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# A Model for Transforming **HONDURAN** Workforce

**METAS PROJECT**  
**WORK READINESS INITIATIVE**



**Workplace innovation, shared goals, and team collaboration** have made it possible for the METAS Project to meet established targets and exceed goals. Innovative program implementation ideas have provided new ways to deliver value to our beneficiaries throughout the nation with a positive common goal—to improve education for work, learning, and success in Honduras.

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[proyectometas.org](http://proyectometas.org)



# WORK READINESS Training and Certification

## PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Demand for the Work Readiness Skills Training and Certification program has increased over time, expanding to new schools, universities, and businesses, all of whom have seen immediate results—employees are more productive, students more confident, and businesses more competitive.

Business managers reveal that employees who are trained and certified in work readiness skills show improved performance, demonstrate critical problem solving skills, and are more resourceful and motivated to learn.

Students with work readiness skills surpass expectations. University applicants exceed the passing grade on admission tests, and certified youth are confident and have a better opportunity to get a job.

Human Resources managers in participating businesses are requesting, hiring, and giving opportunities to certified youth. In fact, some now include the training process as part of their job search for new entrants to their workforce.

And most importantly, schools and universities are communicating with participating businesses, and sharing certified student profiles as they search for internships and scholarship opportunities for their students.



**“As Honduras struggles with high unemployment, many businesses and industries are having trouble finding the right people for the right jobs.”**

– Juan Andonie  
PAGSA (AUDI) Honduras



### ARE THEY REALLY READY TO WORK?

In 2011, the METAS Project, in partnership with the Honduran Private Enterprise Council (COHEP), conducted the business survey “Employers’ Perspective on Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills,” which was answered by more than 200 companies and corporate enterprises in Honduras. These employers identified a set of skills and competencies that first-time job seekers (such as recent graduates of technical and secondary education) need to be successful at work.

## THE CHALLENGES

The future of Honduran business competitiveness is directly tied to the quality and skills of the current and incoming workforce. However, many entry-level employees are transitioning from school to the workforce without the skills they need to succeed. The lack of communication between private sector employers and education institutions in Honduras has resulted in education and training systems that are largely unaware of the changing needs of the private sector, and the “middle skills” gap, among other critical skills challenges, has widened over time.

**WITH CHANGING LABOR MARKETS**, new technologies, and the need for more efficient production systems, traditional technical training programs for youth who have low levels of education are no longer acceptable, and there is a growing realization that traditional technical high schools may be obsolete as well. Today, young people must have adaptable and transferable basic education skills to continue their studies and training, and to take advantage of better employment opportunities.

Some Honduran youth face the additional challenge of employers who won't hire them, even if they have the skills, because the youth live in banned or marginal communities.

**BASIC EDUCATION MUST ALIGN WITH INTERNATIONAL BENCHMARKS**, and technical training must be grounded in strong basic education skills in order for youth to obtain and maintain employment, for the private sector to be able to provide better employment opportunities, and for Honduras to become more competitive under the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) and in the global marketplace.

Based on this national context and these challenges, it is imperative to implement initiatives such as the METAS Project to provide sustainable and impactful solutions for the youth population in Honduras.



**“There is a gap between the skills young people have and what the businesses require, through this program, certified youth gain the skills they need to succeed in life.”**

— Irina Turcios  
Human Resources Manager  
Pride Manufacturing

## BACKGROUND

What is life like for youth in Honduras? The United Nations recently declared Honduras as the most violent country in the world, with a rate of 82 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> According to the Honduran National Statistics Institute (INE), 68 percent of the population is less than 30 years old,<sup>2</sup> and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) reported that 60 percent of young Hondurans live in poverty.<sup>3</sup> In fact, many of the victims and perpetrators of violence are youth. Additionally, the educational crisis, the alarming increase in crime and violence, and the lack of opportunities for young people, make youth ideal candidates for gangs, drug trafficking, and illicit association groups. Given these statistics, it is clear that the youth population in Honduras is a highly vulnerable and at-risk sector.

Honduras is at a critical point regarding

youth—one which not only presents significant challenges but also huge opportunities. The German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ) and other experts have stated that Honduras is about to enter what they call the “demographic bonus,” a period that will range from 2015 to 2040, during which time the country will be reaching a population peak with the youth sector ready to enter the workforce.<sup>4</sup>

According to the recent USAID Youth in Development policy, “Development can be accelerated when the majority of youth in any country are able to make significant contributions to economic, social, and political life.”<sup>5</sup> A comprehensive preparation for this mass of young people is critical at this time so that Honduras can reduce poverty and establish a sustainable and productive development path.

In order to reach this future, young Hondurans require education and

employment opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies they need to improve their personal, family, and professional lives. Such opportunities will also help reduce and/or prevent the risks that lead to participation in networks of violence.



### References:

- 1 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Report (ONUDD), 2012
- 2 Honduran National Statistics Institute, 2012
- 3 Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Report, 2012
- 4 The Supply and Demand for Technical Education and Vocational Training in Honduras, GIZ, 2011
- 5 Youth in Development Policy, USAID, 2012

# A Holistic Approach to Workforce Development IN HONDURAS

## THE SOLUTION

The METAS Project enables at-risk youth to gain the job skills, knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and life perspectives needed to create positive futures, as well as provides Honduran businesses with the skilled workforce needed to compete in local and international markets.

METAS addresses the challenging needs regarding education and training for both employers in the private sector and the large population of young people, with a focus on at-risk youth, who have limited access to basic education and skills training opportunities in Honduras.

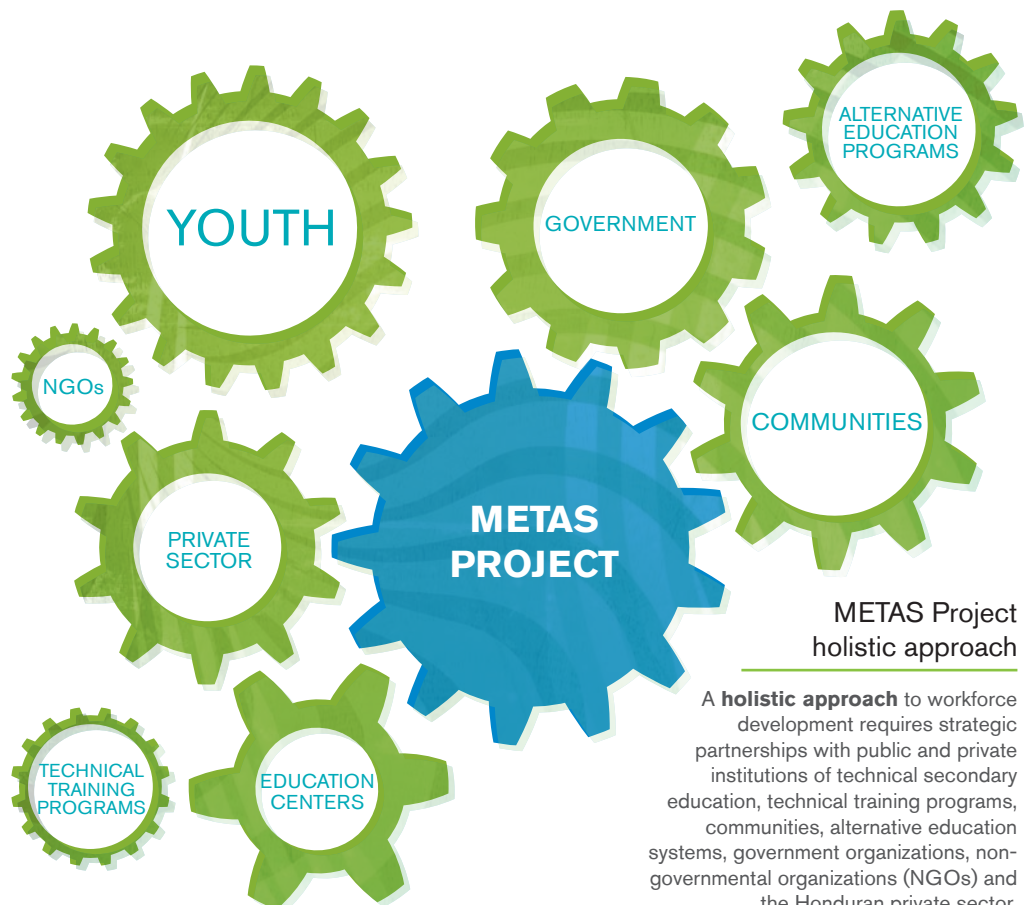
METAS meets this goal through strategic partnerships with public and private institutions of technical secondary education, technical training programs, alternative education systems, government organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and private sector partners.



The most valuable thing I learned is to be able to identify my strengths and skills in math, reading and searching for information.

— María Candelaria Martínez  
Certified Trainer

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## THE WORK READINESS SKILLS TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

As Honduras struggles with high unemployment, many businesses and industries are having trouble finding the right people for the right jobs. Employers report that they are often flooded with piles of applications for only a handful of job openings. Going through these applications is time-consuming and inefficient. Employers need a way to quickly pinpoint individuals with essential, verifiable workplace skills.

In response to these challenges, and to meet the changing needs of education and training in the private sector, the METAS Project developed and implemented the Work Readiness Skills Training and Certification Program. This program aligns basic education skills with labor market needs to improve employment opportunities for young people and increase productivity in the country.

This program is targeted to impact the lives of over 22,000 young Hondurans, ages 15–35. The target population includes:

- 1 Youth with limited access to basic education or training opportunities, and employment opportunities, with particular attention to youth at risk
- 2 Youth who are in high school, have graduated from high school, or have finished vocational technical training
- 3 Youth who are new participants in the workforce or are working in a job in the initial levels of the labor market

METAS worked together with ACT, a nonprofit organization that developed the Work Ready System, comprised of a Job Skills Assessment System (WorkKeys) and the International Career Readiness Certificate, to include standardized training and certification of work ready skills in the program.

Initially, the Work Readiness program focused primarily on at-risk youth in the cities of Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula (including surrounding areas), and La Ceiba, but due to the program's success and the increasing demand from business and schools, it was expanded to include the cities of Comayagua, Siguatepeque, El Progreso, and El Mochito.

**“This program has helped us identify the staff with the right skills, they are more productive and are achieving excellent results.”**

– Patricia Caballero  
Human Resources - BANPAIS

METAS PROJECT



# Ready for Work Skills

WORK AND CAREER READINESS SKILLS TRAINING +  
JOB SKILLS ASSESSMENT SYSTEM +  
INTERNATIONAL CAREER READINESS CERTIFICATE +

= WORK/LIFE SUCCESS



**“Work Ready”:**  
A work ready individual possesses the foundational skills needed to be minimally qualified for a specific occupation as determined through a job analysis or occupational profile.

Work Readiness Standards and Benchmarks - ACT.org

Throughout the training program, participating youth acquire standardized work readiness skills, which include foundational cognitive skills such as reading for information, applied mathematics, locating information, problem solving, and critical thinking. The Jobs Skills Assessment measures the following competencies:



## READING FOR INFORMATION

The Reading for Information skill involves reading and understanding work-related instructions and policies. It measures the skill people use when they read and use written text to do a job. Written texts include memos, letters, directions, signs, notices, bulletins, policies, and regulations. It is often the case that workplace communications are not well-written or they do not target the appropriate audience. Such materials differ from the expository and narrative texts used in most reading instruction, which are usually written to facilitate reading.



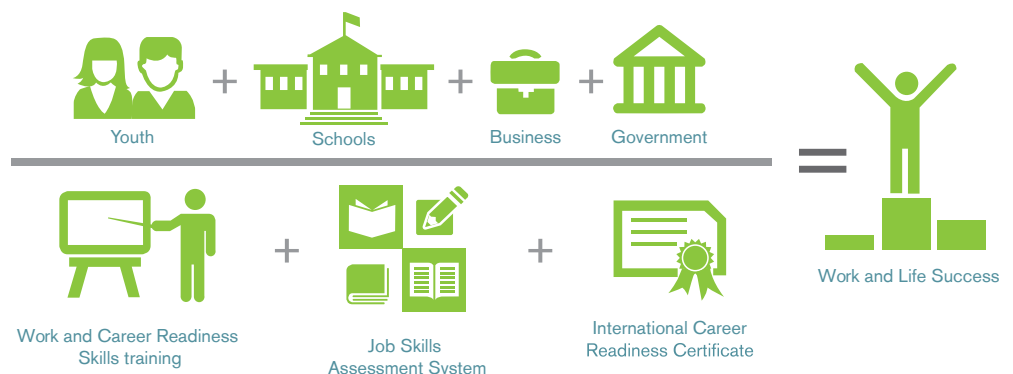
## APPLIED MATHEMATICS

The Applied Mathematics skill involves the application of mathematical reasoning to work-related problems. It measures the skill people use when they apply mathematical reasoning, critical thinking, and problem-solving techniques to work-related problems. Examinees are asked to solve the types of problems and doing the types of calculations that actually occur in the workplace.



## LOCATING INFORMATION

The Locating Information skill involves using information taken from workplace graphics such as diagrams, floor plans, tables, forms, graphs, charts, flowcharts, maps, and instrument gauges. It measures the skill people use when they work with workplace graphics. Examinees are asked to locate, insert, compare, and summarize information contained in one graphic or in a group of related graphics. They also must compare, summarize, and analyze information found in related graphics. At the highest level, examinees are asked to make decisions and draw conclusions based on information contained in one or more graphics.



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## JOB SKILLS ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

The METAS Project implemented the ACT WorkKeys, a job skills assessment system used by companies worldwide to help employers select, hire, and train new employees, as well as develop and build skills of current employee skills, to increase global competitiveness and develop successful career pathways.

Honduran youth who successfully complete the WorkKeys assessments in Reading for Information, Applied Mathematics, and Locating Information can earn the International Career Readiness Certificate.

## INTERNATIONAL CAREER READINESS CERTIFICATE

The International Career Readiness Certificate (ICRC), issued internationally by ACT, is a portable, evidence-based credential that certifies essential skills needed for workplace success in Reading for Information, Applied Mathematics, and Locating Information. This credential is used across all sectors of the economy and verifies the following cognitive skills:

- 1 Problem solving
- 2 Critical thinking
- 3 Reading and using work-related text
- 4 Applying information from workplace documents to solve problems
- 5 Applying mathematical reasoning to work-related problems
- 6 Setting up and performing work-related mathematical calculations
- 7 Locating, synthesizing, and applying information that is presented graphically
- 8 Comparing, summarizing, and analyzing information presented in multiple related graphics



**“This certificate is not only another diploma for my resume, it also represents new opportunities for my future.”**

– Juan Ramón Salgado  
Certified Youth



Individuals earn the International Career Readiness Certificate by taking three WorkKeys assessments in:

- » Applied Mathematics
- » Locating Information
- » Reading for Information

## WORKEYS EXAM

In Honduras, engaged employers have positively supported this training initiative, and some have already started to benefit from the youth who have passed their WorkKeys assessments and earned certification. It is our hope that soon these enterprises will be recommending or requiring job candidates to have the International Career Readiness Certificate.

WorkKeys scores help employers choose the most qualified candidates for the job. Employers want to know that job seekers have the essential skills to be successful in their companies, and these scores prove that job seekers have such skills. The assessments measure real-world skills that employers believe are critical to job success. Test questions are based on situations in the everyday work world.

The program offers four levels of certification in each area, depending on which career path or occupation the job seeker is following:

**BRONZE** - scores at least a level 3 in each of the three core areas and has the necessary foundational skills for 16% percent of the jobs in the WorkKeys database

**SILVER** - scores at least a level 4 in each of the three core areas and has the necessary foundational skills for 67% percent of the jobs in the WorkKeys database

**GOLD** - scores at least a level 5 in each of the three core areas and has the necessary foundational skills for 93% percent of the jobs in the WorkKeys database

**PLATINUM** - scores at least a level 6 in each of the three core areas and has the necessary foundational skills for 99% percent of the jobs in the WorkKeys database

Job Title	Skills Level Required		
	Applied Mathematics	Locating Information	Reading for Information
First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers	3	3	3
Sewing Machine Operators	3	3	3
Machinists	3	3	3
Quality Control Analysts	3	3	3
Tellers	3	3	3
Sales Agents, Financial Services	5	5	5
Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	3	3	3
Automotive and Watercraft Service Attendants	3	4	4
Accountants	5	4	4
Retail Salespersons	3	3	3
Customer Service Representatives	3	3	3



**This certification has changed my life because now I can securely speak in public and I know what I have to say to the people.**

– Pamela Ferrufino  
Certified Trainer

Results are matched with ACT's JobPro Database, which is one of the largest skill-specific databases in existence today, with more than 1,818,000 job profiles. Job profiles are aligned with the WorkKeys skill level required for each job. These profiles, created by ACT over a 15-year period, are available to Honduran businesses and employers to search online and help them identify essential skills and skill levels for selecting, hiring, and training their workforce. The table displays an example of job skills with their minimum required skill level. Employers can search job skills at the WorkKeys Job Profiles site.



# METAS Implementation Steps

# Work Readiness Skills

# Training and Certification

## PROCESSES

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The successful implementation of the Work Readiness Skills Training and Certification Program in Honduras is due to several factors: the participation, involvement, and commitment of all strategic stakeholders, including their views and opinions regarding the METAS decision-making processes, and the creation of the METAS Project Advisory Committee, comprised of representatives of various stakeholders, including the Honduran education, work, and private sectors.

METAS established action-oriented local and regional alliances among private businesses, high schools, training centers, NGOs, communities, and universities, all of which are committed to improving the education and employability of at-risk youth.

### PARTNERING WITH THE BUSINESSES

METAS worked with the Honduran private sector and multinational companies to familiarize them with the value of basic work readiness skills training for current and future employees. To close the gap between the private and education sectors, METAS established a three-tier strategy to engage the private sector:

- 1 Work at the industry/association level
- 2 Work directly with companies located near participating educational centers
- 3 Work with individual companies

Private sector engagement and support started at the association levels, and METAS worked closely with the Honduran Private Enterprise Council (COHEP), chambers of commerce and industry associations in Honduras to reach their associated companies and share the program benefits.

**“This program has created a greater impact within the company because it has improved the performance of its people and the quality of production”**

– Alejandra Izaguirre  
Human Resources - Hanes Brand, Inc.



# THE WORK READINESS Training Process



Participants



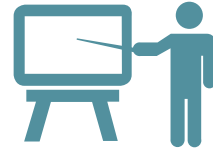
Schools



Universities



Companies



Teachers and Instructors



Certifications

## THE WORK READINESS TRAINING PROCESS

The training process is being delivered by public schools, vocational technical schools, NGOs, universities, and businesses. These organizations receive a two-day train-the-trainer workshop for their teachers and instructors who will facilitate the training process. The workshop provides an orientation on the training methodologies for both the print books and e-learning interactive books.



### DIAGNOSTIC TEST

At the beginning of each training process, participating students or employees take a diagnostic test to determine if they are ready to take the certification test or if they need to receive training in the basic skills. The diagnostic test addresses the three major skills areas—Reading for Information, Locating Information, and Applied Mathematics—and identifies the level at which participants will begin the training.

The test results will help determine the participant's current skill level, which becomes the starting point of the training process. Participants will then progress to achieve the skill level required for each area.



### TRAINING BOOKS AND E-LEARNING INTERACTIVE BOOKS

Materials for the Work Readiness Skills Training program include printed text books and online e-learning interactive books that are structured by levels and designed for self-paced study. Training materials were written specifically to help participants master the applied workplace skills and are available for each level of the three areas:

- ➊ **Reading for Information:** Skills required for reading and understanding documents
- ➋ **Applied Mathematics:** Skills required for applying mathematical reasoning, critical thinking, and problem solving
- ➌ **Locating Information:** Skills required for using graphs, charts, tables, and diagrams and for comparing, summarizing, and analyzing information



### ACHIEVEMENT TESTS

After the training process is complete, participant students or employees take an achievement review post-training test to verify their level of accomplishment prior to the certification exam. The test will either show that a participant is ready for the certification or that he or she needs additional instruction.



### CERTIFICATION EXAMS

Once the training process is completed and the level of achievement required for the desired job position is reached, the participant student or employee takes a WorkKeys assessment test for each skills area. To pass, the participant must score above a level 3 in each skill assessment, which will allow him or her to earn the International Career Readiness Certificate, a portable credential that demonstrates achievement and a certain level of workplace employability skills in the assessed areas.

# Bridging Strategies

## TRAINING OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO YOUTH

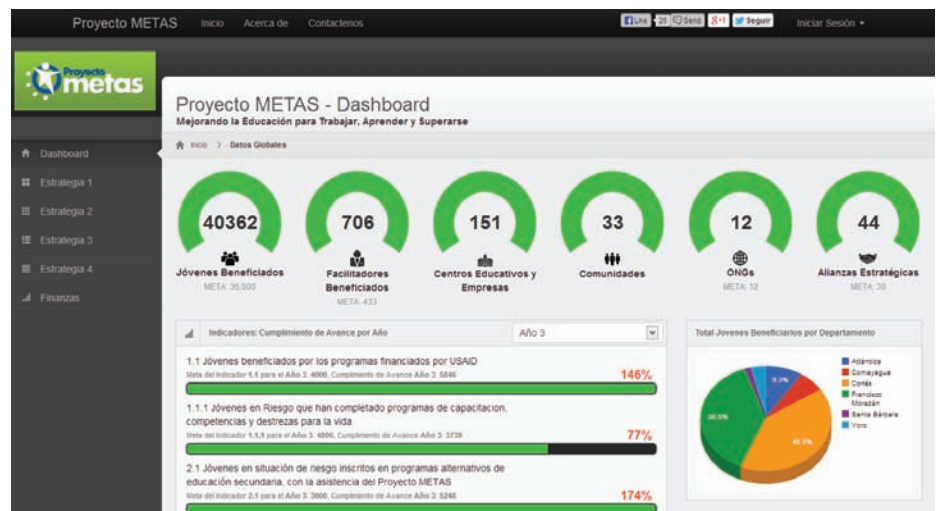
**Self-paced training:** Young participants begin the self-paced training at the level identified by the Diagnostic Test and then move on. For example, if a participant is at a level 3 for applied mathematics, and the job requirement is a level 5, he or she will start training at level 4 and progress up.

**Instructor-led training:** Throughout the training process, participants also need and receive instructor-led training to support motivation, answer questions, help solve problems, and monitor progress. For example, in schools, teachers have helped METAS prepare participating youth, assisted during the train-the-trainer sessions, and voluntarily included METAS Work Readiness Skills Training curricula in their classrooms.

**Interactive training:** E-learning training for youth in schools and businesses helps learners develop their work ready skills through an interactive experience.

A direct result of the METAS Project holistic approach efforts is the unprecedented commitment that schools, universities, communities, businesses, NGOs, and the government of Honduras have made to closing the skills gap and creating a workforce that meets the needs of the local and international labor market, and thereby improving Honduras' productivity and competitiveness.

The Work Readiness Skills Training and Certification Program had reached more than 24,500 youth participants from 150 schools, communities, universities, and businesses. The program has trained 550 teachers and instructors who help facilitate the training process. Youths receiving their International Career Readiness Certificate have increased labor market opportunities through internships, jobs, and hands-on opportunities for work.



## METAS Project

Is a USAID-funded initiative implemented by Education Development Center (EDC), Inc.

METAS aims to provide the young people of Honduras with the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills for life and work, and the attitudes, behaviors, and perspective necessary to create positive and promising futures.

The project supports technical high schools and vocational training programs by helping them create and deliver relevant, up-to-date curricula. The project aims to issue workforce readiness certificates to 20,000 graduates of the schools and centers and to increase graduates' employment opportunities through alliances with private sector businesses. By improving alternative middle and high school programs, METAS expects to reach 10,000 out-of-school youth. With local partners, METAS recruits 2,000 at-risk youth annually for enrollment in basic education, technical training, and long-term employability programs, helping them to be better prepared to enter the workforce.

[proyectometas.org](http://proyectometas.org)



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# Next Steps

## SUSTAINABLE WORK READINESS TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION PROGRAM TRANSFER

The METAS Project will continue to support the Work Readiness Training and Certification Program by transferring knowledge and capacity to a national institution that has the potential to sustain the program and maintain continuity.

METAS will provide step-by-step guidance during the program transfer to ensure a successful training program implementation, as well as access to the training materials and online e-learning work readiness training for all schools and businesses that want to participate in the program.

This investment will guarantee that current and future stakeholders will continue to work together, with one vision, so the program can continue to have an impact and be sustainable in the future.

