Health & Wellness, and Transportation & Logistics. This region has typically maintained a strong presence in Energy & Natural Resources, due to the presence of the Oil & Gas market, however with the recent economic downturn in this area and the forecast of low per barrel oil prices, the Eastern region has seen an increase in layoffs or underemployment in this field. The impact is felt at the frontline, from tool pushers to fracking crews, as well as at the executive level with companies cutting from both the top and bottom. Much of the work in this industry is cyclical, so this industry will always be a focus for Eastern Sub-Local Area Workforce Centers. Despite this downturn, there is still a focus on Energy & Natural Resources because of emerging technology in these industries and an increasing presence of natural energy sources in the region. There is also a crossover between this industry along with Transportation & Logistics - an increase in oil prices or a change in energy technology can have a large impact on transportation as a whole.

The members of the Eastern Regional Planning Group identified three top growth areas for their region: Health & Wellness, Manufacturing, and Food & Agriculture. Healthcare continues to expand in the Eastern region with a focus on nursing and other mid-level providers to meet the needs of the growing and aging population - Banner Health, Colorado Plains
MEdical Center, Melissa Memorial, Plains Medical Center, Kit Carson County Memorial Hospital, Salud Clinic System, and Centennial Mental Health all have a presence in the Eastern region and are all experiencing growth in patient numbers, especially as the area’s population ages. Residents 60 years and older rose from 23,355 to 26,004, according to EMSI data. While just over a 1% increase, the strain on rural health systems as this population ages (hospice, longer term care/nursing homes, home based care) creates a demand for Certified Nursing Assistants as well as higher level care providers and specialists.

For Manufacturing and Food & Agriculture, the focus for the Eastern region will be on technological changes in these industries and an increased need for industrial maintenance and technologically certified occupations. Local community colleges are also responding to this need - for example, creating Associates of Wind Technology at Northeastern Junior College.

b. The employment needs of employers in those industry sectors and occupations;

Employers will be faced with a variety of needs as the top industries in the Eastern region shift. There will need to be educational programs to provide necessary skills in nursing, agricultural technology, engineering, informational technology, and other emerging occupations. For the occupations identified in Colorado’s “Top Jobs” list, a majority require high levels of one or more STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) fields. This perspective is in alignment with the Colorado Talent Pipeline Report who found that 62 percent of the occupations for the future pipeline are STEM-related.

Employers continue to stress the importance of “soft skills” in addition to educational skills such as science and technology. The need for individuals, both young and mid-level, who have solid interviewing skills, a dependable work ethic, and the ability to interact successfully with a customer is always a need for employers throughout the region. In addition, employers may continue to struggle to have employees who are able to successfully pass a drug test, with the legalization of marijuana in the state. Many local employers that participated in our regional planning event shared struggles in this area.

The Eastern region has a high rate of youth migration, similar to many areas throughout Colorado, which means that employers may have a more difficult time finding enough employees in one area which can impact their ability to grow. This, combined with relatively stagnant growth in the Construction sector, makes it difficult for employers to find enough local employees with the right skills to serve their needs. Colorado overall, primarily in the Front Range, is seeing a population increase that will contribute to economic growth, but that is not being reflected in the Eastern region, where housing development is limited.

Employers also need to reflect the changing needs of employees, primarily millennials. Remote technology, work-life balance, and flexible management are all examples of evolving needs that employers have to confront to attract a stable and dedicated workforce.
2. **Provide an analysis of the knowledge and skills needed to meet the employment needs of the employers in the region, including employment needs in in-demand industry sectors and occupations.**

In Morgan County, ¼ of the county does not have a GED or high school equivalency. Many second language learners. Employers need systems to bring and teach these skills - program where potential employees can get technical skills such as plumbing or mechanics alongside a GED or equivalency program, such as the one that exists at Morgan Community College. Or the “Jump Start to Nursing” program at Northeastern Junior College to help nursing students successfully complete their CNA exams through support services. This helps ensure that employers ensure their future workforce learning the technical and soft skills they need to be successful.

It’s not just emerging technology jobs where skills are needed - most of the emerging industries in the Eastern region still require basic skill experience such as maintenance staff, plumbers, and electricians for hospitals, manufacturing facilities, or agricultural production. These skilled maintenance positions are a critical gap at this time - career technical education is going to be crucial over the next four years. One example of the Eastern response to this growing need is at Morgan Community College. Morgan Community College (MCC) recently formed a new advisory board for a proposed Associate of Science Degree in Industrial Maintenance Electrical/Mechanical. The push for a new degree came on the heels of the successful launch of a new course last spring, Basic Industrial Electricity (EIC 104), which ran with two filled sections. The EIC course offering was in partnership with Cargill, who was looking to advance the electrical skills of some of their employees and help them to be promotable within the organization.

Employers need to communicate directly with colleges and high schools that there is a high need in this area and the benefits for youth and other individuals as a career option. The Eastern Youth Council is moving towards offering more connection points to youth and traditional technical education employers through an apprenticeship career fair. The Youth Council (through partnerships with entities such as the School to Work Alliance program, K-12 and community college representation, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and additional youth advocacy representatives) plan to offer this format annually from 2016 forward. This is just one method being implemented to capture those high school students who aren’t necessarily college-degree bound.

Finally, adult education is an important component of ensuring a successful workforce, and Colorado continues to face challenges in this area. There are very limited funding for these programs. The staff and teachers don’t receive high wages for these jobs, making it difficult to retain staff. In addition, many staff are part-time which provides no benefits or higher wages.
3. Provide an analysis of the workforce in the region, including current labor force employment and unemployment data, and information on labor market trends, and the educational and skill levels of the workforce in the region, including individuals with barriers to employment;

In 2015, the Eastern region had a population of 112,397 individuals and 44,779 jobs - this resulted in a lower unemployment rate than other regions. The data are slightly skewed for unemployment here as agriculture is not fully factored in, which is important is such a large agricultural region. The state of Colorado experienced 7.5% population growth, while the Eastern region saw only a 1% growth increase. As previously mentioned, this slower pace of growth in comparison to overall state growth makes it difficult for employers to find enough local employees with the right skills to serve their needs. The low unemployment rate may be seen as a note of success, but actually serves to highlight the struggle facing employers over the next several years to recruit individuals to this region to work. Currently, the low unemployment rate means that employers are simply not able to find enough individuals, qualified or otherwise, to meet their employment needs. The average earnings of an individual from the Eastern region in 2015 were $41,435, yet this average does not reflect the relatively high earnings of individuals from the Oil & Gas industry. When these individuals experience job fluctuation due to changing market conditions and oil prices, their average wage becomes a challenge for case managers and workforce center staff in providing support. [Source: EMSI Q3 2015 Data Set]

The top program completions were Health Professions and Related Programs (283), Liberal Arts and Sciences (237), and Agriculture (114). In 2015, 47.2% of the population had a high school diploma or lower in terms of their educational attainment. This speaks to a high need to increase access to programs like concurrent enrollment or vocational trade educational to support this population in securing meaningful employment. The top industries for employment in 2015 were Government (10,222 jobs), Crop & Animal Production (5,122 jobs), Retail Trade (4,144 jobs), and Manufacturing (3,884 jobs).

The members of the Eastern Regional Planning Group identified three top growth areas for their region in 2016: Health & Wellness, Manufacturing, and Food & Agriculture (including Transportation and Logistics). Despite the projected growth in these areas, there are still barriers to employment for individuals throughout the Eastern region. As previously mentioned, many local employers that participated in our regional planning event shared struggles in finding individuals who could successfully pass a pre-employment drug screen.

Another major barrier is in the ability to speak and write in English. The Eastern region has a high refugee population with a wide range of spoken languages including Spanish, Somali, Eritrean, French, Swahili, Arabic, and Guatemalan, amongst others. In 2005, the city of Fort Morgan became a secondary migration area for the resettlement of Somali refugees to work at Cargill’s Meat Solutions processing plant. By the end of 2013, over 1,000 Somali refugees had
resettled to Fort Morgan, joined by refugees from other east African countries. According to U.S. Census 2013 estimates, Morgan County, with a population of about 28,400, ranks 6th highest among the state’s 64 counties for the number of foreign born, at 12.6%. Further, approximately 26.5% of the population speaks a primary language other than English.

Obtaining the necessary soft skills to function successfully at work is another barrier identified by employers. Employees need skills in areas such as job readiness and preparation, interviewing skills, interpersonal relationship management, and other key areas. The Eastern region has several success stories in this area - for example, the Career Pathways and Adult Education program at Morgan Community College. Students and adult learners receive access to training and support in soft skills and in partnership with employers, are eligible to earn promotions as they progress in their learning. At Northeastern Junior College, there is a program called “Get Your Game On” where students and adult learners are tasked with the management and oversight of a school store. They learn in real time the needs and struggles of managers, the experience of managing employees that don’t arrive to work on time, and other crucial components of running a business successfully. In addition, non-English speaking individuals who learn English, gain additional educational successes, and secure gainful employment serve as mentors and role models for others in their community or new immigrants who may be coming to the region.

Transportation has been and continues to be a challenge and barrier for many individuals seeking employment in the Eastern region. There are limited public transportation options: County Express and small city bus routes can provide some support, but there is no comprehensive transportation system that addresses the full range of barriers faced by individuals. Some employers are trying to tackle this barrier head-on by providing shuttle services for employees, but the cost and liability risk are often too large for employers. Finally, child care is another significant barrier faced by individuals. There is a lack of child care facilities in the Eastern region, which limits the ability of parents to seek employment. The regulations and requirements for licensed child care centers and staff are high and the number of centers has dropped in the region because of this. There are currently only four licensed centers for the entire 10 county region - this is extremely insufficient for the 17,000 square foot miles with a population of 6,374 children under five years and under. Despite this being a significant barrier, members of the Eastern Regional Planning Group identified this as a potential area for growth, especially if focusing on family and home care providers and growing services to provide them with training and experience to care for children safely and appropriately in their homes.

4. **Describe the development and implementation of sector initiatives for in-demand industry sectors or occupations for the planning region, and explain how sector partnerships will be utilized to facilitate the engagement of employers, including small employers and employers in in-demand industry sectors and occupations, in workforce development programs.**
Sector partnerships are an area of key importance for the Eastern region due to the geographic layout of the region and limited access to transportation systems. One example of the development and implementation of such a partnership is in the wind technology and nursing programs at Northeastern Junior College. The Eastern Sub-Local Area Workforce Center and Northeastern Junior College created a close partnership to assist with development of this program to meet growing industry needs as well as support with tuition payments for students in the region. In 2015, the students in the wind technology program achieved a 100% placement rate for school-to-work. Their last LPN to ADN nursing class had 100% of graduates working in the field within six months of graduation.

This successful partnership also ensures that most graduates are being placed here regionally - not moving on to other regions for employment. Grants and other forms of support help keep programs like this successful, but there is always the challenge of securing more funds to ensure the vitality of the program.

Future strategies will include a focus on increasing the presence of industries that are currently underrepresented in established sector partnerships. One area of opportunity is in apprenticeship programs - there is a lack of presence for these programs in the Eastern region, so one component of this plan will be to engage programs from the region or other major regions nearby (e.g. the Denver metro area) to recruit these programs to the Eastern region. Another important partner for the future will be in healthcare services, including mental health. If an individual seeks education and certifications in mental health occupations (e.g. certified addiction counselors, family therapists, etc.), there are significant requirements for observation and supervision hours than can only be completed by an individual who already holds those certifications. The Eastern region workforce will be exploring partnerships over the next year to help meet this need for supervision hours, as well as exploring ways to increase the number of jobs available in these industries throughout the region.

Small businesses can be more difficult to connect with throughout the Eastern region due to workforce center staff sizes and constraints. For example, if a workforce center staff member takes the day to travel to small business sites to educate them on opportunities for partnership, that can mean the workforce center office would need to be shut down if there is only one staff member in the rural area. When these partnerships exist however, they are quite successful. There is an increased focus on entrepreneurship and often an increased willingness to hire or train youth in their small business operations.

One success story is in a partnership between the Eastern Sub-Area Workforce Center and several regional small businesses - they were able to pay the wages for a few youth to get positions started, which was a huge incentive for small businesses to engage.

Marketing and branding for the workforce centers has always been a challenge, and this echoes in relationships with small businesses. Many small businesses simply don’t know what the workforce centers do and how a mutually beneficial partnership can be created. With support
at the statewide level, the Eastern region can continue to increase its marketing and branding efforts to create additional name recognition and drive demand from employers to engage in partnerships. It will be important to connect workforce trends in this area directly to businesses so they can respond appropriately. One proposed new partner from the Eastern Regional Planning Group was the Early Childhood Council, which can provide training for individuals to serve as in-home child care providers.

5. Describe how career pathways will be used to meet the needs of employers and support work-based learning opportunities.

Career pathways are a crucial focus for the Eastern region. The Eastern Regional Planning Group outline career pathways for the three top emerging industries: Health & Wellness, Manufacturing, and Food & Agriculture (including Transportation and Logistics).

In Health & Wellness, there is an increased focus on developing sustainable educational programs for nursing, certified nurse assistants, and other mid-level providers and support occupations. Morgan Community College is a regional model for success, especially as it pertains to their nursing program. Northeastern Junior College is also focusing on this area by working to expand their nursing education program. There are many areas of opportunity with changes from the Affordable Care Act still trickling down in rural areas, and these community colleges are well-positioned to respond to those changes to help create and enhance career pathways for future employees. Within the region, there are existing informal relationships with the Banner Health system - this is an area of opportunity to solidify into a formal sector partnership to enhance career pathways within that system. In addition to formal healthcare occupations, there are many opportunities for industrial maintenance and operational technology positions that need to be supported through career pathways. Partnerships between health systems and industrial maintenance programs, such as the new program at Morgan Community College, will be an important component of training new future employees.

Some programs, such as certified nurse assistant programs, are not eligible for Pell Grants, which can be a barrier for individuals who need access to financial aid. Programs such as the aforementioned Jump Start Into Nursing can help fill that gap, but are dependent on funding sources.

In Manufacturing, there is a focus on natural resources, including wind technology, mechanical engineering, diesel, and industrial maintenance. The Eastern region sees this as an area of opportunity, especially as it pertains to diversifying individuals who may have left the Oil & Gas sector because of the economic downturn.

The industrial maintenance program at Morgan Community College provides this career pathway, and they often have students placed into internships or directly hired after only one semester by an employer, who can support their continued education. There are barriers for
individuals without a GED or high school equivalency, but there are existing resources that can provide support while earning that certification. Morgan Community College offers a program where individuals can complete their GED while doing a certificate for welding, electrical, or industrial maintenance. As previously mentioned, the students in the wind technology program at NJC in 2015 achieved a 100% placement rate for school-to-work - another example of a successful career pathway.

In Food & Agriculture and Transportation & Logistics, there are several efforts underway both in technological advancement as well as certified testing for trucking and other forms of transport. This region is a natural area of expansion for Transportation & Logistics due to the I-70 corridor presence. Yuma is working to get a certified testing site for a Commercial Driver's License, while Sage Trucking School provides classes in Yuma County for potential drivers, thanks to a relationship with Yuma County Department of Human Services. There are several local and national companies with a presence in the Eastern region with a need for transport and logistics occupations including ethanol production, pork production, feed lots, dairy production, and many other areas of agriculture that all require certified drivers. In addition, there are two new Loves truck stops - one that began recruitment in January in Burlington to add 90 jobs, and another being planning in Brush that is estimated to add 65 jobs.

6. Describe other strategies and services that will be used in the planning region to support a local workforce development system that meets the needs of businesses in the planning region.

One strategy generated by the Eastern Regional Planning Group was to expand the sector partnerships with local dairy producers to understand more about the occupations in demand and create career pathways in response. As mentioned, there is a need for both technologically advanced occupations as well as maintenance and frontline staff positions for agricultural production, so this could be a strong area of growth in developing a responsive workforce system.

There will also be an increased focus on connections and partnerships with small businesses. Though these businesses require more time and outreach, the benefits can be quite impactful to workforce development. This area of focus requires more investment in supporting future employees with developing soft skills that make them attractive to potential employers.

As formal sector partnerships increase, the Eastern Regional Planning Group also feels there are opportunities for workforce staff and business staff to work together on aligning career-specific language (e.g. manufacturing vs. aerospace production). Individuals may be more
interested in careers that have more appropriate job titles or descriptions, and workforce staff can assist with that education and alignment between supply and demand of occupations.

7. **Describe efforts that have taken place or anticipated efforts to assess the need for and establish regional service strategies, including the use of cooperative service delivery agreements. In addition:**
   a. **Describe the strategies and services that will be used in the planning region to better coordinate workforce development programs and services with regional economic development services and providers;**

   The coordination between workforce development programs and services with regional economic development services and providers has always been a focus for the Eastern region due to the rural geographic nature of the region. One major area of opportunity would be to have standardized forms between DHS and workforce to ensure that staff are documenting metrics and client information in the same way - this will be one of the goals of this action plan. Several of the community colleges in the region have cooperative service agreements with other schools as well as for concurrent enrollment. Changes in the teaching credential requirements by the Higher Learning Commission may actually decrease the region's ability to provide more concurrent opportunities for high school students. With healthcare being a major focus of industry expansion for the Eastern region, increase attention to these programs and services will be crucial over the next four years.

   Sector partnerships and cooperative service agreements are important and the Eastern Regional Planning Group plans to spend the first year of this plan assessing the current state of partnerships and agreements - total numbers, status of formal agreements, and planning for formalizing existing informal relationships. From there, the agreements will be evaluated on their merits, which will then allow workforce staff to commit over the next two years to manage and grow agreements in the most appropriate areas. One major challenge to address will be the difficulty in providing coordinated regional services across such a large and rural geographic region. To address this, the Eastern region will focus on strategies that reflect remote engagement and virtual job fairs.

   b. **Describe how the planning region will strategically coordinate workforce investment activities with the provision of adult education and literacy activities under title II.**

   There are several strategic areas for coordinating workforce investment activities with adult education and family literacy. One identified goal is to partner more closely with community colleges and workforce centers to make sure their adult students are signed up with
workforce. Morgan Community College and the workforce centers use the same assessments, resulting in clear opportunities to share data. Having workforce center staff present at community colleges to enroll students in workforce initiatives would provide great opportunities for students, but there are still challenges to overcome as previously mentioned, especially as it pertains to small workforce center staff numbers and struggles to increase outreach and maintain operations.

Community colleges also work with the Bridges Out of Poverty program to help adults break out of poverty cycles, provide ESL classes, and connect students to job pipelines across various industries. An important gap is among adult students who may never be able to receive a GED or high school equivalency due to literacy or learning disability struggles, but who could still be employable. There are opportunities for workforce staff to connect with local businesses to share how these individuals can be great employees, even if they don’t have a GED, with the right support.

For offenders exiting out of the Department of Corrections, there are programs to help individuals register with workforce before their release so they can prepare to work right away. One business member of the Eastern Regional Planning Group shared about an experience with meeting and interviewing offenders before their release and how positive the experience was for him and his staff.

The best way for potential employees to connect with adult education in the Eastern region is through the community colleges and other educational institutions. Certification classes in a community setting struggle to break even because of small numbers of participants and challenges around getting certified teachers in those community settings. The most important component is to have direct connections to an employment pipeline - the adult education on its own does not provide sufficient incentive for individuals to participate. These strategies need to happen concurrently with building relationships and service agreements with employers to increase position numbers throughout the Eastern region.

c. Describe how the planning region will strategically coordinate workforce investment activities with the provision of vocational rehabilitation services under title IV.

There are existing resource sharing agreements between Division of Vocational Rehabilitation services and the Fort Morgan workforce center where staff share the physical location. This relationship will be enhanced by the transition of DVR to CDLE management on 1 July 2016. The planning region will be focusing on increasing the interconnection between DVR programs and workforce center efforts. One example is that DVR staff will be working with NJC staff to present at adult education classes to recruit more clients. Increasing DVR’s presence
alongside the workforce presence, especially as more work is done to improve marketing and branding efforts, will be an important strategy for coordinating activities. In addition, the Fort Morgan workforce center engaged in discussions with Morgan County DHS to utilize their forms as a part of the employability plan with the workforce center to try to reduce duplication of forms and paperwork.

d. Describe the strategies and services that will be used in the planning region to strengthen linkages between the one-stop delivery system and unemployment insurance programs.

As previously mentioned, the coordination between workforce development programs and services with regional economic development services and providers has always been a focus for the Eastern region due to the rural geographic nature of the region. Currently, all UI recipients are required to register with workforce center and workforce center staff focus on engaging with these individuals early on in their UI process. One goal for this regional plan is to enroll more individuals into the dislocated worker program. Like many other areas in Colorado, there are existing workforce placement spots for UI recipients that go unfilled. Along with an increase in marketing and branding for workforce centers overall, it will be important to include increase UI engagement and messages that target the difference between UI and workforce center programs. There is a joint strategic planning process taking place through CDLE that emphasized the growth towards a more coordinated hand-off between workforce and unemployment that is also expected to support the Eastern region.

e. Provide a description of how the local board will coordinate workforce investment activities carried out in the local area with statewide rapid response activities, as described in section 134(a)(2)(A);

The local board will be increasing relationships and partnerships with small businesses so that those organizations connect with workforce in anticipation of a major layoff or dislocation event. Over the last year, there has only been one rapid response activity and one trade adjustment enrollment. While the WARN Act specifies that Rapid Response is formalized once the dislocation impacts 25 employees, much smaller dislocation events can have a significant level of negative impact in a smaller, rural community. Workforce center staff make every attempt to be part of any lay-off process, despite the numbers impacted, in an effort to transition
the dislocated worker in the fastest and most sustainable manner possible. Board support and a change in marketing message should better position the region to be more proactive in response to smaller layoffs.

8. Provide a description of the replicated cooperative agreements (as defined in section 107(d)(11)) between the local board or other local entities described in section 101(a)(11)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 721(a)(11)(B)) and the local office of a designated State agency or designated State unit administering programs carried out under title I of such Act (29 U.S.C. 720 et seq.) (other than section 112 or part C of that title (29 U.S.C. 732, 741) and subject to section 121(f)) in accordance with section 101(a)(11) of such Act (29 U.S.C. 721(a)(11)) with respect to efforts that will enhance the provision of services to individuals with disabilities and to other individuals, such as cross training of staff, technical assistance, use and sharing of information, cooperative efforts with employers, and other efforts at cooperation, collaboration, and coordination;

Sector partnerships and cooperative service agreements are important and the Eastern Regional Planning Group plans to spend the first year of this plan assessing the current state of partnerships and agreements - total numbers, status of formal agreements, and planning for formalizing existing informal relationships. From there, the agreements will be evaluated on their merits, which will then allow workforce staff to commit over the next two years to manage and grow agreements in the most appropriate areas. In addition, individual counties throughout the Eastern region will be developing individual plans to integrate Division of Vocational Rehabilitation with workforce center efforts.

In Cheyenne County, workforce center staff will begin to schedule one day per month at the DHS office starting in February 2016. In Elbert County, workforce center staff will begin cross-training staff to increase understanding of workflow and program requirements for DHS programs including TANF and child support. Staff will also be able to utilize DHS office space for dual client meetings when available. In Kit Carson County, workforce center staff will begin outreach to Division of Vocational Rehabilitation staff in Limon to plan for coordinating services on a weekly basis. In Lincoln County, DHS and workforce center staff report successful referral system implementation between the two systems and plans to maintain this strong relationship over the next four years. In Morgan County, workforce center staff bridged a relationship between the local Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the local Goodwill staff to streamline a Job Club initiative. In Phillips County, the local DHS office is working to create a coordinated referral form to be used alongside workforce center staff in 2016. In Sedgwick
County, there is a virtual workforce center at the local library - that successful partnership will be continued throughout the future of this action plan. These discussions are planned to be ongoing and will eventually include all county human services partners in the area.

DVR and WIOA has some mutual clients and are working towards being able to provide unique services from each program to build more potential for client success. DVR is closely working with Labor and Employment Specialists to promote having mutual clients and providing unique services from both sides to help accomplish the goals the clients have.

9. **If determined appropriate by the planning region, describe the coordination of transportation and other supportive services or discuss why these are not appropriate for the planning region at this time.**

The Eastern Regional Planning Group will assess and describe the existing transportation systems and make recommendations by documenting existing plans and services throughout the region. This region is very rural and decentralized, so there are significant economic and strategic challenges to creating a comprehensive regional solution. Existing transportation networks are not public-accessible, meaning that eligibility (such as Medicaid or Medicare eligible) are required, leaving a significant portion of the workforce client base unable to use these systems. Six of the Eastern counties utilize one transportation system while four of the Southeastern counties utilize a different system - thus there are many areas that would require coordination and integration.

10. **If determined appropriate by the planning region, describe how administrative cost arrangements have been coordinated, including the pooling of funds for administrative costs or discuss why these are not appropriate for the planning region at this time.**

As previously mentioned, there are significant challenges to co-location and resource sharing for rural areas, but the Eastern region has worked hard over the years to coordinate and share administrative costs among multiple agencies. The workforce center is exploring potential for a DHS co-location and will work towards that in Elbert County but in the rural areas, existing offices (not just workforce centers) are already extremely full with existing staff. Where possible, workforce and other service offices utilize as much technology to bridge the location gap, including offering system access to DHS staff, virtual meetings/case management coordination, and a robust outreach schedule to counties that do not already have a workforce.
There are existing resource sharing agreements between Division of Vocational Rehabilitation services and the Fort Morgan workforce center where staff share the physical location, but it often not appropriate to pool funds or administrative costs for the other small, rural efforts.

11. The establishment of an agreement concerning how the planning region will collectively negotiate and reach agreement with the Governor on local levels of performance for, and report on, the performance accountability measures described in WIOA sec. 116(c) for local areas or the planning region.

CDLE and regional workforce leadership are currently working to develop the accountability measures, but they have not been finalized at this time.

12. Provide a description of how one-stop centers are implementing and transitioning to an integrated, technology-enabled intake and case management information system for programs carried out under this Act and programs carried out by one-stop partners.

As previously mentioned, there are significant challenges to co-location and resource sharing for rural areas, though the coordination between workforce development programs and services with other services and providers has always been a focus for the Eastern region due to the geographic nature of the region. The move to integrate DVR into CDLE offices is a positive change that will occur on 1 July 2016 as well as agencies working to try and promote each other’s services and resources.

Governmental service agencies in the Eastern region want to enhance and build on their current lines of communication, offer seamless service regardless of location, and hope to see an evolution in state systems that integrate more seamlessly to allow for future agency sharing and integration.

Fort Morgan is the first place in the state that is going to have a videoconference in their location to Weld County for social security connection. This will provide easier access for clients and individuals seeking services from both agencies. Another strategy will be to work with DHS partners to review their enrollment forms to assess if an individual may qualify for workforce services.

13. Briefly describe the activities and steps taken to develop this regional plan.
This regional plan is the result of a variety of outreach and planning efforts, beginning in January 2016 and continuing through May. The focus of the effort has been to improve our understanding of the changing regional economic conditions, particularly identifying those that have created new areas of growth and opportunity in a variety of sectors and occupations. The Colorado Workforce Development Council identified three exploring or emerging sectors in the Eastern region for Sector Partnerships - Energy & Natural Resources, Health & Wellness, and Transportation & Logistics.

We kicked off the regional planning effort with a statewide Colorado Rural Workforce Consortium planning meeting on January 19 with all of the regions and many of the local boards and officials present. Additionally, our consultants were invited to meet all the key players and begin to set expectations for the breadth and depth of the regional plans. We reviewed and determined a new interlocal agreement should be executed for the area that would be consistent with WIOA and the consortium structure. We agreed the four Consortium plans would be launched in a staggered sequence, allowing us to ensure staff and consultant continuity, apply lessons learned from each workshop & fully exploit the statewide opportunity to secure specific feedback from the key impacted stakeholders and agencies. Specifically, this Eastern region was identified to be the first of the four to host an event and begin detailed planning, closely followed by the Southern Region, then Northwest/Rural Resort and finally Western/Southwest. The review and discussions were to take a five week process which leveraged a variety of engagement methods, including one-on-one interviews, telephone calls and other efforts to develop a rough plan that would accommodate the regional differences across the consortium.

Our regional leadership then invited and convened over 25 core partners to begin developing a robust local strategic plan. We facilitated a discussion of distinguished and influential local leaders representing significant cross-sections of our WIOA stakeholders. This includes a variety of regional Community Colleges, mandatory One-Stop partners, including State Human Services, Adult Education, Corrections, Veterans, Vocational Rehabilitation, as well as key Private Sector employers. A variety of other key leaders including Local Elected Officials from the region were invited to attend the planning workshop on January 29th. Feedback on the facilitated session was extremely positive.

In the workshop, we developed a vision of how the system will ideally function in our local area to best meet WIOA goals and the needs of your employers and jobseekers. We confirmed with our WIB to ensure an actionable plan with a shared vision and delivery of services. The quote below is from one of the senior participants in the Planning Workshop: “One of the best meetings in the 15 years I’ve been around on the Workforce (Jessie). The last 2.5 hours have been really amazing. I can take this to the rural board and be proud of Eastern
Colorado. We are the largest region and this has been our vision for years. Some great ideas here along with some future board members.”

Taking advantage of several sets of detailed notes & responses to some initial follow up questions, we then assembled a first draft response to each of the 14 sections highlighted in this document. This document has since been posted to a shared Google Folder with the appropriate permissions to easily track comments, and changes over a five-week review and editing process. This timeline essentially reflected a schedule of one week for document prep, securing Regional Director approval of the first draft, then opening (for two weeks) this draft to a variety of participants who had agreed in the workshop to help draft and comment on the successive versions of the plan. In particular, we tried to identify the right skillset and experience to comment on each section. To that end, we collaborated with one-stop partners to ensure they had editorial control over the document for those two weeks, ensuring we had ample time to integrate additional commentary before releasing for public comment. For example, we sought to have specific details around Vocational Rehabilitation reviewed by the state leads for these programs in the area. This ensures our plan and supporting strategies are aligned with the local needs and preferences.

14. Describe the process used by the local boards in this planning region to provide an opportunity for public comment, including comment by representatives of businesses and comment by representatives of labor organizations, and input into the development of the plan prior to its submission.

As previously mentioned, the process includes a two week period of public comment, which includes representatives of businesses and labor organizations. The process began by including the individuals and agencies that were present at the regional planning meeting. At the meeting, workforce center staff also collected contact information for other key business and labor representatives to connect with to review the plan.