

# 2009 ANNUAL REPORT



Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement



2009 : A Year of Success  
Economic Impact on the RGV  
Current Labor Conditions  
Unemployment Rates

# Message from the Board Chair

Dear Friends:

The Rio Grande Valley has led the state in job creation, and we have been somewhat isolated from the effects of the nation's turbulent economy. Unfortunately the new jobs have not changed the lives of over 30% of our people who still live in poverty.

Despite the difficulties we face as a community, VIDA has achieved real success. Its accomplishments are growing, and every day we are moving people out of poverty and into high-skill, high-demand jobs with good wages and benefits.

Additional funders are investing in residents of our region because they know that we need to invest in skills and education more than ever. They know that the only solid, long-term stimulus to our community's economy is an abundant, qualified, skilled workforce. They want to partner with an organization that is changing the lives of individuals and their families. They also want to partner with an organization that is changing the economy of the Rio Grande Valley.

With new funding we have been able to enroll more participants and expand our reach deeper into our community. This past year we served a record 900 people. Our graduates earned an average of \$18.39 per hour. Retention rates remain very high and our ability to prepare people for college is strong.

I am consistently amazed at the barriers that our participants work so hard to overcome. They may drive long distances to go to school, they may have few economic resources, they may lack the academic background for college, they may have children who count on them, but they still succeed. I am proud to be a part of making this opportunity available to our residents.

I am also very grateful for the work of our founding Board Members and the leaders of Valley Interfaith in making VIDA a reality. I extend my gratitude to them, to previous Board members, and to the hard work of VIDA's excellent staff.

Sincerely,

*David Oliveira*  
VIDA Chairman



Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA)

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Executive Secretary



# 2009 Annual Report

For more information please  
visit our website:  
[www.vidacareers.org](http://www.vidacareers.org)



Call Us: 1 (800) 478-1770  
Or visit our main office at  
1715 E. Pike Blvd. Weslaco, TX

## Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA)

Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA) is a community based, non-profit 501 (c) 3 agency. Created in 1995, VIDA was the result of a local effort led by community leaders of Valley Interfaith (VIF) and private industry business leaders. The impetus was the need to empower the underserved residents of the Region with the tools – education and training – to become self sufficient and in tandem, fuel the growth of the existing employers and increase the recruitment of new investment to the area by developing a highly skilled workforce.

Since its inception, the mission of Project VIDA has remained constant, to formulate new institutional relationships in the Rio Grande Valley that simultaneously address employers' needs for skilled workers and link the area's unemployed and underemployed with high skilled, high wage jobs identified in the region. Project VIDA works closely with the business sector, training providers, and community-based organizations with the mission of developing a skilled workforce to meet the demands of employers along the border.

*Impacting Sustainable Economic Growth in the Region...  
One VIDA at a Time!*

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# VIDA Graduates

## LEADING BY EXAMPLE



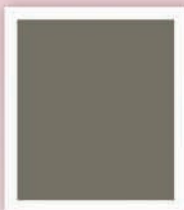
### EMILY GONZALEZ

Emily was a single mother of three small children when she came to VIDA. She was working part time and on public assistance, but she wanted a better life for herself and her children—she wanted to be a nurse. She got up every morning for two years and drove from her home in Harlingen to school in Brownsville, went to school, came home, cooked dinner, took care of her children, then stayed up until 2 or 3 in the morning studying, got a few hours sleep then did it all over again. Sometimes VIDA helped her with rent, utilities and gasoline so that she could keep going. Emily graduated and works at Elder Care as an RN supervisor earning \$33.63 per hour. Her little ones are now 5, 11 and 12. Now they want to go to college just like their mom.



### JUANA CISNEROS

Juana's husband had recently passed away, and she was left alone raising her 15 year old son. She decided to go back to school despite substantial barriers. She couldn't begin college right away because she was unable to pass the required exam without remediation. In addition her only source of income was what her son was receiving from his dad's social security. On top of that her primary language was Spanish, so she used a Spanish to English dictionary to get her through school. She began in 2006 with VIDA's College Prep Academy, a six hours per day, five days per week intense program that prepared her for college level course. She passed the entrance exam in Summer 2006 and moved on to college to obtain her Associate's degree in Teaching, Specializing in Early Childhood Development. She obtained her degree on May 2008 with a 4.0 GPA. Now she is working as a Teacher at Texas Migrant Council earning \$12.78 per hour.



### GUILLERMO MELENDEZ

Guillermo is earning \$16 an hour as a Field Tech for Specialty Biomedical. He has come a long way over the past several years. His journey began when he lost his job as a consequence of NAFTA. First he returned to school after a 20 year hiatus where he finally graduated from high school. Then he went on to Texas State Technical College in Biomedical Technology. His first semester he was not receiving financial aid, so VIDA helped more than usual with tuition, transportation, books and supplies. During the first semester he also struggled with underdeveloped study habits, but he was a serious student so he pushed himself and he finally graduated in 2009 with good grades. Guillermo is a Brownsville resident.



### JORGE MARTINEZ

Jorge Martinez earned an Associate Degree in Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning and Refrigeration from South Texas College. He and his mother struggled to make ends meet while he was in school, relying on his mother's public assistance check and his part-time work study job. After his STC instructors saw how hard he worked, and how well he was performing, they offered him a part-time job as an HVAC instructor, despite his lack of field experience. He performed well in the part-time position, and armed with a 4.0 grade point average he was offered a full-time HVAC instructor position upon graduation. Jorge is only 25 years old. He earns \$23.00 an hour with benefits.

*"From the community, for the community.  
VIDA brings new life to those it serves"*





# Current Labor Conditions

The Meadows Foundation  
Support Data: June 10, 2009

## UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

VIDA's scope of work assists the underserved market at various stages in the ladder towards economic self sufficiency. Our goal is to get every participant through an Associates Degree in a demand occupation. Support of one year certification programs and vocational training for specialized trades are also emphasized taking the lead from the employer requirements without sacrificing the integrity of the wage at placement. Due to the profile of our participant (20+ years, Hispanic with dependents / on public assistance), this often times includes support through the GED and/or College Prep Academy and then, transition into a PSOT (Post Secondary Occupational Training) program.

In April 2009, the unemployment rate in the Rio Grande Valley jumped to *double digits* for the *first time in over ten years* for those individual without a GED or High School Diploma; *nearly double* what it had historically been for those with a GED and still the *highest in ten years* with an Associates. No longer is it enough to have a young, abundant population. In today's market, we must have an abundant, enthusiastic, *skilled work force* with the highest work ethic. The work that VIDA does helps bridge the gap with a 7.2 point spread in unemployment even in the worst of times. With the Meadows Foundation's support, VIDA can augment the outreach, recruitment, and training and make a difference in the lives of our participants and their families.

April	No High School	HS Diploma/GED	Pt. Change	Associates	Pt. Change	Spread
2009	14.6	9.3	5.3	7.4	1.9	7.2
2008	7.6	4.9	2.7	3.9	1	3.7
2007	6.9	4.1	2.8	3.5	0.6	3.4
2006	6.6	4.4	2.2	3.7	0.7	2.9
2005	7.8	4.4	3.4	3.8	0.6	4
2004	8.1	5.3	2.8	4	1.3	4.1
2003	7.9	5.7	2.2	4.7	1	3.2
2002	8.5	5.5	3	4.6	0.9	3.9
2001	6.4	3.6	2.8	2.9	0.7	3.5
2000	5.9	3.2	2.7	2.6	0.6	3.3
1999	6.7	3.5	3.2	2.9	0.6	3.8

Source: US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Databases, Tables & Calculators by Subject.





# 2009: A Year of Successes

## THE ECONOMIC IMPACT ON THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY

For every \$1 spent on VIDA and its participants over the past year, \$7.59 was returned to the Lower Rio Grande Valley. This amounts to a 659% return on the community's investment or a return of \$24.3 million dollars in additional jobs, income, taxes and output in the local economy, according to Researcher Sai Mullapudi and Associate Director of Economic Development Michael Uhrbrock of the University of Texas – Pan American. This infusion into the economy is based primarily on the impact on the economy of new graduates.

## RETENTION AND GRADUATION

VIDA participants are staying in school and graduating at extraordinarily high rates. For example, of the 358 low income new participants enrolled with VIDA in the Fall semester of 2007, 78% or 279 graduated by Fall 2009 and another 18 or an additional 6% were still enrolled in school. This compares with those students statewide who enrolled in community colleges in 2005 who were full-time, credential-seeking undergraduates. Only 11% had finished their associate degree or certification three years later.

	Time Period	Baseline Enrollment	Persisting*		Graduates	
			Number	Percent	Number	Percent
VIDA	Fall 2007-Fall 2009	358	18%	6%	279	78%
Texas Community College Students	Fall 2005-Fall 2009	51,370			5,646	11%

\*Persisting represents the number who have not graduated but who are continuing with their training.

## SUCCESS IN ENROLLING IN COLLEGE-LEVEL CLASSES

The College Prep Academy is highly successful and key to the success of our participants. Texans in general (including VIDA Participants) are academically unprepared for college. For example, at community colleges statewide in 2007 a shocking 25% of those who took Texas' required college entrance exam passed the math section on the first attempt preventing them from enrolling in college-level classes. Community colleges enroll those who cannot pass the exam in remedial classes, but this model is not working well. In the same 2007 group that enrolled in remediation statewide, only 15.1% passed the math section of the exam one year later. After VIDA participants attend our intensive five days per week, six hours per day College Prep Academy, 74% of participants pass the college entrance exam within 2 semesters! This is very important for adult learners who become frustrated and drop out after two, three, or four semesters of remediation without ever enrolling in a college-level class. The College Prep Academy is offered in partnership with South Texas College and Texas State Technical College.

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board: Developmental Education Accountability Measures Data. The comparison in the persistence and graduation table is admittedly not a perfect match:

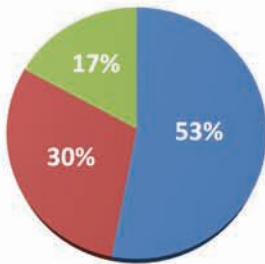
1. VIDA participants all have family incomes below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines while the set of all Texas students includes all income levels
  2. VIDA's students may or may not be attending college for the first time while it is the first time the all-Texas students group attended college.
  3. VIDA's measurement was over a 2 year period and the all-Texas count was over a three year period. Nonetheless, the comparison reflects the positive effect that VIDA has on persistence and graduation.
- Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board: Developmental Education Accountability Measures Data.  
<http://www.bhigheeredata.org/reports/performance/devded/>

# Fiscal Year 2008 - 2009

900 RESIDENTS OF THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY WERE SERVED DURING THE 2008-2009 FISCAL YEAR

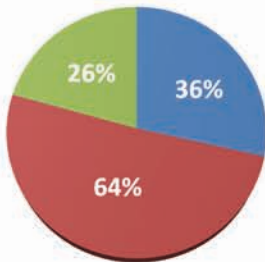
**Age**

■ 14-25 ■ 26-40 ■ 41+



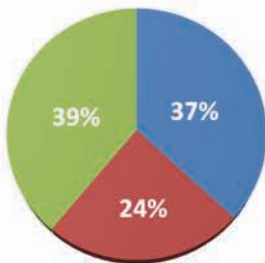
**Gender**

■ Male ■ Female ■ Single Parent



**Eligibility**

■ Unemployed ■ Underemployed ■ Public Assistance



## PERSISTENCE AND GRADUATION RATES

(Student Tracking: Fall to Fall)

**BASELINE:** 358 Students Active in Fall Semester 2007.

## TRACKING THE SAME 358 STUDENTS IN FALL SEPTEMBER 2008:

Incremental 2007-2008

86% Persistence 59% Graduation

## TRACKING THE SAME 358 STUDENTS IN FALL SEPTEMBER 2008:

Incremental 2008-2009

90% Persistence 71% Graduation

## CUMULATIVE 2007-2009

83% Persistence 78% Graduation

## ANNUAL RETENTION RATE

(Total Served)

FY 2008-2009*	Graduates	Active	Terminated	TOTAL
Number of Participants	47%	41%	12%	900

Retention Rate 88%

## PROGRAM DETAIL

(Participants Served 2008-2009\*)

Program of Study	Percentage of Total Served	Graduated this FY	Average Wage at Graduation
Allied Health	46%	35%	\$21.34
Business	3%	52%	\$8.98
Education / Social Services	12%	46%	\$13.96
Manufacturing	1%	60%	\$10.58
Specialized Trades	17%	71%	\$13.61
Technology	9%	40%	\$10.14
Pre-PSOT	12%	57%	\$9.09

## AVERAGE ANNUAL INCOME UPON GRADUATION

**\$35,068.80**

\* Vida Board of Directors authorized the change of VIDA's fiscal cycle to commence October 1st., a change from July 1st. Therefore the reporting period for fiscal year 2008 - 2009 is a fifteen (15) month period. July 1, 2008 -- September 30, 2009.





# About VIDA Careers

## OUR MISSION

To formulate new institutional relationships in the Rio Grande Valley that simultaneously address employers' needs for skilled workers and link the area's unemployed and underemployed with high skills, high wage jobs identified in the region. The program provides job-training services to economically disadvantaged, unemployed, and underemployed adults with family responsibilities.

## OUR PHILOSOPHY

Our philosophy is very simple: A well trained, well educated population will not only be ready for tomorrow's jobs, but will be able to live a more prosperous, healthy, and happy lifestyle. The ultimate goal is job retention, not just job placement, which will develop strong citizens who are self-sufficient taxpayers, providing a clear return on investment of federal, state, local and private funding.

## HISTORY AND SERVICES

VIDA (Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement), was created in 1995 to meet two complimentary needs. Valley residents who wanted good paying jobs were unable to enter and succeed in training programs. At the same time employers were facing skilled workforce shortages. Valley Interfaith leaders and employers came together to meet those needs by forming VIDA to train motivated people to work in high-demand occupations.

- **VIDA has recruited, assessed, facilitated training, and placed nearly 5,000 low-income people for 14 years.**
- **Over 2,650 people moved out of poverty, graduated from training programs, and work in high-skill, high demand jobs.**

VIDA provides a full continuum of services for all participants to ensure high retention and graduation rates including college preparation and assisting with tuition, fees, books, transportation, childcare and emergency assistance. At the heart of our success is career counseling—every VIDA participant meets every week with a career counselor and a group of other participants.

Our graduates have not only helped the families they support and the businesses that now employ them: their ability to successfully move from the ranks of the low-income has helped us all. Their increased earnings have also enhanced their contributions to our tax system and reduced their dependence on public assistance. VIDA has demonstrated a model for success by graduating participants into demand occupations that normally were jobs unfilled or filled at a very high cost by people outside of our community.

*VIDA impacts not only participants,  
but their children.  
Children see their parents going to college  
and they want to go to college "just like mom."  
Those children in turn set an example for  
their children, permanently breaking  
the cycle of poverty.*

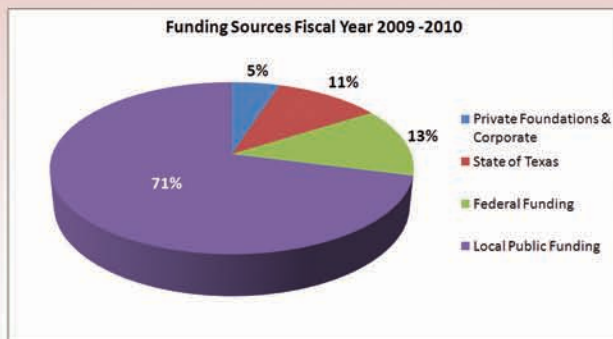




# Funding Sources

FISCAL YEAR 2009-2010

While VIDA provides the financial support and counseling services instrumental to our participants' success, it is our close collaborative efforts with our education, workforce, city government, corporate and private foundation partners that allow us to transform lives in the Valley.



## AUGUST 12th GRADUATION CELEBRATION & VIDA'S 15th ANNIVERSARY

Call or visit our web site [www.vidacareers.org](http://www.vidacareers.org) for more information about our Graduation Celebration and VIDA's 15th Anniversary.

Alumni & Community Partners are welcome to join us!

## VIDA'S NEW WEB SITE

VIDA Careers is pleased to announce the release of our new web site [www.vidacareers.org](http://www.vidacareers.org)

Our new site has been redesigned with a fresh new look and has been updated with information about our latest services, training programs, partners, graduates, employment, news, etc. It is a great addition to our communication activities and directs those who want to get involved in our programs in a very easy and convenient way. Additionally, our site will provide support and information to answer our participants' most common questions.





## New Investors in VIDA's Participants

### THE MEADOWS FOUNDATION

This year VIDA's work was awarded \$80,000 by the prestigious Meadows Foundation. Meadows is among the most recognized private philanthropies in the country. It "looks for programs and services that employ imaginative, innovative ways to solve community problems."



The Meadows Foundation was established by Algur H. and Virginia S. Meadows from wealth accumulated by Mr. Meadows through the creation of General American Oil Company, at one time among the largest private oil and gas companies in the United States. The Meadows Foundation exists to assist people and institutions of Texas improve the quality and circumstances of life for themselves and future generations. They have awarded over \$660 million in grants to Texas institutions and agencies.

### HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

VIDA is uniquely positioned to truly prevent homelessness by empowering people with the tools to obtain high-wage, high demand employment. So when funds were awarded to McAllen and Hidalgo County through the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (part of the Recovery Act passed by Congress), VIDA submitted a bid for funding.

Its proposal required that recipients of funding be enrolled in training. The result of the proposal was awards from the City of McAllen (\$456,000) and Hidalgo County (\$727,793).

To date the program has helped 37 VIDA participants stay in their homes by assisting with rent and utilities and it has helped re-house 16 participants by providing moving costs, security deposits, storage fees, and hotel costs.

The program has been critical to helping participants stabilize their housing situation in the short term, while they work on the long term solution-completing training and securing a good job.

*If you are interested in learning more about our organization and how your contribution can help someone in need become self sufficient, please call us at: 1-800-478-1770 or stop by our office at 1715 E. Pike Blvd. Weslaco, TX.*





# Thank You!

[www.vidacareers.org](http://www.vidacareers.org)

## JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

South Texas College and VIDA partnered on an important project in 2009 funded and supported by Jobs for the Future. It provided an opportunity for 12 people to prepare for their GED, start on their LVN prerequisites, prepare to take their college entrance exam, and earn their Patient Care Assistant Certificate—all of this in a 16 month period (5 days a week up to 6 hours daily). This innovative and challenging pilot program is showing great results. After the first semester, all have their CNA licenses, 7 of 12 earned their GED, and 12 have passed the college-level Medical Terminology prerequisite.

Jobs for the Future identifies, develops, and promotes new education and workforce strategies that help communities, states, and the nation compete in a global economy. In nearly 200 communities in 41 states, JFF improves the pathways leading from high school to college to family-sustaining careers.

## THE JOBS AND EDUCATION FOR TEXANS (JET) FUND

In October the Texas Comptroller awarded two grants totaling \$700,000 over a two-year period: \$300,000 to support participants in Cameron County and \$400,000 for participants in Starr, Hidalgo, and Willacy Counties. This new investment in South Texas has enabled VIDA to serve 93 participants per year to train for high-demand, high-skill jobs that pay a living wage and benefits.

JET funds support Texas nonprofit organizations with programs that prepare low-income adults for careers in high-demand technical occupations, such as welding, computer support, engineering technology, nursing and allied health professions. The JET fund was created in 2009 by the 81st Legislature.

## BROADENING VIDA'S FUNDING BASE

The JET Fund award has provided an additional challenge and an opportunity for VIDA. Since nearly all of this funding is designated to pay for tuition and books, VIDA has intensified efforts to raise money from foundations, businesses and individuals. VIDA's evidence-based experience shows that providing scholarship money will not ensure the success of participants. So additional funding is needed to provide sufficient career counseling, assessment, placement services, transportation, childcare, and emergency assistance. These new fundraising efforts will strengthen the organization by further diversifying VIDA's funding sources.