

Traditionally, much of the employment in the Rio Grande Valley has been credited to the retail, education, government and industrial sectors. However, as the Valley has quickly evolved into a progressive area with a bilingual labor force of an average age of 27 years, Customer Care Centers have quickly been establishing operations and growing while offering career options of all levels to its existing and new employees.

Leaders in the Customer Care Center industry gathered on November 1st in McAllen for an informative, independent wage and benefit study conducted and sponsored by Workforce Solutions, in partnership with McAllen Economic Development Corporation. The study primarily focused on the state of this industry from a compensation and benefits perspective.

The study was done with the intent to help companies in this industry measure their organization's competitiveness versus the results that were recorded. The survey also provides area economic developers with accurate numbers for their recruitment efforts. In addition, workforce development boards were provided with a clearer understanding of the industry in hopes of identifying career opportunities for their recruits.

Out of the 16 Customer Care Centers that are present in the Rio Grande Valley, eight centers participated in this study. This represented approximately 4,300 employees. In order to maintain confidentiality, no individual results were reported on any company. Instead, only aggregate figures were shared among all the centers.

Among the results that were of particular interest to the Customer Care Centers, economic developers, and local workforce boards was the average pay rate for entry level customer service representatives. Base pay average came in at \$9.50 per hour, but 87.5% of care centers reported that performance-based incentives of approximately \$1.50 per hour were given to employees. This brought the average pay rate of customer care employees to \$11.00 per hour.

In addition, all Customer Care Centers offer medical benefits in different capacities to at least salaried employees.

This sector employs approximately 8,500 individuals throughout the Rio Grande Valley. Some of the industries that these Customer Care Centers serve range from telecommunications and financial services to produce sales, government agencies and technical support for a growing number of Fortune 1,000 companies.

Overall, the study indicated that compensation and benefits among these employers were set competitively and showed a definite career pathway. "It's great to see the clear opportunities for career advancement in the industry," says Megan Davila with McAllen Economic Development Corporation. "Not only can you make \$11.00 an hour in an entry level position, but you can advance to team leader, trainer, supervisor and manager with the right skills and drive."