



November 3, 2025

Judge Richard F. Cortez  
Hidalgo County Judge  
County of Hidalgo  
100 E. Cano, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Edinburg, Texas 78539

**RECEIVED**

DEC 22 2025

By: CC 10:47  
County Judge

Dear Judge Cortez,

Thank you for your continued partnership with VIDA and your commitment to empowering Hidalgo County residents through access to education, career training, and comprehensive support services. Your investment ensures that individuals from low-income backgrounds have equitable opportunities to pursue high-demand occupations and achieve long-term economic self-sufficiency.

As you begin your budget planning for the upcoming fiscal year, we respectfully submit VIDA's FY2025 - 2026 funding proposal for your consideration. Continued support from Hidalgo County will allow us to provide essential services that promote student persistence, program completion, and successful entry into the workforce.

To highlight the impact of our current grant partnership, we have enclosed the following:

- VIDA Grant Progress Report (YTD 2025)
- VIDA's 24-25 Annual Report
- VIDA's Funding Proposal for 2026

A recent Economic Impact Study conducted by UTRGV demonstrates a measurable return on the investment that VIDA generates in our region. The study found that for every \$1 invested in VIDA, there is a \$15.69 return in community economic output—resulting in a total impact of over \$51.9 million through increased jobs, income, taxes, and local productivity.

VIDA respectfully requests a continued investment of \$100,000, to support a minimum of twenty Hidalgo County residents in the coming fiscal year. Your investment will help ensure that more individuals are equipped with the skills and credentials necessary to meet the needs of our regional workforce and break the cycle of poverty.

We value our ongoing collaboration with Hidalgo County and look forward to continuing this impactful partnership. Together, we can drive sustainable economic growth and transform lives through education and workforce development—one VIDA at a time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Felida Villarreal", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Felida Villarreal, CPA  
President & CEO



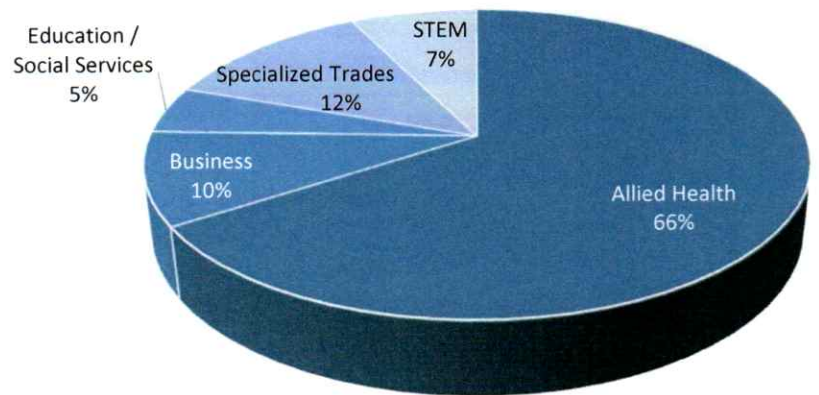
## Hidalgo County Program Report 2025

For every \$1 invested in VIDA's program, there is a return of \$15.69 to the communities we serve.  
*Economic Impact Study 2024 - The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Data & Information Systems Center.*

**Average Salary Reported Upon Graduation: \$76,065 as of November 3, 2025**

2025 AT-A-Glance	
30%	Between Age of 25-50
100%	Unemployed, Underemployed or Low Income
51%	1+ Dependent Child(ren) in the Household
83%	First Generation in College
<b>Hidalgo County Investment: \$100,000</b>	
<b>Hidalgo County Residents Served to Date: 41</b>	
<b>Persistence Rate: 100%</b>	

Program of Study (By Industry)



### CREDENTIAL ANALYSIS

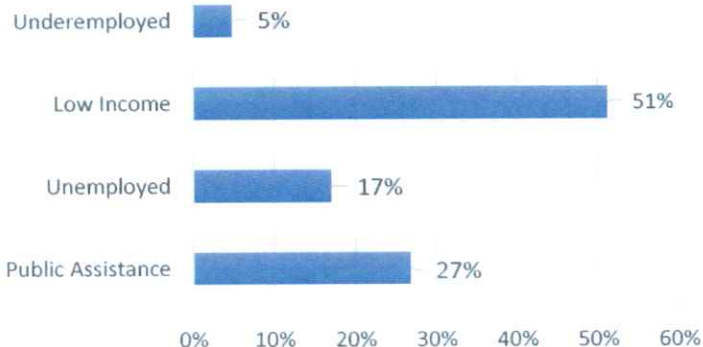
#### Graduates/Completers

Industry Recognized Credential	Certificate	Associate	Bachelor
	6%	63%	0%

#### Active Students

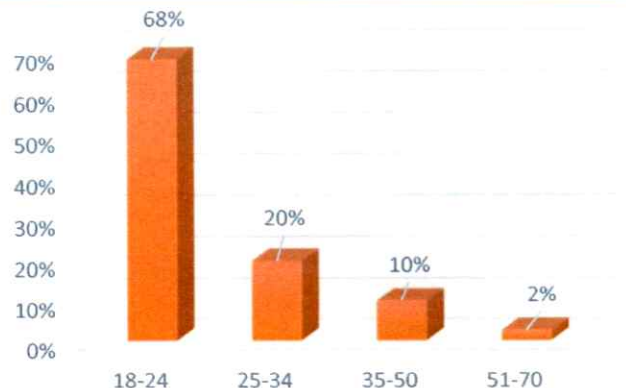
Industry Recognized Credential	Certificate	Associate	Bachelor
	16%	60%	20%

### Financial Eligibility



Some participants meet more than one eligibility factor.

### Participant Age





## **2026 FUNDING PROPOSAL**

*November 3, 2025*

*Prepared by: Felida Villarreal, CPA  
President & CEO*



## **Project Name**

Career Training in High Demand Occupations for Low-Income Hidalgo County Residents

## **Funding Request**

\$100,000 for calendar year 01/01/2026 – 12/31/2026

## **Project Details**

At least twenty Hidalgo County residents will be supported through VIDA's program model through the calendar year January 1, 2026 – December 31, 2026. 100% of students assisted with this grant must meet the following eligibility criteria:

1. Participant must be an Hidalgo County Resident.
2. Participant must be 18 years of age or older.
3. Participant must be eligible to work in the U.S.
4. Participant must be under 250% of the federal poverty guidelines, underemployed, or unemployed.

## **Mission**

VIDA's mission is to empower Rio Grande Valley residents to achieve economic prosperity through market-driven training, resources, and career pathways. Our continued focus includes formulating new institutional relationships in the RGV that simultaneously address employers' needs for skilled workers, while linking the area's unemployed and underemployed with high-skill, high-wage jobs identified in the region. Our vision is to build and sustain a highly skilled and highly educated workforce, which will not only be ready for tomorrow's jobs, but will have an opportunity to live a more prosperous and healthy life.

## **History**

The concept for VIDA began in 1995 with Valley Interfaith, a community-organizing group in the Lower Rio Grande Valley affiliated with the National Industrial Areas Foundation. Valley Interfaith observed a need for education and training to secure family sustaining wage employment, as the region experienced elevated levels of unemployment from many plant closures and layoffs in the textile industry due to foreign competition. Meanwhile, businesses and economic development boards seeking to attract and retain employers in the region reported a need for a more highly skilled and educated workforce. As a result, collaborative efforts between Valley Interfaith and industry leaders sought an opportunity to meet the needs of both Valley residents and employers through the creation of VIDA, a workforce training model committed to providing both economic and social support to low-income residents, to ensure successful completion of post-secondary education training and secure competitive employment. Throughout the years, VIDA has remained relevant and innovative by collaborating with regional institutions of higher education and industry leaders to assess employment needs and align career pathways with local industry demand.

Currently, more than half of our student population enrolls in allied health careers such as registered nursing, licensed vocational nursing, diagnostic medical sonography, occupational therapy, respiratory therapy, radiography, medical billing & coding, surgical technology, and more. As we continue to recover from the long-term effects of a global pandemic, it is critical to assess and

respond to both the regional and national shortage of healthcare professionals. As a result, VIDA continues to promote training and higher education credentials in the healthcare industry in efforts to enhance health equity across the Rio Grande Valley. The remaining student population pursues training in high demand occupations in fields of study such as STEM, education, social services, finance/accounting, economics, and the skilled trades – all of which provide an opportunity for self-sufficiency and long-term career advancement.

## **Core Services**

VIDA primarily funds training for one-year certificates, two-year associate degrees, or bachelor's level degrees. VIDA provides customized financial assistance for training in fields of allied health, STEM, finance/accounting, economics, education, social services, and specialized trades. In addition, VIDA's program provides intensive case management and weekly counseling services to address academic and social barriers. VIDA counselors become key mentors in the lives of our participants, coaching and guiding them to advance in their appropriate career pathways. VIDA regularly updates the occupational training it supports based on feedback from economic development boards and local employers to ensure students pursue careers in high demand occupations relevant to our economic climate. South Texas College, Texas State Technical College, Texas Southmost College, and UT Rio Grande Valley are VIDA's primary training partners. We collaborate extensively with these institutions for outreach, student support and progress, enhancing career pathways, and more.

In 2025, VIDA served 879 students with an average persistence rate of 98%! 100% of our student population is identified as unemployed, underemployed, or low-income, based on 250% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. During 2025, a student enrolled as a VIDA participant with average annual earnings of \$11,419 but ultimately graduated and secured employment with average annual earnings of \$57,720. The average age of VIDA participants in 2025 was 27 years old, and 80% of our participants identified as first-generation college students.

Consequently, this demographic faces a multitude of challenges that represent risk factors for college persistence and graduation. Oftentimes, our participants are first-generation college students, lacking a dedicated support system at home, which VIDA addresses with ongoing one-on-one career coaching and mentoring. VIDA recognizes our participants face language barriers and family responsibilities that interfere with successful completion or satisfactory performance of coursework. As a result, VIDA counselors meet regularly with participants on an individualized basis and in group sessions with other VIDA participants to help them overcome prominent challenges such as time management, stress, emotional triggers, conflict resolution, and promote overall mental health. VIDA counselors share extensive knowledge and expertise in fields of psychology, social work, and education, facilitating strong relationships with participants and effectively building bonds of accountability, maintaining our students focused, committed, and encouraged. Moreover, VIDA's customized financial assistance for tuition, textbooks, tools, uniforms, childcare, and transportation further promotes students' full-time enrollment while breaking economic barriers to education success.

VIDA organizes a speaker series of workshops on a monthly basis, in which we collaborate with local industry partners to share their expertise with our participants collectively. For example, our community partner, JP Morgan Chase, hosts financial literacy workshops with VIDA participants as a group to educate them on valuable topics such as banking, lending, credit scores, financial planning, investments, retirement, and more. In turn, VIDA participants develop and enhance life-long skills

for both professional and personal success, learning the importance of fiscal responsibility and personal budgeting. This type of soft skills development model effectively complements the students' traditional classroom coursework to build a more well-rounded individual, better prepared to achieve career success with a competitive and diverse skillset.

## Outcomes & Results

VIDA's outcomes are primarily measured by higher persistence rates, graduation rates, and number of certificates awarded:

1. 85% or more of VIDA participants will graduate from an educational/training program within 150% of their intended program 80% or more of VIDA graduates will receive job placement with competitive compensation.
2. 90% or more will persist in their education from year to year.
3. 100% will attend mandatory counseling sessions to ensure program retention.

VIDA has a well-established capacity to track extensive information in a secure, comprehensive, Social Solutions database. Detailed demographic and socioeconomic characteristics are maintained and accessed on a regular basis for reporting and quality control. VIDA measures the academic progress of each participant through grade reports, case notes from the counselors and other program staff, and supportive services received - all of which are documented in Social Solutions. Participants entering employment are tracked for three years post-graduation, and their wages, positions, and employers are reported in the database.

A recent economic impact study conducted by UT - Rio Grande Valley, reports that for every \$1.00 invested in VIDA, there is a return on investment of \$15.69 to the communities we serve. Additionally, the Institute for Women's Policy Research featured VIDA in a report on innovations to address unmet needs in job training programs. The report states: "case management can have the added effect of creating a sense of accountability to the program that increases persistence and completion among trainees. Having a primary point person who participants can go to for advice, support, and to access program resources lead them to feel a greater sense of responsibility or commitment to their program...the relationships that case managers establish with participants create bonds of accountability that enhance participants' chances of success within their programs."



**Hidalgo County Project Budget  
20 Participants/Students**

**Post-Secondary Occupational Training (PSOT):**

*Allied Health, Specialized Trades, STEM, Education, Social Services, Finance/Accounting, & Economics Associate Degrees, College/Industry Recognized Certificates, & Bachelor's Degrees*

BUDGET ITEMS	01/01/26 – 12/31/26 PROJECTED EXPENDITURES
<p><b>Curriculum Based – Training Expenses</b></p> <p>South Texas College (STC); University of Texas – Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV); Texas State Technical College (TSTC); Texas Southmost College (TSC); Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tuition &amp; Fees, Textbooks, Exam Fees, Equipment</li> <li>• Tools, Uniforms, Transportation Assistance, Child Care Assistance, Other</li> </ul> <p><b>Direct Program Services</b> Intensive Career Counseling &amp; Case Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Outreach, Profile Assessment, &amp; Aptitude Testing</li> <li>• Peer learning, effective studying skills, &amp; test taking strategies</li> <li>• Soft Skills Training: Guest Speaker Forums, Professional Development Workshops, Financial Literacy, Time Management, Stress Management, Mental Health, etc.</li> <li>• Employability Skills: Conflict Resolution in the Workplace, Resume Writing, Business Etiquette, Job Search, &amp; Interview Preparation</li> <li>• Individualized Career Coaching and Academic Advisement</li> <li>• Individual and Group Counseling Sessions</li> <li>• Job Placement Services &amp; Career Tracking three years post-graduation</li> <li>• Building Accountability - Monitoring Academic Performance and Progress for Intervention and Completion</li> <li>• Direct Program Related Expenses</li> </ul>	
Training & Direct Program Expenses	\$ 85,000
General & Administrative Costs	\$ 15,000
Total Project Budget	\$ 100,000
<b>Hidalgo County Funding Request</b>	<b>\$ 100,000</b>